BEREAVED PARENTS OF ADULT CHILDREN:
A DISCURSIVE STUDY OF RELATIONSHIPS

A Thesis Submitted to the College of
Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Department of Psychology
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon
Canada

Philip Alan Carverhill
Fall 2000

© Copyright Philip A. Carverhill, 2000. All rights reserved.

RUNNING HEAD: Bereaved Parents
The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author’s permission.

L’auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L’auteur conserve la propriété du droit d’auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.
PERMISSION TO USE

Use shall not be made of the material contained herein without proper acknowledgment, as indicated below.

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Postgraduate degree from the University of Saskatchewan, I agree that the Libraries of this University may make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for photocopying of this thesis, in whole or in part, for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor who supervised my thesis work or, in his absence, by the Head of the Department or the Dean of the College in which my thesis work was done. It is understood that any copying or publication or use of this thesis or parts thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to the University of Saskatchewan in any use, scholarly or otherwise, which may be made of any material in my thesis.

Request for permission to copy of make other use of material in this thesis in whole or part should be addressed to:

Head of Department of Psychology
University of Saskatchewan
9 Campus Drive
Saskatoon, SK S7N 5A5
Canada
ABSTRACT

Although there has been rapid growth in some areas of the grief and bereavement literature, little attention has been paid to the phenomenon of adult child loss from the perspective of parents. At the same time, there have been mounting challenges to the traditional grief work hypotheses, which translates “detachment” as healthy grieving, by proponents of the “continuing bonds” model. While the notion of an ongoing connection with the deceased seems to more closely describe the experience of bereaved parents, there has been minimal research to explore the evidence for this among bereaved parents.

Qualitative studies of parental bereavement and grief in general have been biased in the direction of grounded theory approaches. The intent of this study was to examine the written and spoken discourse of parents who were bereaved of adult children in an effort to understand the ways that language is used to give account to that experience and to discern something of the nature of the parent, adult child relationship in death. A discourse analysis approach, in the style of Potter and Wetherell (1987), was taken in order to understand more specifically the function, structure, and variability of written and spoken accounts of bereaved parents. One of the extended aims of this study was to contribute a potential vocabulary to this emerging theory of grief which challenges the traditional notion of detachment from the deceased child.

Discourse was collected from a wide range of sources, including written submissions that were solicited, published writings that existed prior to the study being conducted, interviews with bereaved parents of adult children, and postings from a “virtual” chat line (i.e., Internet) for bereaved parents. The findings revealed a range of discursive devices and practices available to participants, through which they achieved reconstructions of their deceased adult children, their relationships with their children, and their experiences of parental bereavement. The most prominent result of this investigation was the discovery of the use of extreme case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986) by bereaved parents. This particular discursive device had only previously been identified in contexts of conflict. Additionally, participants used categorization, detailed description, characterization, comparison, contrast, paradox, evidence-building, and metaphor as discursive strategies and devices. The social actions performed in the process included: constructing/ reconstructing, convincing, remembering, evaluating, describing, and demonstrating parental investment. The discursive content covered by bereaved parents in this study ranged from talk of how special the child was to the constancy of thoughts about the child. There was discursive evidence in support of the notion of “continuing bonds.” Overall, the bereaved parents’ discourse demonstrated the absolute irreplaceability of their deceased children as well as the possibility of describing the indescribable.

This study informs the literature, both research and practice, on parental bereavement following the death of an adult child as well as expands the field of discursive psychology to include research in grief and loss.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To echo a phrase from the participants, "words cannot describe" how important the contributions of my family have been to the completion of this study. Camille, my spouse, supported my decision to return to graduate school and has steadfastly weathered the many trials and tribulations of this shared journey. She has single-parented our children during all the long hours that I spent away from home working on this dissertation. Camille's continuing love, tremendous courage, and care have sustained me both spiritually and physically. She shares equally in the accomplishment of this work. Jacqueline and Nicholas too have made many sacrifices, some unknowingly, in order that their "papa" finish school before they do! Not many four year-old children have the word "dissertation" as part of their vocabulary, but Jacque and Nic have it firmly embedded . . . as well they have provided much needed fun and distraction in the form of the "tickle game" and other pursuits. With my family all things have ultimately been made possible, including the realization of shared dreams and aspirations.

I have also been blessed with the friendship of a very wonderful human being in the form of Paul Benson. From the days when I first met Paul, on the palliative care unit of St. Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon where he is a social worker, he has always "been there" for me. He has listened to my ideas with great encouragement and challenged me to consider creative ways of helping bereaved individuals. Paul has also become my "buddy" at the Association for Death Education & Counseling (ADEC) conferences, and has complained very little as I dragged him across Washington, DC and other locales. I am also thankful for the encouragement and moral support of my friends and colleagues at SALGES (Saskatoon Association for Loss and Grief Education & Support): Bill Edwards, Eleanor Edwards, Linda Remmer, Vern Ratzlaff, Brian Chartier, and Paul Benson.

In the academic realm I am immensely thankful to my supervisor, Dr. Brian Chartier. Brian introduced me to the Association for Death Education and Counseling (ADEC) and supervised my M.A. thesis in the area of male spousal bereavement. He believed in my abilities from the time of our first meeting in 1990, and has supported my intellectual growth by the paradoxical act of "letting go." I have not done research typical of the tradition in North American psychology, and while Brian sometimes wondered where I was going, he never stopped me from the explorative journey. I have had many lively and thought-provoking discussions with Brian, and as well I have enjoyed his great sense of humour. I have benefited from Brian's wealth of experience as a psychologist who specializes in grief and bereavement. Not only has this been of great value in doing applied research in thanatology, but Brian has also mentored me in grief therapy, assessment and teaching.
I am also appreciative of Brian for his efforts in bringing Dr. Kathleen Gilbert to Saskatoon. In these times of fiscal restraint in academia, graduate students do not always have the benefit of a “live” external examiner. I am thankful that Brian, and the College of Graduate Studies & Research, made this possible. Finally, I want to offer my heartfelt thanks to Brian for his concern for me as a person as well as for my family. Brian seemed to have an innate radar for knowing when I was laying horizontal in a hospital bed, and brought with him a welcomed dose of humour (and Beanie Babies®). With a special place in his heart for children, Brian is also appreciated for being the best (and friendliest) dragon (now penguin) in Saskatoon on Halloween!

My grateful appreciation also goes to the members of my dissertation committee: Dr. Karen Wright, Dr. Pamela Downe, and Dr. Kimberly Noels, as well as to my external examiner Dr. Kathleen Gilbert. Karen brought a wealth of professional experience as a grief therapist, researcher and teacher to this project. As well, she read through this dissertation during her own bereavement experience, following the death of her sister. I have also valued Karen’s counsel on self-care and her genuine concern for me as a person. Dr. Pamela Downe was a wonderful addition to the advisory committee. Pam is a true scholar, and as a researcher who has done discourse analysis, her critical comments challenged me to interrogate my analysis in a number of ways. Pam’s humanity and warm words of encouragement were always appreciated. Dr. Kimberly Noels extended her generosity of time in joining the committee after one member retired, and her presence was much appreciated. Kim brought particular expertise as a social psychologist who has specialized in the use of language. She as well read this thesis while going through her own bereavement experience, following the death of her father-in-law. Particular thanks is extended to Dr. Kathleen Gilbert, who travelled from Indiana University - Bloomington to attend the dissertation defense in person and to deliver a colloquium on qualitative research in the Department of Psychology. Kathleen’s combination of scholar-researcher in the field of death, dying, and bereavement, grief therapist, graduate supervisor, and teacher made for a tremendous addition to the defense process. This thesis has been enriched by Kathleen’s critical input, and her commendatory comments about the work have been most encouraging.

During 1997-1998 my family and I moved to St. John’s, Newfoundland where I completed a year-long pre-doctoral internship in professional psychology. My experience at the Memorial University Counselling Centre and the Health Care Corporation of St. John’s were among the best of my graduate education and foundational to my further development as a psychologist. The opportunity to provide services within a perinatal bereavement program, to listen to bereaved parents and to educate others about grief and bereavement, contributed to the applied emphasis of my research. I am grateful to Dr. George Hurley, Dr. Olga Heath, and Dr. Elizabeth Church for their wonderful mentorship, for the many learning opportunities they provided, and for warmly encouraging my work in the field of grief and bereavement.
Following internship I commenced work as a member of the Psychology Staff at the F.I.T. for Active Living Program, Saskatoon City Hospital, while continuing to work on this research. I am grateful to Mr. Stuart Hutton, Program Manager, for allowing me the flexibility to work part-time and to use my office space after hours to complete the work of this dissertation. His support, as well as that of my colleagues at F.I.T made the journey easier.

During the last year of working on this research I experienced some unexpected and life-threatening health events. If it were not for the incredible clinical skills and thoroughness of Dr. Bert McBride of the University of Saskatchewan Student Health Centre, the outcome might have been very different. The ethic of care that Bert McBride, along with the rest of a very competent staff at the Student Health Centre demonstrated to me and my family during times of ill-health, constitute one of my greatest experiences of “being cared for.”

I also want to express my deep appreciation to my parents, Alan and Thora Carverhill, for providing the essential foundation in my life . . . for the love that they have given throughout the years, for their example of faith, endurance, and hard work and for the patience in raising a son who had to find many things out the hard way! It’s been a long journey and you can share in the pride of having accomplished this goal - the first Ph.D. in the family.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Geoffrey Beattie, of the Department of Psychology at the University of Manchester. It was a very fortuitous meeting with Geoffrey at an Irish Psychological Association reception, held at the Montréal Neurological Institute, that first exposed me to discourse analysis. Thanks to my dear friend Laughlin Taylor for that initial invitation! I am most grateful for the “mentorship at a distance” that I so kindly received from scholars in the field of discourse analysis: Derek Edwards, Jonathan Potter, Anita Pomerantz, and Linda Wood. Your patience in answering the questions of a novice in the field was wholly appreciated.

There would be no dissertation if it were not for the willingness, courage and generosity of the many parents who wrote and spoke to me about their adult children who died. I am profoundly honored to have had the privilege of “meeting” every one of you and your children through your words and writings. I offer you my deepest thanks and gratitude for helping me learn about the “company of bereaved parents.” I hope that the continuing bonds that you will read of in the pages to follow will constitute a further legacy left by your children.
DEDICATION IN MEMORIUM

This thesis is dedicated in memory of
Maud Davies (died at age 26)
and Geoffrey Carverhill (died at age 50)
as well as their parents (my grandparents)
who were bereaved of their adult children
forever.

Harriet Anne (Jenkins) & Aubrey Edward Davies
Florence Watt (MacGregor) & Alfred Carverhill
TABLE OF CONTENTS

PERMISSION TO USE ........................................................................................................... 1
ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................................... 2
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................................................................................... 3
DEDICATION ........................................................................................................................... 6
LIST OF TABLES .................................................................................................................... 12
LIST OF FIGURES .................................................................................................................. 13
LIST OF APPENDICES .......................................................................................................... 14

1. INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................................. 15
   1.1 Historical Background: The Grief Work Hypothesis .................................................. 16
   1.2 Recent Criticism of the Grief Work Hypothesis ......................................................... 18
   1.3 Definitions of Bereavement, Grief, and Mourning .................................................... 19
   1.4 The Phenomenology of Parental Bereavement ......................................................... 20
   1.5 Parental Loss of an Adult Child ................................................................................. 22

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ....................................................................................... 25
   2.1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 25
   2.2 Parental Bereavement: Setting the Context ............................................................... 26
      2.2.1 The Compassionate Friends: The Role of Support Groups .................................. 30
      2.2.2 Cutting the Bond: The Zeitgeist of Detachment .................................................... 33
      2.2.3 Specific Models of Grief: The Example of Klass and Marwit ................................. 35
      2.2.4 The "Continuing Bond": A Challenge to the Traditional Model of Grief ............... 43
   2.3 Research Findings: Parental Responses to the Death of Adult Children .................. 48
2.4 Gender Differences in Bereaved Parents ................................. 86
2.5 The Context and Justification for the Present Study .............. 88

3. METHODOLOGY/METHOD .............................................................. 100
   3.1 Discourse Analysis: An Overview ....................................... 100
   3.2 Core Analytic Concepts of Discourse Analysis .................. 102
       3.2.1 Function ................................................................. 103
       3.2.2 Construction ......................................................... 104
       3.2.3 Variation .............................................................. 104
       3.2.4 The (mis)Management of Variability ......................... 105
   3.3 Stages of Discourse Analysis ............................................ 106
       3.3.1 Stage One: Research Questions ................................. 107
       3.3.2 Stage Two: Sample Selection .................................. 110
       3.3.3 Stage Three: Collection of Records and Documents ....... 114
       3.3.4 Stage Four: Interviews ........................................... 116
       3.3.5 Stage Five: Transcription ....................................... 118
       3.3.6 Stage Six: Coding .................................................. 119
       3.3.7 Stage Seven: Analysis ............................................ 121
       3.3.8 Stage Eight: Validation ......................................... 122
       3.3.9 Stage Nine: The Report .......................................... 128
       3.3.10 Stage Ten: Application ......................................... 129

4. THE PARTICIPANTS ........................................................................ 132

5. ANALYSIS/FINDINGS .................................................................... 135
   5.1 Introduction ......................................................................... 135
   5.2 Describing the Indescribable ............................................... 136
5.3 Reconstructing the Adult Child:
   Extreme Case Formulations ........................................ 140

5.3.1 The Use of Contrast and Paradox ................................ 146

5.3.2 Characterization: The Child as Special and Unique ........ 149

5.3.3 What are Extreme Case Formulations “Doing” Here?
   Investment & Doing Non-Literal ....................................... 150

5.3.4 Injustice of the Adult Child’s Death ........................... 155

5.3.5 Irreplaceability and Variability ............................... 157

5.4 Categories and the Use of Details ............................... 161

5.4.1 Evidence-Based Character Construction ....................... 161

5.4.2 Comparisons to Other Children in the Family ............... 172

5.4.3 Birth Order .......................................................... 178

5.4.4 Gender ..................................................................... 180

5.5 The Categorical Construction of the Relationship ............ 185

5.5.1 Mother - Child .......................................................... 185

5.5.2 Father - Child .......................................................... 188

5.5.3 Son ......................................................................... 190

5.5.4 Daughter ................................................................. 192

5.6 The Relationship Between Parent and Adult Child ............ 196

5.6.1 Child as “Friend” ....................................................... 202

5.6.2 Child as “Best Friend” ................................................ 205

5.7 Thinking of the Child: “Never to be Forgotten” ............... 207

5.8 Presence ..................................................................... 213

5.8.1 “Feeling Close” ......................................................... 213

5.8.2 Sensory Experiencing . . . Seeing, Feeling, Hearing ....... 219

5.8.3 Unexpected Presence ................................................. 223
5.8.4 Ambivalence About Presence .............................................. 229
5.9 Memories As Continuity ......................................................... 231

5.9.1 The Paradox of Memories: Keeping Their Memory Alive .................. 234
5.9.2 Reminders, Remembrances, and Legacy ...................................... 240
5.9.3 The “Last Time” . . . Talk of Regrets ........................................... 247
5.10 Love Continues ................................................................. 251
5.11 Dreams ........................................................................ 253
5.12 Embodiment: Variations on a Theme ........................................... 262
5.13 Linking Objects? ................................................................... 273
5.14 Pride in the Adult Child ........................................................... 277
5.15 What It’s Like to Be a Bereaved Parent ......................................... 281
5.16 Metaphors .............................................................................. 283

5.17 The Company of Bereaved Parents: You Can Only Understand If ............. 296
5.18 Summary .............................................................................. 304

6. DISCUSSION ............................................................................ 309

6.1 Introduction ........................................................................... 309
6.2 A Discursive Approach to Loss .................................................. 309

6.2.1 Limitations of a Discursive Approach ....................................... 313
6.2.2 Reflexivity: My Role as Researcher .......................................... 315
6.3 Discourse and The Language of Grief Theories ................................. 318
6.4 A Discursive Model of Grief ...................................................... 324

6.4.1 Talk of the Dead ................................................................ 327
6.4.2 Applications of the Model ....................................................... 331
6.5 Uniqueness of Bereaved Parents of Adult Children .......... 336

6.6 Applied Discourse Analysis:
   "Watching Our Language" ........................................ 338

6.7 Revisiting the Parental Bereavement Literature:
   Considerations and Directions for Future Research ........... 340

6.8 Conclusions ............................................................ 348

REFERENCES ..................................................................... 353
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>Three Strands of Qualitative Psychology</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>Participant Demographics</td>
<td>133-134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3</td>
<td>Summary of Findings</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1  A Discursive Model of Grief ........................................... 326
LIST OF APPENDICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>Worden’s Task-based Model of Mourning</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>Distinguishing Features of Discourse Analysis</td>
<td>366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C</td>
<td>Call to Participate</td>
<td>367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D</td>
<td>Reflecting Questions</td>
<td>368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E</td>
<td>“Biography” - Bereaved Parents of Adult Children</td>
<td>369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix F</td>
<td>Interview Guide</td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix G</td>
<td>Transcription Notation</td>
<td>376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix H</td>
<td>Coding Categories</td>
<td>377</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Grief fills the room up of my absent child,
Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me;
Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,
Remembers me of all his gracious parts,
Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form;
Then, have I reason to be fond of grief.

Shakespeare, King John, Act 3, Scene 4

Chapter 1 - INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research is to explore the understudied phenomenon of parental
grief following the death of an adult child. While there is a rapidly expanding literature in
the grief and bereavement field, the experience of parents whose adult children have died
is an area of neglect. This lack of research is occurring in a demographic context where
the possibilities of older parents outliving their children is rapidly increasing.
Simultaneously, the theory of grief which has prevailed for most of this century - the
grief work hypothesis - has recently been challenged by an emerging body of evidence
which suggests the importance of a continuing bond between survivors and the deceased.

It would seem that this newer theory of grief may speak more accurately to the
phenomenology of parental bereavement in particular. There exists, however, a dearth of
language with which to describe the developmental nature of relational attachments to
the deceased. My goal here is to examine the discourse of bereaved parents of adult
children in an attempt to contribute both to the development of a vocabulary which
describes their grief process, as well as to a greater theoretical understanding of the
parent-adult child bond. Specifically, to examine discursive support or lack thereof for
the thesis of continuing bonds emerging in the grief of these parents, rather than
disengaging from their deceased children as has previously been proposed as healthy
adaptation.
1.1 Historical Background: The Grief Work Hypothesis

For most of the twentieth century the thinking of researchers, educators, and clinicians in the field of grief and bereavement has been dominated by one theoretical perspective (Kastenbaum, 1995). The grief work theory originated in the writings of Sigmund Freud in the years following the First World War. In Mourning and Melancholia (1917/1957) Freud described mourning as a normal reaction to the “real loss of a loved object” (p. 250) of which the mourner is consciously aware. He proposed that the work of mourning is accomplished over a lengthy period of time through a “piecemeal” process of reality-testing in which the libido eventually detaches itself from the lost object (i.e. decathexis) and the ego is liberated. Kastenbaum (1995, pp. 321-322) has summarized the core propositions of the grief work theory as follows: (1) Grief is an adaptive response to loss, (2) The work of grief is painful and time consuming, (3) The basic goal of grief work is to accept the reality of the death and thereby liberate oneself from the strong attachment to the “lost object”, (4) grief work is carried out through a long series of confrontations with the reality of the loss, (5) The process is complicated by the survivors’ resistance to letting go of the attachment, and (6) The failure of grief work results in continued misery and dysfunction. With regards to this last aspect, people who maintain an intense and extended attachment to the deceased person are considered to be suffering from “pathological” grief.

Eric Lindemann’s (1944) classic study of “acute grief” is often cited as one of the landmarks in the literature on grief and bereavement. He used a clinical case study approach to describe the “symptomatology” and “management” of both normal and pathological grief reactions. Although most authors describe Lindemann’s subject population as survivors of a nightclub fire in Boston, they were in actual fact a much more heterogeneous group of people. Lindemann was the first to actually term the
process of adjustment to bereavement as "grief work," a phrase which was to achieve much usage in the literature and which is now the subject of debate (Stroebe, 1992; Wortman & Silver, 1989). As evidenced by the terms which he used to describe the bereaved people in his sample, Lindemann employed a disease model of grief. For him, grief was appropriately viewed as a syndrome of symptoms, the management of which might present problems, depending upon the nature of the loss and the life circumstances of the bereaved person (Littlewood, 1992).

Other significant contributors to theories on grief include John Bowlby and Colin Murray Parkes, two British psychiatrists who have worked independently of each other. Bowlby (1980) was instrumental in applying attachment theory to conceptualizations about grief and loss. He likened adult grief to the experiences of early separation between infant and mother, suggesting that the goal of attachment behaviour is to maintain the security supplied by a significant interpersonal relationship. Bowlby (1980) accounted for the painful work of grief in that the bereaved must overcome the strong tendency to attempt to restore the lost "love object" through persistent effort:

Evidence shows that, at perhaps increasingly long intervals, the effort to restore the bond is renewed: the pangs of grief and perhaps an urge to search are then experienced afresh. This means that the persons attachment behaviour is remaining constantly primed . . . The condition of the organism is then one of chronic stress and is experienced as one of chronic distress. At intervals, moreover, both stress and distress are likely again to become acute. (Bowlby, 1980, p. 42)

Parkes (1970, 1987) was influenced by Bowlby's work in his development of a model of mourning which involves four phases: (1) shock and numbness, (2) yearning and searching, (3) disorganization and despair, and (4) reorganization. The overall process of which these phases are elements is one of "realization" - transforming that which is real in the outer, objective world into an inner reality, in the intrapsychic world.
Over the past three decades there have been a number of studies investigating various aspects of grief and bereavement, some of which are now considered classics in the field. The Harvard Bereavement Study (Glick, Weiss, & Parkes, 1974), the London Study (Parkes, 1970), and Madison and Viola’s (1968) Australian study are the most notable among these. The past decade has been witness to significant methodological advances in both experimental and field research, with an increasing trend toward prospective longitudinal studies such as the Zisook and Shuchter’s (1993) San Diego study.

1.2 Recent Criticism of the Grief Work Hypothesis

One of the most prolific investigators in the field of grief and bereavement research, Margaret Stroebe of the University of Utrecht, has recently challenged the “grief work hypothesis” stating: “Not only is there very little scientific evidence on the grief work hypothesis, but studies that bear on the issue yield contradictory results” (1992-1993, p. 23). Similar to criticisms which have been made of Kubler-Ross’ five-stage model of dying (Kastenbaum, 1995) and the Bowlby/Parkes phase-based model of mourning (Wortman & Silver, 1989), the comments of Stroebe suggest that the grief work hypothesis was embraced prematurely and without adequate verification.

Taken as a whole, the empirical evidence . . . does not back the strong claims made by theorists and clinicians in favour of the grief work hypothesis. There are insufficient studies; there are methodological shortcomings; and there are inconsistent findings. Overall . . . the grief work hypothesis has neither been confirmed nor disconfirmed empirically. (Stroebe, 1992-1993, p. 27)

Some of Stroebe’s own findings (1992-1993) with regard to spousal bereavement suggested that some widows and widowers functioned very well and showed no evidence of depression, yet they had not ‘done’ grief work. If the tenet of
the traditional grief work hypothesis were true; that successful resolution of grief
requires one to detach from the love object through a lengthy, effortful, and painful
process; then this would seem like an implausible result. The grief work hypothesis
which Freud originated has held tremendous influence in the field of grief and
bereavement. It remains to be seen how this challenge to the traditional framework may
guide research and eventually clinical practice.

1.3 Definitions of Bereavement, Grief, and Mourning

Definitions of grief and mourning abound, and may vary widely. It is a potential
source of confusion when authors do not clearly state the definitions which are implicit in
their work, which is sometimes the case. In the present study the following definitions
were adopted: Bereavement is the objective state of having experienced a loss (Corr,
Nabe, & Corr, 1997; Rando, 1988; Stroebe, Stroebe, & Hansson, 1993). In this sense it
is the cause of both grief and mourning (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987). This situation of
being bereaved is an objective fact which may result from the death of a significant
other, or it may be experienced as a larger social phenomenon in response to mass
deaths, as in the case of a war (Kastenbaum, 1995). Both the “experience” and
“consequences” of bereavement may vary widely across individuals and cultures.
Kastenbaum (1995) has suggested that while bereavement status is only suggestive of
the individuals actual experience and adaptiveness, it represents not only an objective
reality but serves as a marker for potential psychological suffering.

Grief is described as the individual (i.e., “private”), internal and external response
to bereavement (i.e. loss). It is a multidimensional and complex process involving any or
all of the affective, cognitive, behavioural, physical, interpersonal, and spiritual domains
of a person’s existence. Although grief has been described as an emotional response to
loss (Stroebe et al., 1993), such a characterization is criticized as far too restrictive
(Worden, 1991; Corr et al., 1997; Kastenbaum, 1995). Grief is not descriptive of what all individuals experience in response to bereavement, indeed it is apparent that some people do not experience grief, rather they respond to loss with indifference. Corr, Nabe, and Corr (1994, p. 169) have suggested, however, that “failure to grieve for a significant loss is an aberration, suggesting that there was no real attachment prior to the loss, that the relationship was complicated in ways that set it apart from the ordinary, or that one is suppressing or hiding ones response to the loss.”

Mourning may be defined as the collective (i.e., “public”), culturally formed and expected pattern of adaptation to loss. It represents the ways in which people learn to adapt to loss, bereavement, and grief - to blend this experience into the fabric of ongoing lives (Corr et al., 1997). It is characterized by the socially shaped thoughts, feelings, and actions which individuals engage in to express their grief, either publicly or privately (Gorer, 1965; Rosenblatt, Walsh, & Jackson, 1976). Mourning encompasses the customs and rituals that are practiced in various cultures as social expressions of bereavement. Although these manners of expression may be socially expected and sanctioned in a given culture, they may not be equally facilitative of the grieving process, and some members of a society may engage in them without necessarily experiencing grief.

1.4 The Phenomenology of Parental Bereavement

The death of a child has been described as “life’s greatest tragedy”, an “existential wound giving way to loss of meaning in the lives of the parents” (Brown, 1989, p. 466). Likewise it has been characterized as more painful, more consuming, and more likely to involve complicated mourning than the death of a spouse (Gorer, 1965; Schechter, 1995). Parents have assumptions about the natural order of things and issues of justice. These assumptions are shattered upon the death of a child, and the bereaved
parents struggle with questions of why their child died. They may question why other parents, who they see as living less deserving lives, still have their children. The fundamental belief that children outlive their parents is violated by the death of the child (Perkins & Harris, 1990). A parent is not supposed to outlive a child and they may feel outraged at this violation (Rosen, 1990). The death of a child is: "always contrary to the generational law by which it is understood that parents rarely bury their own children. Exceptions to this law are a major affront to biological and psychological behavior that is deeply rooted in evolution" (Levav, Friedlander, Kark, & Peritz, 1988, p. 457).

An examination of the language used to describe this experience reveals the intense tragedy of this type of loss. The death of a child has been considered: "unique among all deaths with respect to impact on survivors" (Brabant, Forsyth, & McFarlain, 1995); "an injustice" (Drenovsky, 1994); "untimely" (Levav et al., 1988); "the least tolerable of all deaths" (Aries, 1981); "rare" (Drenovsky, 1994); "a unique and irreparable loss" (Moss, Lesher, & Moss, 1986); "unexpected" (Videka-Sherman, 1982; Levav et al., 1988); "unnatural" (Shanfield, Benjamin, & Swain, 1988; Cacace & Williamson, 1996; Goodman, Rubinstein, Alexander, & Luborsky, 1991); "the most tragic of human circumstance" (Goodman et al., 1991); and "unbearable" (Jones, 1957). If compounded by secondary losses the death of a child may be "insurmountable" (Goodman et al., 1991).

The grief resulting from the death of a child has been characterized as: "devastating" (Videka-Sherman, 1982; Goodman et al., 1991; Cacace & Williamson, 1996; Brabant et al., 1995; Moss et al., 1986); "chronic" (Rando, 1986); "an ongoing consciousness that loss has diminished their lives" (Pine & Brauer, 1986); and "a deep narcissistic hurt that is not to be healed . . . a paralyzing event" (Freud, in Jones, 1957). Citing various authors (Klass, 1988; Pine & Brauer, 1986; Rando, 1986), Goodman and
colleagues (1991) state that: “The single most-agreed-upon tenet in grief literature is that losing a child eclipses and diminishes other losses” (p. S322).

The intensity of parental grief has been attributed to the meaning of a child for the parent (Raphael, 1983), the uniqueness of the parent-child relationship (Rando, 1986; Moss et al., 1986-87), and the loss of a parent’s “immortality project” (Yalom, 1989). The loss of this child deprives a parent of a sense of continuity of self, a link between the past and the future (Raphael, 1983) . . . Parental hopes, joys, sense of competence, responsibilities, efforts, and failures are manifested in and represented by the child (De Vries, Dalla Lana, and Flack, 1994, p. 48). Many bereaved parents express the belief that they will never be able to adapt to the loss of their child (Rubin, 1992).

Brabant, Forsyth, and McFarlain (1995) have emphasized the family and relational context in which the death of a child occurs, in that it “is not an isolated event” (p. 68). The child and the parents have a “place” in the family and roles which are played out in a dynamic setting. As well, the parents exist within a social context of relations with other people - family, friends, work colleagues, and professionals. The death of a child, similar to other deaths, has both individual and social implications. “The death of a child is no doubt the greatest tragedy any family can endure. The relationship between parent and child is life’s most intimate bond, and an implicit part of that bond is that the elder will forever protect the younger” (Rosen, 1990, p. 61).

1.5 Parental Loss of an Adult Child

Therese Rando, in her book entitled Parental Loss of a Child (1986), stated that the response to the death of an adult child was an area which has been virtually neglected in the study of parental bereavement. Rando identified at that time the need for greater attention to this issue because of the increasing life expectancy in the general population. Fourteen years later, the situation has not altered significantly, while the possibility of
older adults experiencing the death of an adult child continues to increase. Among older
parents, losing an adult child has been perceived as worse than the death of a spouse
(Moss, Lesher, & Moss, 1986).

In his classic account of the grief of parents following the death of an adult child
Geoffrey Gorer (1965) stated:

The most distressing and long-lasting of all griefs, it would seem, is that for the
loss of a grown child. In such case it seems to be literally true, and not a figure
of speech, that the parents never get over it . . . it would appear that, at least in
time of peace, it is against the order of nature that a child should die before his
or her parents; and it seems as though the parents, in some obscure way,
interpret this as a punishment for their own shortcomings . . . it seems as though
their self-image may be destroyed . . . Perhaps a reliance on the orderliness of
the universe has been undermined (pp. 121-122).

The need for research on parental bereavement following the death of an adult
child is acute. Especially lacking is information about the “internal representation” of the
child and the nature of the bond between the parent and deceased child. Likewise little is
known about the development of relationships between adults and their living children as
each move further along the life span. There is a recognition by organizations such as
Bereaved Families of Ontario that parents losing an adult child is an “emerging
phenomenon” (M. McGovern, personal communication, Oct. 11, 1996), and at present
the “field is wide open” for investigation (S. Fleming, personal communication, Sept. 17,
1996). In setting the stage for a description of the present study (Chapter 3 -
Methodology/Method)), the next chapter (Chapter 2 - Review of the Literature) reviews
a number of related literatures. This includes a discussion of both existing (i.e., grief
work hypothesis) and emergent (i.e., continuing bond) models of grief; the example of a
model of grief specific to bereaved parents (i.e., Klass & Marwit, 1988); a description of
a support group network for bereaved parents (i.e., The Compassionate Friends); a
review of research with parents bereaved of adult children; and a discussion on gender
differences. The chapter concludes by summarizing the context and justification for the present study by describing various lines of writing, both clinical and research, which influenced the development of this project. In particular, the discussion highlights observations of the language used in describing bereaved parents in the professional literature.
Chapter 2 - REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

Having set the historical and phenomenological stage for a study of parental bereavement, this next chapter will outline the underlying context in greater detail, followed by an in-depth coverage of specific studies examining the death of adult children.

The chapter begins with further discussion of the lack of research with bereaved parents (especially those bereaved of adult children) and relates this to the more general avoidance by others of parents whose child has died. In preparing to discuss what literature does exist, I then address the significant role which members of the bereaved parents organization - The Compassionate Friends - have played as participants in several studies, alerting the reader to a potential bias. The pervasive influence of Freud, in propagating the notion of detachment from the deceased as signifying “healthy” (i.e., “normal”) grieving is then reviewed, which lays the groundwork for a critique of the inadequacies of generalized theories of grief to explain the course of parental bereavement in particular. I present Klass and Marwit’s (1988) model as a specific and alternative formulation which more adequately accounts for the grief process as experienced and described by bereaved parents. Walter’s (1996) “biographical” model of grief, although not offered as a model specific to parental bereavement, is reviewed later on in this thesis (Chapter 6 - Discussion) as another “new” formulation which also addresses some of the biases and shortcomings of existing frameworks of grief. Throughout the present section, Worden’s task-based theory of mourning (1991), perhaps the most influential in current grief counselling and therapy practice, is also referred to in relation to parental bereavement. The context for the literature review is
Finally developed by a discussion of "continuing bonds" (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996), an emerging model of grief which challenges the predominant notion of the need to detach from the deceased in order to grieve healthily.

The bulk of the chapter then begins with an examination of studies that have investigated the phenomenon of parental bereavement from various perspectives. Included in this review is a study of Jewish and non-Jewish bereaved mothers (Goodman et al., 1991), which serves to highlight the importance and yet lack of cultural considerations in the literature on bereaved parents. This observation, as well as a number of other implications stemming from the research reviewed here are later revisited in the final chapter of the thesis (Chapter 6 - Discussion).

I conclude this chapter by outlining my own journey of coming to ask certain questions about bereaved parents of adult children, a journey which has included not only an academic review of available and diverse literatures, but a process of trying to develop an integrative approach to evidence-based therapy and of working with bereaved parents in group support settings. My underlying preoccupation in all of this has been a focus on language. It is appropriate that I use this word "preoccupation," as it serves as an example towards the end of the chapter, of a word that has often been used to describe bereaved parents in their grief.

2.2 Parental Bereavement: Setting the Context

Although the death of a child has been described by many as one of the most painful losses one might have to endure (Brown, 1989; Rosen, 1990; Rando, 1986) the area of parental bereavement has received little attention, at least in this century (Smart, 1993). For example, while there are numerous epidemiological studies tracking the health consequences of spousal death on the widowed (see Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987;
Stroebe & Stroebe, 1993a) I could identify only two investigations which specifically examined morbidity and mortality among bereaved parents (Levav, 1982; Levav et al., 1988). Bereavement following the death of an adult child remains an area of particular neglect (Shanfield & Swain, 1984; Lesher & Bergey, 1988; Cacace & Williamson, 1996; Goodman, Rubinstein, Alexander, & Luborsky, 1991).

Within the study of parental bereavement Drenovsky (1994) also asserts that certain emotional experiences have been neglected by the research community. Drenovsky conducted a study of seventy-eight bereaved parents (i.e., 39 couples) to examine two of these: a feeling of anger toward the deceased child and a feeling that someone must be punished for the death of the child. Drenovsky argues that it is socially unacceptable to have feelings of anger toward a deceased child because it is more common for bereaved parents to idealize their children who have died (Rubin, 1992; 1996) and feelings of guilt may ensue for having felt angry at the child. Additionally, it is a cultural taboo to “speak or think ill of the dead.” Similarly, Drenovsky asserts that cultural expectations “to accept accidents and illness as faultless events” (p. 304) inhibit bereaved parents from expressing their feelings that someone should be punished for their child’s death. The assignment of blame, however, is a common response to a death and in the case of bereaved parents it is quite often the spouse who is assigned blame for the child’s death (Schiff, 1977).

Society may also feel most ill-at-ease and incompetent with bereaved parents as survivors. Worden (1991) has observed that the unease of friends and family in responding supportively to bereaved parents may actually increase with time. He cites his experience with many bereaved mothers whose friends suggest that “they should be getting over the loss, since it has been over a year since their child died” (p. 122). One study (Brabant et al., 1995) which included the parents of ten bereaved children reported
that more than one half of the parents perceived a lack of family support. The findings were in accord with Worden’s observations, in that even when support was given by family members it occurred early on in the grieving process and was not sustained. The authors of this study also reported that eight of the fourteen bereaved parents received minimal or no support from friends. One of the mothers in the study stated: “A super close friend was supportive and wonderful; I couldn’t have made it without her. But by two years, our friendship was dissolved because she felt I should be fixed by then. Most people acted scared and uncomfortable around me” (p. 76).

A particular bias in this study was that participants were selected by a board member from a local chapter of Compassionate Friends (a self-help organization for bereaved parents). As the authors acknowledge, it is possible that these bereaved parents “were selected for lack of support since each had turned to Compassionate Friends” (p. 80).

Rando (1985) notes the presence of additional losses in that following the child’s death there is a loss of primary support in the form of the other parent, who is also grieving. Men in particular may delay their grieving to “take care” of others in the family constellation, particularly their spouse (Nadeau, 1998). In describing the reactions of others to parental bereavement, Rando (1985) also notes that the parents are often avoided by other (non-bereaved) parents. In interpreting these observations she suggests that the avoidance and even anger of other parents may be a result of the perception that the bereaved parents are not returning soon enough to their pre-bereavement levels of “activity” and “humour”. Rando (1993) has more recently hypothesized about the potential reasons for this lack of support: (1) support may not be available because the parent is socially or geographically isolated; (2) others may not recognize the bereaved parents’ need for support; (3) others may recognize the need for support, but fail to
provide it; and (4) the need for support may be recognized and the support may be provided, but be somehow insufficient. The bereaved parents in the study conducted by Brabant and colleagues (1995) suggested individual explanations for the lack of response by others: “Family members were too devastated, others did not know what to say, the bereaved parent was male, they thought the parent(s) should be over it by now” (p. 80). Their reasons were in keeping with those offered by both Worden (1991) and Rando (1985; 1986).

Elliott Rosen (1990) states that there are no normative time parameters for the course of parental grief, and that it is rarely, if ever, “fully resolved”. In fact, he states that “many parents find the task impossible and thus mourn interminably” (p. 61). Interminable grief is essentially “grief without end and involves the deceased as an ever-present factor in the life of the family” (Rosen, 1990, p. 108). Rosen observes that interminable grief seems to be most prevalent among mothers who have experienced the death of a child, although he states it is “not exclusively a phenomenon experienced by women” (p. 108). This description of interminable grief sounds reminiscent of Worden’s (1991, p. 71) “chronic grief reaction.” The data base from which Rosen makes his observations are the numerous families with whom he has worked clinically as a family therapist and hospice consultant.

Parental grief has been described as “severe, complicated and long lasting with major and unparalleled symptom fluctuations over time” (Rando, 1986, p. xi). Results from a study with parents following the death of a child from cancer demonstrated an amplification of the parental grief experience in the third year of bereavement (Rando, 1983). Other longitudinal investigations have revealed significant levels of depression up to seven years following the death of the child (Lehman, Wortman, & Williams, 1987; Martinson, Davis, & McClowry, 1991). De Vries, Dalla Lana, and Falck (1994) suggest

1. Hospice is a community-based form of palliative care.
that a grief response of this duration exceeds the parameters of “what is considered to be a normal grief response” (p. 49). This statement seems to reflect an underlying belief that parental bereavement is not “normal”, or at least that its length is considered excessive.

Overall then, it seems that ongoing social support for bereaved parents, from either family or friends, has not typically been forthcoming. The spectre of dealing with the death of a child may be too painful for those who might otherwise be supportive in times of need. The death of a child may arouse feelings of incompetence, anger, disillusionment with one’s expectations about life, and a sense of impotence, in both the parents as well as those around them. Indeed, one might speculate that investigators, who themselves have children, find this area of inquiry potentially “too close to home” and therefore avoid the subject as a research endeavour. The “non-normative” intensity and duration of parental grief may leave potential supporters of bereaved parents feeling helpless and perhaps even resentful that the parents aren’t “moving on” or “getting over it” fast enough. This context may help explain the success of self-help groups for bereaved parents. The Compassionate Friends is one such organization and is the focus of the next section.

2.2.1 The Compassionate Friends: The Role of Support Groups

A review of literature concerning bereaved parents would be incomplete without mention of an organization known as The Compassionate Friends (TCF). Indeed, the context for much of Klass’ ethnographic research and theorizing about bereaved parents has been provided by a particular chapter of Compassionate Friends (i.e., St. Louis, Missouri). Likewise, other researchers in the field have drawn upon members of The Compassionate Friends for their data base (e.g., Brabant et al., 1995; Videka-Sherman, 1982; Riches & Dawson, 1997). Therefore, part of the contextualizing of this literature review of parental bereavement requires at least a brief overview of this organization.
The Compassionate Friends is a self-help organization offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents. The purposes are to promote and aid parents in the positive resolution of the grief experienced upon the death of their child and to foster the physical and emotional health for bereaved parents and siblings (The Compassionate Friends, 1995).

Although Compassionate Friends was originally founded by an Anglican priest in England (Burnell & Burnell, 1986), the organization is non-sectarian. The first North American chapter of The Compassionate Friends was founded in 1972, in Miami, Florida. There are now more than 300 chapters in the United States, a quarterly national newsletter, and monthly local chapter newsletters in some locations (Burnell & Burnell, 1986). The main function of a chapter is to provide a "forum for open, non-judgemental exchange and sharing of feelings, ideas and information about one's own grief and the loss of loved ones", in particular children (Burnell & Burnell, 1986, p. 295). There is no limitation placed on the length of time elapsed since a child's death nor on the age of the deceased child.

Internationally, there are approximately 1,000 Compassionate Friends chapters in over twenty-five countries. Canada has about seventy chapters and there are an additional fifty Compassionate Friends contact people in areas of this country that do not have their own chapter (P. Pinch, personal communication, October 5, 1996). A country-wide newsletter for The Compassionate Friends of Canada is published from the national office in Winnipeg on a regular basis, as are local chapter newsletters.

The underlying philosophy expressed by Compassionate Friends appears to be one of accepting that each child is unique and therefore the grief experienced in response to their death will also be unique and individual. The implicit adoption of a grief work hypothesis (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1993b) seems evident in the group's statement that: "each parent must find his or her way through grief," which is contained in their
brochure. The grief work hypothesis suggests that coming to terms with grief is dependent upon a bereaved person working through their loss by confronting the reality of the loss, going over events surrounding the death, remembering the deceased, and working toward detachment (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1993b). However, the necessary “detachment from the deceased” which is required of this process (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1993b, p. 224) seems to be at direct odds with the “continuing bond” which has been posited to exist between the parent and the deceased child (Silverman & Klass, 1996; Klass, 1996). (This issue of conflicting models of grief will be discussed in greater detail in a subsequent section of this literature review.)

It has been suggested that the “success” of The Compassionate Friends chapters on such a large geographic scale demonstrates the lack of support, and short-lived support when it is available, to bereaved parents (Brabant et al., 1995). Silverman and Nickman (1996a) propose that the impetus for the formation of The Compassionate Friends was in part the lack of legitimization for the experience of bereaved parents in the larger societal context. In The Compassionate Friends, bereaved parents:

... find comfort, acceptance and legitimation of their feelings. In the context of these organizations, the survivors are helped to express their feelings, to see that there is a future, and to find role models in people who have successfully managed their grief and continue to thrive. In this context they learn the “tricks of the trade”, using Irving Goffman’s term ... Bereaved parents learn how to include the child in the holidays, and how to tell people how many children they “have”. (Silverman & Nickman, 1996a, p. 354)

Klass (1988, 1996) has also described the transitional process of some bereaved parents, involved in The Compassionate Friends, whereby they move from an initial recipient role to eventually assuming more of a helping role. Klass (1996) contends that the inner representation of the deceased child is “made real” as a function of the parents’ finding meaning in their own lives. One way that bereaved parents may achieve this state
is by helping others, and in The Compassionate Friends this often means taking on the role of group facilitator or planning a commemorative event (Klass, 1996).

With the exception of Dennis Klass' work, there has been inadequate description of the bereaved parents who attend The Compassionate Friends. However, given that these parents form the data base of several studies it would seem useful to develop a greater understanding of this particular context in which many bereaved parents are involved.

2.2.2 Cutting the Bond: The Zeitgeist of Detachment

In examining the bereavement-mortality relationship Margaret Stroebe and colleagues (1994) state:

In the age of postmodernism it is no longer fashionable to die of a broken heart. Rather, one seeks to relinquish ties to the deceased person, if necessary with the aid of expert counselling or therapy (Stroebe, Gergen, Gergen, & Stroebe, 1992). Yet hearts do not change as rapidly as social philosophies. Contemporary studies have shown that when a loved one dies, the bereaved person left behind is also more likely to die (p. 47).

Rudestam (1992) suggests that it was John Bowlby (1980) who played the lead role in linking the bereavement process to the dissolution of attachment bonds. From Bowlby's modernist perspective, grief is conceived of as a form of separation anxiety, and the motivation to restore proximity to the permanently lost object is considered dysfunctional. Nevertheless, the bereaved person attempts to restore the lost relationship through a series of phases which eventually result in the effort becoming extinguished. Bowlby and Parkes (1970) described the phases of normal bereavement as beginning with shock and numbness, then moving through yearning and protest, disorganization, and ultimately, reorganization. Bowlby's conceptualization of grief, like its psychoanalytic forerunners, "suggests that bonds with the deceased need to be broken for the bereaved to adjust and recover" (Stroebe et al., 1992). People who maintain
bonds with the deceased are thought of as maladjusted. Margaret Stroebe and her colleagues (Stroebe et al., 1992) refer to this general assumption as the “breaking bonds” hypothesis.

The earliest origins of this theory are to be found in Freud’s (1917/1957) writing. He considered the psychological function of grief as liberating the bereaved person of his or her ties to the deceased, attaining eventual detachment through a process of reviewing the past and dwelling on memories of the deceased (Stroebe, et al., 1992). The task of the bereaved is to gradually disengage the attachment (“cathectic”) of libidinal energy from the internal representation of the loved one (“object”) and eventually transfer it to a new “love object,” a process which he termed “decathexis.”

The pervasive influence of Freud’s thinking is evident in the original version of Worden’s (1982) task-based model of mourning, where the Fourth Task was seen to involve “withdrawing emotional energy from the deceased and reinvesting it in another relationship” (see Appendix A for a complete listing of the four tasks in Worden’s model). In his attempt to make this task sound less “mechanical” and avoid misinterpretation Worden (1991) changed Task IV to read: “To emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life” (p. 16). It is interesting to note, that despite Worden’s effort to clarify himself that some current writers in the field of bereavement (e.g., Sprang & McNeil, 1995) continue to rely on the original version of “The Four Tasks of Mourning.” Not unlike other areas of psychology, it seems also the case in the grief and bereavement literature, that when a particularly influential theory is forwarded (e.g., Kubler-Ross, 1969) that despite subsequent revisions or conditions, the original incarnation maintains a life of its own.
2.2.3 Specific Models of Grief: The Example of Klass and Marwit

The models of grief which are predominant in this field have arisen from studying the loss of specific close relationships, namely the death of a spouse. Many theorists do not explicitly state which population they had in mind when they were developing their theories, and yet the particular theory seems to reflect more accurately the experiences of one group of mourners more than another (B. Chartier, personal communication, May 15, 1996). For example, Worden’s task-based theory of mourning, which remains one of the most influential in the field, relied mainly on the author’s investigations and experience with bereaved spouses, although this is not stated in either edition of Grief Counseling & Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Professional (1982, 1991) (J. W. Worden, personal communication, May 17, 1996). It may be argued that his initial (1982) statement of Task IV: “withdrawing emotional energy from the deceased and reinvesting it in another relationship”, reflected this bias towards spousal loss. Wortman and Silver (1989) have been critical of phase-based models of mourning, such as the one proposed by Bowlby and Parkes (1970). They argue that the so-called phases are generalizations arising from the study of a particular population that may have been constructed without adequate methodological rigor and that may have limited applicability beyond the original sample.

In 1986, Rando asserted that these generalized models of grief do not adequately explain or address the grief processes of bereaved parents. Likewise, Klass and Marwit (1988) contend that neither the attachment model (Bowlby, 1980; Bowlby & Parkes, 1970; Archer, 1999) nor the psychoanalytic model (Volkan, 1981) were able to sufficiently explain the experiences of parents bereaved of a child. Goodman and colleagues (1991) describe the majority of theoretical models of grief requiring a “decathexis from the deceased, readjustment to the environment, and a commitment to
new relationships as the path to regaining emotional equilibrium (Klass, 1988; Pine and Brauer, 1986)” (p. 323). This description does not fit the phenomenology of grief for most parents who are bereaved of a child.

Klass and Marwit (1988) have proposed a model of parental bereavement in response to their claim that “current models of grief and bereavement do not adequately account for the unique characteristics of parental grief and the complex grief reactions exhibited by parents after the death of a child” (De Vries et al., 1994). They begin with the assumption that what establishes “the special quality of parental bereavement” (Klass & Marwit, 1988, p. 31) is the unique relationship between the parent and the child, a relationship they argue which is unlike the relationship of the parent to their spouse, siblings, friends, or own parents. The implicit belief here seems to be that the parent-child relationship is so unique that grief theories based largely upon other types of relationship losses are unable to account for the experience of losing a child. Klass and Marwit (1988) developed what they believe to be a model to address this gap by asking the question: “What is the relation of parent and child from the parents’ point of view?” (p. 31). They began by exploring a wide body of literature encompassing studies of primates, studies of human parent-child bonding, psychodynamic studies of parenting, and investigations of child abuse and neglect (i.e., “parenting as it turns pathological”).

Klass and Marwit (1988) have pointed out the relative absence of studies of the parent-child relationship from the parents’ perspective as compared to a significant literature on the parent-child relationship from the child’s point of view. They state that “Although there is virtually no experimental literature on the extended relationships between parent and child from the parents’ point of view, there has been interest in the early period of that attachment” (pp. 34-35). Most of these studies are contained in the literature of infant-mother bonding. Citing work by R. H. Turner (1970), Klass and
Marwit distinguish between various types of bonding patterns within families: contractual, sacred, identity, and crescive. Contractual bonds consist of those which "people enter on the basis of an understood group of mutual obligations" (Turner, 1970, pp. 91-92), where the obligations are mutual. Sacred bonds are considered to be "obligations to God, or to ancestors, or to an abstract principle" (Turner, 1970, pp. 91-92). Identity bonds are constituted by a family member assimilating those qualities which are perceived in the identity of another. However, according to Turner (1970), if a response from the other person is not forthcoming, the identity bond loses potency. "Crescive bonds, on the other hand, grow with interaction as lives grow intertwined and as 'we' replaces 'I' in speech patterns" (Klass & Marwit, 1988, p. 34).

Klass and Marwit's model, in part, relies upon the characterization of the parent-child bond as sacred as opposed to contractual. "Contractual bonds may be broken if the interactions are no longer reciprocal, but sacred bonds cannot be broken by lack of interaction because they are not contingent on changes in the behavior of others" (p. 34). The authors contend that in current society, the bond between marital partners is regarded as contractual, while the bonds between parent and child are considered sacred. Likewise, Klass and Marwit (1988) suggest that the parents' obligations to the sacred bond with the child are different than those to the contractual bond with the spouse, and that the parents' sense of competence in part rests on their ability to fulfill the former obligation. This framework would help explain then why the issue of competence appears to arise so frequently in the discourse of bereaved parents. Relying on Goldberg (1979, p.35), the authors define competence broadly as "the need to cope effectively with the environment."
The model of parental grief which emerges from Klass and Marwit’s synthesis of a wide body of literature incorporates: (1) Loss of Interactive Regulators, (2) Loss as a Challenge to Competence, (3) Narcissistic Loss: The Amputation Metaphor, (4) Social Support and the Quality of Resolution, (5) Multiple Representations, Multiple Grieving, and (6) Solace: The Child in the Life of the Bereaved Parent. Parental grief is understood to be “a continuation of the complex dynamics by which the attachment to the child was created and developed”, and is resolved by parents finding “new equilibria” (p. 39).

The first element of Klass and Marwit’s model; “Loss of Interactive Regulators”; addresses the interactive quality of the parent-child attachment. They assert that: “For many parents the crescive bond with the child is the most significant interactive relationship they have” (p. 39). The child’s death means the loss of a significant interaction and subsequent internal regulation. Klass and Marwit (1988) suggest that the extended nature of parental grief is not surprising since “the interactive quality of the attachment means that the loss of the attachment is the loss of a major interactive regulator within an increasingly stressful environment” (p. 39). They make the interpretation that this loss of interactive regulators is concretely expressed in what appears to observers as practical problems, but which bereaved parents experience as existential dilemmas. Examples of these difficulties include how to celebrate holidays and birthdays, how to respond when asked “How many children do you have?”, what to do with the child’s possessions, and how to negotiate the spousal relationship. While not explicitly stated, it would seem that this element in Klass and Marwit’s model is particularly salient for parents whose child was still living in the parental home prior to their death.

“Loss as a Challenge to Competence” describes the effect of the death of the child on a parent’s sense of responsibility. In their model, Klass and Marwit assert that a
child’s death profoundly challenges the “sense of parental competence and sacred obligation” (p. 40). They quote a father from their study on bereaved parents in Compassionate Friends: “You are supposed to be able to protect your child . . . But I couldn’t protect him from doing one foolish thing and that one act cost him his life. Still I feel like a failure as a father. I feel so helpless” (p. 40). The authors cite the work of Bugen (1977) in noting that, in cases of sudden death, the length and severity of the parents’ grief reaction is a function of the degree of perceived preventability. In cases of a lengthy terminal illness, the parent’s sense of competence may be enhanced if they are involved in the child’s care during that time (Mulhern, Lauer, & Hoffman, 1983). Klass and Marwit (1988) suggest that many of the behaviours of parents following the death of their child are explainable as “assertions of competence.” They argue, for example, that the published writings of bereaved parents can be understood in this way, as assertions of competence. They are the parents’ attempts to ensure that the child’s memory stays alive. Likewise, Klass and Marwit assert that parent’s public responses to their child’s death, like founding and managing organizations (e.g., Mothers Against Drunk Driving - MADD) and seeking justice through the legal system can all be seen as assertions of competence in one’s parenthood. “Several parents have reported that such activities are connected in their mind with showing themselves as well as the world that they can still serve their child even after death” (p. 40). While Klass and Marwit have made this particular interpretation of these acts, I wondered if these assertions of competence would emerge in the discourse (i.e. talk and/or writings) of bereaved parents themselves.

The third component of Klass and Marwit’s (1988) model is “Narcissistic Loss: The Amputation Metaphor.” Here, the authors suggest that the death of a child also represents a challenge to the sense of the child as a part of the self in the form of an inner representation, thus a narcissistic wound. Klass and Marwit propose that this sense of
“deep narcissistic hurt” may be at the root of the metaphor of amputation, which they state they have encountered repeatedly in working with bereaved parents. While they acknowledge that grief following the death of any loved one echoes this theme of having a part of the self cut out, they observe that this experience is “exaggerated in parents after the death of a child.” They also comment on the duration of this sense of amputation in bereaved parents: “A continuing sense of that amputation remains in the form of an empty historical track which we find life-long in most bereaved parents” (p. 41).

Klass and Marwit’s fourth area in developing their model concerns “Social Support and the Quality of Resolution.” They draw a comparison between the importance of social support in parental bereavement and the importance of social support in parenting, stating: “It appears that just as the quality of parenting is enhanced when the new bond is shared within other social bonds, the quality of parental bereavement is enhanced by the same sharing” (p. 42). Klass and Marwit (1988) note that the provision of a social support system is the goal which served as the impetus for the creation of many bereaved parents organizations. They also suggest that for bereaved parents in these groups, that the provision of support to other parents serves as an extension of the need to feel competent. In discussing the results of a study which examined affiliation amongst bereaved parents in The Compassionate Friends (Klass, 1984) Klass and Marwit stated that the parents experienced a sense of unity, a feeling of being in a family-like community, and “the sense that the group was an appropriate place to which energy formerly attached to the child might now be attached” (p. 42). The particular wording of this last finding is especially intriguing since it almost mirrors Worden’s (1982) fourth task of grieving in its original form (i.e., reinvesting energy). In examining the discourse of bereaved parents I thought it would be interesting to see how
near or far Klass' interpretation might fall from the language of participants in this study. Still on the subject of words, Klass and Marwit (1988) refer in this fourth component of their model, to the "quality of parental bereavement," the "quality of the bond established between parent and child" and the "quality of the resolution of parental bereavement" (p. 42). The authors are remiss in failing to specify exactly what they mean by "quality" in these instances, especially since the word has such strong connotations.

In the penultimate component of their model Klass and Marwit (1988) describe "Multiple Representations" and "Multiple Grievings" in parental bereavement. Drawing, as they often do, on concepts from object relations and psychodynamic theory, Klass and Marwit reintroduce the notion of multiple inner representations of the "lost object" (i.e., the deceased child). The loss of a child signifies multiple meanings, with different inner representations playing different roles. The implication here is that the bereaved parents' task is to resolve each of the inner representations of the dead child, somewhat independently of each other (i.e., "multiple grievings"). Klass and Marwit (1988) contend that the greater the ambivalences in the attachment between the parent and child, the greater the likelihood of a complicated grieving process.

It is the last component of Klass & Marwit's (1988) model; "Solace: The Child in the Life of the Bereaved Parent," which speaks most directly to the notion of a "continuing bond" (i.e., ongoing attachment). They state that: "A relationship so central to the self as that between parent and child does not end with the death of the child . . . the inner representation plays a role in the parent's ongoing life" (p. 44). Relying heavily on object relations theory, the authors contend that bereaved parents may find "solace" through the transformation of the inner representation(s) of the child by identification, introjection, and externalization. Klass and Marwit (1988, p. 44) describe identification as: " . . . making the child a part of the self by integrating the inner representation into
the self.” Introspection is defined as “... keeping the child as a frozen entity in one’s psychosocial world” (p. 44), and externalization occurs when “the representation is expelled from the self” (p. 45). The authors contend that the healthy incorporation of the inner representations of the child is facilitated by identification and introjection, while the rejection of unacceptable aspects of the inner representation is accomplished by the process of externalization.

In their model of parental bereavement, Klass and Marwit (1988) underline the distinctiveness of the parent-child relationship, one that is extremely complex and ultimately different from any other human relationship. In addressing the complexity of the parent-child attachment, Klass and Marwit (1988) state: “When that attachment is broken by the death of the child, all of the issues we have seen in the creation and development of the attachment are again at play in the response to the loss of the attachment” (p. 38). These authors propose that a child’s death creates two disequilibria with the bereaved parents: one is in the parent’s social environment and the other effects the continuing relationship with the inner representation of the child. “One’s sense of competence as a parent is challenged by the apparent failure to live up to the sacred bond (p. 49).

In discussing the death of an adult child in the context of generativity issues, Goodman and colleagues (1991, p. S323) underline the belief that children are the “primary vehicle of generativity,” regardless of whether the parents are at mid- or late-life:

It is during old age that children vicariously deliver generative validity to their parents, both as successful individuals and as parents in their own right. As grandparents, older persons provide care for their grandchildren, heightening the reality that the self will continue after they are gone, and tightening the bond between themselves and their own children.
These authors also propose that the loss of a child may represent a loss far beyond the personal boundaries of the immediate relationship. In referring to the Jewish bereaved mothers in their study, Goodman, Rubinstein, Alexander, and Luborsky (1991), describe the cultural context as one in which the continuity of the group is charged to the women of the culture and the death of each Jew is seen as a threat to Jewish survival overall. The authors propose that the exalted emphasis placed on bearing and raising children in Jewish culture places bereaved Jewish mothers in "double jeopardy." "Having invested in the survival of Judaism by instilling their beliefs in their children, the loss of a child denies them, not only their own generativity, but the generativity of their culture" (Goodman et al., 1991, p. S323).

As an extension of Klass and Marwit's dual disequilibria model, De Vries, Dalla Lana, and Falck (1994) place the death of a child within a family life cycle framework. They propose that neither the "social environment" nor the "ongoing relationship with the inner representation of the child" are static, but that they vary with regard to placement in the life course or family stage. They argue that "a family death (and particularly the death of a child) is perceived differently and is associated with different issues and patterns of adaptation as a function of family stage" (p. 50). This assertion is supported by the empirical work of Rubin (1990), who demonstrated that the loss of a child is a multidimensional phenomenon with qualitative differences in the grief experience of parents depending on their position in the life span and that of their deceased and surviving children. (Rubin's 1990 study is described in detail in the next section of the literature review)

2.2.4 The "Continuing Bond": A Challenge to the Traditional Model of Grief

An emerging psychological literature on loss is challenging the traditional view of grief and mourning which sees a continuing attachment with the deceased as maladaptive
to the process of "successful" bereavement (Stroebe et al., 1992; Klass, Silverman, and Nickman, 1996; Rubin, 1996). This contemporary perspective considers the ongoing relationship to the deceased to be "normative, evolving, and with great capacity to be adaptive" (Rubin, 1996, p. 230).

The argument for the necessity of expanding our conception of the bereavement process is contained in a recent book edited by Klass, Silverman, and Nickman (1996), entitled Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief. The suggestion is made that the assumptions underlying the existing model of grief, which emphasizes the severing of bonds with the deceased, have remained largely unexamined. Wolfgang Stroebe (1996) has commented on the propensity for social scientists, himself included, to adopt various theoretical models for lengthy periods of time without questioning the underlying assumptions. Silverman & Klass (1996) state that while "models are intellectual schemata ... they are part of the Zeitgeist, the spirit of a particular age" (p. 3). The "spirit" which has characterized the first generation of grief and bereavement literature in the twentieth century has been one based largely on Freud's notions of psychic withdrawal and relational detachment. Even the words "loss" and "lost," which permeate the literature, speak of deprivation and of things vanished (Mackenzie, 1960).

Interestingly enough, as Silverman and Klass (1996) point out, Freud's model of grief was not supported by his own parental bereavement experience. He wrote the following after his daughter Sophie died at age 27:

Since I am profoundly irreligious there is no one I can accuse, and I know there is nowhere to which any complaint could be addressed. "The unvarying circle of a soldier's duties" and the "sweet habit of existence" will see to it that things go on as before. Quite deep down I can trace the feeling of a deep narcissistic hurt that is not to be healed. (Jones, 1957, p. 20)
Freud’s early theorizing about grief took on a life of its own (Silverman & Klass, 1996, p. 7), and his personal bereavement experiences failed to be incorporated into his psychoanalytic framework. Silverman and Klass (1996, p. 7) state that:

The post-Freud paradigm for understanding grief has maintained the idea that the primary goal of grieving is to cut the bond with the deceased so that new attachments can be formed. As we examine the history, we find that phenomena indicating that survivors do maintain bonds with the deceased have been rediscovered many times, but each time the insight fails to be passed on and incorporated into the next generation of research and theory.

They propose an alternative model ("conceptual archetype"), where the "resolution" of grief is seen as involving "a continuing bond that the survivor maintains with the deceased" (Silverman & Klass, 1996, p. 3).

Part of the work which has been initiated in *Continuing Bonds* is to "flesh out" the notion of attachment and "define some of its parameters" (p. 350). Silverman and Nickman (1996a), in the concluding chapter, discuss the multiplicative nature of attachment and the incomplete state of our knowledge about the bond with an "absent person". They question whether it is appropriate to use the term "attachment" (defined in Webster’s dictionary as affectionate regard or devotion) when talking about a continuing bond with the deceased. While Silverman and Nickman (1996a) acknowledge that "Devotion and affection do not end with a death," they state that there are differences between connections with the living and the deceased. Those with the deceased rely, in part, "on the memory and ability of the survivor to maintain an inner dialogue" (p. 350).

The central thesis of *Continuing Bonds* is that maintaining an inner representation of the deceased is normal rather than abnormal, and that survivors “hold the deceased in loving memory” for long periods of time, often their entire life. “It also is more central to survivors’ experience than commonly has been recognized” (Silverman & Nickman, 1996a, p. 349). This alternative view of the relational phenomenon of grief and mourning
appears to address the experience of parental bereavement with particular salience. As the research literature demonstrates, parental bereavement is most often characterized by intense grief over a long time period. Silverman and Nickman (1996a) use the term “interfaces” to describe the experience of the bereaved person. They suggest that there is an interactive and reciprocal influence of both the survivor’s inner representation of the deceased person and the community of living people which encompass the survivor. In terms of what is meant by an inner representation or an interactive relationship, Silverman and Nickman (1996a) acknowledge that there is no common definition. Klass (1996) for example, relying on object relations theory, defines inner representation as: “the part of the self actualized in the bond with the person, characterizations, and memories” (p. 200).

Within this emerging theory of grief the concept of paradox is addressed. This is framed as the “irreconcilable tension” of having the deceased both present and absent at the same time. They are absent by their death and present in the survivors’ experience of the past as an element of who they are (Silverman & Nickman, 1996a). Silverman and Nickman (1996a) underline that by emphasizing the importance of the continuing bond with the deceased, they are not suggesting that mourners live in the past. They contend that the paradoxical reality of survivors is one where “an inner system” continues to be focused on the person who is not physically present any longer. Sometimes this “inner reality” fosters the forward movement of the bereaved.

Klass (1996) describes parents who experience their deceased child as encouraging them to live and appreciate life, to move forward, “but this does not involve severing their tie or their obligation to the deceased” (Silverman & Nickman, 1996a, p. 351). The continuing bonds thesis holds that while the connection between the survivor
and the deceased remains after the death, it is not static. The centrality of the bond in the life of the mourner may shift and it may change its form over time.

One of the implications of adopting the continuing bonds hypothesis, as Silverman and Nickman (1996a) point out, is that the diagnosis of complicated mourning can no longer be made. They state that a “continuing attachment to the deceased has consistently been the defining symptom of people diagnosed with what was called at one point ‘pathological grief’, and is now called ‘complicated mourning’” (pp. 351-352). At another level, this newer understanding of loss moves the field away from conceptualizations which once viewed grief in the context of a disease model and its inherent biases. “A diagnosis of pathological grief or complicated mourning has been one of the society’s ways of enforcing the view that bonds must be severed” (Silverman & Nickman, 1996a, p. 352). The psychiatric nomenclature currently predominant in North America (i.e., American Psychiatric Association, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th ed., 1994) does not include a diagnostic category for either pathological grief or complicated mourning. However, in a section discussing the differentiation of normal bereavement from either Major Depressive Episode or Major Depressive Disorder, the suggestion is made that “symptoms” should be expected to disappear “2 months after the loss” (p. 684). At the same time the editors of the manual acknowledge that: “The duration and expression of normal bereavement vary considerably among different cultural groups” (p. 684). Silverman and Nickman (1996a) assert that a further implication of these new understandings of grief is that the

2. This shift in language from “pathological grief” to “complicated mourning” has been emphasized particularly in Rando’s (1993) writings. With such a shift the emphasis changes from focusing on the “problem” as personal (i.e., pathological grief) to one of wider societal implication (i.e., complicated mourning). The difference in meaning suggests that greater care need be taken by both clinicians and researchers in using these terms as if they were equivalent and interchangeable.
notion of grief being completed becomes irrelevant. Along the lines that Rando (1986) has suggested, the mourner accommodates to the “new assumptive world”, incorporating their loss as an ongoing part of the self in society (i.e., grief is never “over”).

While advocating for a new model of grief, the editors of Continuing Bonds also caution that this emerging model not repeat the mistakes of the past, which Silverman and Nickman (1996a) argue, involved a theory being based on particular cultural values. Specifically, Silverman and Nickman (1996a) warn against imposing the concept of ongoing attachment to the deceased as a rigid requirement for all mourners. “We should not impose any requirements for what healthy grief looks like. We need to allow individuals room to make their own meaning and their own peace” (p. 353). They suggest that the eventual clinical and community-based applications of a new theory of grief would better serve the diverse needs of the bereaved. These would contrast with “Normative approaches based on a prescribed period of mourning, with the idea that one should have ‘moved on’ after that length of time,” which rather serve as “a Procrustean bed for therapy” (p. 355).

2.3 Research Findings: Parental Responses to the Death of Adult Children

A minimal amount of research has been directed towards the subject of parental loss of an adult child (Rando, 1986; Cacace & Williamson, 1996; Goodman, et al., 1991). Given longer life expectancies and the ever increasing number of older adults in the population, the prospect of parents surviving adult children also increases (Cacace & Williamson, 1996). Cacace and Williamson (1996) contend that “the impact of the death of adult children on older parents has only been minimally examined” (p. 16). They were able to identify only two research studies (Goodman et al., 1991; Lesher & Bergey, 1988) and one opinion article (Moss et al., 1986) in this area of investigation.
A parent in a support group made the statement that "It is not necessarily 'harder' or 'easier' to lose a very young child as opposed to a teenager. It is simply a quite 'different' kind of pain" (Weiss, 1984, p. 76). The normal life course and expectation is that the old predecease the young. There exists a dominant social belief that parents should not outlive their children (Sanders, 1979-80; Pine and Brauer, 1986). The death of a child of any age is an assault on this normal life course (Hocker, 1988) and such disturbances have been found to exacerbate the grief response (Videka-Sherman, 1982). Indeed, Miles and Demi (1986) found a greater chance of developing survivor guilt among older parents whose children had predeceased them. As Grollman (1995) states:

Children are not supposed to die. They are expected to live long, productive lives and grow into old age. With the death of a child, parents as well as siblings are often thrown into crisis. It is difficult for siblings to witness their parents anguish and inconsolable pain (p. 13).

Robert Kalish (1977) has made the observation that North American culture views the deaths of young adults as the most tragic. "At this lifestage, they have not yet been able to make use of their training and education, their deaths are often sudden, and they are seen as having been deprived of their birthright" (in De Vries et al., 1994, p. 51). Rando (1983) suggests that the parents of adult children, who are generally older themselves, may experience the "out-of-turnness" of their child's death in particular sharp relief. With the socialized expectation that the old are the closest to death, the child's death seems severely disynchronous. Older surviving parents in particular may feel torn by the competing thoughts that they are glad to be alive, yet should have been the one to die first (Lesher & Bergey, 1988). Their grief responses may be complicated and magnified by this survivor guilt (Moss et al., 1986-87).
With the death of a young adult, in their thirties or forties, life cycle expectations are confounded and families at diverse stages in their life cycles are challenged to undergo complex reorganization (Rosen, 1990; L’Abate, 1994). The young adult, while being a child, can also simultaneously be a grandchild, sibling, marriage partner, and parent. “Probably no death demonstrates the interrelationship of the family of origin and family of adulthood more profoundly than does the death of the young adult” (Rosen, 1990, p. 59). In taking a family life cycle perspective, Rosen (1990) states that “the death of a fifty-year-old child is, in many ways, no less painful than the death of a five-year-old child in that the family’s sense of itself as a nurturing, protective unit is shattered” (p. 58). Although the adult child may have established their independence, separate from their family of origin, it is suggested that strong “bio-social” connections persist (Moss et al., 1986). Some have postulated that the bond of attachment is stronger for the parents than it is for the adult children (Cicirelli, 1983).

As the child holds multiple representations for the parents, the death of the child will naturally hold multiple meanings (De Vries et al., 1994). The adult child may represent a relationship where significant time, emotion, and energy has been invested on the part of the parent(s). The death of the child signifies a loss of this multifaceted investment as opposed to the loss of a potential relationship, as in the case of a younger child (Rubin, 1990). Older bereaved parents have commented that with the death of their adult child, they lost not only their offspring, but their friend (De Vries, 1994). Owen, Fulton, and Markusen (1982) underline that the particular grief response is significantly determined by the nature of the relationship which existed between the survivor and the deceased. Klass (1988) has argued, additionally, that “rather than ending a relationship, a child’s death affects a change in the role the relationship plays in the life of the parent” (in De Vries et al., 1994, p. 53).
Older parents may already be faced with a number life transition and loss issues, including losses of mobility and independence. They may be living with a chronic illness, necessitating their reliance on others for care and assistance. To varying degrees older parents may need to depend on their children for support in accomplishing the activities of daily living (Cacace & Williamson, 1996). Besides the personal aspect of the loss, the death of an adult child may signify a secondary loss in that it means that a key support person will be permanently absent. Rando (1986) suggests that relationships between older bereaved parents and their grandchildren may dwindle away or become lost as a result of in-laws geographical relocation. This form of secondary loss may feel unbearable in addition to the death of their adult offspring. Goodman, Rubinstein, Alexander, and Luborsky (1991) state: “The few existing articles that look at elderly parents responses to the loss of an adult child concur that their grief is uniquely tragic but offer little in the way of prognosis or recovery” (p. S323). The plain fact of having less potential years to live than younger parents, during which to adapt to the loss, may place older parents at a disadvantage (Rando, 1986). On the other hand, one might argue that having to live less years with the memories of one’s child dying, would be the greater blessing.

Videka-Sherman (1982) conducted one of the earliest studies of parental bereavement with 194 parents; 136 women and 58 men; ranging in age from 21 to 67 years (mean age = 41.2 years). The aim of this study was to try to explain parental adjustment to the death of a child, including the role played by a self-help group. The conceptual parameters of coping with stress that were utilized in this study included a definition of coping strategies as: “psychological variables with impact on the level of parental emotional distress . . . conscious or unconscious . . . composites of action and cognitive activity” (P. 689). While Videka-Sherman acknowledged that there are
multiple ways to define “adaptation to loss”, she chose to focus on the psychological adjustment of parents following a child’s death. While levels of depression were considered to “provide one indicator of a parent’s progression through the grief process” (p. 689) Videka-Sherman used personal change (i.e., “an alteration in one’s sense of self”) as a further indicator of psychological adjustment to loss. The study sought to explore the relationships between coping, adjustment, and the potential influence of participation in a bereaved parents self-help group. “The relative adaptiveness of each coping strategy was assessed in terms of change in parents’ psychological adjustment to the loss over a period of one year” (p. 689).

The sample was over-represented by well educated, middle- and upper-middle-class parents and was drawn from lists of bereaved parents which had been generated by The Compassionate Friends. Fifty-seven per cent of the deceased children had died suddenly, thirty-nine per cent died from progressive or terminal illnesses, and twelve per cent of the deaths were violent in nature. Thirteen per cent of the parents had lost their only children and no parents were bereaved more than eighteen months at the time of the study. No details are provided by the author with respect to the ages of the children at the time of death or the cultural backgrounds of the participants. Likewise, although one of the six dimensions on the coping instrument which Videka-Sherman used was “turning to religion”, no information on the religious involvement or affiliations of the participants is given. (The remaining dimensions of the coping instrument included: “preoccupation”; “escape”; “altruism”; “replacement of the child by adopting a new role”; and “replacement with another child”).

In examining coping strategies and psychological adjustment at two different points in time, the investigator administered a self-designed measure of coping, the Hopkins Symptom Check List (HSCL) and a projective sentence completion test (SCT),
up to 18 months after the death had occurred (Time One) and one year later (Time Two). The latter two measures were used to measure depression as one aspect of psychological adjustment to loss. Participants were also asked the question: “Bereaved parents have often stated that their tragic experience has left them with a sense of growth. We would appreciate your comments on the ways in which you have been affected and whether this had been true for you” (p. 691). The responses to this question were coded and content analyzed. The primary purpose in asking this question was to assess perceived self change. While Videka-Sherman (1982) described the investigation as “a study over time”, implying a longitudinal design, the one-year time frame for follow-up is relatively short in the context of parental bereavement. This would be especially true for those parents who were at the lesser end of the 18 month post-loss timeframe.

The findings of this study seemed to confirm the author’s preconceptions about categories of coping with loss. From a review of the literatures on coping and grief, Videka-Sherman (1982) had identified five possible coping strategies available to the bereaved parent, which then translated into the instrument which was used to measure coping in this study: (i) escape (ii) preoccupation (iii) replacement (iv) altruistic behaviour and (v) turning to religion. The author states that: “Most studies of coping with loss suggested the extremes of avoidance or escape and preoccupation with thoughts about the loss of the child” (p. 689). The extreme kind of thinking represented in these polar opposites presents a type of either/or view of parental bereavement. While it may be easier to reconcile this viewpoint with the traditional theory of grief which views the end goal as detachment from the deceased, more recent evidence (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996) suggests that the picture is not so unidimensional. The continuing bonds thesis asserts that perhaps the axis extending from preoccupation to
avoidance is intersected by the notion of a healthy attachment with the deceased; and that an orthogonal axis consists of "frozen" relationships (‘being stuck’) on one pole with developing relationships (‘moving on’) at the other end of the continuum.

The remaining coping strategies which Videka-Sherman (1982) garnered from the literature and from interviewing bereaved parents included replacing the "lost love object with a new object of investment" (p. 689); altruistic behaviour towards others facing a similar crisis; and seeking comfort in religious belief, which was seen as a particular type of cognitive strategy.

The observations which the author reported seemed to be in agreement with the tenets of traditional grief theory, "that the survivor must relinquish the attachment, the psychological presence of the lost object, in order to adapt to the loss" (p. 696). Videka-Sherman (1982) reported that parents who used "active" and "externally directed" coping strategies showed the best adaptation to their loss (i.e. increased growth, less depression, positive change in psychological adjustment). Such strategies included altruism, replacement with another child, or replacement with a new role. Bereaved parents who used these three (replacement/reinvestment) strategies at "Time One" became less depressed compared to parents who did not. The author interpreted these findings as evidence that these three coping strategies allowed the parent an opportunity "to reinvest energy and love in another valued pursuit" (p. 696). In arriving at her conclusions, Videka-Sherman seemed to be relying on the traditional (psychoanalytic) grief work proposition that successful resolution of the grief process is reflected in the ability of the bereaved person to "reinvest love and energy in another object" (p. 696). The author suggested that parents may have been aided in adjusting to their loss by replacing the child soon after his or her death, thus taking an active, external stance. Likewise, Videka-Sherman concluded that escape and preoccupation ("passive"
orientations) were the least adaptive coping strategies. The persistence of preoccupation, but not its intensity, was found to be associated with persisting depression. Videka-Sherman is one of the few authors who actually defined her use of the word preoccupation. She stated that it is “a persistent flooding of thoughts of the child or the death” (p. 689).

It seems that within Videka-Sherman’s interpretations of the findings there is a leap in logic which is based on a corollary of the notion of detachment. The assumption which seems implicit in the author’s interpretations is that bereaved parents who have adapted to their loss must necessarily have relinquished the bond with the deceased child. Klass and colleagues (1996) have challenged this kind of assumption with their evidence that bereaved parents can effectively adapt to the loss of a child, while at the same time maintaining, and even further “developing” (Tyson-Rawson, 1996) their relationship with the deceased. Videka-Sherman fails to directly address this assumptive issue, therefore contributing to the perception of a logical leap.

With regard to involvement in a self-help group, the author reported that at “Time One”, parents who were most involved in The Compassionate Friends were the most preoccupied with their loss and also most likely to use altruistic coping strategies. This relationship between high preoccupation and high involvement in the self-help group did not, however, maintain itself into “Time Two”. Videka-Sherman (1982) interpreted these findings as suggesting the possibility that high involvement in Compassionate Friends might have a diminishing effect on parental preoccupation with the deceased child. An alternative explanation was given in that perhaps the “unique therapeutic effect of participation in Compassionate Friends is the provision of opportunity for parents to shift coping strategies from a higher degree of preoccupation to altruism” (p. 697). This interpretation was most likely based on the observation that
the only differential change which maintained itself across the two times for those most highly involved in the self-help group was altruism. Implicit in the author’s interpretation is a kind of polemic thinking which posits a one-dimensional system, where “preoccupation” is at one end and “resolution” or “moving on” is at the other. It is not a natural conclusion that there exists a linear relationship between greater involvement in The Compassionate Friends and a decrease in preoccupation. This type of logic, however, may in part result from the author’s apparent bias towards the “detachment” model of grief. It would seem appropriate to follow Videka-Sherman’s (1982) suggestion to carry out further research in order to disentangle the relationships between changes in preoccupation and involvement of bereaved parents in The Compassionate Friends.

Shanfield and Swain (1984) studied forty middle-aged parents (mean age 50.4 years) whose young adult children (mean age 26.4 years) died as a result of traffic accidents. The bereaved parents completed the Symptom Checklist 90 (SCL-90), a well-validated self-rating instrument which measures the frequency and intensity of psychiatric symptoms; the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI); and a Bereavement Questionnaire which requested information about the parent, child, other members of the family, and the relationships between them for three time periods: a) the period 1 year before the accident; b) the time of the accident and immediately after the death of the child; c) the period months and years after the death. (The Bereavement Questionnaire appears to be a paper and pencil instrument which was developed for this study and about which the authors provide almost no information except for what has just been described) The demographics collected from the participants included: parent’s and child’s marital status; sex; child’s birth order; number of children; place of residence; age at which child moved out of family home; type of accident; and timing of death.
The authors were also interested in finding out about parent’s assessments of potential difficulties in their child’s life (e.g., financial, emotional, marital, stress, drug use) at the time of their death.

The majority of accidents involved the child as the driver of an automobile. Approximately fifty-two per cent of the children died immediately, while the remainder died within hours or days. The authors note that none of the study participants were with their children at the time of the accident. The parents completed the three paper and pencil instruments on average 25.6 months after their child died (range = 13-36 months) and Shanfield and Swain (1984) report that at this time ninety per cent were “still grieving” as measured by the Bereavement Questionnaire. This finding in itself is not so remarkable as the observation that apparently ten percent of the parents were no longer grieving. Another interesting result is that there were no significant changes in the parents’ use of alcohol, tranquilizers, over-the-counter medications, or cigarettes, although there was a significant rise in the number of health complaints following the child’s death. The authors also reported that 42.5% of the parents felt guilty and that 15% experienced a degree of guilt which the authors described as “considerable to extreme.”

Bereaved parents in Shanfield and Swain’s (1984) study felt that the death of their child was a more painful experience than losing either their sibling or parent. Surprisingly, several parents reported that, compared to the year before the death of their children, the quality of their marital and family life had improved, while lesser numbers felt that it had declined. As opposed to the findings of some subsequent studies (e.g., Rubin, 1996), Shanfield and Swain reported that 65.8 per cent of the bereaved parents (i.e., all who responded to this question) thought that they were closer to their remaining children after the death. The authors offer no interpretations of these particular findings.
One of the unique contributions of this study is that the investigators asked bereaved parents about their perceptions regarding problems in their deceased child’s life. Shanfield and Swain (1984) found the perceived psychological state of the child at the time of the accident to be an important determinant of the outcome of parental bereavement. The perception of their child as experiencing a high degree of difficulty prior to their death was predictive of a high degree of disturbance in the bereaved parent. The authors state: “These parents experience the most depression and psychiatric symptoms. The link between parental distress and children’s problems in the present study is more important than the particular circumstances of the accident” (p. 537).

Since this perception of problems in the child’s life also seemed to impede “family growth”, the authors suggest that the problems may be an indication of general instability in the family. Similar to other authors (e.g., Worden, 1991) Shanfield and Swain found that parents who viewed their relationship to the deceased child as ambivalent, experienced more guilt as measured by the Bereavement Questionnaire. Klass and Marwit (1988) later interpreted these findings in the context of thinking about the child’s death as the loss of multiple inner representations, necessitating multiple and somewhat independent griefings. They would predict the results which Shanfield and Swain found because, in their estimation, the greater number of ambivalences and perceptions of problems in the child’s life before their death, the greater number of negative inner representations to be resolved, one by one, on the part of the bereaved parents.

The investigators reported that parents whose children had died in single car, single driver accidents as well as those who suspected that the accident was suicide, were at greater risk for difficulties during their time of grieving. These bereaved parents had higher levels of psychiatric symptoms, more guilt, more intense grief, and more health complaints than other parents in the study. The data additionally suggested birth
order as an important determinant of bereavement outcome, in that parents in the sample
grieved more intensely for earlier born children. Shanfield and Swain interpreted this
finding as indicative of a “different relationship” between parents and children born
earlier, the loss of which results in more intense grief than for later born children who
subsequently die.

Previous bereavement experiences were deemed to serve as a buffer against
experiencing more intense or frequent psychiatric symptoms following the death of one’s
child. This manifested itself in the finding that older bereaved parents, who had
experienced more loss through death, felt the death of their adult children was less
painful than younger, less experienced, parents. Shanfield and Swain (1984) interpreted
this result as indicating that older bereaved parents had learned and matured as a result
of past losses, which enabled them to cope more effectively and be more expressive
about their grief experience. Younger parents, therefore, were seen as being at greater
risk for developing problems in the bereavement process.

In terms of interdependency, Shanfield and Swain found that the death was
experienced as more painful by parents who had depended more on their child for
emotional support than the child had depended on them. So, the nature of the
relationship between the parent and child appeared to be a determining factor in
bereavement outcome. Additionally, the investigators reported higher levels of distress in
bereaved parents whose children had been living at home before their death.

Although Shanfield and Swain (1984) collected a number of very useful
demographics on their population of study, their findings are limited by the lack of
information available on cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds of the bereaved
parents. The participants all came from within a fairly circumscribed geographical area
(Pima County, Arizona). Similarly, no indications are given as to the degree and quality
of social support received by these parents, which might have potentially influenced their responses and explained some of the discrepancies. There appears to have been no attempt by the authors to examine the parental responses to the death in the context of the family life cycle. For example, the impact of grandparents and the possible caregiving role of the bereaved parent toward their own parents was not examined.

Shanfield, Swain, and Benjamin (1986) essentially repeated their original study, only this time they compared the responses of the same parents whose adult children had died from traffic accidents to parents whose adult children had died from cancer. Instead of the SCL-90, however, the “cancer parents” completed the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI). The authors reported finding distinct differences between the two sets of parents. The “accident parents” were younger, more symptomatic and guilt ridden, had more health related complaints, perceived the loss of their children as more painful than did cancer parents, and had younger children with a higher rate of non-marriage at the time of death. The “cancer parents” on the other hand were older, had higher rates of being widowed and divorced themselves, and had older children who died. The deaths of children from accidents were also much more sudden than the sometimes lingering deaths of children from cancer. The authors suggest that the greater degree of difficulties experienced by the “accident parents” is consistent with the findings regarding bereavement following sudden, unexpected death (Rando, 1986).

Shanfield, Swain, and Benjamin (1986) interpret the data regarding lower levels of grief among parents whose children were older at the time of death, within a family life cycle perspective. The “cancer parents”, whose children were older and less emotionally dependent, had separated to a greater extent from their middle-aged children than the “accident parents” had from their younger, non-married, more emotionally dependent children. These factors, the authors argue, contributed to differential levels of
grief and symptomatic distress in the two parent groups. They suggest that bereaved parents of adult children who die in traffic accidents are likely at greater risk for complicated mourning than those whose children died from cancer.

Lesher and Bergey (1988) examined parental bereavement in eighteen older women (mean age = 86.57 years, range = 79-96 years) who were residents in a geriatric center in Philadelphia. All the women had experienced the death of an adult child (ages ranged from 38-67 years at time of death) after they themselves were over sixty years of age. The mean number of years since the death of the child was 6.28. The investigators collected information using a structured interview which included six domains: (1) demographic and background information; (2) health information; (3) the death and dying process of the adult child; (4) help-seeking behavior; (5) changes in functional activities and family cohesion; and (6) thoughts and feelings regarding bereavement. The participants also completed the following measures of psychological well-being: the Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS); the Texas Revised Inventory of Grief (TRIG); and a single question regarding over-all changes in everyday life. Physical health status, changes in functional activities, and changes in levels of family cohesion were all measured using items from the Multilevel Assessment Inventory.

Lesher and Bergey (1988) reported that among their sample, overall self-rated physical health status was only fair, with a significant increase in mean number of reported health conditions since the death of the adult child. In comparing these results to other nursing home residents the authors suggest that there was a trend towards poorer health status among the bereaved mothers. They further contend that compared to other nursing home residents bereaved mothers may have some particular health problems (i.e., insomnia, hip or bone fractures). The doubling in the mean number of health conditions reported at the time of the study as compared to before the death could
not be accounted for by age and institutionalization. Lesher and Bergey reported that changes in functional activities associated with the death of an adult child were suggested by the data (e.g., decrease or discontinuation of social activities, need for assistance with financial matters, need for assistance with home maintenance).

The most striking finding with regards to family cohesion, in Lesher and Bergey’s (1988) study, was the difference in the level of cohesion reported between the bereaved mother and the children of the deceased child, and the bereaved mother and the children of the surviving adult child(ren). Seventy per cent of the women in the study reported increased cohesion with the children of the surviving adult child(ren) while only ten per cent reported this to be the case with the children of the deceased adult child. “Not only does the bereaved mother lose their adult child, but they may also lose the kinship connections of their deceased child” (p. 87). In no case was there found to be an increase in cohesion between the bereaved mother and her surviving child(ren). In seventy-five per cent of the sample there was no change reported in this level of cohesion and the remaining twenty-five per cent of mothers reported a decrease in cohesion levels between themselves and their surviving child(ren) since the death of their adult child. These are examples of the kinds of secondary losses which Rando (1986) has discussed in relation to bereaved parents.

With respect to psychological well-being, Lesher and Bergey (1988) reported significant levels of psychological distress among the mothers in the study. Eighty-three percent of the participants had scores indicative of significant depression, which was well above that expected among residents of nursing homes in general. The authors noted that besides the elevations in scores on the GDS, the reported depression was also long-lasting. The results from the TRIG indicated that the bereaved mothers level of grief at the time of study (i.e., TRIG Present) was also significantly higher and more
intense in comparison to either the original sample of bereaved respondents for the TRIG (Faschingbauer, 1981) or a group of older widows in another study (Gallagher, Breckenridge, Thompson, & Peterson, 1983). The fact that these scores remained high on average 6.28 years after the death of the child suggested to the authors that high levels of grief were also of long duration.

There was a range of responses to the question regarding overall changes in everyday life following the death of the adult child. Sixty-nine per cent of the mothers reported that the loss had changed their everyday life a great deal, 12% stated that everyday life had changed somewhat, and 19% felt no change in their everyday life since their child’s death. Lesher and Bergey (1988) underlined the enduring nature of the psychological distress among the bereaved women in the study: “Not one of the mothers indicated that they had resolved or adjusted to the loss of their child; rather, many commented they believed that their pain would continue for as long as they lived” (p. 88).

A particular limitation of this study is that, for some reason, one of the inclusion criteria was that the participants be widowed as well as bereaved of an adult child. It is not clear to what extent the findings are therefore confounded by the impact of spousal loss and the absence of this support. Likewise, the authors do not provide their reasons for limiting the study to only bereaved mothers. Lesher and Bergey (1988) also apparently did not collect data regarding the cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds of their participants; the composition of their families; the details of the deaths; or the nature of the particular parent-child relationship.

Simon S. Rubin and his colleagues at the University of Haifa have conducted a number of studies with bereaved parents, many of these published as master’s theses (Rubin, 1996). The theoretical framework which has undergirded this work has been
Rubin's "Two-Track Model of Bereavement" which stresses not only dimensions of function (i.e., Track I), but also an evaluation of the ongoing relationship to the representation of the deceased (i.e., Track II). Rubin (1996) argues that for too long the majority of studies on bereavement outcome have focused almost exclusively on "overt behavioral and psychiatric indications of post-loss difficulties" (p. 218). This bias towards overt symptomatology (i.e., dimensions of function) in the bereaved, has resulted in a lack of awareness and appreciation for other elements of the loss experience (i.e., dimensions of relationship). Rubin suggests that even though the two dimensions may initially seem "hopelessly intertwined", that at both the conceptual and experiential levels they are sufficiently distinct as to merit separate attention.

In one study, Rubin (1992) examined 102 Israeli parents who were bereaved of adult sons, killed during war, and 73 non-bereaved parents. This group was compared to two cohorts of bereaved parents whose sons had died 4 years prior and 13 years earlier in other middle-east wars. To assess functioning (Track I) the parents were administered a battery of measures which included the Parental Grief Experience Inventory (PGEI) (Rubin, 1990; Sanders, Mauger, & Strong, 1977); the State/Trait Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger, Gorsuch, & Lushene, 1970); the Grief Experience Inventory (GEI) (Sanders et al., 1977); and a measure of coping behaviors (Moos, 1984).

On the coping measure, bereaved parents whose style of coping was characterized as avoidance demonstrated a tendency toward significantly more severe emotional, social, cognitive, and somatic difficulties, four or thirteen years later, than parents who did not avoid the loss. The GEI data showed no differences on anxiety, preoccupation with the loss, somatic symptoms, or social behavior between the two cohort groups separated by nine years. Rubin concluded that "the passage of years did not differentiate between the two groups" (1996, p. 223). A gender difference was
reported in that women participants reported significantly more difficulties than men, but only in the first year of bereavement. Results using the first two measures indicated that bereaved parents were significantly more anxious than non-bereaved, and that this effect did not attenuate over time. Rubin interpreted this finding as suggesting that a permanent reduction in the regulation of anxiety had occurred in response to the adult son’s death. Overall, Rubin (1996) has suggested that functioning (Track I) in these bereaved parents was permanently altered to varying degrees as a result of their loss, but generally diminished over time.

In an effort to assess the continuing internal relationship with the deceased child (Track II) and to compare this to the internal relationship with living children, Rubin administered semantic differential measures as well as compared parents’ open-ended written descriptions of their child. On the semantic differential, Rubin found that bereaved parents evaluated their deceased sons more positively and saw them as “less distant” and “less unavailable” than did parents of living children. Contrary to the decreasing trend over time, which was found with alterations in functioning (Track I), the pattern here was reversed. Bereaved parents seemed to be more involved with the image of their son with the passage of time, as suggested by the finding that those bereaved thirteen years prior were most different from the non-bereaved group. Rubin also noted a tendency to evaluate adult children more favourably than one’s “self” amongst all group of parents. “This tendency underscores the continuing significance of the parent-child bond for parents in middle adulthood and beyond” (p. 224). Beyond this comment, however, Rubin fails to interpret the data in the context of a changing family life cycle. He does not comment on the role potentially played by the parent’s position in the life span, as a factor influencing their grief responses. From an analysis of the open-ended descriptive data, Rubin described the relationships between bereaved parents
and their deceased sons as overly involved and enmeshed in comparison to the greater separation and autonomy which marked the relationships between bereaved parents and their living sons. Although he offers some interpretation, in terms of individuation issues with living adult children, Rubin once again fails to address family life cycle issues specifically.

Rubin also analyzed this qualitative data within the framework of Bowlby and Parkes (Bowlby, 1980) four-stage theory of mourning (i.e., numbness, searching and yearning, disorganization, and reorganization), to see the degree to which “the elements of each stage could be measured as currently present” (p. 224). On the first three stages the bereaved parents, separated by nine years, were very much alike. Apparently most of the attenuations in shock, yearning, and disorganization took place in the years which immediately followed the death. A difference was found in the “reorganization” stage, where Rubin argues, there was not a reduction in involvement with the deceased over time but, rather the loss was “softened” by the addition of “perspective.” He asserts that it is given that there will be continued involvement with the deceased. “It is how the involvement is maintained, and at what or whose cost, that becomes the important question” (p. 224). Rubin suggests that there exist behavioural and cognitive indicators of continued involvement with the deceased, such as frequency of gravesite visits, presence of physical memorials to the deceased child, and constant recollections of the child with associated affect “independent of the passage of years.” Rubin’s interpretation would be more enlightening, however, if he had elaborated on what he meant by the term “perspective.”

In describing in detail a family whose son had been killed in battle, Rubin (1996) identified that it was the relationship with the deceased (Track II) which was the primary area of difficulty for the parents. They idealized the son who had died, describing the
relationship as “the closest” they had ever had in their life. Their discourse was one in which the son was portrayed as altruistic and infinitely devoted to his family. The mother wrote:

All his life he gave his parents, brother and community great happiness . . . He never refused to do something for the other person. He dedicated himself to family and friends. He knew only how to love . . . shared his problems with us and was always willing to take advice . . . He would take counsel with his parents before buying clothes . . . wrote to his parents and many friends, and was attached to his family. (Rubin, 1996, p. 228)

Rubin summarizes that it is the parents’ relationship to their deceased son which is the “core” of their experience, and which “is so overpowering that they lose sight of their second son” (p. 229). The continuing relationship with the deceased son, Rubin asserts, is not in this case an “open and evolving one”, which is characteristic of “resolution of bereavement.” Although he does not elaborate on what he means by an “open and evolving” relationship, Rubin’s statement seems to imply that the bereaved parents here are fixated in a past orientation which in a sense freezes the relationship in time. In the family dynamic which Rubin describes, the suggestion is made that the parents most likely accorded great significance to the first-born son’s role as the older son and brother before his death. Following his death this dynamic continued (thus not “open” or “evolving”), thereby preventing the parents from being able to appreciate the “coming of age” of their younger, surviving son.

In another study of bereaved parents in Israel, Rubin (1990) compared those who had lost adult sons in battle (mean age of child at death = 25.76 yrs old) to parents whose younger children had died (mean age of child at death = 1.08 yrs old). The average elapsed time since the death of the child appears to have been comparable across the two groups of bereaved parents (young children = 10.17 years; adult sons = 9.08
years). Problematic in this study, however, is the failure to define "adult child", "older parents", and provide details regarding the causes of death of the "younger children."

Rubin administered a modified Hebrew version of the GEI (Sanders et al., 1977) which obtained information on both past and present grief experiences. The GEI in this form specifically measured the degree to which bereaved parents report having experienced in the first year of loss or at the time of testing - emotions, behaviours, and feelings associated with bereavement. In addition to completing the GEI, participants were also interviewed regarding their experience of loss, the nature of their current functioning, and their relationship to the deceased child. Rubin's (1990) report of this study concentrates on the GEI results, with no mention made of the interview findings. He does, however, make the observation that: "The interviews with bereaved parents were extraordinarily powerful and intimate experiences of human sharing around a nucleus of permanent pain and loss" (p. 333).

The findings of this study demonstrated that bereaved parents (by war) of adult children (sons) experience a more extreme and heightened form of grief and mourning than do other bereaved parents. Of the thirty-six indices of past and present functioning on the GEI, twenty-nine of these were significantly different between the two groups of bereaved parents. On the clinical scales of the GEI, Rubin (1990) reported that in the first year of loss the parents bereaved of younger children were significantly less depressed (despair), less guilty (guilt), more socially involved (social isolation), less preoccupied with the deceased (rumination), less numb (depersonalization), and less given to somatic complaints (somaticization) than parents bereaved of adult children (sons). On the present experience of loss, the parents bereaved of younger children continued to be less depressed, less guilty, more socially interactive, less given to loosened emotional control (loss of control), less preoccupied with the deceased, less
numb, and less somaticizing than parents bereaved of adult sons. The only reversal of this general pattern which Rubin reported was that greater death anxiety was found among bereaved parents of younger children.

In reporting the results of the GEI research scales, Rubin (1990) found similarly that parents bereaved of younger children reported significantly less degrees of sleep disturbance (Sleep Disturbance and Sleep Disturbance New), less appetite problems (Appetite), fewer physical symptoms (Physical Symptoms), greater delight in living (Vigor), and greater optimism (Optimism versus Despair) than the parents bereaved of adult sons.

Rubin (1990) interpreted these observed differences between the two groups of parents as indicative of the multidimensionality of the phenomenon of child bereavement: “The significant differences between groups of bereaved parents suggest powerful qualitative as well as quantitative differences operative in this kind of loss” (p. 332). Rubin highlighted the fact that the differences were most pronounced on the despair and rumination (i.e., “intense preoccupation with the loss and the deceased”) scales; indices which he states “summarize the basic experience of response to interpersonal loss” (p. 333). On the basis of the findings from this latter scale, Rubin (1990) concluded that parents bereaved of adult children are significantly more preoccupied with the loss than are parents bereaved of younger children, and that this does not change appreciably over the ensuing years.

Rubin (1990) further interprets his findings of differences between these bereaved Israeli parents on the basis of three factors: (i) age of the parent; (ii) age of the child; and (iii) cause of death. His arguments in this case are not based on statistical findings, but rather are conceptual in nature. With regard to the age of the parent, Rubin asserts that the “self system” of younger parents may be impacted less by the death of a child
because they are not yet having to deal with the limits imposed by biological and familial transitions. The young to middle-aged parents are in their “productive years of life” (p. 334) and focused largely on the developmental issues of productivity and generativity. In contrast to this, Rubin argues that the particular life cycle context of parents of adult children may place them in a position of greater impact upon the death of their child. Older parents may be feeling the limits of advancing age and be in the process of shifting their aspirations to the next generation. As Rubin states: “They deal with the change, in part, by expecting to see their children continue on to provide them with a sense of proxy continuity, power, and competence as they approach their own limits” (p. 334). Rubin discusses an additional difficulty which is unique to bereaved parents of adult children, and which he feels may further complicate their grief reaction and elicit additional anger and guilt. He proposes that the death of an adult child “forces a regression of the parent to an intense experience of the meaning of the child at a point when a form of adult separation” (p. 334) from the child has already occurred. The fundamental expectation of continuity is shattered by the death of a child among a cohort of parents, whose relationships with their adult children have grown to be relatively autonomous in most cases. Following this separation from the child, “a renewed confrontation with the meaning of the adult child”, which is necessitated by their death, happens exactly at a time when the parent is not ready for such involvement. As Rubin (1990, p. 334) states:

The return to an almost total preoccupation with the adult child who has died is in this sense a regressive one for the parents. Prior to the loss, they were mutually separating from the son. Now they are returned to the fullest experience of the parental bond, as a major component of the bereavement response, at a time when the ability to bear another child is limited.
The age of the child at the time of their death is discussed as a second factor which contributed to the differences between the two parent groups in Rubin’s sample. Rubin describes the loss of a young child as the “loss of a potential relationship” (p. 335), suggesting that the parents in this case may likely mourn the loss of the child as she or he might have been at every potential developmental milestone. Rubin contrasts this to the death of an adult child, which represents instead “the loss of a relationship that has in reality consumed a large amount of energy and emotional investment. Decades of interaction with the son need to be mourned and the finality of the death acknowledged” (p. 335). A limitation of this study, as in much of Rubin’s work, is the fact that only parents whose sons had died in war constituted the adult child bereavement group. In framing some of his conclusions in terms of parents bereaved of adult children in general, Rubin fails to acknowledge the potential restrictions of studying parental bereavement in such circumscribed terms. At no point in his discussion does Rubin attempt to analyze his findings with respect to the gender of the deceased child.

In terms of the cause of death as a differentiating factor between groups of bereaved parents in his study, Rubin (1990) suggests that the sudden and traumatic death of a son in war conjures up a whole complex set of attitudes relating to the context of the armed conflict in Israel. These are not only individual psychological attitudes which are elicited but “social mores of war bereavement in Israel (which) may exert a powerful influence on the ways in which parents enter and exit the mourning process” (p. 335). Rubin contends that the social attitudes toward and of war bereaved parents in Israel results in grief and mourning practices which do not reflect “Anglo-American” customs. In particular, he suggests that there is greater emphasis placed on the memory of the loss and the lost. Rubin (1990) states:
This has led to a cultural ritualization of the continued mourning that has roots in Judaic tradition and Israeli culture but may de-emphasize the adaptation to life that is a part of the commonly accepted definition of the completion of the mourning process (p. 335).

This statement bears striking similarity to points raised by Goodman and colleagues (1991) regarding their study of older bereaved Jewish and non-Jewish mothers. Both groups of investigators imply that there are unique factors in Jewish culture which impede the process of “successfully” grieving the death of an adult child. They seem to implicitly accept the notion that the continuation of a relationship with the deceased is not part of the process of healthy adaptation. Without further explanation, Rubin (1990) concludes that: “...the continued internal and external mourning behaviors of war bereaved parents in Israel is a unique phenomenon” (p. 335).

Cacace & Williamson (1996) conducted a study with older American adults (60-72 years) to identify and describe the experiences of bereaved parents following the death of an adult child. The participants were all between one and two years post-bereavement and their adult children (ranging in age from 18-45 years) had died of cancer. Four mothers and three fathers participated in the study and were each interviewed individually by a hospice nurse. An interview guide was used in which the following three main open-ended questioned were asked: (1). What has your life been like since your son/daughter died? (2). How, if in any way, would your experience have been different if the death of your child occurred in infancy or early childhood, rather than in adulthood? and (3). What, if anything, would you tell parents who are presently expecting or have experienced the death of an adult child? The responses of the parents were analyzed using the grounded theory approach of Strauss & Corbin (1990).
Cacace and Williamson (1996) identified five themes which they named: (1) personal disruption (emotional, mental, and physical), (2) unnatural survivorship, (3) isolation, (4) reminders, and (5) coping strategies.

Within the theme of “Personal Disruption”, bereaved parents described the experience of their adult child’s death as the most significant and personally disruptive one of their lives: “I’ve been divorced. I’ve watched my parents and my grandparents die, but my daughter’s death was the hardest. It was the worst thing that ever happened to me” (p. 18). The intense personal disruption encompassed all aspects of the bereaved parents lives, including interpersonal relationships, behaviour, cognitive activities, and health: “My biggest emotion this past year is hate and discontent. I’m angry and I do hate . . . my husband, my false friends . . .” (p. 18). The authors reported that parents felt “cheated” by the deaths of their adult children and “robbed” of the opportunity of having an adult relationship with them (“the reward”), after having successfully and safely parented them to adulthood. Cacace and Williamson (1996) noted that this sense of having completed one’s primary parenting responsibilities is in agreement with the findings of Moss, Lesher, and Moss (1986). Included in this theme of personal disruption, the authors included statements criticizing the health care system as “cumbersome” and “impersonal.”

The second theme, “Unnatural Survivorship”, incorporated the belief held by parents that they would predecease their children, not vice versa. The death of their adult child represented a violation of this assumption regarding the natural order of things: “I never used to think about my own death, or especially one of my kids dying. I’m the parent . . . I’m supposed to die first” (p. 18). Every participant, the authors state, expressed their desire to change places with his/her child. Cacace and Williamson
reported that bereaved parents in the study also spoke about their own mortality and expressed concerns regarding their own care as seniors.

The investigators subdivided the next theme, "Isolation", into: Separation from Social Contacts, Feelings of Loneliness, Isolation in Grief, and Isolation through Obsession with the Adult Child. The authors noted a gender difference here in that fathers seemed to feel more lonely than mothers. They perceived a societal expectation that they should be strong and supportive of their spouses: "Nobody supports me. I felt so lonely. I just wanted someone to put their arms around me and give me a hug" (p. 19). Although the authors of this study do not provide very much description of the "Isolation through Obsession with the Adult Child" sub-theme, the name itself is reminiscent of what many other authors describe as preoccupation with thoughts and memories of the deceased (De Vries, Dalla Lana, & Falck, 1994; Rubin, 1996).

The fourth theme which Cacace and Williamson (1996) interpreted was named "Reminders." Bereaved parents spoke about the ways in which thoughts and memories of their deceased child were experienced. Reminders came in the form of visions and dreams, events (e.g., weddings of their child's peers), and physical manifestations (e.g., physical similarities in grandchildren). The authors reported that all of the participants voiced the conviction that they "always think of the child (especially when they are alone) and will never forget this child" (p. 19). This experience is also written about in No Voice Is Ever Wholly Lost (Kaplan, 1995, p. 141), where a mother recounts her grief of having lost her twenty-one-year-old son in the explosion of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland. In creating a sculpture ("Dark Elegy") of the grieving mothers Suse Lowenstein related to the author:
When I work... I think of all the children who were lost. Their photographs hang on the wall at the entrance to my studio. Alexander is there too, on the other wall. I speak to him every day. I think about him all the time, even when I am thinking about something else. Funny, I think about him more now than I ever did when he was alive.

The final theme which Cacace & Williamson (1996) described is that of "Coping Strategies", where bereaved parents talked about what "helped them to resolve their initial grief and get on with their lives" (p. 19). Coping strategies included redefining the meaning of their parenting roles through their relationship with their grandchildren; strengthening family ties with their living children and grandchildren; seeking support from others (interpersonal and spiritual); and the use of diversational activities. What seemed to be of particular help to parents in this study, was that they had been involved in the direct physical care and emotional support of their children and their families during the child's illness (the study was limited to parents whose adult children had died of cancer).

Cacace & Williamson suggest that a finding which is particular to bereaved parents of adult children is the importance of the relationship with grandchildren. That parents may be aided in their grief by this specific relationship has also been documented in the work of Moss, Lesher, and Moss (1986). Unlike some of Rubin's (1996) findings, the parents in Cacace & Williamson's study cited "the importance of reinforcing their relationships with and usefulness to remaining children" (p. 19). The authors of the study commented on the presence of one Jewish couple in their sample and attempted a comparison with the larger scale work of Goodman, Rubinstein, Alexander & Luborsky (1991). In particular, they found that the Jewish mother's significant attachment to her adult child in their study was in contrast to the separate identity which the non-Jewish mothers felt in relation to their adult children. The Jewish mother, but not her husband, was the sole parent in the study to state that she would never be able to "go on"
following her daughter’s death (p. 20). One might speculate as to the role of cultural expectations in this mother’s grieving process.

Besides the identification of five themes, Cacace & Williamson (1996) also described two additional categories from their research with older bereaved parents. In response to the question regarding ways in which their experience might have been different had their children died at a younger age, the participants talked about the “Uniqueness of the Experience of Adult Child Death.” They expressed their belief that the death of an adult child was harder to endure than the possibility of the death of a younger child. The parents felt that this type of loss is more painful because of the greater accumulation of memories and shared experiences with the adult child. In accord with the findings of others (Goodman et al., 1991) Cacace & Williamson reported that parents derived “meaning, pride and satisfaction from the achievements and activities of their adult children” (p. 20).

Also unique to the loss of an adult child were the potential dynamic “complications” created by the presence of in-laws and grandchildren. As Rando (1986) has noted, bereaved parents of adult children may be excluded from making decisions about their child’s burial, cremation, or disposition. As one parent in Cacace and Williamson’s study stated: “Sure, you can give birth to a child, but you can’t have any control over her death or her funeral. I had to deal with her adult wishes and the wishes of her husband. It really added to the already complicated situation” (p. 20). This loss of control experienced by bereaved parents of adult children may involve aspects of caring for their child, as well as access to information and decision-making during the illness, treatments, and after their death. The authors reported that parents perceived their children’s spouses and families to be the only recipients of information and support from the health care professionals who were caring for their children. Moss, Lesher, and Moss
(1986) contend that this neglect may be possibly responsible for the lack of research interest in this area.

The final category which Cacace & Williamson (1996) report on; “Advice from Parents to Parents”; resulted from the question posed to participants: “What advice would you give to other parents who are presently expecting or have experienced the death of an adult child?” The vast majority of suggestions that were given involved ideas about what parents could do before the death of their adult child (e.g., be with your child as much as possible before s/he dies; talk to your child about his / her death; support your child in all decisions s/he has to make, etc.). These comments seemed to reflect a respect for the maturity and independence which the adult child had attained, and in this way might differ from comments bereaved parents of younger children might make. Interestingly enough, the only suggestions for parents to follow after the death of their adult child were made by fathers (p. 21):

... to other dads I’d say: find some friends of your own; I’d tell other fathers to show their feelings more ... don’t try to be macho ... the manly person society wants you to be. Show your grief so you stay out of trouble with your wife. Don’t be afraid to cry with your wife. Don’t be squeamish.

Cacace & Williamson (1996) assert that their study is the first “to address parents’ perceptions about the uniqueness of the death of adult children, and that it is the only study which asks fathers about their experience” (p. 20). The study had one particular limitation, however, in that only parents whose adult children had died of cancer were included in the sample. Additionally, because of the relatively limited and self-selected sample (N=7), it is difficult to assess the degree of cross-cultural relevance. The authors state that the study included only one ethnic group, but they don’t identify that particular group.
A study by Goodman and colleagues (1991) specifically addressed the issue of cultural differences in response to the death of an adult child, the context of which was within a larger investigation into generativity among older women. The purpose of this study was to compare the bereavement experiences of older Jewish mothers (N=12) to older non-Jewish mothers (6= Catholic, 11= Protestant). The average age of the women in this study was 74.7 years old with a range of 61 to 93. Using an ethnographic interviewing technique, the mothers were individually interviewed and asked to respond to both open-ended and structured items. The “in-depth interviews gathered life histories and information about generative affect, cognitions, and behavior through questions about subjects relationships, accomplishments, and feelings about having, and having lost, children” (p. S324). In that the goal of the interviews was to access the “meaning” of the events and their significance to the participant, the authors assert that any preconceptions on the part of the interviewer were minimal. To achieve this aim the interviewer used the “reciprocal discourse” of the interview to “frame” her inquiries; an approach based on the work of Elliot Mishler (1986). Similar to Cacace and Williamson (1996), the investigators in this study transcribed and analyzed the interview data to arrive at common themes, however, they fail to describe their model of analysis or its underlying assumptions.

Goodman, Rubinstein, Alexander, and Luborsky (1991) interpreted three themes in common across the ethnographic data which they collected: (1) The Meaning of the Death for the Mother, (2) The Expression of Grief, and (3) The Ability To Reconstruct Life or To Resume Meaningful Activity.

Within the first theme, the investigators reported finding salient differences between Jewish and non-Jewish mothers in (a) the way they conceptualized motherhood or made the self-child distinction, (b) how the death affected their social environment,
and (c) the generative concerns that surfaced as a result of the death. In terms of the self-child distinction, the dominant pattern which emerged for non-Jewish mothers was one of "separateness", with motherhood not being their only self-identification. The authors suggest that the ability of these mothers to achieve separateness and multidimensional independence from the child helped them in coming to terms with their loss. The Jewish mothers on the other hand reflected a pattern of continuing attachment to their deceased child, a propensity to develop and sustain secure attachments with their offspring. "In most cases 'the ties that bind' continued long after the death of the child, handicapping the mothers ability to recover" (p. S324). The authors quote one bereaved Jewish mother, age 74, whose only son had died two years prior of a sudden and massive heart attack at age 50:

We were very close. He was the only child and like I said, my whole life was wrapped around him . . . I just can't forget him. I can't get over him. I can't stop thinkin' about him . . . I wasn't just a mother I was like his best friend. (p. S324)

The Jewish women in this study also seemed to react differently to their social environments than non-Jewish women, in that after the death of their child they found it harder to use social supports and maintain established friendships. Last of all, within this first theme, the authors reported that many of the Jewish women in the study found it impossible to find any other means of satisfying their generative needs once their role as mother was lost. They viewed their child's death as marking an end to their own life:

I have no purpose. I just float now . . . I don't want a goal anymore. No. All that has left me . . . my daughter's gone . . . my future is gone because of her . . . our children are our future. And that's finished. And that's why I feel when I die there'll be nobody there (p. S325).

In describing the second theme ("The Expression of Grief"), Goodman and colleagues (1991) observed an overall pattern in non-Jewish mothers where they would
allow a particular time-frame for grief, "distancing from the death, or using the grief to reaffirm their separate identities" (p. S326). Alternatively, in the interviews with Jewish mothers the investigators saw evidence of hopelessness, fixation, anger, and emotionality. They stated that "Talk of their loss dominated the discourse even though the interview was intended to be multidimensional" (p. S325). The authors used the term "fusion" to describe the expression of grief in the Jewish women; defining fusion as "an unwillingness to let go of grief that manifests in a pervasive negativity, a sense of hopelessness, or an ongoing anger over the unfairness of life" (p. S325). Goodman and her colleagues interpret their findings here as meaning that either the non-Jewish women had a different experience of grief or they were less willing or able to express it as forthrightly as the Jewish women.

The final theme reported in this study was "The Ability To Reconstruct Life or To Resume Meaningful Activity". The authors described the Jewish women as preoccupied with their loss in a way that "cemented" them "in time." They were unable to move on with their lives and sometimes showed little interest in surviving children and grandchildren. However, Goodman and colleagues also observed that some Jewish women became more active, rather than less, "as a buffer against grief" (p. S326). The investigators contrast these findings to the image projected by the non-Jewish mothers, who were more growth-oriented and "positive . . often making references to a self-willed determination to rise above the death and get on with life" (p. S327).

The conclusion that Goodman and her colleagues reach is that a mother's grief response is determined by the nature and strength of the mother-child relationship in life, and that this is culturally defined.
Jewish women tended to construct their sense of personal identity through their children and used grief to reaffirm the bond between themselves and the lost child. Non-Jewish women, on the other hand, saw themselves as independent from their children and used grief to reaffirm their separateness. (p. S328)

The picture that the authors paint of bereaved Jewish women is one of chronic, debilitating, perhaps even “complicated mourning.” Compared to much of the literature on parental bereavement; which also speaks of intense, long-term grief responses; it is the description of the non-Jewish mothers reactions which seem more atypical. Yet, Goodman and colleagues interpret their findings to suggest that the nature of the mother-child bond, which is nurtured and encouraged in Jewish culture, sets these mothers up to deal less effectively with the death of a child. Indeed, in their statement above, the authors of this study appear to see the Jewish women as much more “traditional” in their roles as mothers than the non-Jewish women. The authors review literature which suggests that the culturally determined and socialized Jewish mother (especially those over 60) is entirely devoted to her children, “highly emotional, over-protective and overtly affectionate.” They even evoke the image of a neurotic Woody Allen; “who has made an art [certainly a career] of depicting the struggle of adult Jewish sons in separating from their mothers” (p. S322); as an example of the extension of the “melding of personal boundaries” to adult children. While the description of Jewish mothers hints at the negative side of femininity (i.e., dependency on connectedness to define identity), the depiction of the non-Jewish mothers by Goodman and colleagues is suggestive of typical “masculine” socialization. These authors are implicit in their endorsement of traditional theories of grief, emphasizing detachment as healthy; in suggesting that the non-Jewish women “articulated life philosophies of acceptance and optimism” and “were pursuing new relationships or activities” (p. S328). This contrasted the investigators’ descriptions of the Jewish women as “wanting on
positive reflections about life after death and being "stuck" in life, either anchored to the loss or drifting away from previous commitments because of it" (p. S328). Although not made explicit, the interpretations of Goodman and colleagues clearly suggest that the style of the non-Jewish women conforms to the notion of "successful resolution" as it is depicted in traditional and generalized theories of grief (i.e., detachment is required for successful resolution of the death). Reaffirming the bond with the deceased child was clearly not seen by Goodman and colleagues as a good thing.

As Goodman and colleagues point out, however, they had "no way of knowing whether the acceptance verbalized by non-Jewish women is a reflection of their true feelings or the polite containment of a bereft or raging inner state" (S328). In a phenomenological study which examined the experience of widowers (Carverhill, 1994), some men talked of having felt intense emotional chaos within, while they simultaneously projected an external image of being "strong" and "together" to those around them. The difference between the responses of the widowers in the one study and the non-Jewish women in the other, may reside in the particular questions which were asked by the investigators. In the former (Carverhill, 1994), participants were specifically asked about their reactions and feelings as well as about the perceived support they received following the death of their spouse. While Goodman and colleagues (1991) state that their ethnographic interviews asked "questions about subjects relationships, accomplishments, and feelings about having, and having lost, children" (p. S324), their statement above indicates that the "reciprocal discourse" did not encompass questions regarding potential contrasts between non-Jewish bereaved mothers internal and external experiences or the nature of their apparent "acceptance" of the death. Kvale (1996a) has argued that interviewers, even in open-ended interviews, should ask very specific questions of the participant if they have a hunch which needs to be tested.
It is interesting to note that while Goodman and colleagues offer possible broad cultural explanations for the differences between the Jewish and non-Jewish women in terms of their degrees of emotiveness and discussion of personal issues in the interviews, they fail to address the potential role of cultural issues within the interview context itself. How, for instance, might the Jewish and non-Jewish participants respond differently if they perceived the interviewer to be either Jewish or non-Jewish? While the authors provide an interesting critique of the role of cultural norms in the grief experiences of the mothers, they are remiss in discussing the possible impact of culture between themselves and their participants. In incorporating ethnographic interviews within a study, it is incumbent upon the researcher(s) to account for their role in this dynamic inquiry process (Gluck & Patai, 1991; Cortazzi, 1993; Mishler, 1986; Kvale, 1996b; Fontana & Frey, 1994).

Goodman and colleagues (1991) propose that the “cultural differences which characterize mothering for Jewish and non-Jewish women are echoed in the experience and expression of both physical and emotional pain” (p. 322). They cite evidence to suggest the tendency among Jewish people to cope with pain and suffering by venting their emotions, seeking help and attention (including professional assistance), and endeavouring to find a “listening ear.” In contrast to this “head on” approach, the authors describe the coping approaches of Protestants (“Old Americans”) as checking their emotions, neglecting painful symptoms, de-emphasizing their pain, shunning sympathy or attention, avoiding professional help, and keeping “a stiff upper lip.” It is interesting to note that this latter style of “coping” is also one characteristic of men’s gender role socialization (ONeil, 1981).

In discussing the impact of culture on “outlook”, Goodman, Rubinstein, Alexander, and Luborsky (1991) state that: “The generalized tendencies for Jewish
people to dwell on negative aspects of life and for non-Jews to minimize or deny them may affect the ultimate resolution of the crisis created by the death” (p. S323). They imply that an outlook (non-Jewish) which is characterized by a future focus, expectations of limited happiness and many potential problems in life, avoidance of past difficulties or catastrophes, and optimism and belief in the (Protestant) “work ethic” all enables one to better deal with tragedy.

The study by Goodman and colleagues might be more enlightening if the authors had provided demographic details about the children who had died as well as the family life cycle/structure at the time of death. In the introductory statements to the words of some of the participants, the reader learns that there was an age spread of at least 24-55 years old, that the majority of adult children were daughters, and that the causes of death were varied (e.g., murder, leukemia, kidney failure, MS, drunk driver, pulmonary disease, massive heart attack, fire, suicide, haemorrhaging perforated ulcer, and auto accident). It would have been interesting to see some kind of analysis attempted according to the type of death (e.g., prolonged illness, sudden death, etc.) and the life span position of the parent.

The authors of this study make a very important contribution, however, in bringing a greater awareness to the literature of the potential impact of cultural context on patterns of grieving. Goodman and colleagues (1991) state that: “Since philosophical attitudes toward life and death are influenced by religion, explanations for our findings may be rooted in the existential differences between Judaism and Christianity” (S328). They suggest that a belief in an omnipotent God, that life is preparation for death, and that eternal life stems from resurrection, may have been key in lessening the blow of a child’s death for the non-Jewish women in their study. Alternatively, Goodman and colleagues suggest that the beliefs held by the Jewish mothers may have led them to view
their loss as either “something they could have prevented, or as punishment for their own failures in life or shortcomings as mothers” (S328). These beliefs would potentially include the notion that rewards and punishments are meted out in this life, and that rather than God being in control of things, that people are left to individually interpret the “attribution for life’s joys and sorrows.”

Goodman and colleagues (1991) define religion as: “one property that may both express ethnic distinctiveness and modify it” (p. S321). Ethnicity, in turn, is described as: “referring to distinctive cultural subgroupings within a larger culture”, and culture refers to “patterns of ideas, beliefs, and behaviors integral to distinctive social groupings” (S321). With this framework in mind, Goodman and colleagues assert that the dominant ideology at the heart of American culture is Christianity, and that regardless of specific denominational origin, this ideology is shared by many groups (e.g., Catholics, Protestants - Baptists, Anglicans, Presbyterians). In its ultimate effect on coping with the death of a child, the authors argue that Christian beliefs of omnipotence, resurrection, and eternal life may have served to buffer the non-Jewish women from the impact of the trauma. Likewise, for the Jewish women, beliefs in personal responsibility and rewards and punishments being present in this life, may have led to interpretations of their child’s death as preventable, or as punishment for their own inadequacies. Citing Frankl (1963), the authors suggest that the continuance of grief in the lives of the Jewish women may have been further sustained by a “lingering sense of guilt or the Jewish reverence for suffering” (p. S328). Implicit in this discourse are the authors’ beliefs in the traditional model of grief (i.e., detachment) as imminently more adaptive.

In summary, Goodman, Rubinstein, Alexander, and Luborsky (1991) found key cultural differences between the bereavement experiences of older Jewish women and older non-Jewish women whose adult children had died. They interpreted these findings
in light of divergent cultural notions of mothering, coping with pain and suffering, outlook, and generativity. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, the interpretation, and consideration of cultural contexts in parental bereavement has been largely neglected. This study by Goodman and colleagues represents an obvious exception and highlights the need for greater awareness to cultural issues in thanatology. Indeed, in the general field of grief and bereavement there are few examples of research/writing which have addressed cultural perspectives of loss in sufficient detail. Exceptions to this include the early work of Rosenblatt and his colleagues at the University of Minnesota (Rosenblatt, Walsh, & Jackson, 1976) and a recent volume edited by Parkes and colleagues (1997) in the United Kingdom. That is not to say that consideration of culture in the context of death, dying and bereavement does not take place in a variety of venues, academic and otherwise. In various disciplines there exist detailed treatises on cultural factors and death, for example Schepers-Hughes’ (1992) anthropological (ethnographic) analysis of grieving mothers (“mother love” and “child death”). However, the lack of ‘cross-talk’ and cross-referencing between disciplines may serve to obscure much of the potentially available literature from shared view.

2.4 Gender Differences in Bereaved Parents

Besides varying cultural backgrounds, gender serves as another factor which will affect how bereaved parents not only experiences their grief but also how they express it (P. Downe, personal communication, November, 1996; Archer, 1999). As compared to mothers of bereaved children, fathers have reported less availability of social support: “I don’t have a lot of friends outside work and now that I’m retired and my wife and son are gone, I’m all alone” (Cacace & Williamson, 1996, p. 20). In response to other types of loss (i.e., death of a spouse) bereaved men have also talked about what they view as very limited or even non-existent sources of social support (Carverhill, 1994; Stroebe et
al., 1993; Doka & Martin, 1994). Stroebe and Stroebe (1993) have interpreted the relatively greater vulnerability of men, bereaved of a spouse, to negative health consequences as due to the differences in the availability and utilization of social support as compared to women. Even when social support is available, bereaved men (i.e., widowers) are less likely to make use of it than are their female counterparts (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1993). With the death of his spouse the male partner has most likely also lost his closest support person and perhaps his only confidante (Carverhill, 1994). While the fathers in Cacace and Williamson’s (1996) study suggested greater emotional expressiveness and less stoicism, it is not clear whether they themselves were able to achieve this or whether the suggestions stem from their own desire to have responded differently. Stroebe has recently suggested that the answer to the male dilemma, however, is not necessarily for (all) men to become much more emotionally expressive (M. Stroebe, personal communication, August 18, 1996).

In their study of bereaved parents following the death of adult children in traffic accidents, Shanfield and Swain (1984) reported that the highest levels of distress in their sample was experienced by mothers whose deceased children were living at home. Further to this, they also found that the mothers expressed more intense grief than the fathers, and that the death of an adult daughter was associated with more intense grief and more health complaints following the loss. The finding that mothers were more likely to experience higher levels of distress, including depression, and to have more health complaints than fathers, suggested to the authors that mothers had a “different relationship” (p. 537) with their children than fathers, although they don’t elaborate on this point. Likewise, the apparent difference in mourning the death of a daughter more intensely, suggested to Shanfield and Swain a “different pattern of relationship with daughters in contrast to sons” (p. 537).
A study conducted among Jewish Israeli bereaved parents of adult children found a statistically significant difference in mortality rates in women (Levav et. al., 1988). Levav and colleagues compared bereaved parents whose sons (aged 18-40) had died either in the Yom Kippur War in 1973 or in accidents, to Israel's Jewish population during the same time period. They reported that widowed and divorced mothers, whose adult sons had died, had a higher age-adjusted overall mortality rate than married bereaved parents. The increased mortality risk in women was apparent across most age groups. While this trend was also evident among spouseless fathers in the sample (mainly those above 75 years), it was not statistically significant.

The few findings with regard to gender differences between parents who are bereaved of a child are inconclusive and mixed at this point in time. Studies comparing bereaved mothers and fathers of adult children are virtually non-existent. The implications, however, of developing an understanding of any such differences, may be quite significant for bereaved parents themselves. Sanders (1995) cites an estimate that 99% of all couples bereaved of a child experience some marital problems as a result of the child’s death. Clinicians who have worked with bereaved parents assert that the death of a child may be experienced very differently by each parent as a result their unique relationship with the child (Rosoff, 1994; Sanders, 1995). Further study of gender differences among bereaved parents may serve to assist those who have lost a child, in understanding their partner’s needs as well as in appreciating the uniqueness of their own grief process.

2.5 The Context and Justification for the Present Study

I arrived at the point of planning and conducting the present study from the convergence of several lines of thought, evidence, and experience. In this section I will outline what those sources have been, the questions which they have stimulated, and the
context which led me to consider a discursive approach to the study of parental grief following the death of an adult child.

The literature which I have previously reviewed constitutes a collection of ideas and assumptions and raises a number of questions. As a body of "professional" discourse, the research and clinical literature on parental grief is strewn with language which attempts to depict and communicate to others the nature of this phenomenon. In reading this literature it occurred to me that there are certain words and phrases that recur time and again which are often left unexplained and unexplored. These uses of particular language appear to be purposive and the words themselves sometimes evoke very strong connotations (e.g., "preoccupation"). I have wondered to what degree their use may reflect the theoretical bias of a particular author and how often bereaved parents themselves use these words. It seemed apparent from studies which included excerpts from transcripts that participants were not generally using language similar to that of the investigator/authors. As I gained an introduction to discourse analysis I also began to pay more attention to how these words were being used, for what possible purposes, and whether there was variability of usage across accounts. I began to keep a running list of these words and phrases and present it as follows: preoccupation, loss / lost, phases, stages, tasks, passed away, resolution, resolved, inner representation, solace, letting go, holding on, break down, moving on with life, successful resolution, attachment, and detachment.

Two of the words which seem to have particular salience to the experience of parental bereavement and the debate regarding the grief work hypothesis are "preoccupation" and "resolution." The following are a number of examples of the use of the word "preoccupation" in this literature [emphasis has been added]:
Rumination and preoccupation with thoughts of the adult child were common along with anger and despair for mothers while fathers reported a great sense of isolation and desolation as well as loss of control and fear of death (De Vries, Dalla Lana, & Falck, 1994, pp. 54-55)

Years and decades after loss, some preoccupation with the deceased is common and may well be normative although symptoms as such may not be present . . . With the passage of time, however, the preoccupation with the deceased and the affects associated with loss gradually lose some of their poignancy (Rubin, 1996, p. 220)

The passage of years did not differentiate between the bereaved groups. The additional 9 years that separated the bereaved groups did not show differences on anxiety, preoccupation with loss, somatic symptoms, or social behavior. (Rubin, 1996, p. 223)

For example, the frequency with which our bereaved parent sample went to the cemetery was one index of the extent of preoccupation with the deceased. (Rubin, 1996, p. 224)

It is a complex concept, however, because it relates to the question of unconscious or unmonitored thinking and the extent to which we may be preoccupied or troubled by a relationship that we may not even be aware of as preoccupying us! (Rubin, 1996, p. 225)

Just two years after the book’s publication, [C.S.] Lewis also died. By contemporary standards of mental health, Lewis’ reactions seem excessive; his preoccupation with the loss of his wife may have even hastened his own demise. (Stroebe, Gergen, Gergen, & Stroebe, 1992, p. 1206)

She was preoccupied with her grief, chronically depressed, and appeared to show little interest in a surviving daughter and grandson. (Goodman, Rubinstein, Alexander, & Luborsky, 1991, p. S326)

Non-Jewish women had a tendency to project a positive image, often making references to a self-willed determination to rise above the death and get on with life. There was little evidence of the preoccupation with loss that seemed to cement Jewish women in time (Goodman, Rubinstein, Alexander, and Luborsky, 1991, S327)
Most studies of coping with loss suggested the extremes of avoidance or escape and preoccupation with thoughts about the loss of the child... Preoccupation was defined as a persistent flooding of thoughts of the child or the death. (Videka-Sherman, 1982, p.689)

The most adaptive coping strategies were active and externally directed, including replacement of the child and altruism; least adaptive were escape and preoccupation with the child. (Videka-Sherman, 1982, p. 688)

With the exception of Rubin (1996) the vast majority of investigators used the word preoccupation in a negative way to describe the grief process of bereaved parents. Although Rubin tried to normalize bereaved parents' preoccupation with their deceased child, the question arises as to whether this word can be redeemed in this context. Perhaps the further development of a new theory of grief requires the adoption of a different vocabulary - one which is more true to the experience of the mourning parent?

Silverman (in Silverman & Nickman, 1996a) alludes to the debate which she and her fellow editors had with regards to the concept of resolution:

It seemed the word had been intended by those who have used it to mean the end of grief - that is, grief is resolved and therefore over. However, resolve is a word with complex meanings. It implies "resolute" with the implication of courageous intention. In the new technology it means "clarity", as in high-resolution television. It means decision, as in a resolution passed by Congress. In the end, we agreed with Rubin that resolution may be an appropriate word if it reflects the dynamic ongoing process we have been trying to capture. (p. 352)

The question remains, however, does it reflect the "dynamic ongoing process" which the authors in Continuing Bonds have been attempting to "capture"? Is it the best choice of words? Their final position on resolution sounds like a compromise in that they had previously stated that the notion of grief ending doesn't fit with the emerging model. The definition which they agreed upon was Rubin's:
Resolution is the process that supplements and continues on beyond adaptation and/or coping with loss. The connections to the representations of the deceased and to the memories of the relationship to the deceased continue on across the life cycle. (p. 352)

This discussion underlines the importance of determining both the social construction and individual usage of language. What is the participants’ or the investigators’ meaning when they use a particular word and what are the implications of that meaning?

Silverman and Nickman (1996a) state that: “There is at present no language for describing the diminution of grief, or that accounts for the ongoing activity that appears to be similar to acute mourning behavior” (p. 352). The language which does exist (e.g., detachment, resolution) has developed in a social context which saw the development of the traditional grief work theory, and it seems to fit that theory particularly well. I suspect that what the proponents of the Continuing Bonds theory are encountering is a mismatch between much of the existing language and what they are discovering about the phenomenology of grief and mourning. Part of their task, as described by Silverman and Nickman (1996a), is to find “a language for describing how these representations change as people mature and develop over the life cycle” (p. 352). I contend that a much closer examination of the language used by mourners themselves in conveying their loss accounts will yield potential resources with which to construct a “new language of grief”, one that better describes the experience of bereaved parents. I believe that part of the difficulty in failing to hear the words of bereaved parents lies in methodologies which suppress variability by means of developing broad categories, a strategy which Potter and Wetherell (1987) have termed “gross categorization.” The resulting five themes of Cacace and Williamson’s (1996) study could be interpreted as an example of this tendency.
Another avenue which has led me to consider questions of language is the work of White and Epston (1990). They are family therapists, based in Australia and New Zealand respectively, who have approached people's problems in living by using a narrative framework. Both White and Epston often communicate with clients they have initially seen in person via subsequent letter writing (i.e., "written means to therapeutic ends"). They assert that language, including written language, plays a highly central role in those activities which define and construct persons. Based upon this premise I would further suggest that a discursive study of the written and spoken language of bereaved parents would reveal aspects about the ongoing construction of the deceased child and the parent-child relationship, which might otherwise remain hidden.

White wrote a paper in 1989 entitled: *Saying hullo again: The incorporation of the lost relationship in the resolution of grief*, which interestingly enough is not cited by any of the authors within *Continuing Bonds* (1996). White argues that the process of grief is a "saying goodbye and then saying hullo phenomenon" (p.35). He suggests that the "desolation" which some mourners so keenly experience might mean that they have "said goodbye just too well" (p. 30). White (1989) outlines his experience in working clinically with clients who have been previously diagnosed as suffering from "delayed grief" or "pathological mourning". Their treatment, he describes, was either mainly oriented by the normative model of the grief process, or based upon pharmacological intervention. He states that these people also had an awareness that they had "failed", in their grief work, as evidenced by their lack of "a fully experienced goodbye, acceptance of the permanence of the loss of the loved one, and a desire to get on with a new life that is disconnected from that person" (p. 29). Grief work along the lines of the normative model, emphasizes the saying goodbye metaphor and only complicates the matter further, White argues. He suggests that "establishing a context in therapy for the
incorporation of the lost relationship” would seem far more helpful than “further efforts at encouraging the forfeiture of this relationship” (p. 29). This is the premise which motivated White to explore the ‘saying hullo’ metaphor. White developed and introduced questions in the therapeutic context which “he hoped would open up the possibility for persons to reclaim their relationship with the lost loved one” (p. 29). He suggests that the aim of the therapist is to help clients “re-position themselves in relation to the death of a loved one”, and that this “re-positioning” would bring the sought after relief. The questions that seemed most helpful in assisting persons to reclaim these important relationships were the ones that invited a recounting of what they perceived to be the deceased person’s positive experience of them. This recounting was “an expression of their experience of specific aspects of the deceased persons experience” (p. 32). White reported that the effects of asking these questions were immediate and visible.

I was intrigued by White’s approach, which seemed both paradoxical and creative. Until I saw the effects first hand (by using them myself in clinical practice with a bereaved father) I was skeptical of the reported immediacy of the results. However, it is perhaps exactly because the orientation that White asks his clients to take is so surprising to them (compared to approaches based on traditional grief work theory), that the effects are so immediate and powerful. Both White and Epston (1990), I believe, have demonstrated the clinical utility of paying closer attention to our language as therapists and the language of the client.

It was through White and Epston’s work that I developed a greater appreciation for the potential rediscursive and reconstructive role of the written account. In reading their material I began to think about documents as potential data sources in studying the discourse of parents bereaved of adult children. The possible documents which I began
to consider in the context of this study included letters written by bereaved parents of
adult children, newsletter submissions, articles, and Internet postings.

In facilitating a community-based bereavement support group, which included
five bereaved mothers, I was also struck by the notion of time. I observed some very
distinct differences among the women in the group in regards to their orientation in time
and where they were in the grief process. Some bereaved mothers were clearly oriented
to past-time, while others were more focused in the present. None were what I would
describe as future focused during their attendance at the 10-week group, although for
one there was a shift in this direction toward the later part.

The literature on parental bereavement does not have much to say about time
orientation, except for the occasional use of metaphors like “frozen in time” to describe a
static parent-child relationship. Although the authors didn’t elaborate, I assume that the
observation that Goodman and colleagues made about Jewish mothers, that the death of
their children “cemented them in time”, meant that these women remained oriented to
the past. The question therefore arose as to whether any systematic variation or
functional use could be identified in parental discourse as it related to time orientation.
Without the context of a bereavement support group, does the language of bereaved
parents reveal where they are oriented with respect to past, present, or future? Does this
time orientation interact with the inner representation of the deceased child along
developmental lines? These are some of the questions which remain to be addressed and
which may have implications for clinical practice and parent’s self-understanding.

One of the issues which was raised in reviewing the parental bereavement
literature was that of cultural context. There appears to be a shortsightedness on the part
of the editors of Continuing Bonds to address the “local” culture of any particular study.
While they include broader consideration of Japanese, African-American, Balinese,
Muslim, and Native American culture as it interfaces with grief, there is no discussion regarding what appears to be a bias towards studying Jewish bereaved parents, and especially Jewish mothers. The existing literature does not address the implications of who is being interviewed by whom. In being part of the Jewish culture, for example, what does the interviewer bring with him or her to the interview situation and how might their cultural context influence the analysis? What particular lens are they seeing the data through? A thorough and complete description of the demographics of the sample population as well as the frame of reference with which the investigator approaches the study is necessary for the reader to assess the “goodness of the conclusions” (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In placing the ideas presented in Continuing Bonds within the context of the spousal bereavement findings, which forms the bulk of the overall literature, there seems to be a potential problem. What Klass, Silverman, and Nickman (1996) are saying is that the prevailing grief work hypothesis, with its emphasis on the “letting go” metaphor, has neither been helpful nor descriptive of the process which a great many bereaved people go through following the loss of a loved one. They have specifically stated:

As we examine the history, we find that phenomena indicating that survivors do maintain bonds with the deceased have been rediscovered many times, but each time the insight fails to be passed on and incorporated into the next generation of research and theory. (Silverman & Klass, p. 7)

Perhaps the reason why there has been such an ill fit between theory and reality relates to the fact that the majority of studies in the field have been conducted with women, specifically older women who are bereaved of a spouse. The majority of what we know about grief and bereavement is based on the experience of women (Stroebe et al., 1993; Rando, 1993). If we accept the assumption of Goodman and colleagues (1991) that “Most women over 60 have been socialized to see marriage and child rearing as
their main purpose and work in life” (p. S322), then “detachment” following the death of their spouse or child would not seem to be the norm. The competing metaphor of the continuing bond might provide a better fit with the bereavement experience of this major cohort. The letting go metaphor may not be appropriate for a gender which is socialized to connect, to care for others (especially the continuing bond between mother and child).

Alternately, is the continuing bond metaphor applicable to the phenomenology of men who are bereaved? Recall, those participants who were deemed to be doing better in their grief work were the ones who typified the socialized male role expectations. Perhaps the traditional grief work hypothesis, and the metaphor of letting go applies more appropriately to bereaved men who are socialized to detach from their mothers at a relatively early age. The question then for the emerging theory of grief is whether gender issues are going unnoticed and unaccounted for in this model. In Continuing Bonds there is no mention of the impact of male gender roles on the grief and mourning process and the sole participants described in five of the twenty chapters are women. In reviewing the parental bereavement literature I had also observed that there appeared to be more sons who die than daughters. Is this a natural reflection of the population demographics (i.e., more males die of accidental deaths than females), or is there some sort of self-selection going on? Beyond the “uniqueness” of the parent-child bond, are there further attachment qualities which may vary across gender? Part of my goal in conducting the present study has been to examine whether gender differences emerge in the discourse of the bereaved parents of adult children, either in terms of the gender of the parent or the interaction between the child and the parent’s gender.

Uematsu (1996) has written from the perspective of a bereaved adult daughter, arguing for the usefulness of writing as an account telling process. She cites Harvey, Orbuch, and Weber (1990) who suggest that “the telling of accounts . . . represents a key
step in a healing process - maybe one of the most effective healing steps associated with great personal trauma” (p. 23). Account-making, Uematsu (1996) states, “is an effort to piece together a fragmented narrative, to attain and retain a sense of self, a cohesiveness, a meaningful ground upon which to stand, a meaningful background upon which to lean” (p. 19). Uematsu suggests differences between the act of writing and the act of confiding. The former allows one to “capture moments of insight despite the never-ending flux of emotions, for the page holds those fleeting thoughts and feelings, does not allow them to escape” (p. 20). There is also no immediate feedback in writing (private formulations vs. public disclosing). Uematsu argues, however, that confiding may take place privately as well as publicly, there is always an audience in both processes. The difference Uematsu explains is: “One vocalizes the tale to an other, while one voices the story of thought to one’s self” (p. 22).

Working in clinical settings with bereaved people I have often suggested and heard others suggest that it might be useful to write about the loss, to keep a journal or diary. In placing Uematsu’s reflections in the context of discourse analysis I wondered particularly about the function of writing. Her comments regarding the account making process intersected with readings in the overlapping literatures of social constructivism (Neimeyer & Mahoney, 1995) and narrative studies (Bruner, 1990; Mishler, 1995; Polkinghorne, 1988). One context of inquiry for the present study was to examine the written discourse of bereaved parents for evidence of particular function - what purpose(s) is it serving? Does their writing seem to fulfill a meaning-making purpose, and if so, how is it structured to achieve this task?

The key element in the Continuing Bonds theory, as it is applied to bereaved parents, is that the relationship between the parent and the child continues after the death, albeit in a different form, and that this is normative. While it is a beginning, there
is much to learn in particular about parent-child relationships in adulthood. The primary goal of this study was to gain a discursive understanding of the nature of the bond between parents and their deceased adult children in order to inform this emerging area of theory and potentially have an impact on clinical and community practice. By specifically analyzing the discourse of bereaved parents, from a variety of sources, it was hoped that this study might also be able to provide the beginnings of a vocabulary for a new model of grief. The particular research questions that were addressed in this study, and that follow upon this review of the literature, are contained in the next chapter. They are discussed in the context of an outline on the stages (i.e., Stage One: Research Questions) of discourse analysis, the description of which follows.
Chapter 3 - METHODOLOGY/METHOD

3.1 Discourse Analysis: An Overview

The analytic and theoretical approach taken in this study adopts the definition of discourse analysis as a “functionally oriented approach to the analysis of talk and text” (Edwards & Potter, 1992, p. 27). Discourse is defined by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) as all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written texts of all kinds. Language, in this theoretical framework, is given an action orientation and activities are given meaning through language, meaning which is socially constructed. The broadly defined goals of discourse analysis are to examine the different forms taken by the discourse (i.e., different ways in which texts/talk are organized) and the effects of these particular forms (i.e., the consequences of using some organizations rather than others) (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Two central questions of discourse analysis are: (i) How is participants’ language constructed, and (ii) what are the consequences of different types of construction? Henwood and Pidgeon (1994) assert that through studying language variation in different contexts of use, this approach focuses on understanding the construction of discourses which shape or configure various social and psychological realities. Edwards and Potter (1992) have described the distinguishing features of discourse analysis as they have developed it within the domain of psychology (see Appendix B).

Henwood and Pidgeon (1994) situate the beginnings of discourse analytic work at “the forefront of the critical edge of European social psychology” (p. 235). They note, however, that is has more recently been adopted in other psychological venues, such as in studies on memory (Edwards, Potter, & Middleton, 1993). Edwards and Potter (1992, p. 27) state that the “most immediate origins of discourse analysis are in the sociology of scientific knowledge . . . and applications of that to social psychology”. The roots of this,
they suggest, lay in linguistic philosophy and then subsequent developments in semiotics, post-structuralism and postmodernism in cultural and literary theory, speech act theories, ethnomethodology, and conversation analysis.

Discourse analysis is not by any means a homogeneous field. Henwood and Pidgeon (1994) contrast the model proposed by Potter and Edwards (1987) with the interactional and rhetorical approach of Wooffitt (1993), the thematic emphasis of Coyle (1995), and the "third front" of discourse analysis which uses "the Foucauldian concept of discourses as networks or complexes of power-knowledge relations, together with the post-structuralist concept of deconstruction" (p. 234), as its analytic framework. Potter and Wetherell (1987) credit speech act theory, ethnomethodology and semiotics for their important contributions, yet are critical of these approaches for failing to provide a solid enough basis upon which to construct a social psychological approach to language.

The treatment of language as action moves toward a more social perspective than traditional psycholinguistics. When language is conceptualized as a form of action performed in discourse among individuals with different goals, this compels us to take the social context into account, likewise, with the notion that a "web of felicity conditions" or a system of distinctions is required for language to be used meaningfully. These things are not the property or creation of individual persons but are of necessity shared across collectives (Harré, 1979). Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggest that "Taken together, these features suggest language should be of enormous interest to social psychology, although as yet there are only isolated and preliminary moves to put it at the heart of a programme of research" (pp. 28-29).

Potter and Wetherell's model of discourse analysis challenges the "realistic model" of language, which they argue obscures any data which might "cast a shadow"
on the model itself. Their analysis of discourse focuses on variability and the construction of accounts, assuming that accounts are constructed to have specific consequences. Discourse analysts suspend the realistic approach and focus on “discourse as a topic in its own right” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 35). They don’t attempt to “recover events, beliefs and cognitive processes from participants’ discourse, or treat language as an indicator or signpost to some other state of affairs”, but examine “the analytically prior question of how discourse or accounts of these things are manufactured (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Potter, Stringer & Wetherell, 1984)” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 35).

Henwood and Pidgeon (1994) suggest that what makes discourse analysis such an “identifiable” and “distinctive” qualitative research approach is its complete and explicit break with the empirical model. The break is achieved epistemologically via the constructivist “argument that representations of the world, and specifically linguistic representations (called discourses), do not merely reflect an objective reality, but reflexively construct both objects and subjects” (p. 233). Reflexivity in this context refers to the ability of discourses to achieve practical actions in the world when language is used. Yet, Potter and Wetherell (1987, p. 35) state that:

... it is clear that our perspective depends on an empirical claim as its mainstay, namely that there is considerable variation in participants’ accounts; or, more specifically, that there is sufficient variation in accounts to cause problems for the realistic approach.

3.2 Core Analytic Concepts of Discourse Analysis

There are three core analytic concepts for use in discourse analysis which are discussed by Potter and Wetherell (1987): (i) function; (ii) construction; and (iii) variation.
3.2.1 Function

Potter and Wetherell (1987) observe that both speech act theory and ethnomethodology stress the action orientation of language; that is, people use their language to do things: to appeal, petition, request, persuade and accuse. They state that this “focus on language function is also one of the major components of discourse analysis” (p. 32). Rather than simply try to understand language function in a mechanical way, however, it is necessary to examine the context. One primary reason for this is that peoples’ use of language to do things is often not explicit but must be read from the context in which it takes place. “The analysis of function thus cannot be seen as a simple matter of categorizing pieces of speech, it depends upon the analyst reading the context” (p. 33). For example, there is nothing intrinsic about a person’s complaint about having to walk to the store that makes it a request (to borrow another person’s car). It can only be recognized as a request from the context. The one specific function that is being performed in this example is requesting. An understanding of context clarifies the action orientation of talk and its involvement in various acts (e.g., blaming, praising, disclaiming). The second point that the authors make is that functions can also be more global (as opposed to specific). “Global self-presentations can be achieved with particular kinds of formulations which emphasize either good or bad features” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 33). By “global” they mean a sort of generalized hearing (i.e., an impression that the child was kind to all people) as opposed to a formulation where a characteristic, for example, would only seem to apply to “specific” situations (i.e., the child was kind only to family members). In summary, Potter and Wetherell (1987, p. 72) underline the functional significance of talk when they state: “It is only when we start to look at the function to which talk is put that we can begin to fully understand what is happening in social life.”
3.2.2 Construction

Potter and Wetherell (1987) propose that language is being used by people to construct versions of the social world. They assert that "The principal tenet of discourse analysis is that function involves the construction of versions, and is demonstrated by language variation" (p. 33). The authors emphasize that using the word "construction" here is appropriate because accounts are composed from an array of "pre-existing linguistic resources", result from the "active" selection of these resources, and have important consequences. In emphasizing the linguistic reality base for our social interactions, Potter and Wetherell suggest that "In a profound sense, accounts 'construct' reality" (p. 34). For example, different observers of the same actions between two people may "construct" quite different accounts of what was going on in that event. Some observers may describe the actions of the two people as "horseplay" while another may construct an account which depicts it as an "altercation." Potter and Wetherell (1987) point out, however, that people are not necessary conscious, deliberate or intentional in constructing their accounts. Beattie (1996) additionally talks about discourse being "manufactured" and that by studying language construction we can see the kinds of metaphors people use and the way these are constructed.

3.2.3 Variation

Potter and Wetherell (1987) point out that a person’s account will change depending on the function that it is serving, "it will vary according to the purpose of the talk" (p. 33). They argue that if talk is fulfilling different functions, global and specific, then any examination of language over time will expose considerable variation. The authors illustrate this characteristic with the example of having to describe a particular individual to a close friend on one occasion, and to a parent on another. They suggest
that the way the person is described will vary. You would probably not focus on the person's delinquent behaviour in giving the parental account but this might be the case in giving the account to the close friend. Potter and Wetherell (1987, p. 37) state that:

Discourse analysts see variation in accounts as a consequence of people performing a whole range of different acts in their talk. Some variations may be due to consideration of face saving and creating a good impression . . . others will result from the need to construct discourse to achieve an effect - blaming, say . . .

Variability is seen as a natural and normal part of people's discourse. What distinguishes discourse analysis, Potter and Wetherell (1987) argue, is the priority given to the study of variability in linguistic content in relation to function. Discourse analysts "examine linguistic content or what people say and write rather than how they say it in terms of phonology, intonation and so on" (p. 39). (An example of this emphasis will be given later on when I discuss the work of Gilbert & Mulkay (1984) on scientists' discourse)

3.2.4 The (mis)Management of Variability

Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggest that psychological research, often inadvertently, employs procedures for dealing with discourse that essentially function as management strategies to obscure variability, which discourse analysts contend is inherent in social texts. First of all the authors argue that the intentional design of the social psychological experiment serves to restrict "subjects'" choices and thus variability in their discourse is prevented. The social context of the psychological experiment is also one where the "subject", the source of data, is placed in a position of having lesser control than the "experimenter" (Danziger, 1990). Potter and Wetherell state:

. . . experiments are situations where the value placed on consistency of behavior in our culture is made particularly salient to participants. In general, experiments are designed to wipe out variability of interpretation and response,
indeed, that is supposedly their strength and rationale, although they may be obscuring one of the most interesting and important features of social life in the process (p. 40).

Another management strategy for suppressing variability is “gross categorization” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This is what occurs as a result of the inability of content analysis to incorporate the contextual factors associated with linguistic function. Potter and Wetherell additionally argue that in dealing with open-ended discourse, content analysis often utilizes broad categories “which can easily obscure theoretically interesting differences in discourse” (p. 41).

A final means of suppressing variability, which Potter and Wetherell describe, is “selective reading”. Here, they assert that researchers adopting a commonsense “realistic” model of language may use reification to sustain the model and ignore variability. In reification, the analyst of an interview or text selects out those parts which appear to be important, and may use them to support an a priori expectation. Likewise, variability in discourse can be discounted by interpreting what has been said as having the opposite intention (i.e. ironizing the discourse), instead of treating descriptive language as genuinely descriptive.

3.3 Stages of Discourse Analysis

In terms of how “method” is traditionally conceptualized, either as experimental method or content analysis method, no such analogue exists in discourse analysis. What does exist is a “broad theoretical framework” pertaining to the nature of discourse and its role in the social context of everyday life, along with suggestions about how discourse can be studied most effectively and how the genuineness of findings can be communicated to others (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This section, therefore reads more like a discussion of “methodology” than method per se, beginning with a re-articulation of the theoretical stance regarding language as a constructive and constructed form of
action. The view of analyzing talk and writing which I have taken in this study is a functional one, as outlined by Potter and Wetherell (1987).

In studying the language of parents bereaved of adult children, I essentially followed the ten stages of discourse analysis as outlined by Potter and Wetherell (1987) in Discourse and Social Psychology. The authors make it clear that these stages are not a fixed sequential "recipe", but that there may be considerable overlap and variation in the order of the stages. Potter and Wetherell's process of discourse analysis serves as a springboard from which to understand language. In summarizing their model, Potter and Wetherell (1987) state that:

...these stages are a conceptual scheme rather than a rigid temporal narrative. Discourse analysis involves fluid movement between the different stages, with coding, analysis, validation and writing each leading back to earlier phases and ultimately to the talk and writing which were the original point of departure. (p. 174)

What follows is description of the ten stages in the analysis of discourse, based on Potter and Wetherell (1987, pp. 160-176), which were adopted in the present study:

3.3.1 Stage One: Research Questions

The starting point in discursive psychology, as in many other forms of inquiry, is the research question or questions. Discourse analysts focus on questions which are broadly related to the construction and function of language: "how is discourse put together, and what is gained by this construction?" While there is wide variation in the questions which may be addressed by discourse analysts, the "one coherent theme or restriction linking these possibilities together" (p. 160) is the approach taken to discourse itself. The talk and writing of participants are considered in their own right and not as a passive medium through which to gain access to things "beyond" the discourse, like attitudes, opinions, events, motives or cognitive processes. "Discourse is treated as a
potent, action-oriented medium, not a transparent information channel” (p. 160). The overarching concern here is with talk and text itself and how it can be read and understood, rather than with the “truthfulness” or “accuracy” of the participants’ account.

Within the parameters of studying parents who are bereaved of an adult child, my interest was in investigating the following broad questions: (1) What functions does their writing and talking attempt to serve and does it achieve these particular aims? (2) What is contained in the discourse of these bereaved parents and how is it constructed? and (3) Are there identifiable patterns of variation in the talk and text of these bereaved parents?

Falling under each of these broad research questions I approached this study with a number of more specific questions in mind. These emerged during my reading of the available literature on parental grief, as well as material in other areas (i.e., narrative, psychotherapy, social constructivism, discourse analysis, family therapy, qualitative research, phenomenology, history of psychological language), and from clinical/community experience with bereaved parents (e.g., facilitating bereavement support groups). A fundamental question in this study related to what the discourse of parents who had lost an adult child revealed about the nature of this particular parent-child bond following death.

The following sub-questions, which are subsumed under the three broad research questions, provide a conceptual linkage to the issues raised in reviewing the literature on parental bereavement. They are meant to serve as a heuristic tool, placing the published literature within the context of this more particular discursive inquiry. Each broad question is first re-stated, followed by the more specific questions:
(1) What functions do their writing and talking attempt to serve and do they achieve these particular aims?

- What are bereaved parents of adult children doing with language?
- What is the context of this doing?
- What does bereaved parents' discourse reveal about the nature of the bond with the deceased adult child? Does this vary across gender lines?
- Is it helpful for them to write or talk (make accounts) of their loss?
- How is it helpful or not?
- Does the discourse of bereaved parents in some way give signals to observers that results in less social support from these people? If this is the case, what is it about their discourse that results in observers not hearing how the deceased is remembered and recollected?
- Are there discernible effects of different forms of discourse on bereaved parents or on the listener/reader?

(2) What is contained in the discourse of these bereaved parents and how is it constructed?

- How is the relationship with the adult child described (constructed)?
- How is the experience of losing an adult child communicated?
- How is the adult child described (constructed)?
- What are the metaphors contained within the discourse of these bereaved parents?
- What are the different forms taken by discourse about parental bereavement?
- How does the talk achieve its goal?
- Is it possible to tell from either the written or oral discourse of bereaved parents how the internal representation of their deceased child is maintained?
• How does the relationship maintain and develop, and how is this different from
the maintenance and development of relationships with living children?
• Does the discourse reflect life span and family life cycle issues?
• Is culture reflected in the discourse of these bereaved parents?

(3) Are there identifiable patterns of variation in the talk and text of these bereaved
parents?
• How does the talk of bereaved parents vary?
• Are there any systematic patterns of variability related to the sex of the parent?
• Can style of coping (e.g., avoidance) be heard in the discourse of bereaved
parents?
• Is a parents’ placement within one (or more) of Worden’s (1991) Four Tasks of
Mourning evident from their discourse?
• Does discourse vary in any systematic way from older bereaved parents of an
adult child to younger bereaved parents?
• Are cultural differences across bereaved parents evident in their discourse?
What does participants’ discourse tell us about the phenomenon of parental
bereavement following the death of an adult child?

3.3.2 Stage Two: Sample Selection

On the issue of sample size, discourse analysis suggests a few interviews as quite
adequate. This is because the focus here is on language use and because a significant
number of linguistic patterns will probably emerge from a few people. The question of
sample size also relates to the labour intensive nature of discourse analysis. Although a
variety of computer software programs now exist to help in the management and analysis
of qualitative data (see Weitzman & Miles, 1995), they are limited in terms of their
applications to discourse analysis. In determining sample size the crucial issue is the
particular research question, and whether the data is sufficient to yield recognizable patterns. The suggestion has been made that there is no natural boundary line or point at which sampling may be considered complete. The decision of the investigator will often be influenced by the availability of data, whether that be in the form of participants to interview or various document sources. A guideline to follow, however, is that a clear and detailed description be given regarding the nature and source of the discursive materials.

The sample which provided data for this study consisted of four components: (1) bereaved parents who were interviewed individually (see Appendix F for Interview Guide), (2) bereaved parents contributing to an Internet chat line, (3) bereaved parents whose writing was “published” in some form independent of this study, and (4) bereaved parents who wrote directly to me in response to a set of “Reflecting Questions” (see Appendix D). The overall principle guiding my determination of sample size remained whether there was sufficient data to be able to identify patterns and address the initial research questions (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). In order to determine this, the process of coding and analysis started once data collection was initiated and it continued simultaneously. In discussing this issue in the context of interview research, Steiner Kvale (1996b) has stated: “To the common question, How many interview subjects do I need? The answer is simply, Interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know” (p. 101).

Following these guidelines I interviewed four parents (i.e., INTVW) who had experienced the death of an adult child, three mothers and one father. Interview (i.e., spoken discourse) participants were sought by distributing a “Call to Participate” (see Appendix C) as well as through “snowball sampling” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Crabtree & Miller, 1992). The “Call to Participate” via interviews was published in the
newsletters of various bereavement organizations (i.e., TCF- Saskatoon Chapter, TCF-Canada, ADEC Forum), as well as distributed to settings in the Saskatoon (Canada) area where bereaved parents might potentially see it (e.g., Palliative Care Unit, St. Paul’s Hospital, Saskatoon). More informally, information about the study was disseminated via word of mouth both by grief counsellors/community members (in the context of attending monthly Saskatoon Association for Loss and Grief, Education, & Support meetings), as well as by bereaved parents in the local Compassionate Friends Chapter, collectively constituting snowball sampling.

One interview participant responded from seeing the “Call to Participate” that was published in the newsletter of the Association for Death Education and Counseling (ADEC). Arrangements were made to interview this bereaved mother in a Chicago hotel, while I was attending the annual ADEC conference (1998). Two local participants had seen the “Call to Participate” in the newsletter of the Saskatoon (Canada) Chapter of The Compassionate Friends (TCF), and chose to be interviewed in my clinical office at Saskatoon City Hospital. The final interviewee had heard about the study from another bereaved parent in Saskatoon, and selected his own professional office as the site for the interview.

The discourse comprising the second component of the sample (i.e., ICHAT) was collected from an Internet chat line, where discussions between bereaved parents had been archived (Doerr, 1996). The decision to use data from this particular chat line was based on the ability to obtain informed consent via the discussion moderator. It was found that some other bereaved parent chat lines either had become inactive, therefore a moderator was no longer reachable, or explicitly forbade the “presence” of researchers. By necessity these circumstances meant that data from less rather than more Internet cites was collected.
For the third component of my sample, I collected written submissions (i.e., PWRIT) which had already been published in newsletters, newspapers or magazines, copies of which were submitted by the parents who wrote them. I also received complete books, including both prose and poetry, that some participants had written about their bereavement experiences and their child who died. Participants in this category were responding to a published “Call to Participate”, giving bereaved parents the option of sending either previously existing (i.e., “published”) written discourse, or of writing to me on first instance.

The final component of discursive data in this study was therefore comprised of writings (i.e., SWRIT) specifically solicited by me, via the “Call to Participate”. In this case bereaved parents of adult children, who contacted me in response to the “Call to Participate” and chose this participation option, were mailed a set of “Reflecting Questions” (see Appendix D) and asked to send their letters/writings directly to me. They could either use the “Reflecting Questions” as a springboard for their written responses, or simply write spontaneously about their deceased child and their experience of parental bereavement. For both this category of data (i.e., SWRIT) as well as the previous (i.e., PWRIT), the “Call to Participate” was published/posted in a variety of venues where bereaved parents might see them. These included the national newsletter of MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) in the United States (their Canadian counterpart did not respond to my request); The Forum (newsletter of the Association for Death Education and Counseling); the national (Canadian) newsletter of The Compassionate Friends as well as that of the Saskatoon and Regina (Canada) Chapters. In addition, the “Call to Participate” was sent to the organizers of various conferences for bereaved parents (e.g., TCF regional conference on Lake Okanagan in British Columbia), with the request to post the notice on conference notice boards.
Beyond these publications and postings, some participants became aware of the study indirectly from others (e.g., grief counsellors/therapists, clergy, friends, bereavement group facilitators) who had themselves seen the information and passed it onto the bereaved parent (i.e., “snowball sampling”).

Participants who submitted written submissions either in response to the reflecting questions or as previously published writings, were more numerous and therefore might be considered an “easier” sample from which to collect data as compared to those who chose to be interviewed face-to-face. Perhaps the anonymity provided by mailing in written discourse provided a sense of greater comfort for some participants. Certainly, the written discursive process could be more realistically extended over a longer period of time than a live interview. This option may also have been favoured by some participants because the pain involved in writing about the deceased child could be “dosed” over time (Wolfelt, 1996). A very realistic explanation for fewer interview participants is related to geography, in that the inability to travel afar to interview participants and vice versa, restricted the potential sample of bereaved parents to the Saskatoon area (with the exception afforded by my attendance at the ADEC conference in Chicago).

Whenever possible, demographic information was also collected from participants in the form of a “Biography” (see Appendix E). Overall in this study, I left the decision up to potential participants themselves as to how “Adult child” was defined. This resulted in a chronological age range of deceased adult children from 17 to 47 years old.

3.3.3 Stage Three: Collection of Records and Documents

Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggest that the collection of a variety of text materials (e.g., letters, transcripts of everyday conversations, public documents,
newspaper articles) allows the researcher to apprehend the widest possible variation in accounts, both within and across participants. Gathering documents from multiple sources, recording interactions, and then joining these with face-to-face interviews for example, provides a much richer ground for cultivating an understanding of the organization of participants' linguistic practices than gathering information from a sole source (e.g., interviews). This is why I decided to gather data from four different sources. It is also argued that one of the important advantages of specifically using naturalistic records and documents is that the investigator has not been involved in the production of these accounts and therefore researcher influence is minimized. Potter and Wetherell (1987) state that an additional advantage in collecting records of ordinary conversation between participants is that people challenge each other's accounts in a way that an interviewer could not, and thereby provide further insight into the construction of discourse. In practical terms, this third stage also involved the audio recording of interviews for later transcription.

The means of collecting data for this study have been described in the previous stage. Interviews with bereaved parents were audiotaped and then sections were transcribed for analysis. These sections were chosen based upon discursive content which related to the original research questions (i.e., talk about the adult child, the relationship). I also was able to collect written accounts by bereaved parents in the form of letters directed to me, e-mails, newsletter submissions, and books. The collection of data from an Internet source, represented perhaps the most "naturalistic" form of discourse (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The data for this last segment of the study came from a publicly archived parent "chat group", which focused on bereavement specifically. As the researcher, I had no involvement in the production of the parents' published
accounts nor in the Internet data. All written discursive data was either typed or scanned into a wordprocessor for subsequent analysis.

3.3.4 Stage Four: Interviews

While there are advantages to using non-invasive approaches to data collection there are also advantages to investigator involvement through direct interviewing. Interviews allow the researcher to purposefully question a whole sample of participants on the same issues, allowing greater comparability in responses, and enhancing the initial coding process. The one-to-one research interview is seen as a conversation, a dialogue between two people about a topic of mutual interest. Kvale (1996b) calls the qualitative research interview “a construction site of knowledge” (p. 42). He relates the knowledge produced by interviews to five features of a postmodern construction of knowledge: the conversational, the narrative, the linguistic, the contextual, and the interrelational nature of knowledge. The research interview rests on conversation as access to knowledge. “The medium of the interview is language, and the knowledge produced in linguistic” (Kvale, 1996b, p. 42). There is a significant difference, however, between the ways in which the discourse analyst and the “orthodox” social researcher view the importance of consistency in participants responses. For the latter, this consistency is prized, for its presence is interpreted as evidence for a consistent reality or phenomenon beyond the words of the participants. The discourse analyst, on the other hand, values consistency only to the degree that the investigator seeks to identify regular patterns in language use.

In the discourse analytic framework, where the focus is on the structure and function of talk as opposed to whether the participant’s account accurately reflects some hypothesized internal state, “consistency is often less useful and desirable for analysis than variation in interviews” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 164). The aim of the interviewer in this case is to conduct an interview in such a way that it encourages rather
than restricts the diversity of participants' "accounting practices." One of the ways to achieve this goal is to abstain from using formal procedures which serve to restrict variability (e.g., closed-ended questions requiring a yes/no response) and instead seek to create a venue which is significantly more "interventionist" and confrontational than usual. Potter and Wetherell (1987) are not suggesting that the interview become some sort of argument. They mean that the interviewer should try to establish an active site where the participant has full opportunity to use his or her linguistic and interpretive resources and the investigator is able to explore the functional and variable characteristics of the discourse. The suggested interview strategies for creating this venue include returning to the same issue over the course of an interview while exploring a number of various general topics, and also to use follow-up questions to responses which present "alternate" or "problematic" perspectives or realities for the participant.

In an undertaking of this type the recommendation is made to develop a detailed interview guide which outlines the questions to be asked of each participant, and specifies the probes and follow-up questions to be used if particular responses are given. Such a guide provides a systematic framework for the interviewer, ensures that the same questions are asked of each participant, and records any information which the interviewer might find useful. Potter and Wetherell (1987) underline the skill required in conducting an interview which systematically spans several topics, while maintaining sufficient open-endedness to allow the participant to expand on their views in a "relatively naturalistic conversational exchange" (p. 165). In an effort to hone the interview guide Potter and Wetherell suggest that pilot interviews be conducted and transcribed before beginning the project proper. This suggestion was followed in the present study.
Since the interview is viewed as a "conversational encounter", the questions which the interviewer poses become as much a topic of analysis as the responses of the interviewees. These questions set some of the functional context for the answers and they must be included. In practice this means that the linguistic nuance of the question is as important as the linguistic nuance of the answers (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Discourse analysis, in contrast to more traditional frameworks, views the interviewer's questions as "active and constructive" as opposed to "passive and neutral."

Following these suggestions I developed an interview guide based upon issues arising from the literature and related to the central research questions of this study (see Appendix F). The interview guide was pilot-tested with a bereaved mother whom I interviewed while attending the Association for Death Education and Counseling (ADEC) conference in Chicago (March 21, 1998). All interview participants were asked to provide demographic information as well (see Appendix E).

3.3.5 Stage Five: Transcription

Potter and Wetherell (1987) assert that the importance and difficulty of transcription are often underestimated. They describe the task as both a "constructive" and "conventional" activity. It is constructive in that the transcriber endeavours to make decisions about what was said by the interviewee, and conventional in that talk is translated into an established orthographic system. The accuracy and quality of the transcription are essential for a discourse analysis which involves multiple readings of sections of data. The observation has also been made that the task of transcription forces the transcriber to closely and repeatedly read a body of discourse. This supports the argument for discourse researchers performing their own transcriptions, which is advice I chose to follow.
There is currently no agreement as to how detailed a transcription should be. Those who argue for the significance of intonational features of discourse would include such details as pause-length, hesitations, overlaps, and intonation in their transcriptions. Potter and Wetherell (1987) state that “for many sorts of research questions, the fine details of timing and intonation are not crucial, and indeed they can interfere with the readability of the transcript, particularly when dealing with extended sequences and for people unused to the system” (p. 166). They suggest that the researcher must weigh the issue of more detailed information against the additional time that such a process takes. Assuming the use of specifically designed transcription equipment the ratio of tape time to transcription time may vary from one to ten, for a system not involving intonation details, to more than one to twenty for an intentionally detailed transcription.

In an effort to immerse myself in the data I decided to transcribe the interview material myself. This I have found also reduces the possibility of transcription errors since (as interviewer) I was already familiar with the participant’s linguistic style as well as the context. Following the advice of Potter and Wetherell (1987) I did not include details of timing and intonation in the interview transcriptions. I used a modified version of the transcription conventions developed by Gail Jefferson (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984) as suggested by Madil and Doherty (1994) (see Appendix G).

3.3.6 Stage Six: Coding

Potter and Wetherell (1987) underline the fact that coding is very different from doing analysis itself. The goal here is to transform an expansive body of discourse into manageable chunks as opposed to finding results. It is an analytic precursor to a much more intensive examination of the material. The categories which are used in this stage are very vitally related to the initial research questions. In some cases this selection can be quite straightforward while in others “the phenomenon of interest may not become
clear until some analysis has taken place and a number of attempts at theoretical
interpretation of the data” (p. 167). In these later situations the process is a cyclical one
between analysis and coding. As the analysis becomes more sophisticated new
understandings of what should be coded may emerge.

Potter and Wetherell (1987) contrast discursive coding to content analysis in
that its aim is pragmatic not analytical, and that in gathering together instances for study
coding should be done as inclusively as possible. They suggest that the researcher not
attempt to set limits on the body of instances collected and thus include all “borderline”
cases, and instances that at first sight seem only vaguely related to the category. In terms
of data management, Potter and Wetherell recommend that all pages of transcript
coded as including relevant instances within a particular category be photocopied and
placed in their own file. The file then functions as the starting place for detailed
discursive analysis. The existence of increasingly sophisticated computer programs for
qualitative data analysis (QDA) (see Weitzman & Miles, 1995) now allows for the
possibility of managing the coding, chunking, and sorting tasks with greater time
efficiency. However, in reviewing various QDA programs, I became increasingly
conscious of the theoretical assumptions (e.g., grounded theory) and developer biases
which seemed to translate into certain design features. In seeking the advice of
experienced discourse analysts (e.g., Linda Wood, Jonathan Potter) I decided against the
use of a QDA software program. Rather I chose simply to use a word processor, where
the files and folders now became electronic, but where I could remain close to the data.
While this was significantly more time consuming, it facilitated numerous re-readings of
the data and avoided the “forcing” of discursive data into some other (inappropriate)
qualitative model/theory.
Since this study was fundamentally interested in the nature of the bond between the parent and the deceased adult child, the initial coding categories reflected this line of inquiry. So, for example, all references to the relationship with the child were selected out from the body of the transcript. A number of coding categories were developed and are presented in Appendix H.

3.3.7 Stage Seven: Analysis

As Potter and Wetherell (1987) assert, there is no mechanical procedure or recipe for carrying out an analysis of discourse. The task which underlies this stage is one of careful reading and rereading of documents and records of interviews. “The skills required are developed as one tries to make sense of transcript and identify the organizational features of documents” (p. 168). Rather than reading for a general impression, however, the analyst is interested in the detail of passages of discourse with attention being given to nuance, contradictions, and areas of vagueness. This approach to reading is anathema to academic training which encourages people to “read for gist.” Therefore, an integral component of the discourse analysis process is for the researcher to critically interrogate his or her own presuppositions and unexplored constructive means of sense making. “The analyst constantly asks: Why am I reading this passage in this way? What features produce this reading?” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 168).

Potter and Wetherell (1987) describe two closely related phases to the process of analysis. The first involves the search for a pattern in the data. A pattern both in the form of variability: differences in either the content or form of accounts, and consistency: features which are shared by accounts. The fundamental theoretical assumption in Potter and Wetherell’s model of discourse analysis is that peoples’ talk serves several functions and has varying effects. The second phase of analysis therefore “consists of forming hypotheses about these functions and effects and searching for the linguistic evidence”
(p. 168). The success of a final analysis is based upon its ability to explain both the broad organization and the finer discursive detail, to provide an explanation which is the most coherent.

Potter and Wetherell state that in conducting discourse analysis there is no “analytic method” analogous to others found in psychology. Instead, “there is a broad theoretical framework, which focuses attention on the constructive and functional dimensions of discourse, coupled with the reader’s skill in identifying significant patterns of consistency and variation” (p. 169). The authors do not imply that the reader is therefore left to accept the analyst’s conclusions on trust, because the process does include several phases of validation which are described in the next section.

3.3.8 Stage Eight: Validation

Potter and Wetherell (1987) describe four analytic techniques for validating the findings of discourse analysis: (i) coherence, (ii) participants’ orientation, (iii) new problems, and (iv) fruitfulness.

(i) Coherence

“A set of analytic claims should give coherence to a body of discourse” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 170). An analysis is more likely to be considered complete and trustworthy if the explanation fits for all features of the discourse (i.e. no “loose ends”) and if it accounts for both the broad pattern as well as for many of the “micro-sequences” of talk. In assessing coherence, the importance of apparent exceptions to the analytic schema are underlined. There must be a search for disconfirming evidence once a recurrent pattern of accounting has been discovered and a hypothesis formulated as to its particular goal. Exemplars which fall outside of this explanation may be more informative than those which are accounted for, and may raise “important problems.” Potter and Wetherell (p. 170) state:
If there is clearly some special feature of the exceptions which marks them off from the standard examples and thereby determines their status as exceptions, the explanatory scope of our scheme is confirmed. If there are no special features which plausibly explain difference, the exclusive nature of our scheme must be questioned.

Henwood and Pidgeon (1994, p. 235) contend that in making its break from empiricism, that discourse analysis "does not seek to propose warranting devices on a par with those of reliability and validity." Instead, "the emphasis is on presenting 'raw' transcripts so that audiences can create other readings." These authors suggest that the onus is upon the researcher to present an account that is more "coherent" and "persuasive." "In this way the reflexive processes of constructing knowledge are laid open to public view" (p. 235).

It has been argued effectively by Henwood and Pidgeon (1994) that different sets of priorities may be followed in carrying out research with qualitative data. They present a scheme in which three different strands are identified within qualitative psychology, each one representing a particular approach to justifying qualitative research. Each of these strands as well as their epistemological positions, methodological principles, and representative methods are outlined in Table 1 (see p. 124).
Table 1: Three strands of Qualitative Psychology (from Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broad strand</th>
<th>Epistemology</th>
<th>Methodological principles</th>
<th>Method (with selected examples)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strand I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability/validity</td>
<td>Empiricism</td>
<td>Discovery of valid representations (primarily induction)</td>
<td>‘Data display’ model Miles &amp; Huberman (1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strand II</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generativity and grounding</td>
<td>Contextualism</td>
<td>Construct intersubjective meaning (or Verstehen)</td>
<td>Grounded theory Glaser &amp; Strauss (1967) Strauss &amp; Corbin (1990)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strand III</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the first strand of inquiry, qualitative research is evaluated with reference to analogous concepts of the traditional criteria of reliability and validity. Empiricism is the underlying epistemology in this case, and the methodology espouses an inductivist view that “initial representations of social relationships can be discovered from detailed, qualitative observations made in relatively unstructured situations such as the field” (p. 229). In terms of connecting method to this strand, the “Data display” model of Miles and Huberman (1994) has been suggested as representative (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994).
Throughout their widely read sourcebook, *Qualitative Data Analysis*, Miles and Huberman (1994) provide practical strategies “to ensure that explicit checks can be made to reliability without compromising the gains qualitative analysis brings in flexibility, contextual sensitivity, or external validity” (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994, p. 229). Given Miles and Huberman’s belief in lawful and reasonably stable relationships among objective social phenomena, they are placed fairly squarely in an empiricist framework. In terms of evaluating the “goodness of conclusions” in qualitative research, Miles and Huberman (1994) attempt to “establish a degree of overlap between traditional principles (objectivity, reliability, internal and external validity, and applicability) and the alternative approach of assessing trustworthiness and authenticity proposed by advocates of naturalistic inquiry “ (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1994, p. 231). Henwood and Pidgeon assert that one of the problems of trying to “establish continuity of assessment criteria is that it conceals a number of unresolved tensions” between competing paradigms. The example is given of Miles and Huberman’s emphasis on countering sources of “bias” in data collection and analysis as being “incompatible with the realization that knowledge production involves an essential interconnection between researcher and researched” (p. 231). Henwood and Pidgeon (1994) assert that the inductively derived representations of Miles and Huberman (1994) “could all too easily become subsumed within a traditional view of human science as verification” (p. 231).

The second strand of inquiry that Henwood and Pidgeon (1994) describe is generativity and grounding, which justifies qualitative research by developing new theory that is strongly grounded both in the “participants’ own accounts and substantive domains” (p. 228). They offer grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) as an example of a method which personifies the contextualist approach.
Finally, in the third strand described by Henwood and Pidgeon (1994), discursive and reflexive; qualitative research is evaluated by “focusing analytically upon the reflexive functions of language that construct representations of ‘objects’ in the world, and that have material - discursive effects” (p. 228). The epistemological stance which underlies this strain is constructivism, and the representative method in this case is discourse analysis (e.g., Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Edwards & Potter, 1992; Burman & Parker, 1993).

(ii) Participants’ Orientation

In this approach to discourse analysis the orientation of the participants, what they see as consistent and dissonant, takes precedence over the analyst’s observations of variability and consistency in accounts. One way of checking this orientation is for the researcher to predict that difficulties will arise for participants on the basis of apparent incompatibilities. Actions which are then taken by participants to resolve the problem serve to confirm the validity of the findings. If the participants do not orient to the suggested inconsistencies, then the validity of the findings would be placed under suspicion. Potter and Wetherell (1987) illustrate this point by using Gilbert and Mulkay’s (1984) study of the discourse of biochemists. Gilbert and Mulkay asserted their finding that these scientists constructed their discourse from two incompatible interpretive repertoires. The biochemists accounted for their own errors by appealing to the “empiricist repertoire”, while explaining the mistakes of others by use of a “contingent repertoire.” To validate their findings Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) not only demonstrated that these repertoires appeared incompatible to them, but that the

3. Potter and Wetherell (1987) define interpretive repertoires as: recurrently used systems of terms used for characterizing and evaluating actions, events, and other phenomena. A repertoire, like the empiricist and contingent repertoires, is constituted through a limited range of terms used in particular stylistic and grammatical constructions.
participants themselves (i.e., the biochemists) recognized the incompatibility. When the repertoires were kept separate there was no problem, but when in their discourse the repertoires were produced on the same occasion, particular problems were created for the biochemists which had to be resolved by the use of a specific interpretive device; what the investigators called: the “truth will out device.” The discursive act of having to use this device was evidence to not only the analysts but the biochemists themselves (i.e., participants’ orientation) of an inconsistency.

(iii) New Problems

Potter and Wetherell (1987) assert that “one of the primary aims of discourse analysis is to clarify the linguistic resources used to make certain things happen” (p. 171). They further suggest that these resources won’t just solve problems, but will also create their own unique problems. The authors use the analogy of an automobile engine, which successfully converts chemical energy into mechanical motion, but creates the problem of excess heat necessitating a cooling system to keep the engine running smoothly. Potter and Wetherell suggest that the presence of new problems, and solutions “provides further confirmation that linguistic resources are being used as hypothesized” (p. 171). They use Gilbert and Mulkay’s (1984) finding evidence of the “truth will out device” in the discourse of biochemists as an illustration of this process.

While the two interpretive repertoires used by the scientists were useful, they created problems of their own, especially when used together. Potter and Wetherell (1987) argue that the truth will out device was a solution to the incompatibility between the empiricist and the contingent repertoire and “its existence provides further confirmation of the basic analytic suggestions” (p. 171). It is noteworthy, however, that discursive psychology is evolving in such a way as to be paying less attention to the use of “interpretive repertoires” per se (J. Potter, personal communication, August 9, 1999).
(iv) Fruitfulness

Potter and Wetherell (1987) define this fourth criterion of validity as referring to "the scope of an analytic scheme to make sense of new kinds of discourse and to generate novel explanations" (p. 171). Suggesting that fruitfulness is likely the most powerful criterion, Potter and Wetherell acknowledge that this is a general criterion of validity for scientific explanations and theories; whether they can be used to construct new solutions to existing problems in a particular area of research.

3.3.9 Stage Nine: The Report

The goal of the final written report is to describe the analysis and conclusions in a way which enables the reader to adequately assess the researcher's interpretations. This essentially forms the next chapter of this thesis. Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggest that the final report is an element of the confirmation and validation procedure and therefore much more than simply a presentation of the findings. To achieve this end the report must include a representative set of exemplars from the area of study integrated with a detailed interpretation which links analytic claims to particular segments or aspects of the extracts.

The practical implication of this process is that the analytic section of a discursive study is significantly longer than the analogous section in a traditional empirical work. Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggest that extracts from transcripts or documents will constitute a significant portion of the report, while detailed interpretations identifying patterns and organizational features will form the remainder. They emphasize that unlike "superficially similar work in social psychology and interpretive sociology the extracts in discourse analysis are not characterizations or illustrations of the data, they are examples of the data itself" (p. 173). Potter and Wetherell further contrast the differences between discourse analysis and content analysis. First of all, discourse analysis rests on a different
theoretical base, one which sees language as an active, performative realm. Secondly, in
detailing the interpretation of a text, reports of discourse analysis make explicit those
aspects which are left for the reader to take on trust in content analytic studies. In the
latter, all that the reader normally sees is a numerical summary without any detailing of
the interpretive process.

Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggest that the process of making interpretations
fully explicit for final written reports often uncovers problems and raises questions not
evident at earlier stages. In some cases what appeared to be a coherent discursive
framework breaks down and necessitates a return to coding, or even to the original
documents and transcripts. They recommend that composition of a rough draft of the
analysis and discussion be accomplished earlier than later because the process of writing
often assists in clarifying analytic issues. Six such analytic drafts were completed in the
case of the present study.

3.3.10 Stage Ten: Application

Potter and Wetherell (1987) contend that the final stage in the process of
discourse analysis, “Application”, is often neglected in social research. They suggest that
this is in part due to the lack of understanding and contradictory evidence about how
best to apply the findings of social science investigation. These authors express their
conviction that researchers should address the potential practical applications of their
findings to a much greater degree.

Potter and Wetherell highlight the saliency of this issue for discourse analysis,
reminding us that we are surrounded and immersed in language. They state that
“virtually the entirety of anyone’s understanding of the social world is mediated by
discourse in the form of conversations, newspapers, novels, TV stories and so on” (p.
174). An example to illustrate this point within the Canadian context is “Medicare”, or
"Socialized Medicine". Although no one has actually seen "it" we read news stories about it, debate its future, have conversations about it, and express opinions about its costs and benefits. Potter and Wetherell (1987) contend that one of the contributions of discourse analysis is to encourage an "informed critical attitude to discourse of this kind"; to develop a greater awareness of the constructive nature of discourse and the "close connection between the way textual versions of the world are put together" and "which particular policies and evaluations are pushed" (p. 175). Kurt Danziger has also underlined the irony that psychology, which is completely dependent on a "psychological language", has not correspondingly placed much emphasis on studying language, especially its own (Danziger, 1996, 1997).

Potter and Wetherell (1987) highlight two models for the application of discourse analysis. The first is popularization, where information is distributed to a wider audience as freely as possible; and the second is to initiate a dialogue with the people on whom the particular research has focused. Whatever model one uses, Potter and Wetherell advocate including this last stage in the research agenda.

In terms of the present study, I see the potential for actualizing both of these models of application. With the existence of virtual support groups for bereaved parents (i.e., the Internet) I envisage the electronic dissemination of this study's findings to those who would potentially benefit. The return of information to the community of bereaved parents could also occur through the medium of newsletters, thus creating a reciprocal flow of knowledge. With respect to the second model of application I would also consider the establishment of further dialogue with bereaved parents of adult children as an ongoing form of credibility checking. The trustworthiness of my interpretations could be assessed by a broader audience and tested against a wider context of experience.
I would add an additional model for the application of discourse analysis, and that is professional and theoretical utility. The findings of this study, which examines the words and writing of parents whose adult children have died, may provide professionals who seek to help these parents with an expanded frame of reference than what currently exists. By gaining a functional and contextual understanding of the language of bereaved parents, both professional and lay support people may be better equipped to listen, hear, and communicate with them. As Silverman and Nickman (1996a) have emphasized, there is an absence of a language with which to adequately describe the emerging findings of the new paradigm of grief. The possibility exists for the present study, which focuses on discourse, to provide some of that vocabulary, at least as it applies to parents bereaved of an adult child. It may also serve to inform more specific theory by gaining insight into the nature of the adult child-parent bond through the words of bereaved parents.
Chapter 4 - THE PARTICIPANTS

Table 2(a) (see p. 133) lists the demographics of the 21 participants who wrote directly to me (SWRIT) and whose adult children, aged 18 to 47 years old, died 11 months to 21 years prior to the study. Table 2(b) (p. 133) includes 18 participants who sent previously published writings (PWRIT), whose children ranged in age from 17 to 42 years, and had died 1 to 18 years before the study. Table 2(c) (see p. 134) describes the 4 participants who were interviewed (INTVW) and whose adult children, aged 20 to 22 years old, died 2 to 13 years prior to the study. Table 2(d) (p. 134) represents 5 participants whose archived Internet conversations were collected (ICHAT) and whose children ranged in age from 17 to 29 years, had died 1 to 18 years before the study. Among this last group (ICHAT) there was one parent (ICHAT-002) who experienced the death of 2 adult sons in 2 separate accidents. Blank cells of information in these demographic tables indicate that the information was not provided by the participant. Either the “Biography” form was not returned or it contained incomplete information.

Overall, there is great diversity in these participants. They vary along several demographic characteristics including: age of the deceased adult child, age of parent, type of death (although the majority stem from alcohol-related automobile accidents), time elapsed since death, and occupation. The majority of the participants who sent written discourse are American, while those who were interviewed and whose archived conversations were collected are largely Canadian. While the majority of participants are residents of North America, letters of initial interest came from as far away as Great Britain and Africa. The vast majority of participants are bereaved mothers. As reflected in bereavement research in general, it was more difficult to engage men in this particular study of adult child loss, than women bereaved of their children.
Table 2: Participant Demographics

2a. SWRIT (Solicited Writings)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age of Child</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Cause of Death</th>
<th>Sudden Death?</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SWRIT-001</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>drunk driver</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Sept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWRIT-002</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>automobile accident (alcohol involved)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Sept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWRIT-003</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>drunk driver (died 6 days after, coma)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Nov.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWRIT-004</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>drunk driver (9 mo. baby also killed)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Jun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWRIT-005</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>drunk driver (9 mo. baby also killed)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Jun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWRIT-006</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>drunk driver (self)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWRIT-007</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>drunk driver</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Oct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWRIT-008</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>skiing accident</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWRIT-009</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>drunk driver</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Oct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWRIT-010</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>drunk driver (passenger in same car)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Oct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWRIT-011</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>MVA</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Apr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWRIT-012</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>cancer (meningial mets to breast + lung)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Aug.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWRIT-013</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>drunk driver (passenger in same car)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Feb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWRIT-014</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>drunk driver</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Dec.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWRIT-015</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>drunk driver</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Jun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWRIT-016</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>drunk driver (tractor, victim walking)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Dec.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWRIT-017</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>drunk driver (husband also killed)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Dec.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWRIT-018</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>drunk driver (self?)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>May.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWRIT-019</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>drunk driver (spouse + daughter-in-law killed)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>May.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWRIT-020</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>juvenile diabetes complications</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Sept.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWRIT-021</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>drunk driver/burned</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2b. PWRT (Published Writings)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age of Child</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Cause of Death</th>
<th>Sudden Death?</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PWRT-001</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>drunk driver (passenger in same car)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Apr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWRT-002</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>drunk driver</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Apr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWRT-003</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>drunk driver (wife also killed)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>May.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWRT-004</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>skiing accident</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>May.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWRT-005</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>burned in auto accident (single vehicle)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Apr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWRT-006</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>burned in auto accident (single accident)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Apr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWRT-007</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>automobile accident</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Jun.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWRT-008</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>drunk driver (tractor, victim walking)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Dec.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWRT-009</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>drunk driver (husband also killed)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Dec.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWRT-011</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>alcohol abuse</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWRT-012</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>drunk driver (self)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Apr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWRT-013</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>cancer</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Apr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWRT-014</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>drunk driver</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Apr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWRT-015</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>drowned/drunk driver (passenger in same car)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Apr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWRT-016</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>train accident</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Apr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWRT-017</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>medical accident from cancer treatment</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Apr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWRT-018</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>drunk driver</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Apr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudden Death?</td>
<td>Date of Death</td>
<td>Time Elapsed</td>
<td>Child's Occupation/Activity</td>
<td>Relationship Status</td>
<td>Linking Object?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Sept. 23, 1997</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Soldier</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Sept. 10, 1988</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>Grocery store clerk</td>
<td>Single (living @ home)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Nov. 10, 1994</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Homemaker, parenting</td>
<td>Married/3 children</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Jun., 12, 1983</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>Homemaker, parenting</td>
<td>Married/3 children</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Jun., 12, 1983</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>Self-employed (clothing store)</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mar., 8, 1987</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>University Student</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Oct. 15, 1994</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Banker</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mar., 24, 1996</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Retail Sales</td>
<td>Engaged</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Oct. 6, 1977</td>
<td>21 years</td>
<td>Cashier</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Oct. 18, 1997</td>
<td>11 months</td>
<td>Receptionist/officer clerk</td>
<td>Living with boyfriend</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Apr., 25, 1995</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Research (international law firm)</td>
<td>Living with boyfriend</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Apr., 3, 1997</td>
<td>17 months</td>
<td>Soldier</td>
<td>Divorced/1 child</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Aug., 7, 1993</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>University Student</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Feb., 16, 1996</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Police Officer</td>
<td>Engaged</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Dec., 4, 1994</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Police Officer</td>
<td>Single/1 child</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Jun., 8, 1993</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>University Student/office worker</td>
<td>Married/4 children</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Dec., 22, 1993</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Teacher's Aide (Special Ed)</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Dec., 10, 1978</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>Videographer</td>
<td>Remarried/2 children</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>May, 26, 1994</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Custodian</td>
<td>Remarried/2 children</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>May, 10, 1994</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Manager (MBA)</td>
<td>Living with boyfriend</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Sept. 21, 1991</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No (2/3)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>48 Female</td>
<td>Remarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>47 Female</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No (2/2)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>65 Female</td>
<td>Divorced (X2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>50 Female</td>
<td>Remarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No (3/3)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>54 Female</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>53 Female</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No (2/3+1)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>80 Female</td>
<td>Widowed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>75 Female</td>
<td>Remarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No (5/8)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>72 Female</td>
<td>Widowed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>61 Female</td>
<td>Remarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No (1/2)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>68 Female</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The remaining cells in the table are not visible in the image.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation/Activity</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Cultural Background</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Bereaved Parent Previously?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maker</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Cherokee/Irish</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maker</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>German/Dutch/Austrian</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>middle class, 1 income (37K)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maker</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Danish/Irish</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>combined retirement (50K)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management/Bookkeeper</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Caucasian, German</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>combined income (18+22K)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University (educator)</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>combined income (21+16K)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>WASP</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>retirement income (24K)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(insurance)</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>Greek Orthodox</td>
<td>one annual income (48K)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>low middle income (19K)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casino Rep.</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Caucasian Irish Catholic</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>annual income (49K)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>WASP</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>retirement/investments (70K)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casino Rep.</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Caucasian middle class</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>annual income (12+58K)</td>
<td>Yes (heart failure, miscarriage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casino Rep.</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>WASP</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>combined income (50+40K)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>middle class</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>European/Norwegian</td>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>combined income (7+23K)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Caucasian, Christian</td>
<td>Southern Baptist</td>
<td>combined income (13+17K)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>American, Irish</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>retirement income (15K)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Irish-American, Caucasian</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>retirement income (26K)</td>
<td>Yes (SIDS, miscarriages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>spouse retired/work part-time</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation/Activity</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Cultural Background</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Bereaved Parent Previously?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Caucasian middle class</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>annual income (12+58K)</td>
<td>Yes (heart failure, miscarriage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housekeeping (University)</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Caucasian, German</td>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>combined income (21+16K)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Scottish</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>retirement income (24K)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oncology Data Specialist</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired (Educator)</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary/Bookkeeper</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired (Nurse)</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RedRedVolunteer</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office management</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital Unit Assistant</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel/Casino Rep.</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinator of Nursing Staff Development</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freelance science writer</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author + Hospice Counselor</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writer/Publisher/Notary</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Bereaved Parent Previously?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>annual income (12+58K)</td>
<td>Yes (heart failure, miscarriage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>combined income (21+16K)</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>retirement income (24K)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>combined income (7+23K)</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>combined income (13+17K)</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>combined income (50+40K)</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>combined income (18+22K)</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>combined income (50+40K)</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>annual income (7+28K)</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes (heart failure, miscarriages)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes (granddaughter)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes (SIDS, miscarriages)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>annual income (12+58K)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>MADD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>combined income (21+18K)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>MADD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>retirement income (24K)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>TCF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>annual income (49K)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>ADEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>combined income (7+23K)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>TCF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>combined income (13+17K)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>TCF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>combined income (50+20K)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>MADD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>combined income (18+22K)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>TCF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>combined income (50+40K)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>MADD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>annual income (76K)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>MADD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>TCF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes (SIDS, miscarriages)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>MADD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes (Stillbirth)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>TCF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>TCF</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2 (cont'd): Participant Demographics

#### 2c. INTVW (Interviews)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age of Child</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Cause of Death</th>
<th>Sudden Death?</th>
<th>Date of Death</th>
<th>Time Elapsed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTVW-001</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>industrial accident</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Apr. 30, 1997</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTVW-002</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>cancer</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTVW-003</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>work-related accident</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>13 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTVW-004</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>pulmonary edema</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Oct. 5, 1994</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 2d. ICHAT (Internet)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age of Child</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Cause of Death</th>
<th>Sudden Death?</th>
<th>Date of Death</th>
<th>Time Elapsed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ICHAT-001</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>automobile accident</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICHAT-002</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>accident</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>18 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICHAT-002</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>accident</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICHAT-003</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>hypothermia (alcohol)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICHAT-004</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>cancer</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICHAT-005</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>automobile accident</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 30, 1997</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No (2/3)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No (1/2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 5, 1994</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child?</td>
<td>Burial</td>
<td>Cremation</td>
<td>Gravesite</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Married</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Occupation/Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Hospital Unit Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Psychoanalyst</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Cultural Backdrop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Occupation/Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Lawyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Cultural Backdrop</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English/Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English/Czech</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Chapter 5 - ANALYSIS/FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The process of analysis began with my preliminary coding of the data from the initial solicited writings (SWRIT), transcribed interviews (INTVW), published documents (PWRIT), and Internet-group discussions (ICHAT). The aim at this stage was to distill from hundreds of pages of text, a manageable subset of data which related to the original research questions. I selected out from all of the written, interview and Internet materials, segments of talk/text that related to the relationship between the bereaved parent and the deceased child, the characteristics of either parent or child, as well as any material pertaining to the notion of continuing bonds (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996). According to the suggestions of Potter and Wetherell (1978) I followed an inclusive coding policy in which all borderline or anomalous cases were accepted.

Following the analytical process outlined by Potter and Wetherell (1978) I read and re-read the material not at a thematic (“gist”) level, which would be more typical of some other qualitative approaches; but at the level of a “fine-grained” examination. I took the advice of Jonathan Potter by “start(ing) off with small observations, building on them across the materials”, trying always to “be open to the detail” (J. Potter, personal communication, October 27, 1998). The overriding analytic consideration was one of studying the data for evidence of the performative nature of discourse; and thus back to the original research question: What are bereaved parents of adult children doing with their language?

In terms of analyzing and organizing the data, I decided upon a hybrid model, whereby both discursive phenomena and the particular context in which they were being used (i.e., bereaved parenthood) would receive attention. The first half of the analysis is
therefore organized along the lines of highlighting specific discursive devices and practices that were identified in the study sample, while the latter half is arranged to bring greater attention to the "setting" of grief process in which the resources are used, although this distinction is in some sense artificial and the two are essentially intertwined.

There is no attempt in this analysis to make quantitative claims; therefore except in casual, analysis-provoking ways, I have not made numerical references to the data. The theoretical-methodological underpinnings of discursive psychology differ significantly from the presumptions of traditional positivist research and statistical quantification. Unlike traditional quantitative work, and even some forms of qualitative research, this analysis attempts to stay close to the data. I have essentially endeavored to restrict my analytic claims to what is demonstrable in the data (Anita Pomerantz, personal communication, August 13, 1999) - to not "join in" - but to analyze. Likewise, in the domain of discursive analysis, the single occurrence/usage of a particular device means that it is "available" to other language users (Carla Willig, personal communication, July 31, 1999). This study treats discourse data in this same manner. There is no attempt in this analysis to quantify usage in order to make any sort of (unwarranted) attempt at "generalization."

The majority of the data was represented by the solicited writings of bereaved parents of adult children (SWRIT), followed by published writings (PWRIT), interviews (INTVW), and Internet chat (ICHAT). The representation of data across the analytic examples therefore reflects this distribution.

5.2 Describing the Indescribable

While this is a study about words and their use by bereaved parents of adult children, there is a paradox here to which some of the participants explicitly oriented. (In fact paradox was present at several points in the analysis) What participants
commented on in their discourse were the very limitations of language to adequately describe the experience of one’s adult child dying.

In the context of a newspaper interview, a reporter describes the talk given by a bereaved mother (who is also a nurse) to various high school groups:

__________, who is an emergency room nurse at ________ Hospital, spoke of what happens to a person who is treated for severe trauma - and what happens when the person cannot be saved. “The screams of anguish will cause me to hold your mother, and there is nothing I can say to her because her world has ended,” ________ said. [PWRIT-015]

While the participant is quoted as saying, “there is nothing (she) can say”, she does in her own brief description say quite a lot! This description provides a first instance of the paradoxical nature of parental grief. The bereaved mother very efficiently constructs a severe scene to depict the “trauma” of surviving a child’s death. She achieves the work of description by drawing on an embodied language of “screams” and “hold(ing)”, even the word “anguish”; given the possible range of choices (e.g., distress, pain, agony, sorrow, grief), serves to establish an extreme situation, where the outcome is extreme finality (“her world has ended”). In juxtaposition to being able to describe the scene, in order to have an impact on her youthful audience, the internal dialogue depicts the inability of words (“nothing I can say”) to alleviate the bereaved mother’s suffering.

Slightly less than three years later, Alison died in a car wreck -- a tragic accident that took her life on impact. There are no words to communicate the pain and sorrow of that day. [PWRIT-007]

In this excerpt, the words which the bereaved mother settles on are “pain” and “sorrow.” They are presented as the ‘ground’ of her experience, but their inadequacy is highlighted by the assertion that “no words” can transmit how she felt the day her daughter died. Yet, in the opening segment of this discourse, the participant linguistically
paints a picture of a violent ("car wreck . . . tragic accident") and sudden ("impact") death, in which her daughter was a victim ("took her life"). The passage of time ("Slightly less than three years later") is also emphasized as having no apparent impact on being able to find adequate words. While there may be no singular word to express the inexpressible, the discourse nevertheless conveys much about the experience.

This same paradox of searching for words that don’t seem to exist is again written about by another participant:

I have been trying since her death so many months ago to find the words to adequately describe the pain and horror of having my child killed, but there are no words. I have tried counseling but it didn't help. I was finally prescribed medication for tremendous stress this has caused, but that doesn’t begin to alleviate that pain I feel and the immeasurable void that has been left by Jacy's death. [PWRIT-002]

In this excerpt, "pain" again is used to describe the experience, as well as "horror", which elicits images of terror, panic, and fear. Again, the participant asserts that words do not exist which can “adequately” do justice to her encounter of parental bereavement. She as well, emphasizes ("so many") that much time has passed during which she has been searching ("trying . . . to find") for words. Like the previous mother, this participant constructs her adult daughter as the victim of someone else’s actions in stating that she was "killed". Her discourse eventually shifts to metaphoric language ("immeasurable void"), the use of which will be described later in this section. Pain was, in fact, the most common metaphor used by participants in attempting to describe their experience of losing their adult child. In terms of the search for particular words, this dilemma is reminiscent of William Worden’s (1991) suggestion that the German word “Schmerz” is more useful in describing the pain of grief (p. 13) than any words in the English language, because it encompasses physical, emotional, and behavioural elements.
Yes, we know you’re in Heaven. But we cannot comprehend that you’re not here with us. Our hearts are so broken for you, dying, in that terrible crash. Please know we love you and miss you more than words can say. [PWRIT-005]

In this excerpt, it is the intensity of ‘missing’ the child in particular which the parent suggests is impossible to communicate in language (“miss you more than words can say”). However, earlier on in this excerpt of writing to the deceased child, the parents are able to describe the unbelievability of their child’s absence by stating that they “cannot comprehend” that he is not present. The son’s absence is underlined by use of the particular description “not here with us”, as are the violent and sudden circumstances of his death (“that terrible crash”). Consider, for example, if the description had instead been “dying, in that bad accident.” It is the extremity of language usage here that seems to have particular salience and which essentially helps in describing the indescribable.

My life will never be the same. Nothing is the same for me. I wish I could describe this, because this is the hardest. It seems that there is a cloud over everything. For instance, I can look at a beautiful sunset; what can stir your feelings more than that - the simple beauty of nature. But it just doesn’t glow like it used to for me. Everything that used to make me happy just doesn’t make me as happy anymore. When my granddaughter was born I was thrilled, but went home & cried & cried because of the daughter I lost… I believe there will always be a cloud or shadow over my life. Nothing will ever be the same. I miss her so much. I can’t express it. [SWRIT-007]

In this excerpt, the participant also orients to the struggle of trying to describe her experience of losing her child (“I wish I could describe this”). In particular, she connects her toil with trying to portray what ‘never being the same’ is like. In stating that “this is the hardest”, the bereaved mother emphasizes through extreme language (“hardest”) the intense paradox of her situation. Yet, in enlisting the use of metaphors - permanent change and dark weather - the discourse does ultimately does the work of description. The “neverness” and the “darkness” help construct a picture of intense
grieving, an image which is further supported by the use of examples from the participant's life since the death of her daughter.

It appears paradoxical then, that while participants discursively turned toward the dilemma of "expressing in words" their experiences of parental bereavement, they were simultaneously able to achieve some of that descriptive work. We now turn to examine the various discursive devices and practices through which participants accomplished action through words - how they did the "indescribable."

5.3 Reconstructing the Adult Child: Extreme Case Formulations

The most striking feature of the discourse of bereaved parents in this study was their use of "extreme" language in writing or talking about their deceased adult children. "Extreme case formulations" were identified by Anita Pomerantz (1986) as expressions using extreme words such as all, none, only, most, every, least, absolutely, and completely. Pomerantz (1986) proposed that people often draw on extreme case formulations when they are trying to justify, accuse or argue particular conclusions. Extreme case formulations can be identified as either maximum case formulations (e.g., most, only, greatest, every) or minimum case formulations (e.g., least, never, none). The actual words that are used are also sometimes refereed to as "modulating terms." For instance, in the following example taken from an interview with a bereaved father, "always" is the particular maximum (extreme) case formulation:

Bill: So what can I tell you? Geez I mean a kid who was always (1.0) always going (.) always interested always ( ) [inaudible]

Phil: Mhm (.) always funny?

Bill: Fun and funny (.) yeah (.) Rugby player (1.0) (Phil Uh huh) loved loved rugby [INTVW-004]
Participants in this particular study, rather than using extreme case formulations to defend or justify a description, were instead using their language to construct, or more accurately reconstruct, their child who had died. Rarely did they reflexively orient to this act as construction, although the following exception illustrates the point most explicitly:

If I may, Sir, start at the beginning. Because he is not here, I wish to quickly reconstruct my son in spirit and soul; a personality of love and kindness, a son every person on earth would love to have. Robbie came to us as a gift. I could not bare any more children after my first daughter, Sheila, was born. She is now 31. We adopted our second daughter, Julie, who is now 22. Then we adopted Robbie. Not being able to bare your own children makes adopting the greatest gift God can send. Robbie and Julie were our dreams come true - - a brother and sister for Sheila and 3 complete children for us. [PWRIT-005]

In this description, the bereaved mother writes in the context of the courtroom, where a judge will consider all evidence (including victim impact statements) before arriving at a sentence for the individual implicated in her son’s death. The bereaved mother begins by immediately reminding the judge of her son’s absence (“Because he is not here”) and states her desire to reconstitute his personhood for the court (“I wish to quickly reconstruct my son”). The extrematization begins quite early in her description, where she makes the claim that “every person on earth”, would “love to have” Robbie as their son. This discourse is specific in the sense that it is Robbie in particular, and not a son like Robbie, who is described as lovable and endearing to all. In effect then, there are no possible “replacements.” This use of extreme (maximum) case formulation makes claim to establishing the desirability value for the adult child who died as universal (i.e., “every person on earth”).

Within this excerpt, the bereaved mother also makes use of metaphor (“a gift”) in describing her son. Potter (1996) suggests that in the act of developing descriptive categories, metaphor plays a performative role. By using metaphor in their accounts, people invoke categories which bring to mind particular qualities for the listener/reader,
and thus help establish a descriptive portrayal. In the account above, the adult child is remembered as "a gift", thus invoking elements of surprise and unexpectedness.

Because of this mother's inability to have biological children, beyond her first child, the rarity of this "gift" is heightened. She once again constructs in the extreme, stating that Robbie was not just a gift, he was "the greatest gift", and further to this invokes a sense of her son as a divine gift ("the greatest gift God can send").

There is also an element in this mother's description of the intentionality or agentive nature of her son's arrival in their family ("Robbie came to us as a gift"). In discussing grammatical features of everyday discourse, Kroger and Wood (1998) describe this use of active versus passive voice to situate people as agents or patients. "Robbie came to us as a gift" identifies the son as agent and the parents as object. "The selection of voice reflects the positioning of the interactants, including their relative positions of power, the latter in a subtle way that usually goes unremarked in the hurly-burly of face-to-face conversation" (Kroger & Wood, 1998, p. 275). Here, the parents assume the less powerful position as their son, even in his infancy, takes on an agentive role. This grammatical feature is also present in the father's account as he describes the role of his "only son" Robb in the family business:

He was working for our small family-owned business and always talked about taking over the family business someday when I retire. Robb had an "IQ" that I envied. I enjoyed being around him because he always knew how to do something or handle the situation. His personality was a delight to be around. Our customers always had something good to say about Robb. He had a very clever way with words because of his intelligence . . . [PWRITE-006]

In this segment of discourse the father not only positions Robb as the active agent (i.e., "he always knew how to do something or handle the situation"), he also removes himself altogether. This is combined once again with extrematization in the use of the modalizing term "always", both in terms of Robb's capabilities and in the way
customers talked about their son ("Our customers always had something good to say about Robb").

Throughout the accounts of bereaved parents in this study were frequent uses of modalizing terms (e.g., always, never, only, every) to describe the adult child who had died. This was indeed the most prominent pattern of language usage among the participants. Deceased children were commonly characterized as individuals possessing positive human qualities in the extreme (e.g., "She wasn’t judgemental at all" [SWRIT-003]; "a perfect human being . . . a son who loved so many people" [PWRIT-005]; "She cared what people said and wanted to help anyone she came in contact with. She would give the shirt off her back if she could help someone" [SWRIT-010].

What the discourse of bereaved parents was doing was characterizing the children (e.g., she was . . . he was . . . ); in a very real sense, the participants were actively re-building their child’s character through language. Character re-building here in particular was seen as a process of constructing the deceased child as exceptional and unique, possessing of special qualities.

She was caring and had special ways of comforting you when she knew you were sad . . . She was someone who cared so much for others and would do anything to make others happy . . . She wasn’t judgemental at all. [SWRIT-003]

As is evident in this and other examples, participants formed accounts of their deceased children which emphasized their positive attributes. The character of the child could be described both in terms of who “she was”, an opportunity for endorsing positive attributes (e.g., “caring”) as well as who “she wasn’t”, a device for negating less admirable features (e.g., “judgemental”).
A personality characteristic often highlighted in this regard was the ability of the child to act in selfless ways, thinking of the needs of others, in some cases the parent. This could also be combined with the child's almost innate sense of knowing when the parent needed them the most, thus speaking to the nature of the relationship:

I saw a beautiful caring person who was supportive of me. When I was sick she took care of me which added to her very crowded schedule. She came by to check on me between classes as well as before she went to work. She was always there when I needed her without me asking her to help. She always put her needs last. She was a beautiful person inside and out! [SWRIT-017]

This participant elaborates on her initial statement about her daughter's character by providing specific examples of how she cared for her mother. This provision of evidence further supports her opening assertion that her daughter was a caring and supportive person. (The particular use of "evidence-giving" as a discursive device will be discussed in greater detail in a subsequent section) The use of the extreme case formulation, "always", in this excerpt also emphasizes the consistency of the deceased daughter's character. These kind of modalizing terms helped establish the characters that were being described as enduring, dispositional features, rather than one-time occurrences.

This same sort of pattern was evident in the account of another bereaved mother, who was writing directly to me about her nineteen year-old son who had died five years previously in an automobile accident:

I realized that when he was alive he was always there for me and even though he had died he was still there for me [SWRIT-013]

This discourse utilizes the same extreme case formulation ("always") to describe the son's supportive nature ("there for me"), although in this case it is presented as a "realization", suggesting that it came after the child's death. Rosenblatt (1996) describes the loss experience as a potential series of realizations. The additional feature in this
account is the description of the deceased son as “still” “being there” for the mother. It is this language in particular; speaking of the deceased child acting and in the present tense; that lends discursive support for the notion of a “continued bond” (Tyson-Rawson, 1996; Marwit & Klass, 1996).

Yvonne had empathy towards other people. She cared what people said and wanted to help anyone she came in contact with. She would give the shirt off her back if she could help anyone. [SWRIT-010]

This formulation - “would give the shirt off her back” - suggests that Yvonne was helpful and generous to others, an impression that is intensified by the addition of an extreme case formulation (“help anyone”). The use of such a formulation, the meaning of which is understood to be part of shared cultural knowledge, allows the speaker to reconstruct his daughter’s character with great linguistic efficiency. It also serves as an “upgrade” (Edwards, 1999) to the bereaved father’s opening statement that his daughter was empathic towards others. “Would give the shirt off her back” is hearably more extreme and allows the participant to describe his daughter in more extreme terms.

The concept of “script formulations” (Edwards, 1997) is also helpful in making discursive sense of the preceding excerpt.

Script formulations are ways in which people formulate events and actions as instances of a general pattern (even a potential one, given opportunities . . .), on the basis of (and therefore, inversely telling us about) the kind of person she/he is. It’s a common sense way of talking, a bit of discursive psychology, or everyday practical reasoning, by which the world is described as orderly, predictable, or contrary to expectations, and also the people in it, acting in (for them) typical or untypical ways, based on the kinds of persons they are (constructed to be). It’s a discourse-based re-working of the cognitive psychology of ‘scripts’ and ‘causal attributions’. (D. Edwards, personal communication, August 7, 1999)

In the writings of the bereaved father, above, and in many of the other participants’ discourse, one sees the development of a general pattern of “specialness”,
which is formulated through the description of actions and instances, actual and potential, (e.g., “She would give the shirt off her back if she could help anyone”). The children who died are thus reconstructed as “the kind of people . . .” who were unique and special, and in building up their “uniqueness” and “specialness” they are formulated as ultimately irreplaceable, as is the relationship. This is the overall essence and function of the language used by the bereaved parents in this study. As a consequence of this formulation, the deaths of these children are also then understood as an injustice, an affront to “the natural order of how things should be.”

5.3.1 The Use of Contrast and Paradox

There is no finer person that I know . . . This handsome beautiful boy of mine with smooth skin, blond hair, and the most gorgeous and sincere personality in the whole world. Just left to burn beyond recognition. [PWRIT-005]

Chris was a truly wonderful, caring, funny, kindhearted adult who didn’t deserve to die . . . If there is anything like a guardian angel in Heaven, Chris would be perfect . . . Why does it seem only the good die young? [PWRIT-014 = SWRIT-014] 4

These two excerpts reveal a particular discursive practice, in the form of paradox. Here the bereaved parents begin their accounts by describing their child’s characteristic qualities, reconstructing the child as intensely valuable and special. Using extreme case formulations (e.g., “There is no finer person that I know . . . the most gorgeous and sincere personality in the whole world . . . Chris would be perfect”), the participants first depict both characterological (e.g., “personality”, “caring, funny, kindhearted adult”, “guardian angel”) and physical (e.g., “handsome beautiful . . . with smooth skin, blond hair) qualities of their child. By using such detailed description, the

4. When an “=” sign is used it signifies a participant who has contributed data in more than one category. In this particular case the bereaved father submitted both published (PWRIT-014) and solicited (SWRIT-014) data. The first citation represents the data category in the particular instance. The numbers following are simply for participant identification.
discourse in a sense recreates the child in the present, for the listener to “see” or at least to imagine. Words in this case are serving to help the receiving audience “know” who the child was. A picture is painted, whether it is of the “physical” child or the “social-psychological” child; both possibilities represented in the discourse of these two parents.

Following the building up of the child, the discourse takes a sudden turn for “the worse” in rendering the destruction of the child. In the first excerpt the paradox is perhaps more powerfully presented as the parent states that her son was “Just left to burn beyond recognition”. By inclusion of the word “Just”, the bereaved mother linguistically invokes the paradox between the beauty of her son and the ugliness of an act of omission (i.e., “left”) which resulted in his death. There is a sense of wastefulness and horror brought about by the description of his “beautiful” body being burned “beyond recognition.” The intensity and totality of the degree of bodily destruction is also emphasized by the inclusion in this discourse of “beyond recognition.” Had the participant stopped in her account at “Just left to burn . . .”, the reader/listener would have received a “softened” (Edwards, 1999) description, resulting in loss of power for the paradox.

The second participant more directly orients through his discourse to the unfairness of his son’s death (i.e., “didn’t deserve to die”) and struggles with the paradox of the untimely death of his “truly wonderful” son. He uses the formulation - “only the good die young” - to summarize his questioning of the meaning of this death. Again, there is the use of a formulation which has common currency and which succinctly describes the bereaved father’s evaluation of his son. The presence of statements such as this help establish an empirical basis, rooted in the language of bereaved parents themselves, for what may otherwise be cultural-normative assumptions and discourses in
the broader sense (e.g., injustice). These local discourses reflect the act of doing "being unjustly deprived" of adult children whose futures held much promise.

Both excerpts also illustrate the discursive use of contrast-building, in this case between the specialness of the child and the "wastefulness" of their early deaths. It is largely a function of the extremity to which either aspect is emphasized that the contrast is successful. The following excerpt from a bereaved mother, who is addressing a judge in a court of law illustrates the point:

How can you in your learned and honorable position not at least do your part to stop this vile ruthless killing by applying a punishment severe enough to stop people like ______ from the reckless, senseless killing of innocent people, such as Robbie, a perfect human being who is my life, my breath, my sunshine. [PWRIT-005]

In this particular account, the participant first builds up (negatively) the character of the perpetrator by describing the nature of his ("ruthless, reckless, senseless") action ("killing"). In stark contrast then is the description of her son as "innocent" and "perfect". She actually "upgrades" (Edwards, 1999) her evaluation of Robbie from being among the category of people who are "innocent", to individually "perfect", to essentially the basis of her existence ("who is my life, my breath, my sunshine"). By constructing a characterological and categorical ("people like . . .") account of the person involved in her son's death, the participant establishes believable grounds on which one might expect that this "reckless . . . killing" of other "innocent people" would continue ("do your part to stop . . .") unless "people like" 'that' are not somehow stopped (e.g., through incarceration, punishment). The structure of this particular discourse, essentially resembling the construction of rhetorical arguments in courtrooms, was fitting for its context. Here language was again being used to achieve a particular
purpose, in this case to convince a judge to impose a “severe enough” sentence to
prevent deaths of the kind that her son suffered.

5.3.2 Characterization: The Child as Special and Unique

From the observations of these various organizational features it was
hypothesized that what was being accomplished by bereaved parents was a particular
sort of characterization. I theorized that what the participants were doing with their
language was reconstructing their child as ultimately irreplaceable by building up their
uniqueness and specialness. This pattern seemed to be most clearly evident from the
frequent utilization of extreme (maximum) case formulations in characterizing the adult
child.

In the following excerpt, submitted as an interview from a newspaper article, a
bereaved mother describes who her daughter was:

“She was an incredible person,” said her mother Mavis ______. “She always
made people feel better. She'd walk into a room and would light it up. She was a
beacon. We got through this together because we loved her very much.”

. . . “I've lost the most incredible daughter. She was an absolutely marvelous
person,” ______ said from New Westminster. [PWRIT-003]

Besides using an extreme case formulation (“always”) to describe her daughter’s
effect on people (i.e., made them “feel better”), there is even embellished extreme
language in her description of Mavis’ character. While starting off by depicting her
daughter as “incredible”, the participant then upgrades this to “most incredible”. In a
recent paper, Derek Edwards (1999, p.3) makes the observation that “people may move
to extrematize ECFs still further, using expressions such as ‘the very best,’ ‘absolutely
everybody.’ ‘nobody whatsoever,’ and ‘very true’”. In describing interactional situations,
Edwards (1999, p. 3) gives possible circumstances for the use of such seemingly
“unnecessary embellishments”: “For example, they provide a way of “upgrading” a prior
assessment (Pomerantz, 1984) that is already extreme, where “doing an upgrade” is something that has its own interactional business to perform, and has to be seen to be done.”

5.3.3 What are Extreme Case Formulations “Doing” Here?

Investment & Doing Non-Literal

Most of the research which has examined the use of extreme case formulations has taken place in contexts quite different from that of bereaved parents (e.g., legal trials, political campaign discourse, counselling interactions) and therefore the analyses have also been somewhat contextually-bound. Anita Pomerantz (1986), who originated the term “extreme case formulation”, for example, studied their use in conversational settings involving conflict. She and others (e.g., Edwards & Potter, 1992; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998; Potter, 1996) have typically analyzed their use in defending positions against refutation, making complaints, and justifying factual claims. Since Pomerantz’s original study, extreme case formulations have thus been “generally cited and analyzed in the ways shown by Pomerantz, as devices used in the rhetoric of factual description and normative accountability” (Edwards, 1999, p. 2).

Pomerantz (1986, pp. 219-220) identified three uses of extreme case formulations in everyday talk, mainly in complaint sequences:

1. to defend against or to counter challenges to the legitimacy of complaints, accusations, justifications, and defenses;
2. to propose a phenomenon is ‘in the object’ or objective rather than a product of the interaction or the circumstances;
3. to propose that some behaviour is not wrong, or is right, by virtue of its status as frequently occurring or commonly done.

As Edwards (1999) has noted, all three of these uses are essentially oppositional, or argumentative, taking place in surroundings where descriptions and assessments are being reinforced or contested.
Edwards (1999, p. 1) has expanded on Pomerantz's observations regarding the use of extreme case formulations, suggesting that they can and are used for a variety of other purposes. He summarized his findings by stating that extreme case formulations can also:

1. display various kinds of 'investment' on the part of the speaker (e.g., commitment, certainty, caring, determination, a critical or positive attitude, etc.)
2. provide for a range of non-literal metaphoric uses (glossable as it seemed as if [extreme X], let us proceed as if [extreme Y], or 'take [extreme Z] as ironic, a joke, a tease, etc.

These elaborations are particularly relevant to the findings presented here, as there were demonstrations in the data of both "investment" by bereaved parents as well as non-literal metaphoric usage of extreme case formulations. It is perhaps a feature of the present context, as non-oppositional, that these latter uses of extreme case formulations were seen as more common than Pomerantz's proposed uses. With regards to the first finding, Edwards (1999, p. 15) states:

Given that ECFs are used for insisting on, highlighting, or emphasizing a point, they are simultaneously available to be treated as signalling the speaker's investment in that point. Denying or insisting upon something in an extreme way can highlight the action of denying or insisting, as a kind of stance or investment.

The following example, from the data, perhaps best demonstrates investment on the part of the speaker, through the use of extreme case formulations (i.e., "all; everything; never; always; ever; one; anything; more than life, only"). Here, the bereaved mother is responding in writing to the reflecting question - "Tell me about your relationship with your daughter":

I am sending you a copy of a composition that my daughter wrote in school about our relationship. It was all I ever hoped to have with her. I saw in her everything I never was. She was thin & petite while I am overweight, she was
very intelligent while I was always ‘just getting by’. She was very active in clubs and organizations in school & I never had one single thing behind my name in my yearbook. I was so proud of her. She was everything I wasn’t.
I was extremely protective of her to the point of being fanatical about it. I didn’t want her to ever suffer or be hurt. She was such a joy to me - she was my daughter. I guess it sounds like I viewed her as a possession but I didn’t. I’m trying to put into words how I felt about her. My life was a series of failures but she was the one thing in my life that was right and good. Jacy was so conscious of what people thought about her. She conducted herself with dignity - never a hint of a bad reputation.
If it sounds as if I’ve elevated her to sainthood, maybe I have. But, what I’m telling you is all true. She was my best friend, my confidante & companion. We lived together, just the 2 of us & we had so much fun together. I enjoyed her. She was, in many ways, so much more mature than me. I used to tell people she was like a little old woman. So mature for her age - 19 going on 50. I learned from her more than I taught her, though if she were alive she’d probably say different. I know she loved & respected me & looked up to me. If she asked me for advice, she really listened & followed my suggestions. I used to always tell her that she could do & be anything she wanted & “don’t let anyone stop you from doing what you really want to do.” She didn’t, and because of that she was on the yearbook staff, senior steering committee & so much more. She was my shining star & I loved her more than life.

The participant then continues to write in response to the second part of the following question - “Who was your daughter to you? And what about now?”:

Now - she’s still my daughter. Sometimes I refer to her as though she were still here. She’s a memory - I have so many good memories of her. Sometimes I feel as though people think I’ve elevated her to sainthood. But everything I say about her is true. She was the kind of daughter any parent would want to have. I was so proud of her. Life wasn’t easy for her but she kept on. She worked hard at life. She will always remain my shining star. I once told her that she was the only thing in my life that turned out right. [SWRIT-007 = PWRT-002]

In the first excerpt, Jacy’s mother offers her assessment of both the relationship (“It was all I ever hoped to have with her”), and her daughter (“I saw in her everything I never was”). She begins quite early in this discourse to set up a contrast between herself and her daughter. The extremity of “everything” in describing her daughter, maximizes the contrast to herself, who “never was”. The discursive polemic contrast is further
developed by the use of evidence (i.e., citing instances) which speak to the various differences between mother, who represents the negative valence, and daughter, the positive. In the course of this process she even incorporates the common phrase “just getting by” to contrast her assessment of her own intelligence with that of her daughter. There is an escalating series of extreme case formulations (e.g., “I never had one single . . . She was everything I wasn’t”), highlighting both the admirability of the assessment (of Jacy) and, the built-up investment in it by Jacy’s mother. The participant discursively orients to one of the actions she is achieving through her language (i.e., “doing being proud”) when she writes: “I was so proud of her.” (Talk about “being proud” was prevalent throughout the participants’ discourse and will be discussed in greater detail in a subsequent section of this analysis) Her investment in her daughter is that Jacy was “everything” that she “wasn’t”; both the assessment and the investment being accomplished through the use of extreme case formulations.

The sequence that begins . . . “If it sounds as if I’ve elevated her to sainthood . . .” shows in particular “how descriptions, assessments, and particularly the uses of ECFs, may be treated by participants as not only describing and assessing the objects they are applied to, but also as indexing the speaker’s stance or attitude” (Edwards, 1999, p. 13).

Here, the bereaved mother directly orients to the possibility of her assessment about her daughter being undermined or disbeliefed by others, a possibility which she returns to later in the writing (“Sometimes I feel as though people think I’ve elevated her to sainthood”). In both instances the participant follows with “But, what I’m telling you is all true” and “But everything I say about her is true”, which selects truthfulness as a basis for saying what she had about “sainthood”, instead of, say, a bias in her role as parent. She is emphasizing not only the characteristics that she saw in her daughter, but also her commitment to reconstructing Jacy as she has. While the context of her
account-making is a limited written dialogue between her and I, she is also acknowledging the wider interactional context of her bereavement discourse. The participant's insistence on Jacy's "saintliness", not only constructs the object (i.e., the daughter . . . as having a "perfect" character), but also the participant's act of insisting (to which she orients), which demonstrates her "investment" in that particular construction.

With further respect to the "indexicality" of her extreme case formulations, Edwards (1999) would argue that "this trades on the capacity of ECFs to be heard as going to extremes, and thus saying, perhaps, more than mere accuracy requires" (p. 13). In the case of these bereaved parents it would seem that they are using language in a way that enables them to say more than words, or any one word or phrase (e.g., "missing, losing a child"), could say. For one, the use of extreme case formulations allows them to orient to their "investment" in the child, a theme which is reminiscent of Yalom's (1989) concept of the child as "immortality project." The bereaved mother above, orienting to her own use of language, to "what" she is "doing", states: "I'm trying to put into words how I felt about her." Her account is accomplishing "doing the relationship" as well as "doing what she's like", via the use of extreme case formulations and other discursive resources (e.g., contrast).

Edwards (1999) has also discussed the availability of extreme case formulations for "doing non-literal"; that instead of being taken as literally accurate, they are heard by the participants "as a kind of 'essentially so', 'it is as if' gloss" (p. 17). He argues that participants understand and recognize their assertions (e.g., "the best, every time") as logically/semantically extreme statements, but they also hear extreme case formulations with regard to specifics (i.e., indexicality). It is this "semantic gap" as Edwards calls it
“that enables speakers and hearers to be hearable ‘doing things’ with ECFs” (Edwards, October 28, 1999, personal communication).

Indexical specificity applies to examples such as ‘I couldn’t get in touch with anybody’, ‘nothing’s got through yet’, and ‘the children’ve all gone back to college now’ . . . In context, these were produced and taken to signify something like, respectively, ‘anybody I tried to phone’, ‘the letter(s) you sent’, and ‘the children whose colleges we are talking about, excluding any that haven’t gone back for whatever accountable reason’. They were not challenged, where they occurred, for their accuracy as descriptive generalizations. So although ECFs are generally identifiable as semantically extreme, even out of context, the important thing about them is that they provide for participants’ ways of hearably, commonsensically, going to extremes, and it is that hearable, discursive activity that is the phenomenon we are examining here.

In particular what the bereaved parents in this study are doing with their extreme case formulations is reconstructing their adult child as irreplaceable by characterizing the special and unique qualities of the child and in many cases the relationship as well between the parent and adult child. Through this they may also be leading to meaning-making, in categorizing the death of their adult child as an ultimate “injustice”, an affront to what is “supposed to happen” and what is “not supposed to happen” in life.

5.3.4 Injustice of the Adult Child’s Death

Linguistic evidence for this hypothesis of building up “injustice” was evident in a number of cases, and was constructed in a variety of ways. For example, in the following excerpt, the bereaved mother uses description and categorization of the daughter to then implicitly characterize the death as unjust:

My daughter, Joyce, was a lovely young woman in the prime of her life. [SWRIT-018]

Invocation of the familiar descriptor - “in the prime of her life” - categorizes the daughter as being at that point in the life cycle when she would be able to most fully
realize her potential. Her death, as a “young woman”, is thus a sudden foreclosure of these possibilities.

This developmental theme is echoed and elaborated upon in the writing of another participant, a 75 year-old mother, whose 39 year-old son was killed by a drunk driver:

My son, Douglas ______, was killed before he lived half his life expectancy - Before he lived his most productive, creative, professional years - Before he guided his children through their childhood years. [PWRIT-010 = SWRIT-019] Here, the participant utilizes even greater detail to assert what it meant for her son to die at the age of 39. She builds the case of an unjust death by providing a description of what it was that her son had lost - “his most productive, creative, professional years”.

The account also engages a generative discourse in citing the loss of Doug’s presence as a “guiding” influence in the lives of his own children.

Another participant incorporates assumptive language (“wasn’t supposed to die”) about when people are “expected” to die, to build up the case for an unjust death:

She wasn't supposed to die at such a young age. It should have been me. [SWRIT-010]

The bereaved father in this excerpt incorporates the use of comparison, in asserting that “it should have been” him and not his daughter who died. This particular way of accounting is suggestive of a theme in the parental bereavement literature where the parent expresses desire to change places with their deceased child (Sanders, 1999).

Injustice was also constructed in relation to expectations about life. In the following excerpt, another bereaved father uses an extreme case formulation - “wasn’t everybody” - to assert his expectations regarding “immortality of youth”:
Bill: But again I mean it’s part of the immortality of youth (1.0) and that’s (.) what’s so shocking about when Adam died (.) you see ‘cause I was convinced that he was immortal (.) I was immortal when I was twenty wasn’t everybody (Phil Yeah) you know so was he [INTVW-004]

Finally, with respect to evidence of the construction of the child’s death as unjust, another device that was available to parents was to juxtapose the child’s potential against the very sudden elimination of all those possibilities:

It’s a terrible feeling to go to the hospital and identify you own lovely daughter, who had everything to live for and had such a bright future and it all came to a tragic, violent ending, so quick, because someone made a choice to drink & drive.[SWRIT-005]

Here, the participant engages the use of extreme case formulations to construct the oppositional account, both the potential of his daughter’s life (“everything to live for . . . such a bright future”) and the sudden loss of this promise (“all came to a tragic, violent ending”). The impression of an unjust death is further buttressed by citing the exact cause of death as the outcome of a behaviour (“drink & drive”), which is constructed as the result of a decision (“made a choice”), and therefore ultimately preventable.

5.3.5 Irreplaceability and Variability

Returning to the previous excerpt and discussion regarding extreme case formulations, characterizing Jacy as a “saint” allows the bereaved mother to go to extremes, in order to communicate the immensity of her loss. “It’s that gap, that mismatch against a plausible literal reading, that makes the ECF hearable as doing something other than ‘literal’ and therefore as doing something functional” (Edwards, October 28, 1999, personal communication). In this case the participant is describing the person of her daughter and the nature of their relationship. The participant recognizes the extremity of her assertion, and seeks not a literal acceptance, but a realization of how
she saw her daughter and the relationship, as well as how deeply she loved and admired who her daughter was and who she continues to be ("She will always remain my shining star. I once told her that she was the only thing in my life that turned out right"). The extreme case formulations allow for the demonstration of a range of investments (i.e., commitment to the memory of "who the child was"; certainty; positive appraisal) on the part of the bereaved mother. This going to extremes is a linguistic vehicle for the parent to achieve the construction of irreplaceability for their child.

In a small number of cases participants directly oriented to this irreplaceability by literally using this term:

Doug, Robin, and Rebecca cannot be replaced. These were gentle and kind people - they were not vindictive. [PWRIT-010 = SWRIT-019]

Even though this was the case, the participant added evidence for "how" her adult son (and his family) were irreplaceable. She accomplished this by drawing on category construction, citing characteristics such as "gentleness", "kindness" and "forgiveness."

In a variant of this strategy, the bereaved mother in the following excerpt describes having a "proxy" family:

One of Carol's friends, Tina _____, now has 4 children. From the time of Carol's death Tina has tried to be there for me just as Carol would have been. Her children even call me "grandma" which is very special to me. Even though that family can't take Carol and Bryan's place, it does help to have a "proxy" daughter, son-in-law, and grandchildren. [SWRIT-017]

While she states that this is "helpful" to be involved with Tina and her family, the discourse also speaks of irreplaceability by stating that this "family can't take" her daughter and son-in-law's "place."

In the search for variability, the following excerpt displays how a participant using extreme case formulations and contrast, wrote about "negative" characteristics in her adult child. She was writing to me, as investigator, in response to the reflecting
question: “What did you see when you looked at your son? How did you know these things about him?”

I can tell you when I looked at him I saw only good. I watched a little boy grow into a fine young man. He was so full of life, joy and love, he had a heart of gold. With as much joy and love that Steven had he was just as lazy. He was probably one of the laziest people that I have ever known. If he had to do anything he would find a way to do it sitting down. He didn't care that it would take him 10 times longer to do it as long as he could sit while he was doing it. I always thought that he didn't like steak but he admitted to me one day that it wasn't that he didn't like steak it was that he had to do a lot of chewing when eating it. Yes, that's my son. He brought me so much happiness in his short life and I will be forever thankful for that. Steven was probably the only child I knew that when he did something wrong he would come and tell me what he did. If we were watching television he would be quiet as a mouse when the commercials were on and as soon as the show would start he would talk non-stop until the commercials started again. At times he was such a pain-in-the-ass but I wouldn't have wanted it any other way. I miss all the noise and confusion that there was when all of his friends were over. I admit that at times I was annoyed but at least I knew where he was and that he was safe. [SWRT-013]

The formulation - “only good” - and the idiomatically extreme expression - “heart of gold” - suggest a person who was loving, caring, and admirable. Having set up a sort of ironic contrast, the discourse then turns to describe the deceased son’s less admirable qualities, focusing specifically on his laziness. Here again, the participant uses extreme case formulations, although in a somewhat ‘softened’ version. For example, instead of describing her son as the ‘laziest person in the world’ she states that “He was probably one of the laziest people that I have ever known”, with “probably” and “one of” serving to subdue the extremity of this description. “I have ever known” also reduces the universalizing property of the extreme case formulation. Edwards (1999, p. 10) proposes that one of the ways in which extreme case formulation softeners work to reduce refutation of a statement, is by indexing the speaker as reasonable and not making excessive claims. For example, he cites the latter as the rhetorical basis of a long-running
advertisement for Carlsberg beer, that is it “probably the best lager in the world”.

Nonetheless, the participant here produces an extreme version of her view of Steven’s laziness, that: “If he had to do anything he would find a way to do it sitting down”. The non-literal status of Steven not doing “anything” without “sitting down” is hearable in its extremity and implausible as a factual description. “Anything” can not be taken as literal-accurate, or Steven could never be in a position except for sitting. It must be heard non-literally, as a kind of “essentially so”, ‘it is as if” gloss of the type suggested by Edwards (1999). This paves the way for it to be hearable as a jocular tease. The linguistic evidence to support the proposed joking function of this extreme case formulation follows soon afterward, when the mother recalls a conversation where her son “admitted” that it wasn’t that he didn’t like steak (her long-standing perception), but that it took too much effort to chew. Given that this participant also wrote (later on) about her experiences of Steven’s being near her following his death, the status of this “tease” gains further contextual support by his potential “over the shoulder” presence.

The discourse then weaves back and forth between descriptions of Steven as tremendously honest (“the only child I knew that when he did something wrong he would come and tell me what he did”), “a pain in the ass”, and ultimately valuable (“I will be forever thankful for that . . . but I wouldn’t have wanted it any other way”). The overall action that is being achieved once again by the discourse is a description of who the child was to the parent, leading to a ‘doing acceptance’ in this case. In both his “good” and “bad” characteristics, he was who he was - the participant’s son. The bereaved mother sums it up very well, when in the midst of her narrative she states:

“Yes, that’s my son.” So, even though this represents a case where a bereaved parent’s discourse included description of a negative disposition, this is managed in this instance by way of humour, exaggeration and trivialization.
5.4 Categories and the Use of Details

5.4.1 Evidence-Based Character Construction

This particular strategy utilized description of the child’s accomplishments and activities as evidence for the type of person the child had been in their lifetime. The mother of a 30 year-old banker, who died in a skiing accident, describes her daughter:

Mavis Anne was a bright, beautiful compassionate person . . . I saw a bright, talented, caring person. Her academic prowess and success as a private banker told of her ‘brightness’. Her sports achievements; baseball, soccer, skiing, wind surfing, mountain biking proved her sports talent. Her compassion and support of friends and family were evidence of her caring. [SWRIT-008]

In this excerpt, the bereaved mother cites specific examples of how Mavis Anne was bright, talented, and caring, and in using such degree of descriptive detail linguistically reconstructs her daughter through her actions and activities. While the account begins with more abstract statements by the participant, it gradually builds in its degree of detail. Pomerantz (1986) observed this discursive pattern in situations of dispute, where one party is trying to prove a point or convince the other. This particular evidence-based character construction constitutes a powerful argument for the adult child, Mavis Anne, as “an incredible person” [PWRIT-003]. It also constructs the child as an active person, suggestive of someone who was in the prime of their life, their death therefore representing a premature ending.

In the following written submission to a judge, a bereaved mother provides an account of how she saw her son as a devoted and loving father:

His older brothers and sisters helped bring him up, he helped bring up his younger brother and sisters. I think those relationships laid the foundation for his patience and love of children - the devoted father he became. Even when things weren’t going well, he always said, “Rebecca and Ollie are GREAT!” . . . He took them everywhere and had fun . . . [PWRIT-010]
The participant goes beyond describing her son’s capacities with children (i.e., “patience and love”) to citing her belief in the origins of these qualities. She situates her explanation within a familial discourse to give credit to the relations between younger and older siblings as the underpinning for her son’s eventual parenting abilities. This bereaved mother uses even greater detail in giving a specific example of her son’s characteristic sincerity as a father, a characteristic that she directly orients to in her discourse:

Monday, May 16, it poured rain as hard as I’d ever seen it on the Cape. Had the car serviced, did some laundry, visited with Teree and went to dinner with the kids at ‘Up the Creek.’ Oliver sat across the table from Doug & me - full of smiles - Doug said, ‘Isn’t he a pretty boy?’ It was such a genuine loving comment from the father about his son. [PWRIT-010 = SWRIT-019]

The use of particularly detailed description in this and other segments may be serving multiple functions. As Potter (1996) has argued, “The detail, the specifics of a description, are crucial for the activity that the description is being used to do” (p. 117). The details (“Doug said, ‘Isn’t he a pretty boy?’”), in this case, are enlisted to provide convincing evidence that Doug was indeed a father who loved his own son deeply and was able to express this caring affection.

Potter (1996) also suggests that descriptive details may be used to construct an account as more factual. In keeping with a constructive view of reality, fact is not purported to be an unequivocal truth, but rather a version of the world that appears “solid, neutral...” and “independent of the speaker”. (p. 1). The “neutrality” here is apparent in both what is missing as well as what is present in the bereaved mother’s language. For example, she takes an observer’s stance by using the words “the father about his son”. In particular, “the” and “his” serve as more objective descriptors than if she had used their actual names. This apparent neutrality serves to convince the reader
by “building up the facticity’ of the narrative. By beginning her account with the precise
details of the date (“Monday May 16”), the weather conditions(“it poured rain as hard as
I’d ever seen it on the Cape.”) and the surroundings (a restaurant called ‘Up The Creek’),
this bereaved mother also creates for the reader an “impression of being there” (Potter,
1996, p. 117). While these particular details aren’t themselves significant to the claim
that Doug was a loving father, they nevertheless contribute to the overall prevention of
underminability of this account. They are the types of details that Potter (1996) suggests
would have been obvious to anyone who had been present. Given that the specific
context of this discourse is a judge in a courtroom, the ability of the bereaved mother to
convince him of her son’s positive (i.e., valued) qualities is crucial to the sentencing
decision.

In another case a bereaved mother gives specific evidence in her discourse about
the various roles that her adult son played, including both professional and family roles.
She writes, using detailed description, about her son Jeff as a police officer and as a
father:

... Jeff was working third shift and as lieutenant had employees under him, but
everyone said he was always willing to do anything for the Dept.- in other words
he worked hard, many hours overtime with paperwork. He never missed a
meeting in the daytime and would take his one year-old with him to meetings, as
his wife worked in the daytime. The reason he worked nights was so he could
baby-sit during the day. He also coordinated the drug task force for the county
with the DA, at no extra pay. . . .

His love for children was shown in his own children who were 13, 12, 9 and 1
when he was killed. He was a very patient father and kind. He would always
kneel to children’s height to talk to them when they were small. Jeff was 13
years older than our youngest son Kyle when Kyle was born. Jeff was thrilled
which is kind of unusual I thought for a 13 year old boy. He would come home
from school and want to wake him up. I knew he would be a great dad someday.
I guess this is the hardest thing for me now is that Jeff is not here to raise his
own children. Jon will not even remember his dad. [PWRIT-008 = SWRIT-016]
One particular segment in this excerpt demonstrates perhaps most clearly the discursive practice of citing behavioural evidence as proof of particular character, a technique for character rebuilding. In this case, the bereaved mother first states in the abstract that her son’s “love for children was shown in his own children . . . ”. Taken by itself, this assertion is not particularly convincing and might have little impact on the reader. It contains minimal description and instead has the effect of a general kind of statement which does little to build up the uniqueness of Jeff’s fatherhood. However, the detail added in the second part of the statement, “. . . who were 13, 12, 9 and 1 when he was killed”, begins to paint a more descriptive picture. The participant cites the ages of Jeff’s children, and in doing so informs the reader that her son had four children and that they ranged in age from 1 to 13 years old “. . . when he was killed”. The contrast between the type of information presented by “when he was killed” and the chronological listing of the children’s ages serves to heighten the sense of tragedy, in that young children, as young as infancy, lost their father through a senseless death. The same effect would not have been achieved had the participant for example said “Jeff had four children at the time of his death.” In providing these particular details, the bereaved mother also invokes a generative discourse, extending to her own grandchildren. She mourns the loss not only of her son, but also of her grandchildren’s father.

In the next sentence the participant states her claim that her son Jeff “was a very patient father and kind”. Here, she makes a stronger statement than her initial one in that the discourse becomes more specific in arguing that Jeff possessed patience and kindness in his role as a father. The modulating term “very” serves to accentuate the former quality in particular. It is at this point that the bereaved mother begins to draw upon the “evidence” to support her claim regarding her son, stating that “He would always kneel to children’s height to talk to them when they were small”. Again, an extreme case
formulation ("always") is used to talk about a behaviour ("He would always kneel to children’s height . . .") which serves as an example of an interpersonal quality which the adult son possessed, a quality which in this discourse is inherently connected to being a good father (i.e., "was a very patient father and kind"). This discursive strategy continues, but with the bereaved mother generationally reverting back to a recollection of her deceased son as the 13 year-old brother to a new baby ("Jeff was 13 years older than our youngest son Kyle when Kyle was born"). The retrospective evidence of Jeff’s love for children is described through his being "thrilled" at the birth of his own younger brother.

The "facticity" (Potter, 1996) of this account is strengthened by the participant then taking a discursive step back, situating herself as an observer of sorts, thinking that this was "kind of unusual . . . for a 13 year old boy". This strategy accomplishes its task of convincing by establishing an "as if" quality, that the writer is able to write about her experience of her son as if she were an outside observer of events. The account continues with another piece of behavioural evidence ("He would come home from school and want to wake him up"), this time reinforcing the claim that Jeff as a young boy demonstrated his love for children and his potential qualities as a future father ("I knew he would be a great dad someday").

In the following excerpt from an interview with a bereaved father, the participant is being asked how his son was similar to him. The father begins with more abstract statements about his son's character ("He liked excitement"), and then after briefly digressing, returns to cite specific detailed evidence of his drive for "excitement":
Phil: In what ways would you say that he was similar to you?

Bill: He liked excitement (.) (Phil Mhm) he liked to be on his own (.) he was you know he could (.) he could live in his own mind (.) like what I say he didn’t need people around all the time (.) (Phil Yeah) he liked people but it wasn’t a prerequisite for him he was perfectly happy with a book (1.0) he was uh (.) when I say he liked excitement (Phil Mhm) he (.) he challenged his physical fear.

Phil: Hm

Bill: When I (.) when he skied at Banff he didn’t he wasn’t a very good skier when he went out (.) hadn’t skied much (.) he was a prairie boy (1.0) and by the time he got done a winter in Banff he was skiing double black diamonds (.) in fact he was skiing off the courses (.) and was doing (.) uh (.) aerials and whatever he was skiing off cliffs twenty and thirty feet high (Phil Huh) landing (.) the stuff you see in movies [INTVW-004]

The participant uses an escalating series of statements in which the dangerousness of the behaviour is offered as evidence for his son’s challenging “his physical fear.” The bereaved father establishes a baseline by emphasizing that before he moved to Banff for the winter, his son was not a good skier. In fact he justifies this fact by referencing his geographical origins (i.e., “he was a prairie boy”). Rather than stopping at the statement that his son had accomplished “double black diamonds” by winter’s end, the participant engages the use of descriptive detail to build up the facticity of the account and therefore his initial assertion regarding his deceased son’s character.

There was some variability found in this discursive pattern of evidence-based positive character rebuilding. Some participants spoke or wrote about instances during their child’s development where deviations from the norm occurred, seeming aberrations in the positive account. In the following excerpt a bereaved mother begins by giving examples of her daughter’s athletic skill:
While in high school she played basketball and softball, softball was her best, she truly excelled in it. After high school she went to college for a year, but decided it wasn’t for her. I think she felt her dad and I were disappointed but we knew college isn’t for everyone. She found a job at a local grocery store. In our town jobs are scarce. [SWRIT-003]

The account proceeds chronologically to describe the daughter’s progress, including the fact that she left college after her first year. While this represents variability, in that the parent recounts “evidence” that could be interpreted in a negative way (“After high school she went to college for a year, but decided it wasn’t for her.”), the discourse is constructed in such a way as to minimize this possibility. In a sense, the participant engages a type of recovery strategy. The evidence for this lies partially in what is not contained in the account. For example, the bereaved mother does not state that her daughter “dropped out” or “gave up” college after a year, but rather that she “decided it wasn’t for her.” In framing the act as a decision, the discourse establishes a greater sense of agency and thoughtfulness on the part of the daughter. Rather than invoking the category of “dropout”, the participant reconstructs her daughter, through the example of her action, as someone who could assess the goodness of fit between herself and college.

A further piece of evidence pointing to a discursive recovery strategy lies in the next two sentences (“I think she felt her dad and I were disappointed but we knew college isn’t for everyone. She found a job at a local grocery store. In our town jobs are scarce.”). Here, the participant briefly orients to the possibility of the daughter’s action being seen in a negative light (“I think she felt her dad and I were disappointed”), then quickly counters this interpretation with a strong assertion (“we knew”) confirming the ‘correctness’ of the decision not to stay in college. Both this and the previous example of discursive recovery were signaled by the presence of “but” in mid-sentence.
Finally, in this particular excerpt, the bereaved mother returns to presenting evidence of her daughter's behaviour which speaks well of her character. The construction here is somewhat of a variation though, in that it more implicitly describes the character of the deceased adult child ("She found a job at a local grocery store. In our town jobs are scarce."). By using a matter-of-fact type of discourse, the participant removes herself from being seen as reconstructing her daughter's character, but rather facilitates the reader in drawing the correlation. If jobs in the town were "scarce" and yet she was able to find one, what does this indicate about the daughter's character? Given the discourse which preceded it, one would probably be more likely to conclude that she was diligent and persistent, rather than merely lucky.

Another participant recounted an incident of "rebellion" in her daughter. She did this again in the context of developmentally retracing the adult child's earlier years:

She always did her best at school and was a joy to her Dad and I and her teacher. She helped with her little sister and brothers. She mowed the yard to surprise Dad when he came home from work, when she was about 12. She helped out so much. She had lots of friends in grade school and high school. She often went to the farm to help Grandma clean house and wash windows. One time she rebelled when they were removing wall paper. She had enough and (age 12) told Grandma and Grandpa "This is stupid work, I'm pooped and I'm going to bed!" It's the closest she came to rebelling! [SWRIT-004]

The discourse in this case includes a number of modulating terms (i.e., "always", "so much", "often") in the initial sentences, during which the child's character is being built up through evidence-giving. Then, there is a sudden discursive turn, when the bereaved mother begins to describe the "One time" when her daughter (at age 12) "rebelled". A contrast is therefore quickly established between the frequencies of "good" versus "bad" behaviour, the former far outweighing the latter. The excerpt concludes with the use of detail in describing the incident in which the daughter "rebelled." In this case the participant uses exaggeration to lead up to what is ultimately a very "innocent" example
of a 12 year-old exercising her opinion. The particular use of exaggeration in this
instance has the paradoxical effect of minimizing the (rebellious) action. This is
reminiscent of a previous example, whereby a participant utilized exaggeration (extreme
case formulation), and jocularity to subdue her description of her son as "lazy".

Later in her account above, the bereaved mother described her daughter’s actions
as evidence of her moral upbringing and character:

She got her degree in Home Economics. While she worked on her internship
she went to work with the inmates at a girls prison. She made a wedding dress
for a girl who was going to get married soon, as she was getting released. It was
a moving experience for her and she came back and hugged us all and thanked
her Dad and I for bringing her up with morals and discipline and love.
[SWRIT-004]

An alternative way of accounting for more negative characteristics in the adult
child was to attribute them to someone else, as in the following example:

She was an exceptional student, very rarely did she fall from principal’s list status
on the honor roll in high school. She was a straight A student practically all
through grade school. She graduated 5th in her class. She had so very many
awards that she had won all during her school years. She was trustworthy; she
valued her friends & never betrayed a confidence. She loved her older brother &
looked up to him all of her life . . . I saw someone with great determination; who
wanted to learn all she could. She had a thirst for knowledge. I saw someone
who didn’t let anyone stop her from doing what she really wanted to do. I saw a
young girl who was offered a free ride to the college of her dreams but chose
instead to be accepted on her own achievements. I saw a very intelligent &
likable young woman who was very insecure & self conscious because she
patterned herself after her mother. I saw someone who knew how to be a friend,
who anyone could trust. I saw someone who could have & would have done
anything in life she wanted to, if her life had not been taken away.
[SWRIT-007 = PWRIT-002]

Among a discourse of so many positive statements regarding her child is the comment by
a bereaved mother that her daughter “was very insecure & self conscious because she
patterned herself after her mother”. It is a comment offered almost in passing, as if it
might not be noticed. What is significant about this variation is that while the participant acknowledges in her discourse the more negative aspects of her daughter's character, she implicates herself as the original cause of these qualities. In the only specific reference to the child as a possible extension of the parent, the parent alludes to negative qualities in herself. Through her discourse, the mother is achieving the attribution of these qualities (in her daughter), to herself. She does however, suggest a sense of agency in that her daughter "patterned herself after her mother", indicating an element of choice, albeit perhaps not a good choice. While the writer identifies herself as the source of her daughter's insecurity and self-consciousness, the discourse simultaneously achieves a certain amount of distance from assigning blame in that the writer describes herself as "her [daughter's] mother" as opposed to using the possessive "me."

The following account as well identifies a negative disposition ("an alcoholic") in an adult child, and also finds a way to discursively manage the possibility of negative impressions being formed:

"First you have to know Peter." So saying, Mary __________ opens a folder containing glimpses into her son's life - his watch, photos of his art work, a picture of him in Florida after Hurricane Andrew, a trout fishing map he helped produce, his death certificate. "You have to know Peter because you think of an alcoholic as a dirty person drinking wine out of a paper bag," Mary said. "Peter was a man of many talents. He was an orchid grower in Georgia. An amateur silversmith who put up 'Johnnyhuts' for free after Hurricane Andrew tore through Florida, he was an artist and a fisherman. He was incredibly gentle. He was also an alcoholic . . . It was not unusual for Peter to talk to other alcoholics and encourage them not to take a drink." After Peter's death, a friend told Mary, "He could save everyone but himself." [PWRIT-011]

In this case, the discourse is interactional, an interview between the participant and a newspaper reporter. The excerpt begins with the discursive evidence, in the form of an explicit statement, which points to what the bereaved mother is doing with her language (i.e., function) - reconstructing her son. More specifically, the participant is "convincing"
the reporter of her son’s positive qualities while also doing negative impression
management. The discursive evidence pointing to convincing as the action taking place
here, are the repeated insistences of the participant ("You have to . . .") that the reporter
must come to "know" her son in order to understand his death. Mary orient to the
possibility that the reporter ("because you think") will view Peter as a stereotypical
alcoholic by invoking the category "alcoholic", and then describing a generalized
stereotype ("a dirty person drinking wine out of a paper bag"). She then builds up the
contrast between this stereotype and her son Peter. The formulation that follows - "Peter
was a man of many talents" - suggests that there were "hidden qualities" about her son
that would be obscured by only seeing him as an "alcoholic", an impression bolstered by
the citation of various examples (i.e., evidence) of his skills and his activities. Mary
eventually returns to describing her son as an alcoholic, but it is now in the context of
weighing this out against many positive attributes. Even now as she calls on this category
again, the bereaved mother describes a pattern of behaviour on the part of her son where
he tried to help "other alcoholics" quit drinking. The use of "other" in this instance helps
create the impression of Peter as somehow different from his counterparts. This image is
reinforced by the closing statement, where the participant recalls a friend stating of Peter
that "He could save everyone but himself." The phrase, an extreme case formulation,
calls upon an even larger cultural narrative invoking Christian images of Jesus - "the
saviour."

Another excerpt which explicitly talked about bereaved children in the category -
Christians - was the following:

They were both Christians and very active at Blood River Baptist Church. They
were in charge of our van ministry. Carol was on the budget committee. Bryan
was our Sunday School Director, Church Clerk, and trustee. They both worked
in all the ministries of the church. Carol and Bryan had over 75 children on the
van roll, and she wrote cards to every child that missed church on Sunday and
Wednesday. She and Bryan also made time to go visit in the homes of the van
children. They knew all about the family lives of all the children. They were a
very unique couple to be so young. [PWRIT-009 = SWRIT-017]

The initial description of the children as Christians and their activity (“very”) in a specific
curch, immediately begins the larger discursive work of reconstructing their characters
in a particular way (i.e., positive, special). The participant, as in previous examples,
supports the impression of specialness by citing evidence of their ministerial work. Here
again, extreme case formulations (“all the ministries of the church”; “wrote cards to
every child”; “knew all about the family lives of all the children”) not only work to build
up the uniqueness of Carol and Bryan, but point to the bereaved mother’s investment in
this process, as discussed previously. Additional evidence of what the parent is doing
with her language emerges through her own final orientation: “They were a very unique
couple to be so young.” The use of details further helps build the case. For example, the
use of “over 75”, to numerically describe the number of children on their “van roll”
establishes the impression of a large group of children. While citing “78” children would
be more exact, it doesn’t accomplish the same extrematizing possibilities than “over 75”
does, which allows for the numbers to swell significantly more than 75 children.

5.4.2 Comparisons to Other Children in the Family

Another way in which bereaved parents used modalizing terms (i.e., extreme case
formulations) was to make comparisons to their other children, while at the same time
combining this with categorization. The bereaved mother of a 37 year-old police officer,
killed by a drunk driver while attending to a road hazard, recalls that “Jeff was our 2nd
son - an easy child to raise.” [PWRIT-008 = SWRIT-016] Invoking this same category
of “easy child” was the father of a 27 year-old homemaker, herself a parent of three
young children: “She was the easiest of all our children to raise. She was Very Close to
her Dad. She always mowed the lawn when she was growing up and liked to ride horseback on our pony.” [SWRIT-005]

The use of the extreme case formulation “easiest”, and the use of the descriptor “easy” in comparison to other children in the family, helps establish the deceased child as unique and irreplaceable in the family context. In reconstructing the dead child’s identity in comparison to other siblings, the addition of the words “to raise” also situates this process within a developmental framework as the parent recalls the task of bringing the child up. While the child who has died was an adult at the time of their death, this particular discourse evokes an earlier time in the life of the parent, a time which is no longer available.

The bereaved parents in these segments engaged the use of the category “easy child to raise”. In describing their deceased children in this way, or by using other categories, what is it that the parents are doing with their language? Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998) suggest that people engage in a process of active (category) selection, and that “categories are not neutral descriptions . . . there are strong expectations and conventions associated with them” (p. 213). They give the example of various membership categories: “daughter”, “son”, “Canadian”, “factory worker”, “liberal”, “mother”, “student” and so on, stating that “[t]hese categories are culturally available resources which allow us to describe, identify or make reference to other people or to ourselves” (p. 213). They also note that categories are not mutually exclusive, that people can simultaneously have membership in several categories.

It is interesting to note, as Vivian Guarnieri; Ontario president of The Compassionate Friends; has, that there is no established “category” in the English language, with which to refer to bereaved parents. In an interview in a retirement magazine (Hamilton, 1999, p. 31), Guarnieri, whose 25 year-old daughter was killed in
an auto accident six years before, spoke about this issue [note that just in this brief
description I have used several categories: president; bereaved parents; daughter;
accident; and implicitly, mother]:

Even our vocabulary lacks words to recognize this tragic loss . . . “When you
lose your husband, you become a widow; but there’s no name for people who
lose a child . . . I can’t say I’m not a parent any more because I have another
daughter”.

In fact, this issue of category relates also to the struggle that many bereaved
parents experience after the death of a child when they are asked: “How many children
do you have?” (What is my category now?) Even parents who do not have other children
besides the one who died may not necessarily consider themselves to no longer “be” a
parent, as Guarnieri seems to suggest. Some parents may answer this question with
something like: “I have three children, two of them living”, and depending upon the
recipient’s response they may either leave it there or say more. To expand on Guarnieri’s
comments, there is also the category widower, and children bereaved of a parent may in
some cases describe themselves as feeling “orphaned.”

Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998) emphasize that, given the range of possibilities, it is
significant that we select particular categories to “characterize our social identity, or the
social identity of someone else, in that particular way at that particular time” (p. 213).
To underscore the ‘non-neutrality’ of categories as descriptive devices. Hutchby and
Wooffitt (pp. 213-214) provide the following example from Sacks (1972). The two
sentences in question come from the narrative of a small child:

“The baby cried. The mommy picked it up.” (p. 330) The vast majority of
readers will have interpreted “the mommy” as being the mother of the baby;
similarly the baby crying will have been read as the reason why the mother
picked it up. Neither set of information is contained in the sentence itself;
however, we all arrive at the same interpretation because of the commonsense
expectations associated with categories like mother (for example that they will,
or should, care for their children when they are distressed), and the way in which categories are grouped in relation to other categories.

Bereaved parents in this study utilized these properties of categorization in order to describe their children to readers and listeners. These various categories were available to participants as “inferential resources by which we can come to understand and interpret the behaviour of persons so designated” (Hutchby & Wooffitt, p. 214). “Eldest daughter”, “only son”, “the first to . . .” were categories used by bereaved parents to do the work of describing in particular ways, to evoke particular images and expectations.

Yvonne was my first natural child that I had contact with since her older brother and sister I adopted after I married her mother. They were from her previous marriage. Yvonne is still and will always be my daughter as will her other siblings. [SWRIT-010]

Here again we see a participant engaging the use of categories (“first natural child”) in his discourse, with comparisons to other children (“since her older brother and sister I adopted after I married her mother. They were from her previous marriage.”) in the family serving to underline the uniqueness of the deceased child. The bereaved father does, however, orient to the possibility of his living (adopted) children being minimized in importance by making a point to include them (“Yvonne is still and will always be my daughter as will her other siblings.”)

Unfortunately, my husband and I had marital problems, and separated when Alison was 4 years old. I remember us telling the children that Daddy would be moving out of our home. We thought Alison was too young to grasp the information, yet she was the first to weep. [SWRIT-011 = PWRIT-007]

Again, here is an example of the discursive use of comparison with other children in the family, not to their detriment, but rather to help establish the uniqueness of the deceased child, in this case her emotional sensitivity beyond her years. The bereaved
mother describes the developmentally-based expectation ("We thought Alison was too young to grasp the information") of Alison’s response to the news of her father’s departure from the family, followed by their surprise at her actual response ("yet she was the first to weep"). The success of this account in confirming Alison’s unique qualities, lies largely in its presentation in a type of matter-of-fact, observable reporting which begins with a detailed description of the event in question ("I remember us telling the children that Daddy would be moving out of our home.")

In the search for variability, the following account represents a unique departure from the usually positive way of reconstructing the child as found in this study. This account comes from a newspaper article, where the mother of Michelle is being interviewed. Her 21 year-old daughter had drowned while trapped in a vehicle that was driven by a friend who had been drinking with the group. The driver of the car fled the scene without reporting the accident in which Michelle and two other friends died.

"I don't feel anger toward this person (______). I have no feelings," she said. "I won't waste my anger. I am angry at Michelle for not knowing better. She's the last of my four children who heard all the messages about designated drivers and not being in a car with someone who was behind the wheel and intoxicated" . . . "Michelle was a very honest person who truly believed in living life. A giving, caring person who was so good and loving," her mother said. [PWRIT-015]

In this case the bereaved mother invokes comparisons with her other children ("She’s the last of my four children . . . ") to accomplish something quite different than to establish Michelle’s uniqueness. While the discursive practice is the same as before (i.e., making comparisons), it is used here to accomplish a different task, in this case both blaming and excusing.

The excerpt first establishes that the bereaved mother is "angry at Michelle" for not exercising better judgement in getting into a car with a drunk driver. The use of comparison comes into play when the participant describes how all of her children
("She's the last of my four children who heard all the messages") were told the same thing regarding "designated drivers" and "not being in a car with someone who was behind the wheel and intoxicated." In so doing, the bereaved mother implicitly assigns blame to the child who decided not to heed this same advice. The second thing that this discourse achieves is to excuse the participant herself from responsibility in the child's death. Here again, the practice of comparison is engaged to help build an account, where in this case the mother (implicitly) argues that she provided the same preventative information to her deceased daughter as she did to her other children. Her expression of anger towards Michelle helps underline where responsibility lies (i.e., with the daughter). However, the discourse is not extrematized in the same way that positive representations were, and while blaming Michelle, it is in some sense a limited blame. Rather than say she is angry "with" Michelle, the participant states that she is angry "at" her daughter "for not knowing better", as if for some unknown reason Michelle’s better judgement was impaired. In fact, the context of the accident was that Michelle had also been drinking at various bars along with her friends. While laying blame with her daughter, the discursive construction of the statement does not wholly condemn the person of Michelle, akin to "loving the child but not the behaviour." Given this variability, at another point in the interview, the mother's discourse takes a turn back towards reconstructing her daughter in a positive light again: "Michelle was a very honest person who truly believed in living life. A giving, caring person who was so good and loving." Here, once again, modalizing terms ("very . . . truly . . . so") are being utilized to magnify the qualities of the adult child. Michelle is described not as an "honest" and "good" person, but as a "very honest" person who was "so good and loving". While the bereaved mother's discourse included a "negative" evaluation of her daughter’s choices, the cumulative effect of the account is one favourable to the kind of person Michelle was
(i.e., "... a very honest person who truly believed in living life. A giving, caring person who was so good and loving.").

5.4.3 Birth Order

The bereaved father who is quoted in the following segment from a newspaper interview, invoked an implicit comparison by calling on birth order to describe the pain of his grief:

When you truly love someone, especially your first child and he is taken away from you for no reason, the pain is almost too much to bare. You can't understand how or why this could happen. The pain of losing a child is 100 times greater than losing another family member like an elderly parent. [SWRIT-014]

He used extreme case formulations, in one instance to describe the depth and sincerity of his love for his son - "When you truly love someone" - and again to compare the "pain of losing a child" to that of losing other family members. In the latter case, the specific numeric citation - "100 times" - bolsters the impact of how great the pain is, that it is almost unbearable. The implicit comparison to other children comes about when the bereaved father emphasizes ("especially") the category "first child" to describe interestingly, not so much the child himself, as the pain of losing that child. Although, the invocation of "first child" status also assists in the overall goal of establishing the 'specialness' and 'uniqueness' of this particular child. In following Hutchby & Wooffitt's (1998) notion of non-neutral discursive devices, this particular category is charged with potential images and expectations. Evidence for this comes later in the discourse when the father, talking about the role of the older son in the younger son's life states: "Chris was a great inspiration to Eric," said their father. "He was the one who told Eric, 'You can play Division I football.'" [PWRIT-014 = SWRIT-014]
Further to this use of categorization and comparison, the participant describes a sense of helplessness ("he is taken away from you") and meaninglessness ("for no reason").

Of discursive interest in this same excerpt is the bereaved father's use of the somewhat impersonalized "you" to talk about what is ultimately his own pain. As well, he talks about what it's like to lose "a child" as opposed to specifically talking about his child by name. This example helps illustrate what discourse analysts mean by the "occasioned" nature of talk and text - the variability of language use depending on the setting (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Edwards & Potter, 1992). The setting in this case is the public forum of the community newspaper. While the use of "you" in a more personal social interaction may signal an interpersonal distance, in this context it may be serving as a linguistic vehicle for the participant to explain what it is like "in general" to be a bereaved parent - to belong to that category of individuals whose children have died.

In the next two excerpts the birth order category also forms part of the discourse, although in these instances the particular categories are less value-laden:

Heather was the second of four children. She was two years younger than her older sister. She was her maternal grandmother's favorite, and she formed a particularly close bond with her younger sister, possibly because they shared a bedroom during their childhood years. [SWRIT-012]

Your Honor,
It is a large hole that appears when the center of the group leaves. Doug was the fourth of seven children in our family. Both younger and older members find it hard to adapt to his death. [PWRIT-010 = SWRIT-019]

In that there is nothing inherently special, universally acknowledged, about these particular birth order categories, the participants turn to other category constructions to establish this quality in their deceased adult children. In the first, a bereaved father draws on relationship talk to add that his daughter who died was her "grandmother's
favourite”, and that the “bond” between her and a younger sister was “particularly close”. In the second, a bereaved mother, whose son was “fourth of seven children” depicts his role as the “center of the group”, whose death has created “a large hole.”

5.4.4 Gender

Another category that parents sometimes invoked in their discourse was that of gender, either their child’s or their own. The mother of Joey, a 25 year-old police officer when he was killed, emphasizes gender in her description:

Joey was my third child, but my first son. He was very sensible and serious at the same time had a dry sense of humor. He loved sports and he loved being a police officer. He became a dad at age twenty and he adored his son. He had a rocky relationship with his son’s mother. My grandson was five when Joey was killed. [SWRIT-015]

The participant here is responding to the reflecting question: “Tell me about your child who died.” In this particular segment of text, Joey’s mother anticipates potential minimization from the fact that her deceased child was her “third child” by immediately reorienting (“but”) to his gender as a form of categorization (“my first son”). While there may not be any inherent significance to being the third child, Joey’s ‘special’ status is established by describing him as the “first son” born into the family. His particular significance in the family structure is further emphasized by the role he played in communicating with his estranged father:

Joey was the one who first talked to his Dad after a lot of years. He told me to go through life with hate and anger stifles your life and keeps you from living. [SWRIT-015]

Here, Joey is reconstructed as “the one” child who was primary (“who first talked”) in his ability to reconnect with the (separated) father. By invoking this particular categorization (i.e., “the one”), Joey’s mother implicitly puts him apart from her other children, without necessarily minimizing their importance. The significance of this act
becomes highlighted in this excerpt by the bereaved mother’s addition of the length of
time which had passed since communication had taken place between her estranged
husband and any family members.

In orienting ourselves once again towards evidence of variability, as suggested by
Potter and Wetherell (1987), we can observe that there is one section of this text which
diverges from an otherwise positive characterization of Joey. It is the segment which
refers to the “rocky relationship with his son’s mother.” While the participant could have
remained consistent in her way of describing her son (i.e., “He was ______”, “He
loved ______”, “He became ____”), instead she uses a possessive form “He had
______”, which has the effect of distancing Joey from the relationship with his partner,
and from potential culpability in its demise. In her discourse, this bereaved mother
reconstructs Joey by using the categories of child, son, police officer, and dad, yet when
she approaches his role as partner/ex-husband she reorients her description to a focus on
the relationship itself (“He had a rocky relationship with his son’s mother”), and away
from her son’s particular characteristics. In switching her discursive style to one which is
less detailed, the participant defends against or at least reduces the potential attribution
of blame towards her son. The focus is suddenly on the characteristics of the relationship
(“rocky”) as opposed to the characteristics of her son. This raises potential speculation in
the reader, that the turbulence of the relationship could have had as much (or more) to
do with his partner’s characteristics (i.e., attribution) as with Joey’s. Prior to describing
the relationship, she also emphasizes the type of father Joey was by stating that “he
adored his son”. In further describing Joey’s ex-partner as “his son’s mother”, the
bereaved mother distances him from this woman, and refocuses the reader’s attention on
the tragedy of her grandson (“My grandson was five when Joey was killed”).
The category of gender and how its availability to bereaved parents helps define the parent-adult child relationship is evidenced in the discourse of a father of three:

Robb was my only son. Robb was a good son. He also was my friend and my buddy. We enjoyed doing things together. He was working for our small family-owned business and always talked about taking over the family business someday when I retire. [PWRIT-006]

In this passage, the male gender of the child is emphasized by the additional descriptors of Robb being the “only” son, and a “good” son. The father goes on to specify the nature of their relationship in describing his son as his “friend” and “buddy”, categories which invoke notions of camaraderie and companionship. This invocation is then reinforced by the father depicting their shared activities and his enjoyment of those times (“We enjoyed doing things together.”). The segment concludes with a reference to the generative nature of this particular father-son relationship. Here, the father uses strong implication (“always talked about taking over the family business”) to suggest that his son would replace him when he retired. In a later segment the bereaved father builds upon this theme of continuity and its relationship to gender:

Robb is my son and always will be my son. Oh how I miss him now. He was my delight. He was my energy. He was to take over life where I left off. Now I have no one to carry on the “______” name. Robb loved life and didn’t want to die. Robb wanted to run a business like me, but now will never have a chance. He wanted a family and someday have his own son. [PWRIT-006]

The notion of the adult child as an extension of the self (the parent) is strongly reflected in the discourse of this bereaved father. He explicitly connects their lives together as he states that his son “was to take over life where (the father) left off”, but that there had been a foreclosure of this continuity, and of the (male) “family” name. The generational nature of this extension of the parent is further represented in the text which decries the loss of a potential grandson (“He wanted a family and someday have his own
son.”). This account hearkens back to that particular description of parental bereavement in the literature as “a deep narcissistic hurt that is not to be healed . . . a paralyzing event” (Freud, in Jones, 1957), as well as Klass and Marwit’s (1988) model which includes “Narcissistic Loss: The Amputation Metaphor”. Robb’s death in this sense, is seen as a narcissistic wound, in that it symbolizes a challenge to the notion of the child as a part of the (father’s) self in the form of an inner representation. Not being able to “take over life where (his father) left off” is, in this interpretation, an “amputation” of the father’s “immortality.”

In that the context of this discourse was a victim impact statement to a judge, with implications for sentencing, the bereaved father in his description, anticipates possible minimization of his son’s life and future potential. Rather than using a more passive depiction of Robb’s involvement in the family-owned business (e.g., he worked for our small family-owned business), the father uses an active turn of phrase (“He was working for our small family-owned business”). Again, rather than depicting the son as having a casual, perhaps passing interest in the family business, the father uses a maximum case formulation (“always talked about taking over the family business”) to express the certainty of this plan. The use of this extreme case formulation also demonstrates the father’s “stake” (Potter, 1996) or “investment” (Edwards, 1999) in establishing his “certainty” of this particular construction.

The bereaved mother of a 24 year-old woman describes her daughter’s birth order by writing that “She was the third of three children” and then adds that Alison was “the only girl.”

She didn't have it easy from the beginning. I had conceived her in the first month after I stopped taking oral contraceptives, and she was born with a cleft palate. I later learned that there was a statistical correlation between ‘the pill’ and congenital cleft palate. Her lip was not affected, and she was beautiful.
She had a peaches and cream complexion, with magnificent bright blue eyes, and an engaging smile. I had so much fun being her mother...

Besides being the “only girl” Alison is described by membership in the category of people who are challenged at birth by a congenital abnormality, and not only that, but that she was able to overcome this physical challenge.

On occasion, the category of gender was invoked more to describe the parent than the deceased adult child.

As a woman and a mother I was encouraged with the decisiveness that Congress displayed in handling the Tailhook situation. However, nobody died at Tailhook. There is no more important issue to a woman than the death of her child.

The participant in this case begins by stating her claim - “As a woman and a mother”- in relation to the outcome of legal hearings into a series of sexual misconduct activities in the American navy. The discourse appeals to the reader’s awareness of the particular “Tailhook situation” and the actions that were taken by Congress to address the sexually assaultive behaviours. The participant expresses her approval with the integrity that was shown by Congress in their “handling” of the “situation”, and also lays claim to the particular salience of this case for women and mothers. What she is also doing with her language (“I was encouraged . . .”) is commending Congress for their previous ability to act decisively to right a wrong, and simultaneously stating her expectation that they act similarly with regard to her concern, which is to find out the details of her son’s death.

While this account initially focuses on establishing the importance of the Tailhook hearings, particularly for women, the discourse takes a sudden turn towards a study in contrasts. This turn is signaled by the use of “However”, after which the participant
asserts that “nobody died at Tailhook.” In this single, brief sentence, the bereaved mother reorients the listener/reader to the reality and significance of death. She establishes an implicit comparison between the implications of two separate events, one of which involved the death of her son. Implicit in this discourse is a judgement on Congress, via comparison, that they have the obligation to act no less decisively in a matter which she constructs as more serious in its outcome than Tailhook. Finally, this participant once again evokes the gender category of “woman” and implicitly “mother” to emphasize the catastrophic and specific nature of being a bereaved mother. She accomplishes this claim by the use of an extreme case formulation (i.e., “There is no more important issue for a woman than the death of her child”), which also implicitly speaks to the significance of the mother-child relationship.

5.5 The Categorical Construction of the Relationship

5.5.1 Mother - Child

Talk and writing about being the mother of the child who died took many different forms, and served various purposes. In some cases, the discursive work that was being done was that of describing the relationship itself:

As Jacy grew into a young woman, we shared a closeness that any mother would envy. We had a deep respect for each other, confided in each other, and I enjoyed her wonderful sense of humor. Jacy was not only my daughter, she was my best friend, my companion, and my confidante. As a parent I was overcome with pride as I watched her grow, mature, succeed in her goals and begin to realize the fulfillment of her life’s dreams . . . she should be enjoying the wonderful closeness she shared with her mother and brother. [PWRIT-002]

In this excerpt the participant begins by describing the relationship between mother and daughter as close. The use of the phrase - “that any mother would envy” - is an extreme case formulation that suggests a high degree of universal desirability for the “closeness” of such a relationship. It also constructs the discourse in a way that hearably defends
against ("any") the possibility of disagreement with the statement. The impression of
closeness is further bolstered by the relational evidence that the participant puts forward
("We had a deep respect for each other, confided in each other, and I enjoyed her
wonderful sense of humor"). The discourse then proceeds in a series of escalating
extreme case formulations, which are combined with the use of category constructions.
The series begins with a statement that emphasizes and anticipates Jacy as being more
than just ("not only") the participant’s daughter - she is reconstructed by use of the
category "best friend." Again, we see the use of a maximum case formulation to
emphasize the nature and quality of the friendship ("best"). The relationship itself is
further defined by invoking the categories "companion" and "confidante", the definition
of the latter being "one who is a woman" (Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary,
1985). The tragedy and injustice ("she should be . . .") of the daughter’s death is
underlined in this excerpt by the juxtaposed description of a promising young adult life
("begin to realize the fulfillment of her life's dreams") against the reality that the daughter
is not here to enjoy the "closeness" of the relationship she "shared" (N.B., past tense)
with her mother as well as her brother.

The following bereaved mother wrote in a newsletter, her reflections on her
daughter and their relationship:

Some images were wondrous in their beauty, some not quite so beautiful, but all
represented the loving relationship of a mother and her woman-child. Heart
pounding, I remembered our organ donation conversations . . . I had so much fun being her mother. [PWRIT-007 = SWRIT-011]

She uses an extreme case formulation - "wondrous in their beauty"- to
characterize the positive aspects of their relationship, and then a qualification - "some
not quite so beautiful"- to suggest that there were less attractive features. Then again,
she turns to an maximum formulation ("all") in what seems like a discursive recovery
strategy, signaled by the word “but”, to ultimately characterize the relationship between “mother and her woman-child” as “loving”. The participant directly orients to the unique nature of the adult child by idiosyncratically combining the categories “woman” and “child”, thus reflecting its “dual nature.”

In the following account a participant laments in a letter she had written to her daughter after her death:

Dear Maggy,
I miss you so much still. It hurts so bad. But, I’m hanging in here, Baby. Just like I know you want me to. I know you probably thought at times, that it didn’t matter if you left us, that maybe everyone would be better off. That was wrong. We all hurt in our own way. I’ve grown from my grieving, the tears seem to be farther apart, but the pain is always there, even though I smile, I laugh. I’m sorry I wasn’t a better mother. I tried, you know that, and you always loved me. . . . still do, don’t you, baby. I can still feel your big hugs, see your big smile, hear your hearty laugh. It seems so long since I held you in my arms. I talked to you on the phone 2 yrs ago today. I’m glad you don’t hurt anymore. You suffered a lot of pain in your short life. God took your pain away, I’m glad you loved God. I have no doubts about you’re being with him. I thank Him for taking you “home”. I’ll always love you Maggy. I thank God that he let me be your “Momma” as you always called me. I’m very fortunate. God is good to me. It would have been a privilege just to have known you. I’ll see you again someday, honey, but I’ll try to stay healthy to see the rest of our loved ones through, OK? They need me. If I go first, I want them to be happy for me, so that’s what I’m trying to do for you. I’m happy your tears are gone. I love ‘ya, baby!

Mom [PWRIT-012]

Following her initial apology to the daughter, the mother’s discourse quickly turns into an attempt to soften the blame. She proclaims her efforts (“I tried”) at mothering and appeals to the daughter (“you know that”), using an extreme case formulation (“always”), in what sounds like an attempt to convince herself of her daughter’s love towards her. Further linguistic evidence for the work of ‘convincing’ is the participant’s question to the deceased daughter - “still do, don’t you, baby.” This is
also suggestive, directly through language usage (i.e., tense), of the notion of a continuing connection between the parent and adult child, which the bereaved mother orients toward via “still do.”

It is perhaps this connection which is also being alluded to in the following bereaved mother’s account, when she uses the phrase - “tied with heart strings”:

A Mother’s Love is tied with heart strings. Every day I sit at your grave looking for the same courage you had to carry on. Your daily struggle to survive is now my daily battle to live without you. My endless river of tears are memories from my heart. [PWRIT-013]

The beginning statement specifically characterizes the love of a “Mother” in a way that builds up its unique nature. Extreme case formulations (“Every”) are then utilized to construct not so much the child or the relationship, but in this case, the nature of the mother’s grief. The participant uses a war metaphor (“battle”) to describe what it is like on a “daily” basis to go on living without her daughter. She describes a vigil in which she searches in herself for a personal characteristic (“courage”) that her daughter possessed, as a resource for survival. Besides the previous linguistic implication of an ongoing connection (“strings”) there is also an implied sense of continuing on in the present (“is now my”) from where the daughter left off (“Your daily struggle to survive is now my daily battle to live without you”); a kind of legacy in a sense. By the use of extreme language, this discourse accomplishes the task of “doing extreme” in describing what the actual grief process is like for this bereaved mother.

5.5.2 Father - Child

Among the data corpus there were only two instances of male participants directly invoking the category - father - to refer to themselves. The first was a very brief citation in which a participant writes to a judge in the beginning of his victim impact statement:
My name is Robert W. ________, the father of our son Robert W. ________ III better known as Robb. [PWRIT-006]

This introduction quickly establishes a sense of gender-based, generational continuity by the combined use of name and category. The repetition of first name and second initial from “father” to “son”, plus the addition of the “III”, describes the passing on of name, and the significance of name, from male parent to male child. Further evidence of this was provided in the discourse of the spouse, who stated:

Our son bares his grandfather’s and father’s name - RWS III. An honorable and proud name. [PWRIT-005]

The other instance of the category - father - occurred in the writings of a male participant who was responding first to the question “What did you see when you looked at your son?” and then “Tell me about the relationship”:

I saw a son who was to be the first _____ to graduate from college and who made his Dad so proud. I made a decision years ago to be more of an “at-home” Dad. Fortunately, I was able to see all these great days in person. . . I think he thought I was pretty cool for a Dad and that he could always rely on me. He would light up my life. [SWRIT-014]

Here again, we see a “generative” discourse, where the “son(’s)” accomplishment as “the first” college graduate in the family is lauded. The use of the category - “the first” - helps to further the work of description by invoking implicit images of hopes, dreams, and expectations. The description of how proud (“so”) this made the bereaved father also points to the degree of investment which was placed in this son, and in his reconstruction of his son. Upon reflecting on the past (“year ago . . . I was”) the participant also engages an extreme case formulation (“all”) to emphasize the importance of having been a stay “at-home” father.

In all other instances where the category - father - occurred, it was used in either describing the adult child’s role in his own family or by mothers, in talking/writing about
their spouses as ‘father(s)’. The following two examples are from bereaved mothers who
had been divorced from their deceased child’s birth father for some years:

Thank God, Rich was wise enough to ask him to come to Florida. I knew Alison
wanted to be buried in New York, and I was afraid Ed, her father, would wait
until we brought her body there. I didn’t think I had the right to ask him to come,
but I was glad that Rich asked. It was a very intimate experience for her father
and I to stand at our daughter's casket, together for the first time in years.
Tragedy has a way of negating old grudges. [SWRIT-011 = PWRIT-007]

When my [2nd] husband and I went to Oklahoma for his graduation and I saw
Steven for the first time in 3 months I saw a different person. He finally seemed
at peace with himself. He had this great feeling of accomplishment and I was so
happy for him. I know that Steven wanted his [birth] father to see the new him
and was very hurt when he didn't attend his graduation. Steven introduced my
husband and myself to everyone as his mother and father and so for three days
everyone addressed us as Mr. & Mrs ______. He didn't want anyone to know that
his father didn't come and my husband knew how much it meant to Steven and
so he was a good sport about it and never corrected anyone when they called
him Mr. ______. [SWRIT-013]

5.5.3 Son

More common in the data, than use of the categories “mother” or “father”, were
the categories “son” and “daughter”. Again, the same category could be used to achieve
different discursive functions, depending on the context. The following excerpt describes
what is has been like to live “without” the deceased “son”, that it is been more like
“survival” than living, and that it is “surviving” without “any sense of normality”:

We have not been able to survive with any sense of normality the first Christmas
without Robbie, the first Mother’s day and Father’s day, our individual birthdays
or any day - - without our son. We are stuck in a mire of clay so deep and
penetrating, each day, each month, without Robbie is a devastating blow.
[PWRIT-005]

Part of the discourse in this case emphasizes the individual “firsts (anniversaries)
without their son Robbie, situating the account within a family context. It describes how
difficult it has been to celebrate these normally special occasions without him.
The bereaved mother accentuates the metaphor of their grief as being “stuck in a mire of clay” by using extreme language - “so deep and penetrating.” The extreme case formulation helps achieve the “as if” quality of what their grief has been like. It allows for the “doing” of extremes (Edwards, 1999).

Alternatively, talk about one’s “son” who died could be used to engage the actual process of memorializing and remembering, or asking others to remember, as in the following:

However, before I announce the winners of the Christopher ______ Performing Arts Memorial Fund Scholarship Awards, I must ask your indulgence and allow me to speak a few minutes about our son, for whom this award is named. [PWRIT-014]

For other participants, discourse focused around the “son” allowed for specific talk about his character as well as the relationship with the parent:

My son to me was a very important part of my life. My children always were the most important thing in my life. I have always been very proud of my children for who they were and are. I am still very proud of Jeff and what he became and for what he did. I hope and pray my son is in heaven. It is always hard to believe that is really so but I like to think he is there with my other relatives who have died. Yes I do dream about my son, not as much as I used to, but I have had very vivid dreams where he has spoke to me about his death . . . My son was similar to me - quiet, reserved, loved to read, devoted to family, also an enabler (I have since found out he gave in a lot to his wife - found this out from his oldest daughter and his wife’s family.) I think Jeff found a lot of happiness in little things, sunrise, sunset, music, his children's little things. His wife said he was her best friend. Always talked over their problems. [SWRIT-016 = PWRIT-008]

Part of what is emphasized in this excerpt, with the aid of extreme case formulations (“always”; “most important”), is the pride that this bereaved mother feels towards her children. She also asserts that her pride in her deceased son’s character (“of Jeff”), accomplishments (“what he became”), and actions (“what he did”) continues (“I am still very proud of Jeff”); that it did not cease with his death. This is further discursive
evidence for the ways in which a continuing bond between parent and adult child may be constructed, evidence that becomes available only through the fine-grained analysis of language which is the particular hallmark of discourse analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

In the second part of this excerpt the participant achieves something different than doing “being proud.” Here, she begins in the abstract with an assertion that her son was similar to her. This account is then further supported by the use of details as a discursive device in describing exactly how the two were similar. Paying attention to the detail of the discourse in context, one sees that the participant has also reverted back to using the past tense when writing about her son (“was”). This may indicate a “property” about the continued bond, that for bereaved parents it does not translate uniformly across all situations and times. The continuing bond may not be so much a static, once and for all, entity, but instead may be manifested in different ways and degrees, at various times within the same individual across contexts.

5.5.4 Daughter

Talk surrounding the “daughter” also utilized various discursive devices and practices to achieve diverse ends. The following account, for example, directly oriented to the linguistic dilemma of how much detail to include in order to describe a relationship, the death of a daughter, and the parent’s ensuing grief:

It is not easy to put on paper 18 years of caring for your daughter, watching her grow, sharing good, bad, and all, being a parent and all of a sudden she’s gone. How much detail do you go into? How do you explain to someone the pain, anxiety and sense of loneliness you feel? [SWRT-003]

In the opening sentence of this excerpt, the participant, in a paradoxically linguistic way, achieves what she initially frames as the difficult task of description. Imbedded in a implicitly developmental discourse (i.e., “18 years . . . grow”), her account focuses on
the relational actions (i.e., "caring . . . watching . . . sharing") of raising a daughter to adulthood. The particular use of "18 years" to preface the account helps emphasize the invested nature of the category "parent" (i.e., investment of time). The fact of the parental investment having been worked up, then allows for the contrast, which is signaled by the abrupt ending to the sentence - "and all of a sudden she's gone." The structure of this particular sentence seems to very accurately mirror the course of what the participant has experienced in the sudden death of her daughter in an automobile accident.

Another bereaved mother whose daughter was killed in an auto accident recalled the time which followed her learning of the death:

The next few hours were the most bizarre of my life. I functioned -- somehow. The police called a friend for me, and I sent him to pick up Rachel [the participants younger daughter]. I called Alison's boyfriend, Rich, and when he got home, we called Alison's father together. I remember wondering how to tell him that we no longer had a daughter. It was awful.

[SWRIT-011 = PWRIT-007]

The extremity of this experience is described again by using extreme language ("most bizarre . . . my life"). The use of descriptive detail gives the reader a sense of "being there." Reflected in the participant's penultimate sentence is the extreme finality ("no longer") of the daughter's death, as well as their role as parents to this daughter. Once again, however, while this particular discourse reflects a sense of absolute discontinuity, the same participant in another discursive context, uses her language to speak of a continued relationship (see p. 215). This illustrates once more the action orientation of language, as well as its occasioned and flexible use to achieve particular results in particular settings (Potter, 1996). In this excerpt the bereaved mother achieves a reconstruction of what is was like to give the worst news possible to her ex-husband, that their daughter was dead.
The bereaved mother whose excerpt follows, expressed what I have heard from many parents in bereavement support groups; which is the need to talk about the child who died, and to talk about them using their name:

Before I returned to work, I sent a message with a colleague that I would need, and wanted to be free to speak of Alison. I told one uncomfortable coworker that "Alison lived for 24 years, she only died one day". I know I made many people uncomfortable. I didn't care. A wise friend told me that as long as I didn't carry any weapons, I could repair whatever damage I did. It must have been months before I was able to introduce myself without saying the equivalent of "Hi, my name is Sharon. My daughter died in a car wreck". It was the central event of my life. [SWIT-011 = PWRIT-007]

In this narrative, Sharon orients to the interactionally sensitive issues concerning talk about the dead as well as her justification for doing so. She provides a progressive accounting of her need to talk (“to be free to speak”) about her deceased daughter, starting with the preparation of the workplace to receive her talk. This warning is hearable both as advanced notice to co-workers, as well as the participant’s anticipation of their discomfort, which she ultimately confirms with the extreme case formulation (certainty term) - “I know.” The justification of her need to talk about Alison is constructed by describing external support in the form of the sage-like category - "wise friend." The content of the justification is framed in a sort of exaggerated irony, that words may make people feel uncomfortable, but they can’t cause unrepairable “damage.” The account concludes with a description of the tremendous impact of Alison’s death on her mother’s identity, expressed through metaphorically extreme language (“the central event of my life”). The overall effect of such accounting is not only to achieve justification of Sharon’s need to talk about Alison, but also trivialization of the fact that other’s may feel “uncomfortable” with this talk.

It is again this need to talk about the daughter who died which is oriented to and emphasized by another bereaved mother:
Carol's death left a huge void in my life that can never be filled. The loneliness is indescribable. I lost my daughter as well as my best friend. It was hard coming back to work because Carol was at my office so much since I work on campus where she was a student. I work at the Psychological Center at ______ State University and the students as well as the professors I work for have been so supportive of me. They all knew Carol and they have allowed me to talk about her. This is not always the case with other people. [SWRIT-017]

The participant uses both metaphoric language ("huge void") and extreme case formulation ("never") to achieve the function of describing the "indescribable." In reflecting upon her losses, she invokes not only the relational category "daughter", but also "best friend", thus underlining the potentially multiplicative nature of grief (Rando, 1993). By placing agency with her co-workers and students ("they have allowed me"), the bereaved mother is able to describe the ability to talk about Carol in the workplace as an "act" of support. Carol contrasts these supportive listeners, and their willingness to hear about her deceased daughter, with those who are potentially unsupportive - discursively constructed as "others."

Finally, with respect to the potential use of multiple role categories - mother, father, parent, child - one sees additional linguistic evidence of the child as an extension or representation of the self (mother), as well as anticipation of "a deep narcissistic hurt" (Freud, in Jones, 1957):

When I looked at Steven I saw a lot of myself. He was stubborn and until this day my mother always tells me she can't believe how stubborn I am. Steven stood up for himself and fought for what he felt was right. He didn't like to follow rules and at times had problems with authority figures. I have always been that way. The fact that Steven stood up for himself when he knew he was right created a lot of friction between him and his father. His father thought that because he was the parent he was always right and Steven was only the child and didn't have the right to defend himself. [SWRIT-013]
5.6 The Relationship Between Parent and Adult Child

As the adult child could be constructed as ultimately irreplaceable, through the building up of specialness and uniqueness, so too was this discursive practice available in the reconstruction of the parent-adult child relationship:

Carol and I had a mother-daughter relationship but we also had a “best friend” relationship. We were so very close . . . I am at a loss for words to describe the type of relationship I had with Carol. It was a very special one. [SWRIT-017 = PWRIT-009]

In her attempt to describe the nature of the relationship, as being “more” (“but we also had”) than “mother-daughter”, the participant engages the use of the category - “best friend” - which suggests a ‘special’ quality to the relationship (i.e., exclusiveness, intimacy, closeness). This impression is reinforced through the use of extreme case formulations (e.g., “so very”), culminating in the actual characterization of the relationship as “very special.” Along the way, the participant orient to the difficulty in finding the language to describe the relationship she has with her daughter (“I am at a loss for words to describe”). There is particular evidence that the bereaved mother is orienting to the hearability of categories when she expresses her struggle as trying to characterize the “type” of relationship.

In response to the reflecting questions: “What did you see when you looked at your daughter? How did you know these things about her?”, the same participant wrote the following:

I saw a beautiful caring person who was supportive of me. When I was sick she took care of me which added to her very crowded schedule. She came by to check on me between classes as well as before she went to work. She was always there when I needed her without me asking her to help. She always put her needs last. She was a beautiful person inside and out! We were so close that I knew all about her. We shared everything. [SWRIT-017 = PWRIT-009]
In building her account, the participant begins and ends with somewhat broad statements about the kind of person her daughter was. She constructs her daughter as a “beautiful caring person” who was altruistic and selfless (“She always put her needs last.”). The bereaved mother also orients to the relationship between herself and her daughter, specifying that she was the particular recipient of support from her daughter (“supportive of me.”). Between the more abstract linguistic ‘bookends’, the discourse takes a turn towards more detailed description. The bereaved mother gives a specific example of her daughter’s character by referring to a period when she was ill, during which time her daughter tended to her needs (“When I was sick she took care of me”).

Once again, one observes the discursive practice of providing evidence for the qualities displayed by the adult child. The altruistic nature of the daughter is further built up by the addition of description which details how busy the daughter already was (“which added to her very crowded schedule”), yet she found time to care for her mother. With great linguistic efficiency the participant informs the reader that her daughter was both going to school and working at a job, and that amidst these activities her daughter would come to “check” on her. The use of this descriptive evidence helps build a convincing account of the daughter as a tremendously caring individual. As the account once again becomes broader (“She was always there when I needed her without me asking her to help. She always put her needs last.”), the bereaved mother draws on an extreme case formulation (i.e., “always”) as a discursive device. The participant talks of the enduring nature of the relationship in referring to the fact that her daughter “always” provided support and presence in times of personal (“I”) need.

In the following two excerpts another bereaved mother orients directly to the “special” qualities of the relationship between herself and her son, Doug:
It's been my ambition to be impartial with my children, particularly because my husband [remarried] had a favorite daughter, but Doug and I had something special that didn't and doesn't exist with the others. [SWRIT-019 = PWRIT-010]

To me, Doug was special with talent and charm and humor. Doug and I both realized we had a close relationship. I felt strongly - - about him and worried about him - his safety - his health - his happiness - his financial situation. Because I worried about his safety so much, and he'd been a risk taker, I'd imagined burying him many times. The premonition the night of the crash was similar to the times I felt he was in trouble or danger with the thought "It's Doug!" When he died, it broke my heart, but I didn't have to worry about him any more. [PWRIT-010 = SWRIT-019]

She begins with "accountability" talk, in bringing attention to her conscious efforts to remain "impartial" with her children. However, despite these best efforts ("but"), she recognizes an intangible connection ("something special") that is unique to her relationship with Doug, using comparison with her other children to support this assertion ("that didn't . . . exist with the others"). The participant bolsters the evidence for the uniqueness of the relationship by extending its specialness into the present ("and doesn't exist"). This latter orientation to time also points to the writer being able to hear the potential for her initial description as opening the door for one of the living children's relationship to have replaced the one she "had" with Doug.

In the second excerpt, the bereaved mother's assertion of the closeness of the relationship is further strengthened by her statement that Doug also recognized it, that it was not her alone who felt the closeness of the bond. Thus she is building up the facticity of her account, as believable and resistant to refutation. She then describes having frequently "imagined burying" her son and having experienced a "premonition" on the night of his death. While these descriptions point also to the uniqueness of the relationship, they are also of the type of talk which is potentially viewed with critical skepticism. One way in which social discourse of this type is managed is by justifying the
thoughts or actions which are heard as problematic (Wooffitt, 1992). The participant in fact ‘does’ this justification (“Because . . .”) by citing worry about “safety” and Doug’s apparent history as a “risk taker” as reasons for these precognitive images.

Another strategy that was available to bereaved parents in reconstructing the uniqueness of the relationship is evidenced in the following excerpt:

There are not nor will there be grandchildren to love and be loved by. The loss of the support/emotional/mental/spiritual from my son, friend, spiritual connectee is profound. There is not nor has ever been another relationship quite like that one. The loss of continuance is also profound. No child, grandchildren, etc, close family, special (spiritual) friend will ‘be there’ for me nor for me to ‘be there’ for. [SWRIT-002]

Here, the participant very succinctly provides an inventory of the meanings and roles of the relationship, thus underlining the multiple losses that she experienced in the death of her son. We see the added spiritual dimension of the bond described (“spiritual connectee”), an idiosyncratic category which has the ring of the more popularized term “soulmate.” Similar to the previous participant, this bereaved mother also emphasizes, with an extreme case formulation (“ever”), the absolute irreplaceability of the “relationship” itself. She buttresses this extreme case assertion (“No . . .”) via the listing of specific relationship categories, none of which would fulfill the reciprocal “presence” that seemed to characterize the mother’s relationship with her son. With the combined use of a certainty term - “No” - and the naming of (potential) younger generational categories (i.e., “child, grandchildren”), the discourse is hearably determined in avowing both the continuing and historical specialness (“profound”) of this particular parent-adult child relationship. At the same time, the “loss of continuance” is described as the loss of potential future generations - the generational fabric being seen as irreparably torn.

The following group of excerpts represent a form of variability in the construction of the relationship as special and unique. They were written by a mother
whose eighteen year-old comatose daughter died, six days after being in an automobile accident, in which the driver of the other vehicle was impaired. The daughter had died four years prior to this study, and was living at home when she died.

Theresa and I got along pretty well. She was one who didn’t like to be told “no”. She was the type of person who wanted to do everything and go everywhere. Sometimes it was hard to let her go . . .

Theresa was not only a daughter but a friend. She was caring and had special ways of comforting you when she knew you were sad. She is still my daughter, watching our family from heaven . . .

When I looked at Theresa I saw someone who deserved everything good in life. She was someone who cared so much for others and would do anything to make others happy. She could look at me and know what I was thinking or how I felt. Her specialty was bringing flowers on days when I was down . . .

As for my relationship with Theresa, I think it was good. Until you write it down I guess you never really think about it. [SWRIT-003]

Initially in the account, there is an apparent lack of extrematization in describing the relationship (“got along pretty well”), along with a typification (“was one . . . the type of person”) of the daughter as determined and adventurous. The mother alludes to worrying about her daughter when she states “Sometimes it was hard to let her go.”

However, there is evident a more incremental type of extrematization, whereby the discourse focuses on characterizing the relationship by describing the daughter (e.g., “not only a daughter but a friend”). The participant invokes the quality - “special” - in recounting how her daughter “cared so much [extematization] for others” in “special ways”. The specialness of Theresa is worked up through the incremental descriptions of her intuitive powers, which are particularized towards the mother (“She could look at me and know what I was thinking or how I felt”). Of additional note is the sense of continuity (“is still my daughter”) of the daughter as caring for her family “from heaven.”
The single mother of a 25 year-old male police officer who was killed four years earlier by a drunk driver, extends this intuitive connection between parent and adult child in writing to me:

Joey knew he could always count on me. When he looked at me I think he felt gratitude for raising his sisters, brother, and him by myself. He also seen me as judgemental towards people, he pointed this out many times. I’m sure sometimes he was disappointed in some of my actions. He could always tell what kind of mood I was in . . .

When I looked at Joey I could tell if he was angry, sad, or happy by his expressions or the sound of his voice. I never realized until his girlfriend got pregnant with my grandson how much he didn’t want me to be disappointed in him. He actually was afraid to tell me. I think I made him happy when instead of being angry with him and his girlfriend I accepted the situation and have a grandson that I love so very much . . .

It was hard I told you things that I never said to even myself. There were times when I know I disappointed Joey and my other children, but I know they love me and know I did my best . . .

Joey appreciated everything I done . . . Now Joey is a hero to me . . . he could always tell what kind of mood I was in. [SWRT-015]

In her narrative, this participant makes use of an extended example of an interpersonal situation involving her son, to describe some of their relational dynamics (i.e., disappointment, happiness, acceptance). Again, she draws on extreme case formulations to emphasize the degree to which they “knew” each other’s moods. Similar to some other participants, if the discourse turned to focus on negative dispositions, it was usually the parent who was describing themselves (“He also seen me as judgemental . . . I’m sure sometimes he was disappointed in some of my actions . . . I know I disappointed Joey and my other children”). Yet, similar to the “explanation” of negative characteristics in the child, we see evidence here of a discursive recovery process whereby the parent explains or justifies her “disappointing” and potentially disappointing behaviour. In the first instance she recalls that “instead of being angry with (Joey) and his girlfriend” for getting pregnant, that she responded with acceptance. In the latter case,
the participant responds to her own accusation by retorting with (extreme case) certainty terms - "I know" - that her children love her and realize that she did her "best."

In describing Joey as her "hero", the bereaved mother signifies both her characterization of her son, as well as her investment (i.e., idolization) in that characterization. Rather than speculate about "idealization" (an unobservable mental construct), discourse analysis allows us to identify the evidence here as "idolization." While we cannot say anything about what exists in the participant's mind (i.e., 'ideal') regarding her view of her son, we can see what she is doing with her language (i.e., "real").

5.6.1 Child as "Friend"

Several of the participants drew upon the category - "friend" - to describe their adult child who had died:

Chris was not only a wonderful son but was also a friend, gave me support, and someone who made me feel good. [SWRIT-014 = PWRIT-004]

My daughter was also my friend. We were supportive of each other being we were the two women in the family. She confided in me and told me everything. She was a very honest person . . .

We were a lot alike in the fact that we both liked to have fun, travel, and see new places. We liked nice clothes. She loved clothes even as a small child. She liked to look nice. [SWRIT-009]

She and I often worked out together at the gym. When her boyfriend was out of town, she'd come and have dinner with Rachel and me. We shopped, and went to the movies. We were friends. I loved her so much. [SWRIT-011 = PWRIT-007]

Participants constructed the category of their child as "friend" by variously describing the qualities of a friend (i.e., "gave me support . . . made me feel good", "[reciprocally] supportive . . . a lot alike", "very honest", 'love'); as well as the activities
that adult “friends” could be expected to engage in together (i.e., “confided in me and
told me everything”, share interests, “worked out together at the gym . . . came and have
dinner . . . shopped, and went to the movies”).

In the following account, a bereaved mother reflects on her “friendship” with her
daughter as an adult, while acknowledging that this wasn’t always so:

We had a good relationship, too. We were friends besides being mother &
daughter. It wasn’t always like that, though. A few years before, she had sought
the services of a psychiatrist for her stepdaughter. Through this she became
totally alienated from her father and me. To me this man was a charlatan and
cultist who had no business practicing medicine with his strange and weird
practices and beliefs he was persuading my daughter to believe. This was the
first time I lost her. Eventually, through her children, she overcame this and
started to live normally again. I was grateful for this, as I didn’t want anything to
happen to either one of us as shut out of her life as I was . . . I repeat I’m glad we
became friends before she died. It has been a precious memory to me. She
followed pretty much in my footsteps in raising her children. It was like seeing
yourself in a mirror at times. So I guess she approved of my methods even
though, as a growing child, she didn’t always like them. [SWRIT-018]

She recounts a time earlier on where she “lost” her daughter for the “first time” through
alienation. Using her discourse to simultaneously carry out blame against the psychiatrist;
and excuse her daughter; she describes him as “a charlatan and cultist who had no
business practicing medicine with his strange and weird practices.” These categories in
themselves evoke images of disrepute and evil. The fact of their ultimate friendship is
characterized as a process of “becoming” prior to her daughter’s death. The latter part of
the discourse engages the “mirror” metaphor, in which the mother sees reflections of
herself in her daughter, particularly in relation to child-rearing. She constructs the
daughter’s use of similar parenting style as an affirmation (“she approved”) of her own
“methods.”

Similarly, another participant recalled a very turbulent period in her relationship
with her teenage (at the time) daughter:
After eight difficult years, I divorced my second husband. Alison was 16, and was having a hard time managing the turmoil of adolescence. Her father was strict, and she wanted to "try her wings". She asked me if she could come to Florida to live with Rachel and me. She really wanted her mother's guidance as she entered womanhood. I was not prepared for the challenge of a sixteen year old, and Alison knew how to stretch my limits. We had so much unresolved emotional baggage, that our relationship was stormy. Alison was opinionated, and her opinions were always correct. We argued often. She could provoke me to extraordinary fury. Of course, I had residual shame for leaving my children, and even once accused Alison of coming to Florida to "punish me". Those were tough years. We always loved each other but it wasn't always obvious.

While this appeared to represent variability in the relationship accounting of the bereaved parents in this study, the difference was only surface (i.e., content) deep. Upon close examination, the participant is seen to be using the same discursive device of extreme case formulation to accomplish the same work - that of constructing both the relationship and the person of her adult daughter as unique, special, irreplaceable. While we may typically be drawn towards thinking of these descriptors in a positive valence, they may also be represented through more “difficult” characteristics. Alison is described as being “opinionated”, and that her opinions were “always” right. She is embued with the ability to “provoke” her mother to “extraordinary fury.” Yet, all of this is part and parcel of building up the uniqueness of Alison and their relationship, described as “stormy.” The discourse orients to the reality that while these were “tough years”, with a daughter entering “womanhood”; and an “unprepared” mother feeling guilty “for leaving her children”; that mother and daughter “always loved each other.” The act of “missing” and “yearning” (Parkes, 1972) for the deceased child it appears, can be just as much related to “difficult” as to “positive” characteristics of the child or the relationship. Even in the description of stressful times in their relationship, the participant excuses her daughter’s behaviour through justification. This is discursively accomplished through the
giving of descriptive evidence which would account for her actions (e.g., “hard time managing the turmoil of adolescence”; “Her father was strict”; “she wanted to 'try her wings’”).

The same bereaved mother who earlier stated that she “saw only good” when she looked at her son, describes the variability in their relationship:

If you knew Steven you couldn't help but like him. He had a laugh that you could hear across the street and the thought of never hearing him laugh again is unbearable. We had a good relationship which isn't to say that at times we didn't fight like cats and dogs. But I could never really stay mad at him. His heart was full of love and he was always there for me. He gave me the courage and encouragement to learn how to drive and to lose weight. [SWRIT-013]

What the participant is doing here through her discourse is getting the reader to “know Steven”, and in doing so to “like” him. She uses extreme formulations to construct his sense of fun (“a laugh that you could hear across the street”), his caring personality (“his heart was full of love”) and his commitment (“he was always there for me”). While characterizing their relationship as “good”, the participant also acknowledges, using the well-known and somewhat endearing term - fight like cats and dogs - that they could square up against one another quite intensely. To recapitulate the theme, in the final analysis, the relationship is constructed in its entirety as both valuable and “undoable” with anyone else.

5.6.2 Child as “Best Friend”

Another form of categorization that was available to participants, which also reflected the degree of “stake”(Potter, 1996) for the parent, was to describe the relationship with their deceased child as one of “best friends.” In this case, the relationship was characterized as one of particular closeness, intimacy, and companionship. One mother who wrote to me in response to the reflecting questions stated:
Mavis Anne was my best friend... My daughter was my friend, financial advisor, confidante, and my number one supporter...
Mavis Anne seemed to believe I could do anything. She supported and followed all my endeavors. [SWRIT-008 = PWRIT-003]

The characterization of the relationship between mother and daughter - "best friend... confidante... number one supporter" - suggests tremendous exclusivity, uniqueness and support. This perception is further supported by the "evidence" (extematizations) that Mavis Anne thought her mother "could do anything" and was interested in "all" her mother's pursuits. What this extematizing discourse accomplishes, is not only a demonstration of the mother's investment in the adult child, but also the daughter's investment in her mother. The child is not described as "one of my best friends", but "my best friend". The extreme case formulations allow for the doing of extremes in demonstrating the participant's investment (i.e., appreciation; admiration; respect) in this particular reconstructive account of Mavis Anne.

The same sense of the unique and irreplaceable role which was played by the daughter when she was alive, is reflected in the following excerpt:

Jacy was in many ways, my best friend. We went places together, though less before she died because she stayed busy. I enjoyed her; she had a great sense of humor. She could make me laugh when no one else could. She was my confidante. I asked her opinion on many things like who I dated, what clothes looked good on me. I could confide in Jacy & knew she would never betray a confidence. I used to tell people that Jacy was like a little old woman; she was so mature for being only 19. [SWRIT-007]

The participant gives evidence in her discourse of there not being any other relationship like the one she had with her daughter. Jacy is described as being able to make her mother laugh "when no one else could" (extematization of exclusivity) and as a "confidante" who would "never" break faith in the relationship. These various details
provide grounds for the citation of the daughter as "best friend", and result in the overall construction of "specialness."

The following excerpt underlines the possibility, reflected in the language of bereaved parents, of the multiple losses involved in the death of an adult child:

Carol's death left a huge void in my life that can never be filled. The loneliness is indescribable. I lost my daughter as well as my best friend... Carol was my only child and her death has left a very large hole in my life. Carol was my best friend. We confided in each other. She came to me for advice and I also went to her for advice. She was a very bright young woman. I was so proud of her... The first two years after Carol was killed, on the 22nd of each month I would feel a deep sense of loss, loneliness, and sadness. I would feel this way even if I didn't realize it was the 22nd. When I would look at the calendar I would realize why I felt this way-I had made it through one more month without my daughter. This was the same way I felt at each holiday. Now the 22nd of each month is not as bad but some of the very special holidays are still hard. The anniversary of her death is still very hard. Christmas is hard but I try to look for all the things Carol enjoyed so that I can experience a warmth during the holiday season and not make it bad for others. [SWRIT-017 = PWRIT-009]

In the discourse of this bereaved mother, we here a number of relationship categories called forth in the loss inventory - daughter, best friend, only child, confidante, source of pride - all of which may have both particular as well as overlapping meanings. In using both metaphor ("void") and extreme case formulations ("huge", "never", "only", "best") the participant constructs "what Carol's death has been like." She "does" extremity through the use of extreme language, and orients to the dilemma of trying to describe that which seems beyond words (i.e., "The loneliness is indescribable").

5.7 Thinking of the Child: "Never to be Forgotten"

One particular activity that several bereaved parents described engaging in was that of thinking about their deceased child. "He's the first thing I think of when I wake up and the last thing I think of when I go to bed at night." [PWRIT-011] stated the mother of a 42 year-old man whose death was related to alcoholism. "A day never goes by that
I don’t think of her. Her presence is around me all the time. Even after twenty-one years, the thought of her being gone overwhelms me and I have to cry.” [SWRIT-009] This being written by a bereaved mother about her 25 year-old daughter, who was killed by a drunk driver 21 years earlier.

In all of the accounts where participants wrote about thinking, they once again drew upon extreme case formulations in their descriptions. In this case it appeared that parents were using this discursive resource for the dual purpose of describing “not forgetting” their children as well as to potentially convince others of the normalcy of this activity for bereaved parents.

The mother of a 27 year-old woman, who was the drunk driver of her own vehicle, first makes the assertion of how often she has thoughts about her daughter, followed by detailed examples of particular triggers for these thoughts:

I think of her all the time. Things that remind me of her: pretty girls, thin girls, blonde hair, fashionable ladies, pretty clothes, make-up, hair brushes, blow dryers, Mazdas, little blue cars, laughter, tears, orderly rooms, perfectionism, pack-rats, Malamutes, Benson & Hedges 100’s Menthol, Costco, post office, Golden Steer, Harold’s, East Hill off Kent, all places she’s lived, our backyard, the rocker squeaking, cigarette lighters, earrings, necklaces, head bands, bluejeans, nail polish, gold chains, the color blue, red, black & all others, Puget Sound Bank, Sea-1st Bank, babies, little kids, books, long-haired guys, foxes, chequebooks, purses, scotchtape, calendars, and everything else that I see. [SWRIT-006]

In anticipating that the receiver may not appreciate the frequency of these thoughts, beyond generally stating that they are “all the time”, she goes on to build her case by itemizing in great detail the objects, people, and scenarios that remind her of her deceased daughter. An additional observation of these details is that while some of them are fairly specific (e.g., “Malamutes, Harold’s, our backyard”), the majority would be virtually unavoidable (e.g., “pretty clothes, bluejeans, little kids, books, scotchtape,
chequebooks). By detailing such commonly occurring objects as thought-provoking triggers, this mother builds the discursive argument that it would be considered normal, therefore, to have constant thoughts about her daughter. As Sacks (1984) puts it, she is in the business of doing "being ordinary." That is "ordinary" in the context of being a bereaved parent. The detailed account citing the prevalence of these associations makes it difficult to discount her experience as anything but expected. Likewise, the participant discursively manages the possibility of being seen as forgetting her daughter, through this same use of detail, by describing the frequency with which she thinks about her.

In the following excerpt, a bereaved father relies on the use of a maximum case formulation - "all the time" - to counter other possible constructions of how frequently he thinks about his deceased son:

I still think about Chris all the time. I have a hard time dealing with the reality that I won't ever see him again. [SWRIT-014 = PWRIT-014]

The addition of "still" provides a particular emphasis on the continuity of thoughts about the deceased child and reveals the bereaved father's orientation to this as an issue of concern. In this particular case, the death had occurred two years prior to the participant's involvement in the study. The constancy of the father's thoughts are juxtaposed against a "reality" in which he "won't ever see him (Chris) again", the reality of a bereaved parent. Again, using a maximum case formulation ("won't ever"), the finality of his loss is emphasized.

Considering that the context of this excerpt is a response to the reflecting question: "Tell me about being a bereaved parent. What has it been like for you?", the description portrays a cruel paradoxical reality where the parent struggles with "never" being able to "see" his son again, yet 'always' thinking about him. An additional layer of linguistic juxtaposition is represented through the use of these two different
sensorial/perceptual activities - seeing and thinking - that while one is unattainable the other seems inescapable. This participant additionally comments on his thought orientation towards the future, thereby delineating part of his grief as the loss of “what could have happened.”, the loss of potential for his son’s future: “Roger recalls that Chris talked about moving back to Oak Park and raising a family, and said, “I cry every time I think about what could have happened.” [PWRIT-014 = SWRIT-014]

One participant in her discourse directly oriented towards the ‘hearability’ of constant thoughts of the deceased child as preoccupation:

Obsessive thinking was a hallmark of my pregnancy. My child was always in my thoughts. At times, when she was not uppermost in my mind, she’d give me a prenatal nudge that would remind me of my focus. She again became an obsession after her death. I had a deep visceral aching, a physical sense of her absence. I yearned to see her smile, touch her skin, hear her voice. My mind was filled with images of her from "newborn" to "newdead". I began to prepare myself for a life without her, but the preparation was fraught with periods of confusion, uncertainty, and real fear. [PWRIT-007 = SWRIT-011]

Here, the bereaved mother uses the analogy of pregnancy to describe the frequency of her thoughts about her now-deceased child. By situating the “obsessive thinking” within a more commonly experienced process (i.e., “pregnancy”) than bereaved parenthood, the analogous comparison serves to normalize what might otherwise be considered extreme behaviour (in a bereavement context).

The following excerpt from a bereaved mother explicitly makes the connection between “letting go” and not “thinking about” the child who has died:

Being a bereaved parent has been difficult. The hardest part for me was letting go. I didn't want to stop thinking about her. I wanted to talk about her to others but no one wanted to listen. It was an embarrassment to them. Eventually I found the support group, Compassionate Friends, which I found helpful but this caused a lot of pain to resurface. As I write this it is almost 20 years to the day since she died. So, it is hard to write about it. Christmas season is never the happiest of seasons for her sons or me anymore. [SWRIT-018]
While the discourse of this parent does not focus on the frequency of the thoughts, instead it makes a direct assertion regarding the intentionality of thinking about the deceased child: "I didn't want to stop thinking about her." The bereaved mother here describes the attachment to her daughter in terms of holding on by thinking about her.

In the construction of being a bereaved parent, this mother makes a distinction between those who belong to a community of understanding ("Eventually I found the support group, Compassionate Friends, which I found helpful but this caused a lot of pain to resurface") and those who stand outside of this community ("I wanted to talk about her to others but no one wanted to listen. It was an embarrassment to them"). This discourse also seems to establish an equation between not thinking about the child who has died and "letting go", something which this participant did not want to do ("The hardest part for me was letting go. I didn't want to stop thinking about her.")

The following five excerpts from various written submissions describe the ongoing prevalence of thoughts about the deceased child:

The last thing you think of when you go to sleep and the first thing in the morning I think of Jeff. [PWRIT-008 = SWRIT-016]

Three months after his death, Peter is still in his mother's thoughts. "He's the first thing I think of when I wake up and the last thing I think of when I go to bed at night." [PWRIT-011]

Natalie, if we had a rose for every time we thought about you we could walk in our rose garden forever. [PWRIT-013]

There isn't a moment that goes by that I don't think of him and to say that I miss him terribly doesn't even come close. [SWRIT-013]

A day never goes by that I don't think of her. Her presence is around me all the time. Even after twenty-one years, the thought of her being gone overwhelms me and I have to cry. [SWRIT-009]
Through extreme case formulations (e.g., “last thing”; “first thing”) these accounts allow the speakers to demonstrate their investment in their children; to provide evidence for their experience of “constancy.” They are discursive examples of the child’s continuing presence in the daily life of the surviving parent. The parents construct the act of thinking as a process of doing the connection with the deceased child.

The opening comment in the second excerpt is that of a newspaper reporter who is interviewing the bereaved mother. The reporter’s discourse orients to the existence of a temporal expectation surrounding grief, either her own or the general readership’s. The linguistic evidence pointing to this observation is her use of a specific time period (“Three months”) along with the word “still” to describe the continuing thoughts that the mother is having about her deceased son. The implication is that three months is somehow a surprisingly long time for such thoughts to continue in the mind of the bereaved mother. This is a good example of how through the detailed examination of language, as provided by discourse analysis, one sees the performative nature of words “as social action” (Potter & Wetherell, 1986). In the reporter’s account, one hears the “doing of expectations” with regards to an “acceptable” timeframe for bereavement, and perhaps some of the social basis for how words like “preoccupation” came to form the lexicon that has typically been used to describe bereaved parents.

The last two excerpts both drew upon the extrematizing phrase - “not a day/moment goes by” - to describe the constancy of their thoughts about their deceased children. Being well known, this particular phrase is something that would be widely available to readers/listeners, and therefore a useful interactional resource for helping to describe the nature of the continuing bond. A specific way, then in which the possibility of a continuing bond is described and oriented to in the language of bereaved parents, is to talk about how often one “thinks” about their child who has died.
While “missing” the adult child was frequently mentioned in the context of “thinking” about them, the following excerpt represents some variability in this pattern, in that it focuses on what the child “is missing” [emphasis added]:

There were times that I didn’t know where I was on a familiar road or forget what I needed to accomplish when studying, doing chores, etc. At times I could not function and just sit around and cried. I am always thinking about how much Yvonne is missing. I will always wonder how Yvonne would have been as an adult: Would she have been a nurse? How many children would she have had. Would she have eventually gone on to school? ... Yvonne is still and will always be my daughter as will her other siblings. I worry about Yvonne’s siblings, but I think about her most of all. [SWRT-010]

The bereaved father, in this case, uses an extreme case formulation (“always”) to emphasize how often he ‘thinks’ about all (“how much”) that his daughter is “missing” in life. This formulation is reinforced by giving examples of hypothetical questions he asks himself related to his daughter’s potential career and family. By use of comparison to his living children, the participant underlines his investment (“but I think about her most of all”) in Yvonne, his deceased daughter.

5.8 Presence

Bereaved parents who participated in this study, either by being interviewed or by responding to reflecting questions, were specifically asked about the possibility of their experiencing the “presence” of their child who died: “Some parents say that they still feel their child’s presence, for instance, that they see, hear, or smell the child. Are there any ways in which you experience the presence of your child now?” While the responses to this question were varied, some clear patterns of variability were observed.

5.8.1 “Feeling Close”

One category of responses described the experience of “feeling close” to the deceased child, without necessarily experiencing their “presence”:
I can honestly say I don’t feel her presence. But, when I look through her belongings or pictures I feel close to her, share the good times or things that made her happy. [SWRIT-003]

The discourse here, makes a clear distinction between experiencing the child’s presence, and feeling close to the child. By starting her response with - “I can honestly say” - the participant begins with a strong and definitive argument for what has not been experience, which is then countered (“But, . . .”) with the alternative description of “feeling close”. The alternative is made even more convincing by the use of a specific example (i.e., “when I look through her belongings or pictures I feel close to her,”). As well, it establishes a connection between specific activities undertaken by the parent and “feeling close” to the deceased child. In this particular example, the discourse imparts a sense of control or agency, in that the bereaved parent takes an active role (i.e., “I look . . . I feel”) in establishing “feeling close” to her deceased daughter. So, the participant, through her description, is essentially “doing” “feeling close” to her daughter.

In another bereaved mother’s account, the question of feeling the child’s “presence” is again countered by an alternate explanation:

My daughter is in my heart . . . I don’t ‘feel’ Mavis Anne’s presence as much - I just take her with me wherever I go . . . My feelings right now are of comfort. When I write about Mavis Anne I feel very close to her . . . I receive solace when writing about my relationship with my daughter. I realize what a wonderful gift it was and I appreciate the thirty great years I had with her. [SWRIT-008 = PWRIT-003]

Once again, the discourse begins with a denial of one type of experience (i.e., “I don’t “feel” Mavis Anne’s presence as much”), followed by the endorsement of a different description of the experience (i.e., “I just take her with me wherever I go”), and the specific example of an activity which helps the parent feel close to her deceased daughter ( “When I write about Mavis Anne I feel very close to her”). This is further discursive
evidence of the action and control orientation of the bereaved parent's language; the participant describes being able to engage in a self-selected activity ("I just take her . . . I write . . . I feel") that results in her feeling "very" close to her daughter. Similarly, another bereaved mother wrote that the particular action of writing about her deceased daughter gave her a renewed sense of closeness:

It was great writing about my relationship with Carol. It gave me a new sense of closeness to her as well as renewed the sense of warmth I have when I think about her. [SWRIT-017 = PWRIT-009]

As argued previously in this analysis, the use of descriptive detail serves to reinforce an account as believable. The following written discourse, by the bereaved mother of a 24 year-old woman, recounts both the content and process of keeping a grief diary:

Sleepless, in the middle of the first night, I started my bereavement journal. I wrote to Alison. I kept that journal, and wrote of our life together, from conception to death and beyond. I occasionally add to it now, more than three years after her death . . . There are so many effects of Alison's life and death. It is clear to me that I can never lose the essence of someone whom I have loved. I feel so very connected to my daughter. In an odd way, the relationship I have with her now is less limited than when she was alive. I am amazed at the vastness of our love. Alison taught me much in her life on earth. She is still teaching me . . . It is almost 3 yrs since she died, and although I miss her very much, I also feel very close to her. Grief presents the ultimate paradox! [PWRIT-007 = SWRIT-011]

In this account the participant underlines the certainty of a continued connection ("I can never lose the essence of someone whom I have loved.") with her daughter Alison by incorporating a visual metaphor (i.e., "It is clear to me"). A continuing bond is also indirectly referred to when the bereaved mother describes writing about their "life together, from conception to death and beyond" [emphasis added]. As well, her use of the present tense (i.e., "the relationship I have with her now"); "She is still teaching me")
situates a relationship with the deceased daughter in the here and now, as opposed to the
past, and therefore, describes a relationship which is ongoing.

In using certainty terms, the participant prepares against interpretations which
may undermine this sense of an ongoing bond. She achieves this by removing any doubt
from her own mind ("It is clear to me"), thus creating the possibility for the vicarious
removal of similar doubt, should it exist, in the readers' mind. The words in this case are
doing the work of convincing. The discourse then takes a sudden turn towards lack of
specificity in suggesting that what can never be lost is the "essence" of the deceased
child. The discursive function performed by this more vague description is one of
removing the ability to counter the argument, since "essence" belongs to a category of
terms for which a generally accepted definition is elusive. This excerpt, like the previous
one, also includes a statement about feeling "very close" to the deceased adult child
("although I miss her very much, I also feel very close to her.")

While not necessarily an extreme case formulation, the participants in these cases
have taken the further step to describe and define the degree of closeness by the
particular use of the modulating term "very." Indeed, this latter account further
emphasized the nature of the closeness: "I feel so very connected to my daughter."

The bereaved mother in this instance, also orients her discourse to the fact that
she may be seen to be reflecting on her experience in a way that is out of the ordinary:

In an odd way, the relationship I have with her now is less limited than when she
was alive. I am amazed at the vastness of our love. [PWRIT-007 = SWRIT-011]

Being heard as potentially "abnormal" is also something that is represented in the
following excerpt from a bereaved mother of a 37 year-old male police officer:

I have at times felt Jeff was close - not that I have ever saw, heard or smelled
him. [SWRIT-016 = PWRIT-008]
Responding to my question about “presence”, the participant re-frames her experience as one of “feeling close”, however, she uses a qualifier (“at times”) to suggest that it had been relatively infrequent. The bereaved mother’s rejection of “presence” as a category of experience is heightened by her denial of specific sensorial occurrences which might otherwise be taken as evidence of “presence.” The action orientation of “denying” is signaled by the (extematizing) phrase - “not that I have ever” - which helps the participant respond directly to my question about “presence.” This same participant later describes a visit to the site of her adult son’s death:

The day after Jeff’s funeral we went to the scene where Jeff was killed. The paper wrappers were still lying in the ditch that had contained needles etc . . . where the paramedics had worked on him. His blood was still on the road. I found flares there. I took a blue carnation and placed it on a flare. I actually felt closer to Jeff at that spot than at the funeral home or the church. The blue carnation was so fitting as blue was Jeff’s favorite color.

[PWRIT-008 = SWRIT-016]

In this segment, the bereaved mother convincingly reconstructs the scene of Jeff’s death by the use of detail (“The paper wrappers were still lying in the ditch that had contained needles . . . His blood was still on the road”). The account continues with the description of her placing a “blue carnation” on a flare that she has found at the site, and commenting on the significance of the flower’s colour (i.e., “The blue carnation was so fitting as blue was Jeff’s favorite color.”). By using the word “actually”, the effect is one of surprise, where the feeling of closeness to Jeff, at the site of the accident, is constructed as perhaps an unexpected occurrence. By so doing, the discourse anticipates the expectation, by self or others, that what is seen to be “normal” is to feel close to the deceased at the “funeral home” or “church” and not at the scene of death.

This geographically-based sense of closeness, however, does not appear to be a cultural “abnormality”; we witness it on an ongoing basis in daily life (unfortunately).
One such example was the visit of 650 family members to the water off Peggy’s Cove, Nova Scotia; the site where 229 people died in the fatal crash of Swissair Flight 111 on September 2, 1998. More recently, family members and loved ones flew from Egypt to the United States, and held a memorial service in an area which was the closest piece of land to where Egypt Air Flight 990 crashed, killing all 217 people aboard. Parents bereaved of children in accidental circumstances often express their need and desire to visit the site where their child died, demonstrating a desire to be “close to” their child, perhaps to “feel” them in some way?

Another activity that was described, which brought feelings of closeness to the deceased child for the parent, was one of wearing their clothes:

I am able to wear some of Carol’s clothes and I feel very close to her when I do. I don’t know if that is feeling her presence or just the warmth of knowing she had those clothes on. [SWRT-017 = PWRIT-009]

Here again, the discourse prepares against presence being heard as perhaps abnormal (“I don’t know if that is feeling her presence”), by suggesting an alternative explanation of the phenomenon (“or just the warmth of knowing she had those clothes on.”) which may be more readily accepted. A theme of connection which is repeated in this parent’s description is the ability to feel closeness through seeing a photograph of the adult child:

I feel the same warmth when I wear one of my lockets with her picture in it. I also feel that same feeling any time I look at her picture or see something she had always enjoyed. [SWRT-017 = PWRIT-009]

The participant uses an extreme case formulation (“any time”) to describe how, whenever she sees here daughter’s photos or “something” her daughter “always” enjoyed, she feels a certain “warmth” and “closeness.”
5.8.2 Sensory Experiencing: Seeing, Feeling, Hearing

Another aspect of experiencing one’s deceased adult child was described by using sensorial language terms (i.e., seeing, hearing). In one account a bereaved mother situates this experience in the present, writing:

I can still feel your big hugs, see your big smile, hear your hearty laugh.
[SWRIT-006 = PWRIT-012]

In writing about these various sensory sensations involving her daughter, the participant also incorporates adjectives which serve a descriptive purpose in further reconstructing the daughter as expressive of her affections (“big hugs . . . big smile . . . hearty laugh”). While not extreme case formulations, they are quantitatively positive, serving to “shore up” (Riches & Dawson, 1997) the case for a daughter who was unique in her characteristics of interpersonal warmth.

A bereaved father, in writing about his deceased daughter, takes this practice further by making a statement in which there is sensorial reciprocity (i.e., the child also experiencing him):

Yvonne is still and will always be my daughter as will her other siblings . . . I see Yvonne looking at me through the few pictures I have of her. She is smiling like she didn't have a care in the world. I have seen her in the clouds.
[SWRIT-010]

The mother of a 21 year-old woman, whose husband was also killed along side her, wrote more generally about the usefulness of having visual images close by:

I also have pictures of Carol and of Carol and Bryan and Bryan in my home, on my desk at work, and in my locket. I have found that this helps.
[PWRIT-009 = SWRIT-017]

What is striking about this description is the presence of pictures in multiple settings of this person’s life (“in my home, on my desk at work, and in my locket”). The excerpt
reveals that there is not a place that the bereaved parent could go where they would not have in their presence a picture of their deceased daughter and son-in-law.

(The encompassing presence of such items is reminiscent of Volkan’s [1972, 1973] writings on “linking objects”, a subject which is discussed in a subsequent section of this analysis).

In the following account, a mother who is bereaved of her 19 year-old son, recounts the auditory experience of his presence:

At times I can still hear him calling me, his voice is so clear it’s as if he is standing right beside me . . . ” [SWRIT-013]

Again, the discourse places the experience in the present (“I can still . . . is so . . . he is standing”), but at the same time orients to and compensates for the possibility of being read as unbelievable (“it’s as if he is standing right beside me”). The particular use of “it’s as if” serves the function of situating the speaker in the realm of those who acknowledge that the deceased do not actually physically ‘re-present’ themselves, rather that is “almost like” they are there. However, the discourse simultaneously manages to maintain a heightened intensity regarding this sensory experience (“his voice is so clear it’s as if he is standing right beside me”), by describing in detail the quality of the sensorium (“his voice is so clear”), thus helping to establish a convincing account about presence.

A bereaved mother who I interviewed spoke about herself and others experiencing the presence of her son, who had died as a result of an industrial accident:

*Phil:* Have you found (. ) you talked about your living son, you know, writing to Arlo (. ) Um. Have you found any ways to stay connected or, uh *(Karen Well it’s uh)* (. )
Karen: It’s really quite (2.0) Yeah (.) I have [coughs, clearing throat twice] I have written notes to Arlo, or uh (. . .) at Christmas or on his birthday I still get a card and uh . . . Actually uh (3.0) I know you’ve heard of this before but uh actually (.) myself and uh (.) my husband and my husband’s secretary and my (2.0) my husband’s secretary’s daughter have uh and our family doctor have uh (2.0) felt Arlo’s presence [sharp in-breath] uh (1.0) one night shortly after (2.0) [takes drink of water] he was killed [crying, deep sigh] Ah (2.0) Arlo was very active and he was always hungry

Phil:  Hm

Karen: So [mild laughter]

Phil:  [mild laughter]

Karen: So usually when he came in [sniffles] you could here the back door open and he’d go downstairs (2.0) and uh take his stuff off and then he’d come back up and you could hear him in the kitchen making lunch (. . .) So anyway this one night it was about a week a week and a half after he was gone [crying, deep sigh] (3.0) I could hear these footsteps up and down the stairs (1.0) and it woke me up and (2.0) the first thing was “Who’s there?” (1.0) [sharp in-breath] and then it was it was (.) it was Arlo’s footsteps and I know I couldn’t be hearing Arlo’s footsteps but it was Arlo’s footsteps (Phil Yeah) [holds breath, deep sigh] (2.0) and then a couple of times later (1.0) in the daytime (Phil Mhm) I heard the same thing see [mild laughter] (2.0) Arlo was hyperactive and very [sniffles] uh (1.0) uh (2.0) [mild laughter] how would you say (. . .) very domineering very strong willed (1.0) and so when he walked downstairs I mean the whole world knew about it because it was sort of this thump thump thump thump thump [blows nose] and uh (. . .) so it wasn’t that I don’t know it wasn’t that you were

Phil:  It wasn’t subtle

Karen: No it wasn’t subtle (. . .) and even [sniffles] the (. . .) hearing the footsteps wasn’t subtle it was the way Arlo walked

Phil:  Mhm (1.0) and how did you feel when (.) what kind of a feeling did you have when you heard his footsteps?
Karen: Uh (2.0) uh I felt comforted (Phil mhm) to some extent (.) and uh (1.0) I know occasionally [sharp in-breath] when I’ve uh (2.0) [sharp in-breath] when I’ve been sort of upset or start going through something or whatever uh (.) [sniffles] uh (.) I’ve had to (.) I collect angels [takes tissue from box] plus little mice ‘cause that was Arlo’s nickname when he was a young person (.) “our little guy” and uh so I’ve collected them for years and (.) it’s (.) it’s odd but a few times when I’ve been really upset (Phil Mhm) you’ll hear something fall (.) like one of the angels will have fell over or one of the mice will have fell over and I don’t (1.0) I know that sounds weird but that’s (.) what’s (.) happened (Phil Mhm) and uh (2.0) uh [sharp in-breath] actually uh (.) sometimes when it’s been sort of difficult uh (.) I have uh (.) It’s like he’s talking to me (.) with uh (.) conversations we had the last year of his life . . . [INTVW-003]

The participant prefaces her talk about her son’s presence by “normalizing” what she is about to say - “Actually uh (3.0) I know you’ve heard of this before but . . .”, thus orienting to the possibility of a skeptical hearing and minimizing this possibility with a certainty statement. In what appears to be a justification of her claim, the bereaved mother then enlists a type of evidence giving in naming the various people (listed by role/category), including herself, who have felt Arlo’s presence. She emphasizes (“and”) that the “family doctor” is included among these people, which serves as an example of what Potter (1996) calls “category entitlement.” This occurs when membership in certain categories (e.g., medical doctors) is used to infer claims of privileged knowledge (e.g., science).

The participant begins to relate an incident of experiencing her son’s presence (“one night shortly after (2.0) [takes drink of water] he was killed”) when she abruptly changes direction and goes into a description of the context (“Arlo was very active and he was always hungry”) for which I am ultimately to hear about the presence behaviour (i.e., loud walking). In a sense, this type of discursive practice is similar to what is described in the next section as “I was just doing X . . . when Y”, where the description
of the "usual" context for the son's behaviour establishes a sort of mundane quality before the (exceptional) phenomenon is introduced. The descriptive fact of her sleeping also contributes to the characterization of the pre-phenomenon time as mundane, as ordinary.

In her discourse the bereaved mother orients once again to the possibility of a skeptical audience by acknowledging her own skepticism on hearing her deceased son's footsteps ("and I know I couldn't be hearing Arlo's footsteps . . ."), however quickly rebutting with a formulation of certainty (". . . but it was Arlo's footsteps"). She reinforces the facticity of her experience by asserting that during daytime hours (implied as perhaps more accurate) she also heard her son's footsteps, and then underscores the uniqueness of his steps by calling on evidence of unmistakability. When asked about how she felt on hearing these footsteps, the participant describes an experience of solace ("comforted") and then uses this to bridge her discussion over to talk about possible linking objects and their meaning to her. In what appears to be a progression of escalating presence, the bereaved mother begins to describe a sense of her son's continuing communication with her, especially at times when she seems most distressed or in need of that connection.

5.8.3 Unexpected Presence

Another category of talking and writing about "feeling" or "sensing" the deceased adult child was constituted by "unexpected" presence experiences. In these cases, participants' discourse centred on describing situations which seemed to defy logical explanation, and which the parent connected to their child in some way.

In the following excerpts a bereaved mother describes in detail two instances of experiencing the presence of her deceased adult son in her home. The first occurs on the
anniversary of his birthday, five years after the death. The episode takes place while the participant is typing a letter on her computer:

At times I can feel Steven's presence, sometimes it's so strong that I turn around and am disappointed when I don't see him standing there. December 20 was his 24th birthday and I was upset and couldn't sleep. I was sitting at the computer trying to write a letter when all of a sudden I smelled roses. It was just for a second but the smell was so strong I actually got up to look and see where the smell was coming from. I then realized that it was Steven and I said a quiet thank you. I realized that when he was alive he was always there for me and even though he had died he was still there for me. [SWRIT-013]

In this account the speaker is using a particular two-part discursive device which has been described as "I was just doing X . . . when Y" (Wooffitt, 1992; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998), where the "X" component is being used to describe the speaker's state of activity or state of mind just prior to encountering a phenomenon, usually in the past progressive tense, and the "Y" component reports the speaker's first awareness of that phenomenon. In the preceding discursive account, the bereaved mother claims that she "was sitting at the computer trying to write a letter" ("I was just doing X . . .") "when all of a sudden I smelled roses" (" . . . when Y"), which she takes as a sign of her deceased son's presence in the room.

Wooffitt (1992) first identified this pattern of language use when investigating accounts of paranormal phenomena. The typical pattern is that prior to reporting the experience of the phenomenon, the speaker first describes the mundane circumstances in which they were engaged. This regular reporting of ordinary circumstances prior to a traumatic event taking place has been identified in a wide range of literatures from women's experiences of breast cancer (Fallowfield & Clark, 1991), to peoples' recollections of hearing the news of Abraham Lincoln's death (Colegrove, 1982).

Here, the bereaved mother's recalling of mundane circumstances is significant in that it was not a result of investigator solicitation, but was spontaneously produced by
the participant in the construction of her account. Wooffitt (1992) has noted the frequent occurrence of these spontaneous recollections of mundane circumstances in accounts of paranormal experiences, where interviewees had not in fact been asked to recall what they had been doing exactly at the moment of the experience.

Wooffitt (1992) refers to the "X" part of this "I was just doing X . . . when Y" format as a state formulation, and argues for its constructed nature. Here, the speaker can furnish information which attends to more than one issue, they can refer, for example, either to an activity or a place. In the excerpt above, the participant describes that she "was sitting at the computer", thereby reporting both her activity (sitting) and her location (at the computer). In the second excerpt, this same participant describes another incident in which she experiences her son's presence:

One night I was lying on the couch watching television and was drifting off when suddenly I felt someone touch my cheek, it was the softest most gentlest touch that I had ever felt. I knew that it was Steven just letting me know that he is still with me. [SWRIT-013]

Here again, the "I was just doing X . . . when Y" device is enlisted. This time the reported activity contains more of a sequential component (lying down, watching TV, falling asleep), and takes place in a location (i.e., couch) which is often associated with the act of relaxing.

It is argued that these state formulations, which often seem conspicuously mundane, are indeed specifically designed to have this mundane character, and that function is revealed by examining such design features. In this case the state formulations serve the discursive function of creating "ordinariness." This can be seen by examining the first excerpt once again:

At times I can feel Steven's presence, sometimes it's so strong that I turn around and am disappointed when I don't see him standing there. December 20 was his 24th birthday and I was upset and couldn't sleep. I was sitting at the computer
trying to write a letter when all of a sudden I smelled roses. It was just for a second but the smell was so strong I actually got up to look and see where the smell was coming from. I then realized that it was Steven and I said a quiet thank you. I realized that when he was alive he was always there for me and even though he had died he was still there for me. [SWRIT-013]

The sequence begins with Steven’s mother recounting some very intense emotions regarding her deceased son’s presence (“sometimes it’s so strong [his presence] that I turn around and am disappointed when I don't see him standing there . . . I was upset and couldn't sleep”). These experiences are by no means routine and uneventful. However, when she arrives at that part of the account in which she makes first specific reference to the actual phenomenon she is reporting, the bereaved mother constructs a very mundane state formulation “I was sitting at the computer trying to write a letter”. Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998) refer to this kind of summary of one’s prior talk as an upshot. In using the state formulation in this way, speakers “gloss over or discard those features of their prior talk which are non-ordinary, emotive or traumatic. This deletion of specific features of their prior talk suggests they are actively constructing their state formulations” (p. 193). The account then becomes one where the ordinary characteristics of the situation at the time are emphasized. The analytic question then follows: what kind of function is being served when state formulations (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998) are constructed in this way?

In their examination of the reporting of paranormal experiences, Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998) propose that these accounts are always open to being reconstructed as “ordinary” by sceptic receivers. In fact, they note that this is often the strategy that sceptical “experts” use when attempting to undermine such accounts in television documentaries on the paranormal. It is not uncommon for those who make claims regarding anomalous experiences to be labeled with unfavourable attributes simply by
reporting their experience. This results from the attribution by others of various personal (i.e., negative) characteristics which are used to "explain" why a particular person claims to have had an extraordinary experience (Wooffitt, 1992).

Based on awareness of this societal bias, there may have actually been a tendency for participants in the present study to under-report any such experiences. By providing information about themselves in their accounts, speakers are also vulnerable to having hearers formulate competing explanations regarding their claims, based on an assessment of their words and/or writings. For example, the bereaved mother above explicitly describes the kind of phenomenon she then claims to have experienced ("At times I can feel Steven's presence, sometimes it's so strong that I turn around and am disappointed when I don't see him standing there"). Her claim could be dismissed on the grounds that her experience was simply a self-fulfilling prophecy, a form of wish fulfillment as opposed to an extraordinary event. The bereaved mother's account might be "explained" on the basis on her emotional distress ("I was upset and I couldn't sleep"). Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998), however, argue that this:

production of distinctly mundane state formulations does important inferential work: such routine formulations ensure that the immediate sequential context for the first reference to the phenomenon is not the kind of information which could support a sceptical reappraisal of the claimed experience (p. 194).

Bereaved parents in this instance are using their language in such a way as to fend off the possibility of an "unsympathetic or sceptical hearing" (p. 196). They have available to them a discursive device which allows for the construction of "self" as someone who does not "normally" (i.e., usually; under "normal" circumstances) encounter such extraordinary happenings. The building up of "mundaneness" helps establish this formulation, thereby allowing for the unexpected presence experience to be heard as both believable and exceptional.
Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998) stress that regardless of the interviewer's potential receptivity, the speaker may be constructing their account "to address a wider, culturally based scepticism" (p. 196). This may be particularly so in the case of bereaved parents, who often express their frustrations and difficulties in being understood by anyone who is not themselves a bereaved parent. (see later part of this chapter)

When the data corpus was examined, however, the "X then Y" format was not the only discursive device that participants used in describing the experience of unexpected presence. The following example illustrates this observation:

I guess it depends on what you believe. I like to think she is with me because sometimes, for no reason, this one music box I own will play a few notes. It isn't because it's partially wound, because it's electronic. After Jacy died I kept her door to her room closed for about 2 1/2 yrs because I could still smell her in there. I went around her room & collected hair & it's still there in her room. But I really can't say I feel her presence, but maybe its because I don't pay attention to goings on around me. [SWRIT-007 = PWRIT-002]

Here, the participant's claim is albeit more hesitant than the previous example in regards to presence. The bereaved mother, in this case, orients to the existence of different "beliefs" and presents a much less invested account of her daughter being "with her." She uses a "softened" assertion with "I like to think", yet goes on to give a particular example (i.e., evidence) of the unexplained playing of a music box, which might point to Jacy's "being there." While she avoids committing herself to beliefs which might be undermined by others, the participant leaves the door open to reading particular conclusions, that perhaps she does not "pay attention" to what is "going on around her." The further provision of the lack of a logical explanation for the music box playing (i.e., "It isn't because it's partially wound, because it's electronic"), provides for the possibility of some other ("non-logical") construction.
The participant in the following excerpt alternately used the practice of “reporting” events, without any addition of her own evaluation of these events, as reported in her diary:

9 May 1995, we received a postcard from Doug & Robin dated 28 Mar 1994, from the Bahamas. Kitty & Dave also received theirs about this time -- Nancy & Dunc had cards in 1994 ... Jane ____ said we should enjoy Doug’s continuing sense of the unexpected ... Sept 1997 - When Doug’s father was dying, he told a visitor the man in the corner was his son, Doug. He insisted, when told there was no one there, that it was Doug. [PWRIT-010 = SWRIT-019]

In the opening line, the bereaved mother writes about getting a postcard from her now-deceased son and daughter-in-law, which took over a year to reach its destination. While the use of details helps the discourse achieve its aim of pointing to the mysterious nature of the circumstances, the matter-of-fact way of reporting these details also aids in constructing the writer as an objective “observer” of events. This in turn may affect the account as being heard as more “believable”, and the writer as credible. The participant maintains this “distance” by then recalling someone else’s comments about the delayed postcards; that they represented an opportunity to “enjoy” the deceased son’s “sense of the unexpected”, not that they necessarily indicated Doug’s presence. The bereaved mother then recounts an incident in which her husband, on his deathbed, reported the presence of their deceased son. Again, the practice is one of simply providing description, without committing oneself to the content of the account. This type of discursive presentation makes the account difficult to refute, since there is no interpretation to challenge, rather a description of events.

5.8.4 Ambivalence About “Presence”

Other participants oriented to their ambivalence in knowing whether or not they experienced the presence of their deceased child, and in doing so created less of an investment in either belief:
I don't know where she is now. Sometimes I think that she is close but I have nothing to base this feeling on. I don't believe in guardian angels but there have been occurrences when I felt someone or something was watching out for me. But there is no tangible thing that I can see, hear or smell. [SWRIT-018]

The "doing of ambivalence" took the form of "'A' but 'C'"; where 'A' represented the argument for one construction of reality (e.g., "Sometimes I think that she is close"), and "but" signaled the approach of an undermining challenge 'C' (e.g., "I have nothing to base this feeling on"). The bereaved parent thus reports on a thought, feeling, or perception, and then questions the legitimacy of that experience.

Another participant communicated similar ambivalence:

I feel Joey around me, but to be truthful I don't know if it's just wishful thinking. Till this day sometimes when the door opens I expect Joey to walk in. [SWRIT-015]

There were two instances in which participants, responding to the question about presence, stated explicitly that this had (mostly) not been a part of their loss experience; in both cases the respondents were bereaved fathers:

Other than one brief dream, I can't say that I have ever felt his presence and believe me when I say, I wish I did. I hope someday God will allow this to happen, but until that day comes I will continue to talk and pray to him. Sometimes good things happen after talking to Chris, but who knows. (Even in my one dream, Chris was helping someone.) [SWRIT-014 = PWRT-014]

The quality of her life by the time she died was so poor that I could not wish her back. Since I do not believe in a "hereafter", I don't think she is anywhere now. I don't feel her presence in any way, but I do dream about her occasionally. The dreams are always in the context of some kind of family event and are pleasant, never disturbing. As I write this I feel again the regret that Heather is gone and that her life was cut short. [SWRIT-012]

While these participants stated that they had not felt their child's presence, they both commented on having dreamt about their child who died. The first father orient, in addition, to his strong yearning ("I wish") for such thing to occur, and situates this in a
context of wanting the wish to be heard and accepted by the reader ("and believe me when I say"); a formulation which also underlines the intensity of this yearning. He constructs a spiritual discourse in which "God" is described as having agency in perhaps "allow(ing) this to happen". As well, the participant’s account provides further linguistic evidence of the orientation of bereaved parents to the notion of a continuing bond ("I will continue to talk and pray to him. Sometimes good things happen after talking to Chris"). The second bereaved father uses extreme case formulations ("always"; "never") to emphasize the favourable nature of his dreams of his daughter.

5.9 Memories As Continuity

Among the accounts of the participants was talk of remembering and having memories of the child who died. It was through this talk of remembering that some bereaved parents expressed another possible means of continuing the relationship with their child.

Memories will live on, joy and happiness she brought me will remain in my heart forever. [SWRIT-003]

In this excerpt a bereaved mother uses certainty terms ("will") to assert the permanence ("forever") of her memories for her daughter. The theme of continuity, in opposition to the "finality" of death, is expressed through her particular description of memories "living on.” This description also implicitly points to the paradox of grief, that while her daughter is dead, that memories of her will “live on” eternally in the bereaved ("forever"). The latter is another example of the use of an extreme case formulation in constructing, in this instance, the ongoing nature of memories. While the discursive device is the same as that used in characterizing the child in earlier examples, it is being used here to achieve a different purpose, to describe memories. It is also interesting in
this discourse, that memories of the deceased child are embodied in the parent (“in my heart”), rather than being described as a cognitive construct/process.

Similarly, another bereaved mother, in writing a poem about her daughter who died in a skiing accident, embues memories with an embodied and sensorial quality:

\textit{NOW}
\begin{quote}
I \textit{treasure} the memories
Your laugh and your love
Hold them so closely
Until up above
One day we'll meet
\textit{On a happier trail}. \[\text{PWRIT-003 = SWRIT-008}\]
\end{quote}

She begins by situating memories in the present (“\textit{NOW}”), and then underlines their significance by the use of a \textit{value} metaphor (i.e., “treasure”). The discourse then proceeds to include more specific description of what exactly is being remembered (“Your laugh and your love”), as well as the particular sense of \textit{embodiment} (“Hold them so closely”). While not an extreme case formulation, the inclusion of the word “so” serves to enhance the description of how tightly the memories of the child are “held” by the parent, as if the relationship continues (at least metaphorically) in a physical way, manifested in memories. Edwards (1999) describes words like “so” (e.g., so strict) and “such” (e.g., such high morals) as “indefinitely maximizing terms”, and suggests that they help create maximum contrast.

This same bereaved mother describes the usefulness of writing, in terms of being able to commit her recollections of her daughter to permanent memory:

\begin{quote}
I have found writing about Mavis Anne gives a permanency to my memories of her. After Mavis Anne died and thoughts of her would occur I was afraid I would lose or forget the memories as I had lost her. When I wrote them down I knew they were recorded and I could go back to them at any time. \[\text{SWRIT-008 = PWRIT-003}\]
\end{quote}
Among other features, this account serves to highlight the potential importance of instrumental activities (i.e., writing) in aiding the grieving process. The participant’s discourse alludes to the lack of agency and control in the matter of “having” memories. She states that “thoughts of her” daughter “would occur”, thus describing their presence in a passive way (i.e., not having control over memories). Further to this, the bereaved mother expresses her fear of “losing” or “forgetting” “the memories”, orienting to this possibility as a secondary loss (“as I had lost her”), beyond that of losing her daughter. The discourse is able to do its work of “convincing” by the inclusion of a certainty term (“I knew”), as well as an extreme case formulation (“any”). The overall result is an account which speaks of the usefulness of writing in helping to remember the deceased, as well as the more implicit element of taking back control by the intentional use of this instrumental activity.

A further example of maintaining continuity with the deceased child by instrumental “remembering” activity is represented in the following excerpt:

I try to do things that will keep her memory alive. I have enclosed a copy of a biography sheet that was included in a newsletter that I received for 4 years written by a lady who lost her son in a traffic accident. I think this will answer the “what about now” part of this question. The one change in the enclosed biography sheet is that Christmas ‘97 I was able to put lights on our Christmas tree. This was hard, but I just knew that was what I was suppose to do.

[SWRIT-017]

Again, a bereaved parent draws upon certainty terms (“I just knew . . . suppose to do”) to argue for the “sureness” of her actions, actions which are meant to keep her daughter’s “memory alive” and which she implies is what her daughter would have wanted.
5.9.1 The Paradox of Memories: Keeping Their Memory Alive

Other participants also wrote or spoke about their conscious efforts to remember their child who had died, about the fear of forgetting, and particularly about the paradox of remembering:

Everyone says the pain will go away but I really don’t want it to because sometimes I’m afraid I’ll forget her if the pain leaves... Now - she’s still my daughter. Sometimes I refer to her as though she were still here. She’s a memory - I have so many good memories of her. [SWRIT-007 = PWRIT-002]

In this excerpt the bereaved mother constructs an account whereby she associates the ongoing presence of pain with the continued ability to remember her daughter. For her, the absence of pain might very well signal the inability to remember, and further, perhaps an even more complete loss of her child. The discourse, in this case, aims to convince the reader of the meaning of the pain, which others may not fully appreciate. By the use of an extreme case formulation (“Everyone”), the participant emphasizes the extent to which others try to, perhaps implicitly, convince her that the ongoing experience of pain is not a good thing. The bereaved mother’s discourse alternately attempts to describe the paradoxical nature of grief, in that while it is painful, that memories may provide “solace” (Klass, 1993). Another participant wrote: “I hope we can all find solace in remembering the good, the funny, the loving time...” [PWRIT-010]. In Embracing their memory: Loss and the social psychology of storytelling, the social psychologist John Harvey (1996), specifically emphasizes this intimate link between pain and memories of the loved one (p. vii): “The book clearly is about pain and the importance of recognizing, knowing, and not running away from pain.”

This participant [SWRIT-007 = PWRIT-002] goes on to situate, not her deceased child, but more specifically the relationship, in the present (“Now - she’s still my daughter”). The discourse immediately reorients to a conscious awareness of the
writer's occasional ("Sometimes") use of language, which might suggest that she believes the daughter herself is still 'present'. She counters such a potential assessment of her account by stating that she refers to her daughter in an 'as if' ("as though") way, and then clarifies further that her daughter is [emphasis added] "a memory."

The pain which may be brought on by remembering and by writing is also reflected in the comments of another bereaved mother:

As I write this, I feel very sad and it has brought me to tears. This is the Holiday Season which also is a sad time for us. All the family things we did when she was alive is a constant reminder when we get together. [SWRIT-009]

Here, the paradox is extended to include reminders (i.e., memories) of the deceased child in the context of the family. Extreme case formulations ("All", "constant") serve to construct an account where family gatherings are described as both venues and triggers by which the loss of the daughter is continually refreshed.

The bereaved mother of Steven uses the phrase “emotional roller coaster” to describe her paradoxical experience of grief:

There are days that I do everything that I can not to remember because it is too painful and then there are days that I live in fear that I won't remember. I guess that is the emotional roller coaster of grieving and having to deal with the loss of a child that you loved more than anything. All I have left of Steven are my memories and somehow that just doesn't seem like enough. [SWRIT-013]

She engages the use of an extreme case formulation ("more than anything") to describe the intensity and nature of her love for her son, and to explain ("I guess") both the pain of remembering and the fear of forgetting. An extreme case formulation is also used to describe memories of her son as the only remaining element of his being ("All I have left of Steven"), which she adds is insufficient ("just doesn't seem like enough").

Another bereaved mother describes the paradoxical nature of remembering the child and their death. She begins by reflecting on her conscious efforts to engage in
activities ("do things") aimed at maintaining a continued sense of the child ("keep her memory alive . . ."): 

I try to do things that will keep her memory alive . . . I have really enjoyed thinking about Carol from birth to present. It has been an uplifting thing for me to do. I do feel a deep sense of loss and emptiness but the pleasant memories I have about my daughter and the things we did together covers that sense of loss and emptiness with a warmth that will allow me to meet each day with all its challenges. Every time we go to church (My husband is the pastor) we pass the place my daughter was killed. Every time we pass the place of the wreck I think about Carol's death, how it happened, how I have been robbed of experiencing my child growing older, owning her own home, having children, and having a caregiver as I get older. Writing about it today has just reinforced all these feelings. It causes an empty feeling but also a good feeling knowing that Carol died serving the God she loved so much. [SWRIT-017 = PWRIT-009]

The participant describes that responding to the "Reflecting Questions" of the study has been an "uplifting" experience, and has caused her to think about her daughter's whole life span. Part of the participant's reflection focuses on the relationship with her daughter, when she states that some of her comforting memories are about "the things that (they) did together." This account of remembering is also constructed with the help of metaphor, whereby the "warmth" of memories are described as helping assuage the "deep" feelings of "loss and emptiness."

The paradox of remembering and reminders becomes quickly evident as the bereaved mother describes passing "the place of the wreck." Here, it is not pleasant memories of the past which are evoked, but reminders of her daughter's ongoing absence, and the effect that this will continue to have on her own life. The use of both extreme case formulations ("Every time") and repetition helps construct a discourse which emphasizes the frequency and impact of these painful reminders. The participant again uses metaphor ("robbed"); in this segment to initiate a listing of secondary losses
that are described within a life span context; culminating in the loss to the participant of her eventual caregiver. This invocation of a developmental loss inventory seems to be particularly effective in building up a description of losses yet to come, for the participant; milestones which now will never be witnessed and experienced by the daughter and her mother. The excerpt concludes with a more explicit statement of the paradox involved; that while the experience of writing and remembering her daughter was “good” and “uplifting”, it also caused feelings of emptiness to be “reinforced”. In the final sentence, the participant goes beyond talk of remembering to invoke perhaps her sense of meaning-making in the fact of her daughter’s death (i.e., “Carol died serving the God she loved so much.”). The strength of this assertion is heightened by the participant’s use of the certainty term “knowing”, which serves to remove doubt about the ‘reason’ for the accident, as Carol had died while in the church’s ministry van.

As opposed to thinking about the future losses represented in the death of an adult child, the author of the following excerpt orients toward the past:

I have many fond memories and try to focus on them, rather than on what might have been. [SWRIT-014 = PWRIT-014]

This discourse recognizes the potential for distress (“rather than”) in projecting losses into the future, and uses a comparison (“try to focus on them, rather”) to suggest that for him it is more comforting to remember the past (“many fond memories”).

In contrast to this account, another participant describes looking at the past, through photographs, as a stimulus for “sorrow”:

I look at photos of the past and the thought comes to me ‘that’s when we were still happy.’ I can still laugh, but happiness is not the fundamental tone, sorrow is. His early death is his loss too - so much so. Kyle explains that it is looking at everything in a different color now. So many things remind you --even seeing a squad car, hearing a siren, seeing a policeman. [PWRIT-008 = SWRIT-016]
The photographs of the past are depicted as representing not only a 'former' time ("that's when"), but also a former emotional state ("still happy"). The discourse builds a construction of emotion, not as a temporary feeling, but as a more enduring disposition ("tone"), which has been inexorably ("fundamental") altered since the untimely ("early") death of the participant's son. Edwards' (1997) discusses the flexibility of language in constructing emotions in numerous ways, including temporary states and ongoing dispositions.

The bereaved mother of Natalie writes in a poem about the paradoxical nature of memories, suggesting through the use of metaphor that the "tears" of the "Heart" simultaneously represent "precious memories" of the deceased:

Our hearts are like a silent volcano waiting to erupt into an endless river of tears . . .
These tears are precious memories from our Hearts . . .
We pray for peace that will cultivate our soul,
To find serenity in the memories from our hearts . . .
Your legacy of love and determination will continue to serve as an inspiration to us . . . your Love and memories give us guidance into a world of hope . . . Natalie ... my memories of you always take me back through the years . . . [PWRIT-013]

The awesome power of emotions associated with grief are constructed by way of the "silent volcano" metaphor, where "tears" are equated to "memories"; both implicitly representing the lava that bursts out of the volcano. While the discourse begins with a metaphoric description of the unpredictable power of memories flowing forth, it alternately suggests that "peace" and "serenity" will be found in these same memories, emanating from the same heart. Once again, the discourse presents a paradox in that memories are described both by a focus on the past ("my memories of you always take me back through the years . . ."), as well as a comfort for the future ("your Love and memories give us guidance into a world of hope . . ."). The use of the extreme case
formulation ("always") by this participant suggests a sort of guaranteed consistency to the act of remembering her daughter.

This same participant further invokes the metaphor of "a journey" while engaging in a developmental life-span discourse:

My memories of you mark a journey from a baby girl to
A beautiful gentle woman, my best friend, the one I shared
Secret jokes, special talks, laughter and victory, tears of defeat.
You spoiled me with boundless joy and soaring pride. [PWRIT-013]

The bereaved mother recalls her daughter from birth to maturity, focusing in this latter part on the construction of their relationship as uniquely exclusive (i.e., "the one"; "Secret"; "special"; "you spoiled me").

In the excerpt below, another participant situates her "remembering" in the context of a relational and religious discourse. In the act of recalling her daughter, this bereaved mother also constructs the child as unique (i.e., "that only she could give"): 

God is taking care of her. God only loaned her to us for awhile, to love, enjoy. Thank you, God. Especially for the last two years. Please help me to go on - without her physically being here. Let me always remember her laughter, 'Hi there's,' her 'I love you Momma's,' her big wonderful hugs, that only she could give. Today, I had 'our' favorite lunch, Taco Salad from Taco Bell. I went to the park, where she and I went once. The salad was terrible, even the Pepsi tasted bad. Then I drove past the cemetery, but I didn't stop. She's not really there. I don't like seeing her name there in the stone. [PWRIT-012]

The participant describes her attempt to "ritualize" her daughter through having a fast-food meal that the two of them used to enjoy together ("'our' favorite lunch"). The description of the episode then takes on an almost grotesque quality through its use of hyperbole ("even the Pepsi tasted bad"). In sum, the account builds up not only the irreplaceability of the relationship, and thus the daughter, but also the irreproducibility of a former context when the daughter was living.
5.9.2 Reminders, Remembrances, and Legacy

The memory discourse of some participants more aptly described the "act" of remembering their child. In this way, language was usually less centered on the past (recalling events involving the child) and more centered on the present, as well as the future. In describing the act of remembering, the activity typically took on the quality of "legacy" (Fleming, 1998), whereby the child could be remembered as having made some impact on society (Fleming defines legacy as how we continue the ongoing attachment). The child could be reconstructed as continuing to "live on" in the lives of others via the particular legacy that they left. One example of this type of discourse is the following excerpt from a bereaved father, who was interviewed by a local newspaper reporter about his son's death, the article was entitled "Keeping Chris' Memory Alive":

On Feb. 16, the ____'s will hold a candlelight service at Oak Park High School to remember the one year anniversary of Chris' death. The service will be held at the campus location where the ____'s hope to see an auditorium or amphitheater constructed with the help of The Oak Park Unified School District Chris _____ Performing Arts Fund. "About $15,000 has been raised so far. He loved the stage and theater" said Roger . . . "I would like to ask that you remember Chris ____ in the following manner: NEVER DRINK AND DRIVE, and ALWAYS WEAR SEAT BELTS . . ." The ____'s want Christopher to be remembered because his young life touched so many others. "He saw his dreams coming to fruition," they said. "Chris' smile and his caring for other people is what made him so special." [PWRIT-014 = SWRIT-014]

In this excerpt the reporter is writing that a remembering event (i.e., a candlelight service) is about to take place which will mark the anniversary of the death of the participant's son. The geographic location is important in that the site of the service marks the place where the bereaved parents hope to establish a performing arts auditorium in their son's name (i.e., legacy). The participant is quoted from a speech that he gave to the students at his son's former high school, in which he further establishes Chris' legacy. He asks the students to remember his son by "NEVER DRINK(ING)
AND DRIV(ING), and ALWAYS WEAR(ING) SEAT BELTS . . .” During the interview, the participant also combines two discursive devices; extreme case formulation (“so special”) and evidence-building (“Chris’ smile and his caring for other people is what made him so special.”); to describe his son’s unique and endearing character. Implicit in this discourse is the father’s assertion that by consciously deciding to (“ALWAYS”) wear seat belts and to “NEVER DRINK AND DRIVE” that the young people will be living out his son’s legacy of caring for others. The contextual significance is that Chris was killed by a drunk driver who crossed the centre line and hit Chris’ vehicle head-on.

The same bereaved father submitted a speech which he had given for an awards banquet at his son’s former high school. His introduction went as follows:

Hello and Good Evening.
My name is Roger _____ and I am here tonight to present for the first time scholarship awards (one male and one female) in the amount of $500.00 each to two deserving seniors. However, before I announce the winners of the Christopher _____ Performing Arts Memorial Fund Scholarship Awards, I must ask your indulgence and allow me to speak a few minutes about our son, for whom this award is named. [PWRIT-014 = SWRIT-014]

While the award, in and of itself, was a legacy to the deceased son, the speech which he gave was also an act of remembering, a way through language of having young students “meet” his son Chris.

In the following excerpt, the bereaved mother of Carol uses detail to describe how memories of both her daughter and son-in-law will be kept “alive” in their community:

One of the churches in our association started a Bryan and Carol ________ Christmas memorial fund through our church. There is also a Bryan and Carol ________ memorial fund through the Family Resources Center at East Elementary School in ________ County. Donna ________ handles that fund. This will help keep their memories alive. Through the generous contributions from
churches and people in Western _______ and all parts of the United States we purchased two vans to be used in the van ministry that Carol and Bryan were in charge of at our church. The vans have painted on them: "THIS VAN WORKS FOR THE LORD" "IN MEMORY OF BRYAN AND CAROL _______'s VAN MINISTRY." This will also keep their memory alive.

One of the ladies at church painted a special marker and placed it at the place of the wreck. We keep flowers there and my father twisted two memosa trees (young trees) together and tied them with a ribbon and planted them at the place of the wreck. Carol loved red roses and Bryan was always sending her roses. I keep red roses (silk ones) there by the marker. I think that everyone that goes by and sees these roses and the trees and marker will remember Bryan and Carol.

[PWRIT-009 = SWRIT-017]

The legacy or "living memory" discourse in this case, is constructed through the combined use of repetition, descriptive detail, evidence-giving, certainty terms, and extreme case formulation. The participant, for example, repeats (using the certainty term "will") that various legacy-building activities "will keep their memories alive." The strength of this assertion is "shored up" (Riches & Dawson, 1997) by the giving of "evidence", in which the activities are described in detail. While the fact that "Donna ______ handles that (memorial) fund" is not necessary to the description, such (mundane) detail contributes to the "facticity" (Potter, 1996) of the account by producing both a "being there" as well as a "doing being ordinary" quality (Sacks, 1984).

"The place of the wreck", as a geographical site of mourning and remembrance, is described with particular significance. The participant describes it as a place where a "special marker" was placed; where "red roses (silk ones)" are kept; where her father planted two intertwined mimosa trees "(young trees)." Using an extreme case formulation ("everyone"), the excerpt concludes with an assertion regarding the (locally) "universal" effect of this memorial as a remembrance to the deceased daughter and her spouse.
The following excerpt describes the act of remembering by essentially referring to
the function of discourse in the context of a bereaved family:

I hope we can all find solace in remembering the good, the funny, the loving
time . . . We all talk frequently about Doug among the family and friends - I,
probably more than others. Rebecca is always included when we talk about the
grandchildren. [PWRIT-010 = SWRIT-019]

But, what is this particular discourse itself achieving? The participant, a bereaved
mother, expresses her wish that through “remembering” times when her son was living,
that family and friends may find comfort (“solace”). She goes on to operationalize
remembering as a function of “talk”, that talk about Doug serves as the vehicle and the
act of remembering. So, in essence, this discourse is asserting that the ultimate function
of talk, particularly “good . . . funny . . . loving” memory talk about Doug, is to bring
about solace.

The participant engages the use of an extreme case formulation (“all”) to describe
the extent (i.e., frequent) to which family members and friends talk about her deceased
son. She also sets up a comparison between herself and others, stating that she talks
more about Doug than others. However, in doing this, the discourse does not use a
certainty term (e.g., definitely) but, rather moderates the assertion by the use of the word
“probably”. This helps achieve an account whereby the participant is constructed as
remembering (via talking about) her son the most often, while not discounting that
others also remember Doug on a frequent basis. The excerpt concludes with an extreme
case assertion (“always”) that the participant’s granddaughter, who was also killed in the
same accident as her son, continues on within the fabric of this multigenerational family.
In this instance, talk (i.e., discourse) is seen to function as a means for inclusivity and
continuity, both of which are represented in the use of the present active tense “is” to
describe the talk about Rebecca.
The importance of others, besides the parents, remembering the child who died, is emphasized in the following account:

Robbie’s Auntie Esther in Chicago has been especially compassionate and kind by sending Robbie his own Christmas gift. Each Christmas since Robbie was killed she sent him evergreen wreaths for his grave. That expression warmed our hearts tremendously and gave us strength to know someone besides ourselves feels that Robbie is still with us in our hearts and minds everyday. [PWRIT-005]

The opening sentence is written as if Robbie is still living, emphasizing the son as a separate individual in that he is sent “his own” gift by the Auntie. The discourse also specifies that the remembering by Auntie Esther takes place every year (“Each Christmas”). Finally, the participant orients to her and her spouse feeling isolated and perhaps exceptional (“someone besides ourselves feels”) in experiencing a sense of their deceased son on a daily basis. “Still with us” constructs an account of Robbie’s continuance in the everyday lives of his parents. The use of “feels” in this context goes beyond its potential purpose as emotion language to an indication of belief, whereby the discourse suggests a level of knowing, of understanding, that the Auntie has for the bereaved parents.

Recalling an article that she read in People Magazine (March, 1997) entitled “The Mourning After”, a bereaved mother comments on the interview with seven celebrity parents whose children had died:

John Walsh, whose six year old son was abducted became the host of the TV show ‘America's Most Wanted.’ John comments that he would never have accomplished the things he has, such as the Missing Children's Act which brings the FBI immediately into cases involving missing children, if it wasn’t for the loss of Adam and his love for him. This statement reminded me that my love for Mavis Anne prompted the setting up of a memorial fund in her name with the B.C. Brain Injury Association to aid people with brain damage. [PWRIT-003 = SWRIT-008]
In this instance, the participant uses comparison between her experience and that of John Walsh, to specifically emphasize the connection between legacy and the parent’s love for the child who died. She gives her own example of establishing a provincial-wide “memorial fund” in her daughter’s name, and that it benefits people who have experienced brain injuries. The contextual significance here is that her daughter died while skiing down a treacherous mountain slope, an activity which might also result in brain injuries to some.

The following excerpt describes legacy as “action”, and for this participant relates directly to how her son died, in that he was killed by someone who was “Driving While Intoxicated” (i.e., “DWI”):

My most positive activity is to monitor the courts, lobby the legislature and speak to groups about public safety in relation to DWI. These people I work with have the same desire to understand either because they have experienced a like incident or are professionals in the field. The anger I have is directed at those who minimize the catastrophe we had to face and don’t think DWI problems are serious or require constant observance. I do attempt to be logical and factual in taking community action which was Doug’s method too.

[PWRIT-010 = SWRIT-019]

This particular account actually describes a sort of “double-legacy”, in that not only does the bereaved mother write about her efforts to monitor “DWI problems”, but also that she approaches these activities in a style modeled after her son (“I do attempt to be logical and factual . . . which was Doug’s method too”). The participant also constructs her anger (using a weapons metaphor) as something which through her own agency she can control and aim towards certain “targets” (i.e., people who “minimize” drinking and driving’s effects).

The bereaved mother of Alison, who had earlier written about the specific impact of her daughter’s donated cornea, also discusses her own ongoing role in the campaign for organ donations:
It is tough to adjust to life without Alison; she meant so much to so many. Had I been able to donate all her organs, I may have been satisfied with that gift. To honor her belief in organ donation, I have been given the opportunity to participate in educating the public . . . that I ask you to look into your hearts. Plan to make the "gift of life" your legacy.

I am comforted that my daughter continues to be of service. Consider providing that comfort to those who love you and will mourn your death. [PWRIT-007 = SWRIT 011]

The mother frames her participation in public education about organ donation as an "opportunity." This particular construction is suggestive of "growth", which has been afforded ("given") to her by the occasion of Alison’s death. The "opportunity" of educating the public is also constructed as a legacy, in that it "honor(s)" her daughter’s "belief in organ donation." This notion of legacy is then extended as a possibility to others who would seek to "comfort" their own survivors, as she has been comforted by Alison’s "gift."

Perhaps the most straightforward example was provided by a participant who expressed, in the form of her daughter’s presumed wishes, that continuing to live, is itself a legacy:

I miss you so much still. It hurts so bad. But, I’m hanging in here, Baby. Just like I know you want me to. [PWRIT-012]

Again, in a lengthier and more detailed account, another bereaved mother describes doing what she is certain that her deceased adult child would want her to be doing:

I had also felt for a long time that there was something that I was supposed to be doing but for the life of me I couldn't figure out what it was. I woke up one morning last September and I said to my husband I don't know why but I know that today is the day that I have to move on and if I don't do it today I never will. Suddenly it had all come together and I realized what it was I needed to do. I decided at that moment that I was going back to school to get my High School Diploma. Without it I wouldn't be able to further my education and hopefully
one day be able to help people. It was all so clear now what I needed to do was help other people. For the first time in a long time it seemed brighter outside and instead of taking steps backwards I finally felt that I had taken one step forward. I knew that from that point on one step would become two and two would become three and so on.

I believe that we are just visitors here and we all have a job to do. Once our job is complete we go home. I really believe that Steven was put in my care to teach and show me that I can make a difference in other lives. If I can help just one person then Steven will not have died in vain. I also want to give back the help and love that was given to me. I have no doubt now that I will survive. I am happy to say that in March I did get my high school diploma and someday soon I will be doing the job that I was sent here for. Just as I was determined to write this I am just as determined that I will be doing exactly what Steven would want me to do. [SWRIT-013]

The bereaved mother engages the use of a narrative (i.e., sequential account) to tell the “story” of how she experienced the “realization” of her purpose in life and then how she came to enact this plan. Within this particular discursive process, the participant emphasizes (and reconstructs) the role of her son as “teacher” and “motivator.” Also of discursive interest in this excerpt is the use of a sort of extended version of what was earlier described as “I was just doing X . . . when Y” device. In this instance, the mundaneness is less “worked up”, but there is the presentation of this sudden realization; a change from the previous state of (more ordinary/usual) affairs.

5.9.3 The “Last Time” . . . Talk of Regrets

Sometimes participants’ discourse included specific references to the “last time” they saw or spoke with their child before they died. In the following excerpt, the parents of Michelle are being interviewed by a reporter who visited them in their home:

Carol, coordinator of nursing staff development at ______ Hospital, showed me pictures of Michelle sky diving, snapshots taken four days before her death . . . “I still can’t look at those pictures,” said Michael, as he turned away from the images . . . Carol recalls being in Florida a month before her daughter’s death. She remembers the last time they spoke, talking about another visit at the end of February 1996. “We hugged and kissed and I told her how much I worried,”
Carol recalled. "She told me that nothing was ever going to happen to her. It was our last conversation." . . . "The last time I ever spoke with her," said Michael, "she ended our talk as she always did. 'I love you, Daddy.'" Behind the ______ home, up a small rise near the swimming pool, is a small memorial rock garden filled with mementos of Michelle reflecting in the winter's sunlight. Michael rests his head on my shoulder, his body racked with sobs. "I don't wish this on anybody," he whispers. [PWRIT-015]

The bereaved mother first reports, using maximizing terms ("how much"), that she fretted about her daughter. Then, through extreme case formulations, she describes both the content of her daughter's response ("nothing was ever") regarding this concern about safety, as well as emphasizes the finality of their talk ("last"). In a different linguistic context, the description "our last conversation", might signify "the last conversation we had before this one", and appear to be quite inconsequential. However, the use of "last" in this particular discursive context evokes a very different and consequential impact. The statements as a whole are suggestive, in a vicarious way, of Rando's (1986) notion of a "changed (shattered) assumptive world", whereby the (daughter's) expectation that "nothing was ever going to happen" is recalled as if it were an obscenity.

The bereaved father, in this excerpt, also uses extreme case formulations in recalling both the finality ("last"; "ever") of his conversation with his daughter as well as to allude to the (good, close) quality of their relationship ("she ended our talk as she always did. 'I love you, Daddy.'"). In his final reported comment, the participant appears to express the inexpressible about being a bereaved parent by suggesting, via an extreme case formulation, that no-one should have to experience what he has experienced ("I don't wish this on anybody").

In terms of explicating the occasioned nature of discourse (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), one particular example of this feature in the present study related to talk about the
“last time.” It was in this situated context of recalling the “last time” of being with the child while they were still alive or of the time nearing their death, that bereaved parents most often spoke about regrets:

My relationship with my son at the time of his death was a good relationship, although at the time he died we had probably seen him the least in the prior 6 months as in anytime (due to health problems with my mother and other health problems of other members of the family). In fact my other daughter-in-law had kidded about skipping 1983 (little did we know Jeff would be killed in June). Jeff was a man of few words if he didn't have something to say so our phone calls were usually brief. His job was very demanding. We lived 2 hrs away which isn't far but far enough if there is a lot demanding on all sides. I guess I hadn't given much thought to my relationship with my son at the age he died. I regret now that I had not told him often that I loved him, although his family told me that he knew that. It is always normal after a death to have regrets. I wish we had seen him more. Somehow when your children get married, you want to give them space to live their own life - which I guess is the right thing to do, but if I could do it all over I would have seen him more, even if I thought I was intruding at times, because we never felt really at home with his wife (now her whole family has been feeling like that to).

[SWRIT-016 = PWRIT-008]

The participant in this excerpt recalls that the (“6 months”) period before her son died had also been the one where she had seen him the least. In that she “hears” this as an undesirable state of affairs, the participant counters with a justification for this lack of contact with her son (“due to . . . in fact my”). She adds subsequent justification, basing it on a characterization of her son (“a man of few words”), the demands of his job (“very”), the distance between their communities (“2 hrs”), and other possible factors (“if there is a lot demanding on all sides”). The bereaved mother directly describes her regret (“that I had not told him often that I loved him”), and then immediately attempts to soften this with a statement about reassurance from her son’s family. At this point she uses an extreme case formulation to normalize the regret for herself (“always normal after a death to have regrets”), and the cycle of regret-justification continues.
In recalling their “last night together” the bereaved father in the following excerpt expresses his particular regrets:

I believe Chris and I had a pretty strong, loving relationship. He was easy to talk to and respected what I had to say. I wish I would have spent more one-on-one time together when he was growing up. I was also too hard on him with regards to sports competition. I was very proud of Chris and his accomplishments and I told him so on our last night together. [SWRIT-014 = PWRIT-014]

One of the similarities to the previous account is that these discourses demonstrate the possibility of talking about regrets within the context of a parent-adult child relationship which has been constructed as “good” and “loving”. The presence of regrets do not appear to negate the essential nature of the relationships as reconstructed in these narratives, nor the possibility of their continuance in some form.

As somewhat of a variation, the excerpt below was written by a bereaved mother, whose thoughts about the “days before her (daughter’s) death” were triggered by reading about the regrets of another bereaved parent:

The daughter of George McGovern froze to death in a parking lot. His regret was that he wasn’t closer to his daughter in her last few weeks. I began to reevaluate and appreciate how close Mavis Anne and I were in her lifetime. To treasure those days before her death, we were laughing, sharing and kissing good-bye. [PWRIT-003]

The specific regret in this case refers to the lack of “closeness” between McGovern and his daughter in the time leading up to her death, which the participant then uses to draw a contrast with the relationship she had with her own daughter. She draws upon the category “close” to characterize their relationship, a quality which is constructed with positive value in her account (i.e., “appreciate . . . treasure”).

In the final example of this section, a 75-year-old father, bereaved of his 47 year-old daughter, writes about regret in a distinctly different way, thus illustrating the
flexibility of language to achieve different actions, depending on the (situated) context:

As I write this I feel again the regret that Heather is gone and that her life was cut short. Writing about the experience of her death has been therapeutic, and has provided an opportunity for me to really examine and evaluate our relationship which I had not done heretofore. I had not written about this to anyone else and would probably never have done so. I do appreciate the opportunity to do so now, and I hope it will be helpful. [SWRIT-012]

The nature of the regret written about here seems at first more vicarious or sympathetic, in that the participant appears to be expressing regret as if, or “on behalf of” his deceased daughter. It is qualitatively different to how “regret” is written about in the previous examples. However, if we consider again the situated and contextual nature of words as social action, what is this participant doing with his language? Given his age (75 years) and discursive clues embedded within his narrative; such as the use of the word “heretofore”; we might presume that he is using the word “regret” in more of a previous than contemporary form. A historical synonym for regret is “remorse”, with alternative synonyms including “grief”, “sorrow”, and “lamentation”. The corresponding verb for remorse is “mourn”. It would seem to make sense from examining the specific (local) context in which the participant constructs his discourse - “regret that Heather is gone and that her life was cut short” - that what we are witnessing is the historical versus contemporary use of “regret.”

5.10 Love Continues

In terms of the possibility of a continuing bond with the deceased child, some participants used the metaphor of love as a descriptor for the ongoing relationship:

It is Elizabeth, who lived and worked with Michelle, who has selected the memorial notice running in today’s paper in Florida. “One year since we heard your laugh, felt your hugs, seen your smile. The time we spent with you was short, but filled with laughter, joy and love. You may have left us physically, but know you are always in our thoughts and in our hearts. We will always love you. Love your family and friends”. [PWRIT-015]
The extreme case formulation ("always") is engaged in this memorial description to characterize the nature of love and the relationship as unending, as continuing. Similarly, in an account which intermingles love with memory, the mother of a young woman who died from cancer writes to her daughter:

Just like a beautiful rose, Natalie’s precious memory grows and grows . . . *Always just a heart beat away*. Your legacy of love and determination will continue to serve as an inspiration to us . . . your Love and memories give us guidance into a world of hope . . . Though Millions of stars and Heaven keep us apart, our precious bond of love exceeds distance . . . Your life was a blessing you are the Heart Beat of my life . . .

*T’amo Bambina ... Mom*” [PWRIT-013]

The daughter’s love is described as a “legacy” that will carry on in the lives of the survivors, serving to “inspire” and “guide.” The participant also refers explicitly to love as a “bond” and uses extreme case formulations (“Though Millions . . . exceeds distance”) to construct this bond as limitless.

In the following excerpt from a mother bereaved of her daughter, an extreme case formulation is again used, in this instance serving to establish both the certainty (i.e., demonstration of investment) of the mother’s knowledge (“It is clear to me”), as well as the “guarantee” of love’s continuity (“I can never lose the essence of someone whom I have loved”):

There are so many effects of Alison’s life and death. It is clear to me that I can never lose the essence of someone whom I have loved. I feel so very connected to my daughter. In an odd way, the relationship I have with her now is less limited than when she was alive. I am amazed at the vastness of our love. [SWRIT-011 = PWRIT-007]

Once more, the limitless nature of love is described through extreme case formulations (“vastness”). As well, the bonded nature of the relationship between mother and deceased daughter (“so very connected”) is constituted, along with its ongoing character (“the relationship I have with her now”) through the use of the present tense.
Jeanne Webster Blank (1998, p. 182) who wrote a book about the death of adult children, and herself is bereaved of her 39 year-old daughter, recalls the following account about love as memory:

I read a true story some years ago about a man who went to a nursing home to visit his aged mother. Time and illness had taken a heavy toll; she was only dimly aware of who or where she was. As her son sat in a chair beside her bed, she took his hand and said, “I don’t know who you are, but I know I love you very much.” After all the memories have receded, you will still retain love for your child. Love, the most precious of all, is the last memory to go.

5.11 Dreams

Participants who chose to respond to (written) reflecting questions or be interviewed, were specifically questioned about their dreams. They were asked straightforwardly whether they dreamed about their child who had died. What was striking overall about the responses in general was their brevity. For the most part, participants who responded to this question answered the question directly, with little elaboration. The responses could be divided into various categories including those where the parent either had no current dreams about their child or were uncertain about whether they had such dreams or not:

I can not remember having any dreams about Yvonne. [SWRIT-010]

I used to dream about her all the time right after she died. But I don't much any more. Since my husband died six years ago, I dream more often of him. [SWRIT-018]

I don't know if I dream or not. If I do I never remember them when I wake up. I just lie down at night and go to sleep. The next thing I know, the alarm is going off and it is time to get up. I just don't know if I dream or not. [SWRIT-017 = PWRIT-009]

The discursive variability here is that the first two excerpts contain extreme case formulations, while the third does not. Rather than stating that he cannot recall
dreaming about his deceased adult daughter, the bereaved father in the first example builds a more extreme account by the use of a modulating term ("any"). The statement is, however, softened by framing the situation as a potential problem with his memory, allowing for the possibility that he has perhaps had dreams of his daughter, but that he is unable to remember them. One of the limitations of this being written, as opposed to interactional discourse (i.e., interview), is that the latter may have provided further analytic clues regarding emphasis (e.g., remember vs any).

In the second excerpt, the participant makes an implicit connection between dreaming of the deceased and the time elapsed since their death. The bereaved mother asserts, using a maximum case formulation ("all the time"), that in the time immediately following her daughter’s death ("right after she died"), she frequently dreamed of her, but that since her husband’s more recent death, the balance of her dream content has shifted to him. Alternatively, the participant may be seen as justifying the fact that she dreams less about her daughter now ("But I don't much any more"). Rather than stop her account following this admission, the discourse continues with a justifying statement that “Since” (emphasis added) her “husband died six years ago” she dreams “more often of him”. The discourse in this second excerpt also differs from the first in that it uses a more active description of dreaming ("to dream . . . I dream") as opposed to the more passive form of “having . . . dreams.” In this sense the discourse constructs the self (i.e., the participant) as more agentic in the experience of dreams.

There were also responses where the participants experienced dreams that brought about good feelings:

A few times I have dreamt she was with us, saw her smile, her twinkle in her eyes. [SWRIT-003]
I don't feel her presence in any way, but I do dream about her occasionally. The dreams are always in the context of some kind of family event and are pleasant, never disturbing. [SWRIT-012]

Yes, I do dream of Mavis Anne. It's lovely - it's like a visit. [SWRIT-007 = PWRIT-002]

(Even in my one dream, Chris was helping someone.) [SWRIT-014 = PWRIT-014]

While this particular group of responses shared in common the pleasant nature of the dream, they varied in terms of their discursive construction. The first two of these excerpts placed the deceased adult child in the context of family ("dreamt she was with us", "dreams are always in the context of some kind of family event"), however, the first description incorporates greater description, of the sensory experience in particular. By using such description ("saw her smile, her twinkle in her eyes"), the bereaved parent constructs an account which underlines the vividness of the dream, the sense of the dream as almost a (past) reality. The use of the possessive "her" paired with particular physical features serves to highlight the unique features of this woman's daughter ("her smile, her twinkle in her eyes"). In a sense, she "comes alive" again, or is at least "physically" experienced, through the dream.

The second excerpt begins with the writer immediately orienting to the reflecting question regarding possible experiences of the child's "presence." The bereaved parent, through his discourse, differentiates between presence and dreams, and dissociates himself from the former by strongly stating that he does not ("in any way") experience his daughter's presence, but that he does sometimes dream of her. The participant engages extreme case formulations to achieve various purposes, first to deny the experience of presence, and then to assert the agreeableness of these "occasional" dreams. The discourse incorporates both a maximum case formulation ("always") to
heighten the positive aspect of the dreams, and at the same time a negative case formulation ("never") to minimize any potential impression of the dreams being "disturbing”. The overall result is that the account provides effective reassurance that dreaming of his child is an enjoyable, perhaps welcomed, experience. The description could have ended with the statement that the “dreams are . . . pleasant”, however, the participant “ups the ante” and the account becomes more convincing and less refutable by the addition of “never disturbing.” Where both the first and second excerpts share a common discourse is in describing the occurrence of their dreams. Both participants qualify the frequency of their dreams (i.e., “a few times”, “occasionally”) rather than use extreme case formulations in these instances.

As opposed to dreams being comforting, some participants spoke of being disturbed by dreams of their deceased child:

I have only dreamt about Jacy maybe 4 times since her death. I’m kind of glad I don’t dream about her much because the dreams are always upsetting to me. They involve me trying to find her & I can’t, or me trying to touch her & I can’t. [SWRIT-007 = PWRIT-002]

In this excerpt a bereaved mother tries to convey in her discourse the infrequency of her dreams. She begins her account by using “only” as a means of enumerating how often she has dreamt of her adult daughter Jacy, and then continues with an approximating term (“maybe”). However, at this point, the discourse reorients to much greater specificity in suggesting that it was “4 times” since Jacy’s death that the participant has dreamt of her. The more detailed description helps to strengthen the assertion that these dreams have been infrequent. Had the participant stated instead that she had “only dreamt of Jacy a few times since her death” (emphasis added), this would have constituted a much weaker and unclear account of the actual infrequency of the dreams. By the use of specific numerical description, the discourse builds itself to a greater level
of facticity (Potter, 1996). The importance of this infrequency becomes clear immediately following the first sentence, when the bereaved mother expresses relief at not having these dreams very often because they “are always upsetting” to her. In this instance, a maximum case formulation (“always”) is used to emphasize that every time the participant has dreamt of her daughter the content is distressing. This assertion becomes stronger as the discourse continues by invoking more description; this time the participant detailing the nature of the struggle to “find” or “touch” her daughter in the dream. She constructs an account where yearning for the child is placed in opposition to an impossible reality imposed by death. The strength of this dilemma is achieved by the repeated paradoxical statement “and I can’t.”

Two bereaved parents expressed through their discourse the desire to have dreams about their deceased child:

Other than one brief dream, I can’t say that I have ever felt his presence and believe me when I say, I wish I did. I hope someday God will allow this to happen, but until that day comes I will continue to talk and pray to him. Sometimes good things happen after talking to Chris, but who knows. (Even in my one dream, Chris was helping someone.) [SWRT-014 = PWRIT-014]

In this sequence the bereaved father equates dreams of his son to experiencing his “presence”. He is able to emphasize the strength of this yearning for dreams by the addition of “. . . and believe me when I say . . .”, which is a difficult statement to refute because of its subjective origins.

Likewise, a bereaved mother describes her “wish” for her son to “appear” to her just as she believes he did so her young grandson, in a dream:

Just once since Joey’s death I had a dream I found him hiding in the basement. He told me it was all a mistake he was still alive. After Joey died his little boy woke up crying. He said him and Daddy were playing hide and seek and Daddy was hiding and he couldn’t find him. I believe Joey did appear to his son. I wish he would appear to me just once. [SWRT-015]
Through this particular discourse the participant constructs her deceased son as having agency in deciding whether or not to “appear”, while simultaneously she is constructed as a passive player in the scene, thus a difference of power is constructed (Kroger & Wood, 1998). She can only “wish” that her son comes to her as he apparently chose to do (“appear” implying agency) for his own son.

One participant, the bereaved mother of Steven, who was nineteen years old at the time of this death, gave two very detailed descriptions of dreams she had. In terms of discursive variability, these accounts are much lengthier than most others in this study, contain far greater detail, and place the bereaved parent (the dreamer) within the dream, interacting in some way with the deceased child:

I have had very few dreams about Steven. In most of them I'm crying and telling him I thought that you were dead, but you're not, you're alive. I really believe that he is trying to tell me something. In one dream he kept telling me to look in his mouth but I was too busy crying and asking him why he wanted me to look in his mouth. When I woke up I was so angry with myself for not listening. In another dream he was just a child and he was in the backyard digging. As he was digging he kept finding old baseball cards. It seemed that the deeper he dug the more cards he was finding. He didn't say one word in the dream he was so engrossed with digging. As he was finding the cards he was handing them to me. At one point in the dream he handed me an envelope with a letter inside that he had dug up. I don't remember who the letter was addressed to but I knew that it was written by my husband. [SWRIT-013]

This account emphasizes the participant’s interpretation of the dreams as attempts by the child to communicate with the parent (“I really believe that he is trying to tell me something”). The conviction of the mother’s belief is strengthened by her use of “really” as an added emphasis. The bereaved mother begins by stating the infrequency of her dreams (“I have had very few dreams”), but then quickly follows with detailed description of two dreams in particular. Both the specificity and degree of detail used in this discourse helps construct an account which is difficult to question. At one point the
participant discursively situates herself in a position of being too upset and dubious to pay attention to what she felt her son was trying to tell her ("... but I was too busy crying and asking him why he wanted me to look in his mouth. When I woke up I was so angry with myself for not listening"). At the same time she discursively emphasizes the persistence of her son’s attempts to get some kind of message across to her by the repeated use of the word “kept” (i.e., “... he kept telling me to... As he was digging he kept finding”). Here again a participant is expressing the frustration of communicating “across worlds”, although in this case it is from the perspective of the adult child and not the parent.

Interesting in this particular account is the brief interweaving of a dream-embedded dialogue between the parent and adult child (“... I thought that you were dead, but you’re not, you’re alive”). What is accomplished by this addition to the discourse is a greater sense of immediacy for the reader. So, besides the use of detailed description and eliciting the physical characteristics of the child, here is evidence of the availability of an additional discursive strategy for invoking the child’s presence. There was one other participant who briefly alluded in her discourse to a dialogue between the child and herself:

Yes I do dream about my son, not as much as I used to, but I have had very vivid dreams where he has spoke to me about his death. [SWRIT-016]

The bereaved mother of Steven also uses the venue of describing dreams to express her frustration with a military bureaucracy that has given her little information about her son’s death:

In another dream he told me that the car wasn’t what it seemed to be. Steven died in a car accident while in the military. I don’t know how the military works in your country but in the United States they tell you only what they want and have the right to deny you whatever information that they don’t want you to see. Although Steven has been dead for five years I still don’t know the whole story
about his death. There are conflicting reports and conflicting stories. My husband has written over 200 letters and we have spent thousands and thousands of dollars to try to get to the truth. I have had to hire a private investigator, an auto accident reconstructionist and two attorneys to try to find out exactly what it was that happened that night. I believe that Steven knows how important it is for me to find out the truth. I also believe that people who have died communicate with us by using symbols. I think that all of the dreams that I have had about him he is trying to tell me what happened that night and that is why he kept telling me to look in his mouth. I think that the dream with the letter and baseball cards signifies all the letters that we have written. Steven collected baseball cards and he treasured them. In the dream when he is digging in the dirt he is finding treasures, he knows that finding out what really happened would be a treasure to me. [SWRIT-013]

In this excerpt, the participant’s discourse veers away from talking only about dreams of the deceased, to encompass an argument that the military has withheld information from her and her husband. The use of numeracy in this account is of particular help in building the argument that great amounts of time and money have been spent to get at “the truth”, all for naught. The participant states that her “husband has written over 200 letters” and that they “have spent thousands and thousands of dollars to try to get to the truth.” In both these cases of numeracy, the bereaved mother does not commit to an exact number, rather she uses estimations (i.e., “over 200 . . . thousands and thousands”). Why would she do this instead of saying, like she did when she cited the number of years that her son has been dead (i.e., “five years”), the exact figure? The effect that this use of maximized estimation has is to create an image of absurdly high measures that these parents have had to go to within the military bureaucracy. Citing exact figures in this case would project a much more “cut and dry” account, whereas this situation achieves a depiction as anything but cut and dry.

Embedded within this discourse are also various statements about how essential it is to this bereaved mother to find out what exactly happened that resulted in her son’s
death. She first expresses that she has hints from her son in this dream regarding the
disguised details of the accident ("he told me that the car wasn't what it seemed to be").
Then she implicates the military in a conscious effort to keep her from "the truth" by
referring to the existence of "information that they don't want you to see." The
participant juxtaposes ("Although . . .") the significant length of time that her son has
been dead ("for five years") against the fact that she "still (doesn't) know the whole
story about his death." All of this detail then leads up to underlining the significance for
the bereaved mother of "knowing" how and why her adult son died, a theme which is
often reflected in the everyday accounts of bereaved parents.

    Interspersed throughout the account, the discourse equates "the truth" ("to try to
get to the truth . . . I believe that Steven knows how important it is for me to find out the
truth."). to discovering the details of how the car accident occurred and how her son
ultimately died ("to find out exactly what it was that happened that night . . . I think that
all of the dreams that I have had about him he is trying to tell me what happened that
night and that is why he kept telling me to look in his mouth."). It is not sufficient for the
participant to have the general gist of what happened "that night", rather she emphasizes
her need through her language that she must know ("the truth") "exactly" what
happened. By referring to the night of her son's accident and death as "that night", the
bereaved mother also raises the uniqueness of this particular point of time. It no longer is
just the same as any other night, it is now referred to as "that night", a description which
raises the spectre of significance. The excerpt concludes by the participant inferring how
valuable it would be to her to find out the truth of "that night", and she returns in this
process to a description of a dream (i.e., "In the dream when he is digging in the dirt he
is finding treasures, he knows that finding out what really happened would be a treasure
to me"). She engages the use of metaphor ("treasure") to emphasize the essential
importance of knowing how her son died. While she was not present at the accident, this bereaved mother seems to be expressing the wish of many bereaved parents, to have been witness and present for their child’s death, and that given this impossibility at the very least they need to know “exactly” how it happened. The following dream account reflects the parent’s experience of a dream; and her certainty (investment) of its message; in which she is reassured by her deceased daughter that she is in a place of no sadness:

I believe she is in a better place, and I keep her in my prayers every night. Shortly after she was killed, I dreamed of her and I heard her clear as a bell tell me “Mom, there are no tears in heaven.” [SWRIT-009]

5.12 Embodiment: Variations on a Theme

Reflected in the discourse of several participants was an embodied sense of the deceased child within the parent. The most common expression of this continued sense of presence was that of carrying the child in one’s heart:

My daughter is in my heart . . . I don’t “feel” Mavis Anne’s presence as much - I just take her with me wherever I go. [SWRIT-008 = PWRIT-003]

A few times I have dreamt she was with us, saw her smile, her twinkle in her eyes. . . Memories will live on, joy and happiness she brought me will remain in my heart forever. [SWRIT-003]

I realized that moving on doesn’t mean leaving those people that we loved and lost behind. We carry them always in our heart and no matter where we go they are always with us . . . [SWRIT-013]

One year since we heard your laugh, felt your hugs, seen your smile. The time we spent with you was short, but filled with laughter, joy and love. You may have left us physically, but know you are always in our thoughts and in our hearts. We will always love you. Love your family and friends. [PWRIT-015]

In these instances the discourse is aimed at negotiating the process of moving through one’s grief without abandoning the child who has died, where abandonment of course has particular salience in the parent/child relationship. Once again bereaved
parents utilized extreme case formulations, in this case to emphasize both the eternal and all-encompassing nature of the connection with the deceased adult child (e.g., “just take her with me wherever I go”, “will remain in my heart forever”, “carry them always in our heart and no matter where we go they are always with us”, “you are always in our thoughts and in our hearts. We will always love you”).

The use of these maximum case formulations helped solve the problem of either being seen by others to have forgotten the child, or fearing in oneself that over time the child may not be remembered. The third excerpt above, in particular orients to this paradoxical problem of “moving on” (in one’s grief process) while not “leaving those people that we loved and lost behind” (i.e., abandonment). In beginning this sentence, by constructing it as a realization, the speaker underlines that this has been a learning experience for her. It suggests that she has “come” to this point of “realizing”, having perhaps previously thought that moving on meant abandoning loved ones. This particular construction also allows for the reader to share and “share in” this realization with a larger community. She achieves this flexibility by using the generalized (and somewhat impersonal) formulations - “those people that we have loved”; “we carry them”; “always with us.”

Faced with the irreversible physical absence of their children, some participants in this study clearly oriented towards this dilemma by embodying the child (paradoxically) forever in their “heart”. This process of embodiment served as a way of “integrating” (Elder, 1998) the deceased child into the ongoing life of the parent.

In contrast to the heart being described as a place of continuance with the deceased child, the participant in the following excerpt describes it as primary site of injury following his daughter’s death:
I have been numb, angry, in shock, denied Yvonne died, felt like my heart has a hole in it that will never heal. The hole in my heart has opened up once again. I feel like crying and beating on something [SWRIT-010]

The participant enlists the use of a damage metaphor (“felt like my heart has a hole in it”) as a way of communicating the visceral sense of loss he has experienced at his daughter’s death. The immensity of the loss is discursively constructed by the use of an extreme case formulation (“never”), which serves to counter alternate explanations which might suggest a time limit on this “damage”, thereby minimizing the experience of parental bereavement.

The following excerpts depict a mother’s intense yearning to physically hold her deceased daughter, along with the realization of her absence and the visceral memories of her presence:

Please help me to go on, without her physically being here. Let me always remember her laughter, “Hi there’s,” her “I love you Momma’s,” her big wonderful hugs, that only she could give... Things that remind me of her: pretty girls, thin girls, blonde hair, fashionable ladies... I’ve grown from my grieving, the tears seem to be farther apart, but the pain is always there, even though I smile, I laugh... I can still feel your big hugs, see your big smile, hear your hearty laugh. It seems so long since I held you in my arms. [SWRIT-006 = PWRIT-012]

At times, it seems only yesterday, that I held you close, I can still feel your big tender hugs, and your warm embrace. Yes, I can hear the laughter and see your beautiful smile. But it’s only in my memory, my dear child, it shall not be erased... What seems only yesterday, that I saw her smiling face, Held her in my arms, with her saying, “I love ya, Momma” Has been almost a year now, and sometimes seems forever [PWRIT-012 = SWRIT-006]

In this excerpt the modalizing term “always” is used both to describe the pain of her loss, as well as to express the desire to remember her daughter. The participant
contrasts her account in such a way that orients to the possibility that she may be seen by
others, or herself, as being "over" the pain of grief. Through her discourse this bereaved
mother emphasizes that although she may be outwardly displaying a sense of enjoyment
for life (i.e., "I smile, I laugh"), she orients to the reality that the pain of grief is ever
present ("Even though I . . . but, the pain is always there). In a way then, the child's
continuing absence and thus paradoxically her presence, are signaled by this ongoing
pain. Here, pain is discursively constructed as object ("the pain") rather than process, an
object which in some way becomes a sort of companion in the journey of grief.

Other participants talked about their child's body, and this talk was usually
situated in discourse which described the period of time close to the child's death. The
following excerpt from the written submission of a bereaved father describes his
difficulty in accepting the death of his daughter, and how seeing her body was an
important step in perhaps "acknowledging" the reality of (her) death (Worden, 1996).

I was not going to leave until I saw Yvonne because I still did not believe she
was dead. I hadn't cried much so far. The funeral director talked me out of
seeing Yvonne at that time. He wanted me to wait until Yvonne's body was
repaired to the best of his ability. I asked when I could see Yvonne? It was
agreed that night would be okay . . . About 8:00 PM we went back to the funeral
home to see Yvonne. I believe everyone was waiting on me to go first. As I
arrived at the casket I knew it was Yvonne laying in the casket and then I
started crying. How can my baby be laying in the ugly box? Not many
thoughts at all. Yvonne get up, get up. Look at Yvonne's beautiful red hair.
I held onto the casket for support and cried. [SWRIT-010]

The father emphasizes the visual sense ("until I saw Yvonne . . . talked me out of
seeing Yvonne . . . I asked when I could see Yvonne?") in his discourse, invoking the
popularly held maxim - "seeing is believing." He uses this particular language as a form
of justification, both in terms of justifying his disbelief at his daughter's death as well as
connecting “not seeing” her body to the fact that he “hadn't cried much so far”. He goes on to describe the cathartic effect of how once he is allowed to see his daughter’s body that he is then able to cry (“As I arrived at the casket I knew it was Yvonne laying in the casket and then I started crying”).

In this excerpt there is also discursive evidence of blocked agency on the part of the bereaved father in his attempts to see his daughter’s body. While he expresses his initial intent of staying in the funeral home until he sees the body (“I was not going to leave until I saw Yvonne”), the father then excuses his delay in doing this by describing his acceptance of the funeral director’s wishes (“The funeral director talked me out of seeing Yvonne at that time. He wanted me to wait until Yvonne's body was repaired to the best of his ability”), and then reasserts his own request (“I asked when I could see Yvonne?”).

The discursive practice of justification is again used, in this case by a bereaved mother, to explain why it is she finds it hard to cry:

I rarely cry. It is difficult for me to weep and I haven’t cried for Doug. This is a lifelong situation that was multiplied when I protected the children from their father and kept their secrets from him. It seemed necessary at the time, but I couldn’t coddle them and tell them how wrong their father was - it kept them from knowing how harsh he was. Right or wrong - that created a hard shell around me. [SWRIT-019 = PWRIT-010]

Here, the participant contextualizes her difficulty in crying within a historical framework of the family problems (“I protected the children from their father . . . how wrong their father was . . . it kept them from knowing how harsh he was”). She builds an justification of her inability to cry based on the need to create “a hard [emotional] shell” in order to “protect” her children in earlier stages of their life. The success of this discourse lies partly in the received appreciation of the justifiable need to protect one’s children from harm, be it physical or emotional. Allowances can be made for the secondary (indirect)
effects resulting from the primary need to protect children. This bereaved mother orientsto a possibly unreceptive audience by directly addressing the “correctness” of her choices(i.e., “It seemed necessary at the time... Right or wrong - that created a hard shell around me”).

The following discourse uses talk of the child’s body to build contrast between the beauty of the “living” body and the ugliness of the body’s destruction. The use ofdetailed description (e.g., “handsome beautiful boy of mine with smooth skin, blond hair... with Robbie’s broken and burned body sitting in the passengers seat right there...”) helps construct an account which may be heard as viable:

When _____ killed Robbie he killed me too. I just didn’t die. But many times I have wished to be dead rather than go through the agony and wrenching pain of burying my beautiful baby boy and living one second without him. I could not even tell him goodbye in death. _____ got himself out of the truck he crashed but left Robbie inside to burn to death. This handsome beautiful boy of mine with smooth skin, blond hair, and the most gorgeous and sincere personality in the whole world. Just left to burn beyond recognition. How in God’s name could _____ get out of that truck and have the unmitigated gall to leave Robbie and watch him burn to death. Then blatantly with concerted effort conceal his guilt as being the driver; leave the scene of the accident, refuse the blood alcohol test; save himself; to leave Robbie to burn, with Robbie’s broken and burned body sitting in the passengers seat right there, how ignorant and ugly can _____ be to do this to a human being as valuable as my Robbie. There is no acceptable excuse from here to eternity for _____ to kill Robbie and watch him burn... Can you please, Your Honor, conjure any kind of sensible statement why _____ is allowed to kill my beautiful son and walk, away with such a lessor charge... How can you in your learned and honorable position not at least do your part to stop this vile ruthless killing by applying a punishment severe enough to stop people like _____ from the reckless, senseless killing of innocent people, such as Robbie, a perfect human being who is my life, my breath, my sunshine. [PWRIT-005]

The participant’s use of graphic details allows her to be heard as doing extreme narrative. The bereaved mother also utilizes detailed description in building an effective account of the intentional nature of the actions taken by the person who was driving the
truck in which her son was killed ("Then blatantly with concerted effort conceal his guilt as being the driver; leave the scene of the accident; refuse the blood alcohol test; save himself; to leave Robbie to burn, with Robbie's broken and burned body sitting in the passengers seat right there").

The following excerpt from another bereaved mother alternately describes an embodied sense of the deceased child by incorporating a consumption/sacrament (food) metaphor:

I had no appetite, although people were trying to encourage me to eat. At about 5 A.M. I found the left over spaghetti that Alison had made for dinner. I ate it so I could have my daughter inside my body again. It was a sacrament to me. It didn't even taste good, but it was a transcendent moment; a symbol of the communion of our spirits . . . [SWRIT-011 = PWRIT-007]

The act of eating food is described not as fulfilling a wish for nourishment, but essentially as providing a linking object (Volkan, 1972, 1973; Worden, 1991), albeit fleeting, between mother and daughter. The participant describes consuming the leftovers of a meal which had been prepared by her daughter before her death, with the expressed intent ("I ate it so I could have") of feeling her daughter embodied within her own body ("so I could have my daughter inside my body again"). The participant utilizes the discursive practice of excusing, by making explicit that her motivation for eating was not physical (i.e., "I had no appetite, although people were trying to encourage me to eat . . . It didn't even taste good"), but spiritual (i.e., "It was a sacrament to me . . . it was a transcendent moment; a symbol of the communion of our spirits"). The bereaved mother also orients to the possibility of her account being heard as the mundane fulfillment of biological need by countering with this very "un-mundane" talk of "sacramental" embodiment.
While linking objects have often been viewed, or inferred, as detrimental to the grief process (Worden, 1991; Volkan, 1972, 1973), it appears that this linking experience (i.e., eating the leftovers) was indeed opposite in its effect. This concept of linking objects is also reflected in a less-embodied account by another bereaved mother: “I am able to wear some of Carol's clothes and I feel very close to her when I do. I don't know if that is feeling her presence or just the warmth of knowing she had those clothes on.” [SWRIT-017]

The previous participant later returns to the consumption metaphor as a way of describing the strength of her yearning (Parkes, 1972) for her child: “There are times when I yearn for my daughter with an all consuming intensity.” [SWRIT-011 = PWRT-007] Again, there is use of a maximum case formulation (“all consuming”) as a discursive attempt to capture the nature of the experience and perhaps counter potential minimization by others.

Other manifestations of embodied talk included references to smell and hair (“After Jacy died I kept her door to her room closed for about 2 1/2 yrs because I could still smell her in there. I went around her room & collected hair & it’s still there in her room.”) [SWRIT-007], sight (“It’s just sad - so sad- that we’re not going to see Chris,” Liz said.) [PWRT-014 = SWRIT-014] (“I feel cheated that I will never see Steven get married”) [SWRIT-013]; general visceral loss (“I am emptied ...”) [SWRIT-002]; as well as hearing, touch, and breathing:

I remember the first days after learning that Steven had died, I felt like I couldn't breathe. And even now sometimes the pain of his loss is so great that I find that I can't breathe and at night memories haunt me and I can't sleep ... At times I can still hear him calling me, his voice is so clear it's as if he is standing right beside me ... I feel cheated that I will never see Steven get married and I will never hold his newborn baby ... I feel cheated that I will never hug him again, kiss him again or tell him how very proud I am of him and how very much I love him ... I thought that I should be so lucky to have Steven walking in the door
saying “Mom I’m home”. I would give anything to hear those words just one more time. [SWRIT-013]

While embodied talk appeared to be one of the strategies available to bereaved parents in which they could communicate their intense yearning for their child, it was used almost exclusively by mothers in this study:

My arms long to hug him. If but one of my fingers could just touch his soft and beautiful cheek. I will never again hear his contagious laugh or see his beautiful blue/green eyes sparkle. I can’t tell him good morning or good night - or “Hello, Kiddo” or “Goodbye Robbie, Mom loves you” - as he goes out the door . . . Mom and Dad long to hold you again. You are in every second we breathe - night and day. We ache so deeply . . . [PWRIT-005]

In this account the participant paints a portrait of profound desire for bodily contact with her son Robbie. The achievement of the physical is accomplished in part through the use of detail in naming various body parts - “arms . . . fingers . . . cheek . . . eyes”. Further detail helps to add a physical dimension to the ongoing re-construction of the child as special, unique and thus ultimately irreplaceable. Robbie’s cheek is described as “soft and beautiful”, his laugh as “contagious”, and his eyes as “beautiful and spark(ling)”. The writer is also telling who Robbie was in the physical sense, and thus what it is she misses and yearns for. The doing of yearning is attained via the use of one particular word - long - which is also a synonym for - yearn. This same word is used by another bereaved mother to describe her embodied experience of grief:

I remembered how close we were & it makes my whole body ache with the loss & longing to have her back. [SWRIT-007 = PWRIT-002]

The sense of physical absence is underlined by the description of not being able to hold a daughter who has died of cancer:

It’s three A.M. and PANIC syndrome has set in again . . .
Tears, fear, empty aching arms & Hearts . . . No hugs or kisses goodnight . . . [PWRIT-013]
In making the observation with regard to gender differences surrounding the embodied expression of grief, I am reminded of the description of Dark Elegy, the collection of sculpted figures that Suse Lowenstein created to originally depict her grief following the death of her son in the Pan Am Flight 103 disaster over Lockerbie, Scotland:

When it is complete, Dark Elegy will include 125 figures. The earth-colored stone mothers, wives, and grandmothers - with their mouths open, screaming, eyes weeping, fists raised in anger and despair, fingers covering the mouth, hands clutching the head, arms reaching to heaven, bodies kneeling in prayer, crouching in terror, and stretched out in longing - are naked in their grief. (Kaplan, 1995, p. 141-142)

While Lowenstein had invited fathers, husbands, and grandfathers to be included in her human sculpture of mourning, there were none who came. Commenting on this phenomenon, she states: “They know they are welcome, but it has to do with the difference between men and women. The mothers weep. The men don’t feel comfortable showing their grief” (Kaplan, 1995, p. 141).

In writing an article for a professional newsletter (The Forum - Association for Death Education and Counseling), a bereaved mother uses the analogy of pregnancy as a means of describing her process of grief, which was largely an embodied experience.

The submission is reproduced here in the context of its entirety:

“Nine Months: The Gestation of a Grief”

Nine months after the death of my daughter in an auto collision on April 1995, I was struck by how much grieving reminded me of pregnancy. I replayed every physical sensation, reexperienced every emotion, and struggled with this life-changing event.

Physically, I felt a constant low-level nausea, and a total revulsion to food. Certain aromas -- especially the heavy, cloying scent of too many flowers in too small a space -- brought up a nausea reminiscent of cooking pork chops in early pregnancy. That smell always made me sick. This "mourning" sickness could not be managed by eating dry crackers
before getting out of bed. It just ran its course until the next food related phase: the cravings.

I sought solace in food. Especially appealing were foods that felt like love -- mushy, sweet, and sometimes forbidden. I found myself remembering foods I'd yearned for during pregnancy; foods I hadn't thought of in years. Indulging these hungers put a few pounds around my middle, and I found myself touching my rounded belly in an unconscious but reverential way. It felt so lovingly familiar.

Sleep disturbances, and their accompanying fatigue reminded me of pregnancy too. The major difference was that when pregnant, I stayed awake filled with thoughts and plans for my child. After her death, I stayed awake because each time I slept and woke up, I'd have to know all over again that she was dead. Humans must sleep, thus sleeplessness gave way to oversleeping. The energy drain of grief work is no less exhausting than the energy need to support a growing fetus. Just the results are different.

Obsessive thinking was a hallmark of my pregnancy. My child was always in my thoughts. At times, when she was not uppermost in my mind, she'd give me a prenatal nudge that would remind me of my focus. She again became an obsession after her death. I had a deep visceral aching, a physical sense of her absence. I yearned to see her smile, touch her skin, hear her voice. My mind was filled with images of her from "newborn" to "newdead". I began to prepare myself for a life without her, but the preparation was fraught with periods of confusion, uncertainty, and real fear. Family and friends did their best to support and comfort me, but I began to notice a blank expression on their faces when I was so often, and so painfully vocal. It felt like I was being impolite by discussing private matters in public. My grief obstetricians were my colleagues in the local chapter of The Association for Death Education and Counseling, The Grief Recovery Institute, and The Academy of Bereavement. These experts gently escorted me through the process I'd studied, and was now learning.

The real midwives were other grievers. I sought them out with an innate radar. It seemed that after a few moments of conversation, I'd know there was a loss pain as deep as my own, and I shamelessly asked questions: How do you cope? Are you different with your surviving kids? Will I always hurt so much? These questions replaced ones I remembered about breast feeding, scheduling, and sibling rivalry. The answers came with honesty and kindness. Perhaps the information was not always "textbook accurate", but the camaraderie was genuine and nurturing.
In my naiveté as a new mother, I thought I'd automatically make the changes and adjustments required by new motherhood, and that it would be easy. I was mistaken. I was not prepared for those times that parenthood overwhelmed me. Neither was I prepared for those crushing moments of the unbearable pain of loss. As I struggled with the roller coaster emotions of bereavement, I drew faith and hope from remembering that I was once terrified that I'd never achieve balance in motherhood. I did.

Now, in the "postpartum" of my daughter's death, I face challenges that seem as scary as new motherhood. It is hard to incorporate the unthinkable reality of her death into the pattern of my life. Rather than dwell on the multiple losses that result from the death of a child, I . . . living without her was not on my agenda, but I can live, love, share and grow in the wake of her death. She taught me much in her too-short life. I am certain her lessons live on and will sustain me through the infancy of my bereavement. [PWRIT-007 = SWRIT-011]

5.13 Linking Objects?

The discursive accounts of the bereaved parents sometimes included mention of objects and items that had belonged to the adult child, which seemed to hold particular meaning for the participant:

"First you have to know Peter." So saying, Mary _________ opens a folder containing glimpses into her son's life - his watch, photos of his art work, a picture of him in Florida after Hurricane Andrew, a trout fishing map he helped produce, his death certificate . . . As Mary was collecting the memorabilia she had brought with her, she fiddled with the watch. "I wonder how long that watch is going to keep running?" [PWRIT-011]

In the context of an interview with a newspaper reporter, the bereaved mother brings forth a folder of "memorabilia" relating to her deceased adult son. She focuses her attention on his watch and asks a question about its longevity, essentially "how long" it's going to keep ticking. In describing the timepiece as "that" watch, as opposed to "it" or "the watch", the bereaved mother ascribes particular significance to her son's watch. By commenting on the timepiece by means of a question, in combination with the use of the
word “that”, the watch is imparted a life of its own. Implicitly, she also communicates that she has no intention on winding it, rather letting it “run its course.”

Another bereaved mother mentions a piece of jewelry belonging to her son, which she wore until the person who killed him received his jail sentence:

I insisted on viewing the body of Doug - “Hi, Larry” of funeral home told me one casket couldn’t be “open,” but we were to have family viewing Wed. a.m. I told him I wanted Doug’s wedding ring which I wore until _______ was sentenced. Then I gave it to Oliver. [PWRIT-010 = SWRIT-019]

The concept of time connected to the object is an interesting addition to the discourse. The participant expresses her intentionality (“I wanted”) in wearing her son’s “wedding” ring from the period between his funeral and the time that her son’s killer is jailed. She then describes giving it over to her grandson (“Then I gave . . .”), and in so doing creates a sequential account in which the ring is seen to be serving a purpose during the period leading up to the sentencing.

The following excerpt illustrates the variability of the form that these objects took in the lives of the bereaved parents in this study:

I left her room closed for about 3 years. I did give some of her clothes away but mostly I left it alone until her scent left . . . After Jacy died I kept her door to her room closed for about 2 1/2 yrs because I could still smell her in there. I went around her room & collected hair & it’s still there in her room. [SWRIT-007 = PWRIT-002]

In this case, the “object” is a physical part of the daughter’s body (i.e., “hair”) which the participant describes as having intentionally and actively gathered (“I went around her room & collected”).

Photographs were also mentioned as objects to be shown to others, in this instance a newspaper reporter, who did not know the deceased adult child:
Carol, coordinator of nursing staff development at ______ Hospital, showed me pictures of Michelle sky diving, snapshots taken four days before her death. [PWRIT-015]

A participant on an Internet chat line responded to a thread which began some months before, with another mother’s concern that she was moving away from the city where her child lived and died, and that she would therefore no longer have the gravesite “always available”:

Kate 04:58 pm July 22, 1997 EST
I lost my son [son’s name] 2 years ago in August, we live in [name of city] and will be moving this summer. I’m not sure if I’m going to be able to say good-bye to my son again. I know that his spirit will always be with us. But knowing that we won’t be able to visit him anytime is tough. We don’t go out there very often, but it was always available. My other kids are also finding it tough. If anyone has any suggestions they would be greatly appreciated.

Joan 02:57 pm November 27, 1997 EST
Our sons were 19 and 29 when we lost them, but I still call them ‘my boys’. We are fortunate and still live in the house where they were raised. I can look at our giant oak tree and still see their tent under its shade. They are buried near to us but you can’t get into the cemetery in winter. On the first anniversary of the death of our last son we planted a blue spruce in our front yard. I typed out a message and put it into a peanut butter jar. It told that it was a memorial tree. Their names and dates of birth and death. We put it in the hole, under the tree. That tree is so big and beautiful. It is decorated as our Christmas tree. [ICHAT-002]

There are direct references in this one account to several possible linking objects. Joan implies (“We are fortunate . . .”) the significance of living in the same house in which she raised her two sons and imbues the “giant oak tree” with the ability to evoke memories of them in childhood. Her qualified description of their burial site may be an attempt to reduce the distress of the mother who posted the message, to which she is responding. While the “blue spruce” is described as a “memorial tree”, and was planted
on the anniversary of one of the son’s death, the “peanut butter jar” also represents a potential linking object in that peanut butter was apparently one of his favourite foods.

Worden (1991, p. 84) defines linking objects as “symbolic objects that the survivor keeps to provide a means through which the relationship with the deceased can be maintained externally.” Focusing on their apparent potential to “hinder satisfactory completion of the grieving process”, Worden encourages therapists working with the bereaved to facilitate the “putting away” or “giving up” of these objects. Similarly, Silverman and Nickman (1996b, p. 81) refer to linking objects as “aspect(s) of the relationship or an object from that relationship that keeps the mourner living in the past.” All of these authors cite Winnicott’s (1953) notion of a “transitional object” - one that connects one domain of experience with another - as a related concept. In their study of children’s (re)construction of their dead parents, Silverman and Nickman (1996b) found that possession of an object belonging to the deceased parent was an important means of maintaining a connection to him or her. They reported that seventy-seven percent of their sample of children (N=95) had something personal that used to belong to their parent who died.

Whether, and in what way, all of the various items described by the participants in the present study can be described as linking objects is an issue for further debate. When participant’s were asked, on the “Biography” form, whether there were any items that belonged to their child which they felt especially attached to, the vast majority responded in the affirmative. Of note as well, is that while Volkan (1972; 1973) initially hypothesized the possible detrimental effects of linking objects, he has more recently confirmed that they can indeed facilitate the grief process. He bases this in part on his observations of Turkish earthquake survivors and his suggestion that monuments be constructed, which could serve as “shared linking objects.” Volkan also has confirmed
the notion of linking relationships in his writings about "so-called replacement children who are living linking objects for their parents who could not mourn the death of their older child." Finally, some of Volkan's more recent work describes Palestinian orphans who were able to create linking objects to the parents they never knew (Vamik Volkan, personal communication, November 17, 1999). Suffice it to say at this point with the present data, that these objects held sufficient importance that the participants made mention of them without prompting. What these examples also illustrate is the flexibility of discursive resources for talking/writing about the same thing (i.e., an object) across a variety of situated contexts. The information was variously delivered in the form of a question, a description of a request within a larger sequential account, a recollection of activities, and as description of something shown to others.

5.14 Pride in the Adult Child

Within the data corpus were many instances of bereaved parents writing and talking about how proud they were of their adult child who died. This sense of pride was expressed in a variety of ways. One form that talk about pride took was for participants to describe a particular accomplishment on the part of the child:

As we were waiting for graduation to begin I was looking around at all the people that were there. The one thing that everyone seemed to have in common was the look of pride on their faces. Every face you looked at was just beaming with pride. I thought that as people looked at me they must be seeing the same thing because I was just bursting with pride. When I saw Steven in uniform for the first time I had tears in my eyes. He wasn't my little boy anymore he was a man. I knew how hard he had worked to earn the right to wear the uniform and at that moment I wanted to get up and yell out to everyone "that fine young man standing on stage is my son and I am so lucky to be his mother." At that moment I felt truly blessed that out of all the women in the world I was chosen to be his mother. I had always been proud of Steven but never as proud as I was at that moment. [SWRIT-013]
The bereaved mother in this excerpt is describing the commencement exercises at the military academy from which her son graduated. It is a scene in which the adult child is achieving an adult milestone ("he was a man"), and thus points to how the discourse of bereaved parents of adult children may differ from that of parents whose children die at a younger age. The participants in this study, had at their disposal between seventeen and forty-seven years of memories, events, and achievements to draw upon in constructing their accounts. The participant in this particular discourse orients, via extreme case formulations, to the presence of pride among the parents in the audience, in fact she proposes that pride was the unifying feature of the audience ("The one thing that everyone seemed to have in common was the look of pride on their faces").

Detailed description of an event, this time involving a grandchild, depicts vicarious pride (and resultant loss/grief), "on behalf of" the deceased adult child:

Our oldest granddaughter Jessica just turned 19 in October. Her birthday and Confirmation were celebrated the same day. We were happy for her but it was a very hard day for us. Jessica is now 19 and was told to leave her home when she refused to sign her social security check over to her step-dad. Her other grandmother and I gave her a graduation party. She is in her own apartment now, working and going to school. We have become quite close to her. Her dad would have been proud of her. We just keep thinking Jeff should be here. He would have been so proud. [PWRIT-008 = SWRIT-016]

In this case, however, the focus of pride is a grandchild instead of the adult child; where the parent is grieving Jeff’s absence in witnessing a milestone in the life of his own child. This represents an example of a secondary loss which is encountered by the bereaved parent, beyond the loss of their child.

Another participant is reported as recalling his expression of pride towards his son when he was alive, in expectation of his being the first in the family (i.e., generational discourse) to graduate with a university degree:
Roger _____, who lives in Oak Park, remembers telling Chris, who was due to graduate in three months from the University of Arizona at Tucson, how proud he was that Chris was going to be the first _____ to graduate from college. [PWRIT-014 = SWRIT-014]

In describing to a newspaper reporter his anticipation of accepting the degree (posthumously) on behalf of his deceased son, the bereaved father highlighted the paradox of the act:

His father will accept the degree in media arts for him during a College of Fine Arts ceremony before UAs main commencement. “I think it will be the happiest and saddest day of my life. He achieved his goal,” Roger _____ said. [PWRIT-014 = SWRIT-014]

In contrast to the open expression of pride, the bereaved mother in the following excerpt questions whether her son was aware of how she felt:

Joey was my son and I was very proud of him, but I don’t know if Joey knew this. I don’t show my emotions outwardly. [SWRIT-015]

There were also discourses of pride that were temporally located following the child’s death. In this excerpt, a participant is commenting on an article she read about bereaved parents in a popular magazine:

Valerie Percy, twenty-one year old daughter of Charles Percy was murdered in the family home. Charles and his family have since dedicated themselves to trying to be the kind of people that Valerie would be proud of. How often the faith Mavis Anne had in me comes to mind. Honoring that faith by helping others keeps her alive for me. [PWRIT-003]

Here we see an example of continuing bonds in the form of an explanation, where the helping activities of the bereaved mother are described as an expression and an honouring of the daughter’s “faith” in her. The participant also draws a parallel comparison to the Percys in trying to be the kind of person that the bereaved child “would be proud of.” This is suggestive of the nature of the bond, in the sense that the
deceased child will somehow “know” about the parents’ activities.

Alternately, pride could be expressed about the adult child in terms of their after-death impact upon others. The following example pertains specifically to the potential for organ donation:

Stammering and crying, I called the Medical Examiner's Office to make my request that some of my daughter continue to live on and enhance the lives of strangers who could no longer see. The person who answered the phone was gracious. His voice reflected reverence for Alison's gift, and I was so proud. [PWRIT-007 = SWRIT-011]

The participant calls on the use of metaphor to describe the organ donation. In stating that this was “Alison’s gift” she also imparts a sense of agency on her deceased daughter’s part, which then becomes a source of pride for the mother. This same participant also reflected on (retroactive) pride originating from her daughter:

Alison was, as I often am, sought out by others for emotional support and guidance. I knew that Alison and I had healed our non-traditional relationship. That knowledge was confirmed at her funeral, when one of her friends told me that Alison would often say "What you just told me was too hard for me to handle alone. I have to share it with my mother. Is that OK?". That conversation gave me so much comfort. Not only did Alison and I know we were important to each other, but she felt safe and proud enough of our relationship to let her friends know about our closeness. [SWRIT-011 = PWRIT-007]

The bereaved mother reconstructs the relationship with her daughter, characterizing it as “non-traditional”, “important” and “close”, while alluding to a time when it had not been good and required “healing.” In part she accomplishes this through her comparison of herself and Alison as similar, in that they are both characterized as “natural counsellors.” The “evidence” for Alison’s pride in their relationship is given in the mother recalling one of her daughter’s friends’ conversations with Alison.
A final excerpt reflecting talk about pride takes the discursive form of anecdotal humor, in which a participant recollects upon the comments of people who had viewed her son’s body:

Joey had my dry sense of humor. When he was laid out people expressed that he looked so much like me laying there, that I thought they were telling me I looked like I was dead. We always would tease Joey, saying he looked like his Dad. I was proud when everybody said he looked like me. [SWRIT-015]

Again, there is the description of similarities between parent and child, this time with regards to sense of humor. The participant then uses this very sense of humor to present the observation of further similarities ("looks") of which she is ultimately proud. She uses, in this instance, an escalating series of extreme case formulations ("so much . . . always . . . everybody") to reinforce her investment of pride in her son.

5.15 What It’s Like to Be a Bereaved Parent

A number of participants spoke and wrote, in diverse ways, about what it is to be a bereaved parent of an adult child. The varieties of ways in which they did this included making comparisons (to other deaths, life experiences), referencing themselves to other bereaved parents, drawing contrasts with non-bereaved parents/people, and making attempts at description. The participants were essentially using their discourse to do "being bereaved parents."

Similar to the business of characterizing the deceased children, and sometimes the relationship itself, participants made use of extreme case formulations as a discursive device for characterizing the nature of parental bereavement:

Being a bereaved parent is unlike any other thing I have went thru in my life. Everything is before and after the death. You never really feel the same again. You still think it can't be true at times. There is always a certain sadness that hangs over you. [SWRIT-016 = PW9RT-008]
Here the bereaved mother of a 37 year-old police officer, makes use of several modulating terms ("any"; "everything"; "never"; "always") within the space of five sentences. First of all, she combines two discursive devices, in this case an extreme case formulation and a comparison. She makes the comparison of "Being a bereaved parent" to "other" experiences in her life and concludes by emphasizing through extematization ("any"), that nothing ("unlike any other") compares. Invoking temporality, the participant then establishes "the death" of her adult son as the reference point in her life. Using a maximum case formulation ("Everything") she describes all else being categorized as either preceding ("before") or following ("after") the death. This same sort of referencing was evidenced in the statement of another participant, who said: "It was the central event of my life . . ." [SWRIT-011 = PWRIT-007], emphasizing ("the central") that is was the pivotal point in her existence. Life is now classified as falling temporally into two categories - "life before" and "life after" the death of the adult child.

Finally, the bereaved mother above uses two extreme case formulations to accomplish the business of describing how it feels to be a bereaved parent. She highlights the permanency of change ("never . . . again") that the bereaved parent experiences by stating that "You never really feel the same again". This also suggests a specificity to the change, in that it is "you" the bereaved parent, who is altered. The inclusion of "really" in this sentence is interesting. What does this achieve as compared to a sentence which could have read "You never feel the same again"? The latter form establishes greater certainty, while the former (used by the participant) introduces a margin of doubt, that perhaps as a bereaved parent you "should" feel "the same" eventually? Evidence that the participant has oriented to this feature lies in the final sentence, where she "upgrades" (Edwards, 1999) the assertion by describing more specifically just how "You never really feel the same again" (emphasis added). The mother uses an extreme case formulation
once again ("always") to describe a particular and definitive ("certain") emotion
("sadness") that permeates her experience.

The discursive practice of combining extreme case formulations with
comparisons was evident in the accounts of other participants as well:

The pain of losing a child is 100 times greater than losing another family
member like an elderly parent. [SWRIT-014]

In this excerpt the bereaved father uses numeracy ("100 times") to underline the
degree to which the "pain of losing a child" is so much more intense than suffering the
loss of another member of the family, and here he even illustrates with an example ("an
elderly parent").

The worst thing that can happen to me in my life has already happened
[SWRIT-018]

In this instance, the participant sets up an implicit comparison between her child
dying and anything else that could possibly occur in her life span, and enlists a maximum
case formulation ("worst") to characterize the former.

5.16 Metaphors

Rather than examining narrative structure (which focuses on identifying linkages
and sequences); Antaki (1994) suggests that a broader option in analyzing people’s
accounts is to explore "central key metaphors" as the source from which explanations
"spread out" (p. 101). While he acknowledges that there is lack of consensus with regard
to how metaphors work, there seems to be greater agreement about their properties:

A metaphor will map one domain onto another (for example ‘emotion’ onto
‘containment’) and, by mobilizing our analogical abilities, generate an
indefinitely large number of revealing substitutions of concrete images for
abstract ones (thus it was all bottled up inside, it all came out in a rush,
he kept his feelings hidden, and so on) (p. 101)
In critiquing the cognitive linguistic approach to metaphor, represented in the work of Lakoff (1987) and Gibbs (1994), Edwards (1997) further extends this discussion of alternative treatments into the realm of discursive psychology. He argues that Gibbs and Lakoff do not go far enough in confronting the common view that presumes these "‘literal’ mappings between language, mind and world" (p. 239):

I would argue that an objectivist element is retained in these theories of metaphor, in the form of appeals to bodily experience (Lakoff’s ‘experiential realism’), and in the notion of how ‘abstract’ ideas are expressed by more concrete or ‘familiar’ analogies. My unease stems also from what the cognitive linguists insert between ‘language’ and ‘reality’, in order to loosen up the objectivist (or ‘literal’) relation that otherwise might hold between them. What they insert are not discursive practices, as I would do, but individual cognitive processes. (p. 240)

In the context of a discursive framework, Edwards (1997) argues against an approach where the investigator constructs superordinate categories as a means to group various metaphors together. While this may allow for greater "order" it is nevertheless a limited and perhaps biased construction on the part of the analyst. In the present study, I could have grouped metaphors under headings; superordinate categories; like “Damage”, "Pain", and “Void” and stopped there. However, this treatment would have resulted in an analysis that did not go beyond recognizing metaphors as conceptual resources (Gibbs, 1994; Lakoff, 1987). Rather, the interest in this study of bereaved parents was to investigate and appreciate the further discursive uses of metaphor. Given that all metaphors are not created, or at least used, equally (i.e., not equivalent or interchangeable), the task for the discourse analyst is to consider the reasons for people choosing one particular metaphor over another, as well as what sort of “discursive business such choices may perform” (Edwards, 1997, p. 189).
Apart from heat, pressure, and container metaphors for anger, Lakoff (1987) lists madness, struggle, and dangerous animal metaphors. While it is possible to devise conceptual relationships between all these, they also have their own narrative implications and rhetorical uses. ‘Contained heat’ metaphors such as ‘boiling with rage’ are unlike wild animal metaphors such as ‘bit her head off’. Raymond Gibbs (1994) suggests that different anger metaphors encode different parts of a complex cognitive model, suitable for use on different discursive occasions. For example, note that ‘bit her head off’ is explicitly active and object-related, while ‘boiling with rage’ is more passive and experiential. The choice between such alternatives may be useful for constructing alternative narratives of causal attribution and accountability. (Edwards, 1997, p. 189)

As Potter (1996) has persuasively argued, metaphors (“terms from one field being used in another” p. 180) play a performative role, allowing the speaker to describe, convince, narrate, and explain (Antaki, 1994). While acknowledging the difficulty in distinguishing metaphorical from literal discourse, Potter suggests that this is not “something that needs sorting out before the operation of descriptive discourse can be studied. Thus, the discourse can be studied for its rhetorical and constructive work” (p. 181).

The following excerpt illustrates, within one account, both the potential range of metaphors which were available to bereaved parents in this study, as well as the discursive work that participants were able to do by using these “conceptual resources”. The context for this particular discourse, is a bereaved mother serving as part of a court ordered “Impact Panel”, speaking to “3rd time offenders for drunken driving.” She reported that she takes part in these panels in her County five times a year, and that they usually have between 60 and 90 people in attendance:

Our living nightmare began at 3:00 a.m. on June 9, when our third son Todd who lives one block from us burst into our bedroom yelling “Mom, Dad, wake up, Jeff was killed!” . . . The senseless death of Jeff has devastated our family. There will always be a part missing, needlessly torn away from us. A critical link in our family has been broken. The pain of grief I feel is like nothing I’ve
felt before in my 65 years. At times the pain consumes me - the pain of no more outweighs the pain of once was. Jeff loved living so much. He was a valuable and contributing human being. One doesn't expect to bury one's children. My mother wrote in her diary the summer Jeff died, just weeks before she died that she never thought she'd live to see a grandchild die before her and why couldn't it have been her instead of him. I'm sure Jeff's death did contribute to her death. The burial of one's child is a wrenching alteration of expectations. It's the neverness that is so painful, never to sit with us at the table again, never to laugh with us, never to cry with us. Sometimes I think happiness is over for me. I look at photos of the past and the thought comes to me "that's when we were still happy." I can still laugh, but happiness is not the fundamental tone, sorrow is. His early death is his loss too - so much so. Kyle explains that it is looking at everything in a different color now. So many things remind you --even seeing a squad car, hearing a siren, seeing a policeman. The last thing you think of when you go to sleep and the first thing in the morning I think of Jeff. There was no time for good-byes and it is so hard. At times irritability, short attention span, losing a certain "zest" for enjoyment and living, knowing I can never hear his laugh, see the twinkle in his eye, hear his great sense of humor can only be a memory. Depression, being weak, crying, feeling sorry for yourself all are therapeutic in the end and eventually you reach out and try and help others as some have helped you. I am no longer the person I was before Jeff was killed. Recovery from a child’s death is the most difficult task I have ever had to undertake. I cannot replace Jeff, and being open about the pain is healthy. Sometimes the empty space is so real I can almost touch it, I can almost see it --it gets so big I can’t see anything else. [PWRIT-008 = SWRIT-016]

This account begins in the sequential form of a narrative, recounting the beginning of her ordeal as a bereaved mother of an adult child. The use of "began", within this narrative structure, prepares the listener for hearing about an experience which has an extended timeframe. The use of a horror metaphor ("living nightmare") immediately establishes the nature of her experience, helping to depict it as an atrocity. Rather than describing it only as a "nightmare", the inclusion of "living" suggests an additional element of torture in the ongoing loss of the child. The participant uses various details in her description ("3:00 a.m. . . . burst . . . yelling . . . wake up") to
communicate the element of suddenness with which she and her spouse learned of their son, Jeff’s death.

Another participant, also calls upon this horror device, but in the flexibility provided by metaphors, uses it to contrast the hope of the “nightmare” as a fantasy against the heavy (“weight”) reality of the child’s death:

You're in a daze; you feel someday you'll be OK or that you'll wake up from this nightmare. But then the weight of it comes down on you and you realize he won’t come back. [PWRIT-014]

Yet another participant, bereaved of his son, also draws upon this horror metaphor, and similarly used the details of time to emphasize to a judge (who would be sentencing his son’s killer) the length of the ordeal so far:

The crash was on August 31, 1994, at 11:50 p.m. My son was killed at that moment in time, and a part of his mother and I died that night with him. We will never, ever, be the same again. The past 11 months and 9 days have been a living nightmare. At times I feel I don’t want to live anymore. I’ve always been a very solid Christian and now I have problems praying and even attending church. [PWRIT-006 = PWRIT-005]

In the next segment within the excerpt above, concerning Jeff, the bereaved mother is attempting to impress upon her listeners the unnecessary nature of her son’s death (“senseless . . . needlessly”) and its hurtful effect in the “family” context. The participant invokes physical amputation and damage metaphors (“a part missing . . . torn away . . . broken . . . pain consumes me”) in describing the carnage that has prevailed on the family. Notice the choice between alternative metaphoric constructions, in that the segment begins with a more passive metaphor (“There will always be a part missing”), which is then progressively “upgraded” to two more active and agentic metaphors - “needlessly torn away from us . . . has been broken”. What these second metaphoric
constructions achieve in this context is a causal attribution of blame for the death of the son. Jeff is not "needlessly" "missing" because of some spontaneous occurrence, or for no reason at all, but because of someone's (i.e., a drunk driver's) intentional decisions and subsequent actions. The bereaved mother, through the use of metaphoric resources, builds an accountability discourse which is available to be heard as such by the listeners ('drunk drivers'), and which also ultimately reveals her own stake or investment.

To highlight the variety of discursive strategies available to these bereaved parents, the following account illustrates an alternate, much more explicit statement about accountability and culpability:

Your Honor, I know full well that nothing can bring Jacy back, for she is lost to us forever. But I strongly feel that Mr. ______ should be held fully responsible and accountable for the choices he made. [PWRIT-002]

Again, being mindful of context, this bereaved mother is making a written statement to a judge, who is the arbitrator of justice in the case of her daughter's death, as opposed to trying to encourage "3rd time offenders" not to drink and drive (i.e., to change their behaviour). Her aim is to convince the judge of not only the injustice of her daughter's death, but also to be heard as seeking justice and not revenge ("I know full well... But I strongly feel").

Notice how in writing about the participant's use of metaphor above, I have drawn substantially on other metaphors; impress, hurtful, carnage, constructions. Potter (1996) invokes the work of John Soyland (1994), to underline the dilemma of trying to distinguish between metaphorical and literal discourse, that this process itself depends on the use of metaphors to make it work. Potter concludes that "The search for non-metaphorical language within which to discuss metaphor is futile, or, at the very least, it begs the question of what literal uses of language would be" (p. 180).
Returning to first excerpt itself, the participant engages the use of an enclosure metaphor ("At times the pain consumes me") to effectively describe what the "pain" of her grief is like, that it is all-encompassing. She continues with further efforts at description by invoking metaphoric categories of the finality of her son’s death and his permanent absence ("the pain of no more"), and contrasting these to memories of her son being alive ("the pain of once was"), via the metaphor of measurement ("outweighs").

In a recollective narrative, the participant then recalls her own mother feeling the injustice of Jeff’s death, as a young adult, and expressing her desire to have died in his place ("why couldn’t it have been her instead of him"). Once again, a metaphor is chosen to do the work of description - to describe what it is like to be bereaved of an adult child ("The burial of one's child is a wrenching alteration of expectations"). In this instance the metaphor - wrenching - is one of violence, descriptive of assumptions about life being suddenly ruptured. This particular metaphor is reminiscent of Rando’s (1986) and Janoff-Bulman’s (1992) notions of "shattered assumptions." However, the choice of "wrenching" versus say "shattered" denotes once again a greater degree of causality and agency on "someone’s" part. While "shattered" leaves open the option for some sort of spontaneous action, "wrenched" speaks more to the presence of a perpetrator.

The use of the healing metaphor - recovery - at the end of the excerpt is another example of the importance of considering discourse in context ("Recovery from a child’s death is the most difficult task I have ever had to undertake"). Taken in isolation, this might be interpreted as an expression of grief as an illness, a construction that earlier grief theories have been criticized for espousing. It is hearable as healing by taking the wider discursive context into account; that the participant further describes it as a "task". In that she also describes herself as assuming ("undertake") this "task", the participant
constructs "recovery" as a process in which she is not a passive recipient, but an active agent, thus in the process of healing versus being ill (somewhat akin to health promotion versus illness narratives of "health"). This hearing is further supported by the sentence which follows - "I cannot replace Jeff, and being open about the pain is healthy" - in which the bereaved mother provides evidence about the "health(iness)" of what she is doing (i.e., talking openly about the pain). At the same time, her ending comments ("Sometimes the empty space is so real I can almost touch it, I can almost see it - it gets so big I can't see anything else.") are suggestive of the often cyclic nature of grief in general, where there are waves of intensity as opposed to a "linear" path of healing.

While this particular analytic discussion has focused on the use of metaphor, one can also see that the account contains numerous examples of extreme case formulations (e.g., "always"; "nothing"; "never"; "over"; "everything"; "can't"; anything"), which help the participant with the overall task of achieving an "extreme" account of an "extreme" life event.

In a similar vein to the account of the bereaved mother, above (i.e., "Sometimes I think happiness is over for me . . . the thought comes to me 'that's when we were still happy.' I can still laugh, but happiness is not the fundamental tone, sorrow is.") [PWRIT-008]), the participant below also writes about the end to "real" happiness:

Sally Jesse Raphael, remembering her thirty year-old daughter says that every single day is hard. "If you have had a child, there's no way not to have them always. You never expect the you will not know happiness. But I will never again be really, really happy. I have times when I'm more at peace. But there will always be this pain inside. Nothing makes up for that."

There is a tremendous change in me since the death of my daughter. I am less! I am less because part of me has died. I am less optimistic now that the improbable has happened to me. My eyes and smile are less vibrant, they have lost the look of inner happiness. But I am more! I am more tolerant of others. I am more patient, I am more compassionate having walked the road of grief and loss. [PWRIT-003 = SWRIT-008]
The context for this discourse is the bereaved mother’s published entry into a Compassionate Friends newsletter, and in part she is reflecting upon a magazine article that she herself had read about bereaved parents (People Magazine, March, 1997). In the context of a discourse on change resulting from the death of her daughter, the participant relates to lost happiness through use of an energy/amount metaphor (“less vibrant”). By use of this particular metaphor, she is then allowed the flexibility to write about how she has also changed for the ‘positive’, how she has become “more” as well as “less” (i.e., negative). In fact the title of her newsletter article was “I am Less . . . I am More”. Of note as well in the quote from Sally Jesse Raphael, is her use of extreme case formulations, where the paradoxical nature of bereaved parenthood is described through the contrapuntal (note the musical metaphor) play (another metaphor) of “never again” being “really, really happy” and “always” having “this pain inside”, versus there being “no way” to “not have” the child once “you have had (the) child.” In terms of reflexivity, what I am doing with my own language in this instance, is using the particular discursive device of metaphor to describe how Raphael’s discourse is constructed (in an oppositional way). My own analytic concern here is “describing”, I am to use Edward’s (1997) term, in the “business” of describing, and here I have turned the discourse onto itself (reflexively).

The “central key metaphor” (Antaki, 1994) of the account of one bereaved father was that of “a little room”:

Bill: I remember being at _____ Lake and we were sitttin’ there (.) you know in chairs and it’s night and you’re looking up at the stars (2.0) and you just don’t need to say anything [begins to cry]

Phil: No (4.0) What’s it like talking about him now?

Bill: Tough (.)
Phil: Yeah (2.0) have you done much of this?

Bill: Oh (.) yeah *(Phil Mhm)* not lately (.) but certainly after he died (1.0) It’s a little room *(Phil Mhm)* I don’t go in there very often anymore

Phil: It’s a little room.

Bill: Yeah (.) that’s the way you know (.) *(friend’s name)* described it

Phil: With a door on it?

Bill: With a door on it yeah (.) you don’t go in there that often (.) not anymore

Phil: Yeah (.) yeah

Bill: When you first lose a child you’re *there* all the time (.) and eventually you get out of there (1.0) and uh (.) you carry on that’s what they say (.) an air of normalcy comes into your life *(Phil Hm)* and it becomes normal to have a child’s ( _ ) *[inaudible]* (.) but (.) *[crying]* when you go back into the room it gets very difficult

Phil: ‘Cause the new normal that you’ve gotten to is (1.0)

Bill: Yeah (.) well the new normal is where you live *(Phil Yeah)* when you go back to the old normal (.) or the room (.) you recognize what the old normal was and then you again realize what you lost *(Phil Mhm)* (2.0) you know (.) what’s missing [INTVW-004]

In this account the participant begins to cry as he recalls times spent with his adult son, where no words were required to communicate. When asked what it is like to talk about his son now, the bereaved father invokes the metaphor of “a little room”, descriptive of a small, enclosed space within himself, that sounds very much like pain. In using this particular metaphor the bereaved father allows for the possibility of agency and control (i.e., “I don’t go in there . . . you get out of there”) of the pain. Yet at the same time he has, paradoxically, gone to that small room by my asking questions of him, and
by him talking about and remembering his son who died. He ends by equating “the little room” with the “old normal” - life as it was when his son was alive.

In this next excerpt, geographical metaphors are engaged to describe what it is like to live with the death of an adult child. The bereaved mother is writing directly to me as a “researcher of bereaved parents.” Her son Steven was a soldier who died as the passenger in a car driven by another enlisted man who had been drinking. The mother reported that she and her spouse had experienced much frustration in trying to find out details (“the answers”) of her son's death from the American military:

I have lost count of how many times I sat down to write this. I certainly gave the delete key a workout. I don't know why I am having such a hard time, maybe it's because I have to deal with a lot of feelings that I would rather keep buried. If we were sitting face to face I would be better able to tell you what I feel, I am a pretty good speaker but not a very good writer. . . . But I am determined to do this no matter how long it takes. If I am able to help you to help other people then I have helped myself. . . .

I will try my best to put into words what my life has been like since Steven died. The definition that the dictionary gives for the word grief is “intense emotional suffering caused by loss, disaster, misfortune, etc.; acute sorrow, deep sadness”. That definition just doesn't seem accurate enough. My definition of grief is to imagine for a moment that someone reached deep inside of you and ripped out your heart. The pain is unbearable, isn't it? It is not until you live it that you can truly understand or even comprehend what it is like. Living with grief is like living every moment of your life under a dark cloud. Sometimes no matter how hard you want to and no matter how hard you try you are stuck in one of the most terrible places that you can be. It seems that the longer you are there the harder it is to escape it. At times it's like being in a deep dark pit and as you are trying to climb out you keep slipping and ending up at the bottom. . . .

I found that not only did I lose my son I also lost myself. I can never be the same person that I was no matter how hard I try. And although it may sound stupid, at times I miss myself. I liked the person that I was a lot better than the person that I have become. Although I can never be that person again it doesn't stop me from searching and looking and hoping that one day I will be that person again. I have become bitter, angry, afraid, and impatient, so unlike the person that I used to be. I have had to learn to like myself all over again and believe me some days I am a very hard person to like. I learned the hard way that no matter how much
you love someone it isn't enough to ensure that they will always be with you. I loved Steven more than anything in the world and there wasn't anything that I wouldn't do for him including giving my life for him. Unfortunately, I wasn't given that choice which is why he is not here and I am writing this . . . There isn't a moment that goes by that I don't think of him and to say that I miss him terribly doesn't even come close . . . I will never accept Steven's death. I have learned to live with it because that is what I need to do in order to keep on living. For a long time I was stuck in this very dark place and was petrified to move on. I felt that by going on with my life I would be leaving Steven behind. I knew that staying where I was would be easy, moving on would be very hard. I felt guilty that I was alive and he wasn't. [SWRIT-013]

While I as researcher am the "immediate" audience for the participant's writings, she is also indirectly writing to a "potential" audience of other bereaved parents ("If I am able to help you to help other people . . ."). Her first geographical reference is in relation to "feelings" she would perhaps prefer to "keep buried", but that she ultimately chooses to discuss. That she describes emotions by the use of this metaphor, and in this particular way ("I would rather"), allows both for agency in being able to "bury" them (and the corollary of choosing to dig them up), as well as for perhaps their surfacing unintentionally (i.e., passively), when the "ground" above them is "disturbed" by others. This is yet another demonstration of the range and flexibility of discursive resources through which bereaved parents constructed their accounts.

The participant then embarks on an etymological description of "grief", which she ultimately concludes is unsatisfactory. She counters with an analogy of violent disembodiment ("someone reached deep inside of you and ripped out your heart"), resulting in pain - the metaphor of injury invoked. A bridging simile ("Living with grief is like living every moment of your life under a dark cloud") then intensifies into another geographical metaphor ("a deep dark pit"). Throughout this process of describing "what (her) life has been like since Steven died", the participant also uses a number of extreme case formulations (e.g., "unbearable . . . every . . . the most terrible"), which aid in
constructing an account of intense magnitude. The combined use of these devices is similar to another participant’s orientation to her own use of words:

Chuck was my only child and the devastation has been harrowing to me . . . The language used, by myself, is black hole. I am emptied, lost, left ‘for dead’ emotionally. [SWRIT-002]

In the closing lines of the first excerpt, Steven’s mother returns to the geographic metaphor to describe her grief process, and combines this with the images of “darkness” and being frozen in “fear” (“petrified”).

Edwards (1991) proposes that the purpose of all of these various “metaphorical expressions is, surely, to enable certain things to be said and not just thought” (1997, p. 189). In the particular case of these bereaved parents, metaphors allow for the doing of extremities. Through enlisting metaphors in their discourse, bereaved parents in this study were able to formulate the experience of parental bereavement as extreme, thus performing important narrative/descriptive work in the overall construction of their accounts. Edwards (1997) additionally states (p. 189) that:

. . . specifying anger [insert grief] in such graphic (experiential and visual) detail provides the kind of warrant, the kind of document of experiential recall, of ‘being there’ (Geertz, 1988), that bolsters the validity of all kinds of stories and descriptions when they are in danger of being countered (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996; Wooffitt, 1992)

Certainly in their choice of metaphors, and the degree of detail provided, the bereaved parents in this study demonstrated their ability to select from a rich array of discursive resources in describing their children, their relationships, and their identity as bereaved parents. They were also able to link this practice with the use of extreme case formulations; in that the death of the adult child - having been worked up as unique and irreplaceable- is formulated (through metaphor) as an absolute violation and injustice.
5.18 The Company of Bereaved Parents: You Can Only Understand If.

Losing my parents, brother and husband were difficult times for me. But nothing can compare to the loss of my child and the only one who knows this is another parent who has lost a child. [SWRIT-018]

Like some of the previous examples above, this excerpt demonstrates the use of evidence-based comparisons to highlight, in this case, the immensity of losing one’s child. The effects of parental, sibling, and spousal death are described in relatively mild terms (“difficult times for me”) as compared to the implication of what it means to “lose” a child (“nothing can compare”). A unique feature of this discourse, is the addition of an assertion of exclusive community; wherein an extreme case formulation is used (“the only one”) to construct the argument that only other bereaved parents can comprehend (“who knows”) what it is like to lose one’s child.

The following account as well emphasizes the importance of a community of support (i.e., “the camaraderie was genuine and nurturing”) that was actively pursued (“I sought them out”) by the bereaved parent:

The real midwives were other grievers. I sought them out with an innate radar. It seemed that after a few moments of conversation, I’d know there was a loss pain as deep as my own, and I shamelessly asked questions: How do you cope? Are you different with your surviving kids? Will I always hurt so much? These questions replaced ones I remembered about breast feeding, scheduling, and sibling rivalry. The answers came with honesty and kindness. Perhaps the information was not always ‘textbook accurate’, but the camaraderie was genuine and nurturing. [PWRIT-007 = SWRIT-011]

Another bereaved mother, in her discourse, orients to the “community” of bereaved parents:

Any parent who has lost a child will tell you it is the hardest thing to overcome. You don’t get over it. It doesn’t go away. You can’t put all your feelings on paper by answering questions. When I saw this in the MADD magazine we receive I felt I should share or help others from my experience. I hope I have done that. [SWRIT-003]
The participant constructs an argument of “selective universality” through the use of the extreme case formulation - “Any parent who has lost a child will tell you” - which suggests a uniformity of understanding of what it is to be a bereaved parent. Her language speaks against notions about grief “in general”, which are widespread in society, that there is some time limit on this process. The bereaved mother directly orients to expectations of “getting over it” and the pain of grief “going away” by using extematizations to refute these assumptions (“don’t”; “doesn’t”). As well, she orients to the struggle of trying to express her “feelings” in the particular context of a study of bereaved parents.

In the following excerpt, the participant writes specifically about her involvement with The Compassionate Friends, and how that was helpful:

Being a bereaved parent has been difficult. The hardest part for me was letting go. I didn't want to stop thinking about her. I wanted to talk about her to others but no one wanted to listen. It was an embarrassment to them. Eventually I found the support group, Compassionate Friends, which I found helpful but this caused a lot of pain to resurface . . . You may notice I use the word die frequently. This was stressed in support group. Face up to it. People don’t “pass on”, “go to heaven” and the like. They just plain die. But I seldom hear other people use the word . . . Answering your questions reminds me of my first visits to Compassionate Friends - it stirs up the ashes and reopens old wounds. But maybe that’s good - as the hurt is still there and I think always will be. [SWRIT-018]

Once again we read of the permanency of the “hurt” of losing an adult child, as constructed through an extreme case formulation (“always will be”). This suggests, as in other examples, that the grief of these bereaved parents does not end, and that this is in fact normative in this study. The participant simultaneously describes an extensive community (“no one”) of “others” who were unwilling to hear her story of losing her daughter. She uses the word “embarrassment”, which suggests that these assumed non-bereaved “others” felt uneasy or even perhaps annoyed at the participant wanting to
talk about her deceased daughter. This description of “others” helps establish the ground for a comparison to “the support group, Compassionate Friends”. Here again, however, paradox emerges. The participant states that while the group met her needs to talk about her daughter, and was something that she had been seeking (“Eventually I found”), that it “caused a lot of pain to resurface”. This and her later use of the metaphor - “stirs up the ashes” - gives an impression that talking or writing about the deceased child simultaneously elicits “pain”. The bereaved mother also orient towards people’s use of euphemisms to avoid talking about death, an observation which apparently was emphasized in her support group, and which has caused her to use the word “die” more readily.

While the participant above characterized the lack of support from “others” as “embarrassment”, as the literature suggests, it may be fear and helplessness that at times prevents non-bereaved parents from helping. The following excerpt orient towards this possibility as a bereaved father recounts the “knock on the door” to inform him of his son’s death:

Remembering the 5:30 a.m. wake-up call Feb. 16 when Ventura County Sheriff’s officers knocked on the door to advise of the tragedy, Roger saw flashlights at the doorway and opened a second floor window to inquire about the intrusion. “Are you Mr. _____? Can you come down here?” they asked. “It’s like a nightmare that all parents fear,” Roger said. [PWRIT-014 = SWRT-014]

He uses an extreme case formulation - “all parents fear” - which suggests a universality for the fear of losing one’s children.

The following parent as well describes that moment of “first” hearing “the words that your child has died”, and how her immediate response was denial (“there must be some mistake. It can’t be my child”) brought on by “shock”:
Most people don't understand that when your child dies there is a big part of you that dies with them. They think that after an appropriate amount of time you should just pick yourself up and go on with your life. If only it were that simple. When you first hear the words that your child has died the first thing you think is that there must be some mistake. It can't be my child that they are talking about and I think that at that moment shock sets in because it is your way of protecting yourself from losing your mind. I have to admit that some days losing my mind and being oblivious to what has happened would be a blessing. Weaving baskets doesn't seem like a bad way to live out my remaining years. At least then the pain would be over. I envy people with amnesia, the thought of waking up one morning and not knowing who I am or where I am and not remembering anything that has happened would be great. [SWRIT-013]

How this participant does “us and them” in her language is through the use of categorization, where she describes those who lack understanding of what happens to the parent when a child dies, as “Most people”. She also orients to the existence of a societal expectation around how long a parent should be grieving (“an appropriate amount of time”), and characterizes this assumption as “simplistic.”

Another bereaved mother, constructing the pain of losing a child as “the greatest hurt”, wrote similarly about the protective role of “shock”, describing it metaphorically as a “gift”:

I cannot begin to imagine a greater hurt than losing a child. I got through her death & the funeral only with the gift of shock, because without that, I would surely have lost my mind. I stayed in some degree of shock for probably a year & a half. The police and attorneys & others also (people who witnessed the crash) let the information trickle out to me very slowly. They protected me as much as they possibly could. I didn’t find out just how bad she was mangled until close to 2 yrs after it happened. Then the pain would start all over again. It is a physical pain, not just emotional; anyone who has lost a child can tell you that. Sometimes it’s almost unbearable. Jacy has been dead for close to 4 yrs. now & it still feels like yesterday at times. At other times I can look at her picture & think “Did I ever really have her or was she just a dream?” [SWRIT-007 = PWRIT-002]
Both this participant and the woman previously cited, constructed explanatory accounts of "shock", whereby they proposed that it served the specific role of protecting them from "losing their minds." The possibility of this latter occurrence was emphasized in this account by the use of a certainty term "surely." Once again, the participant uses an extreme case formulation - "anyone who has lost a child can tell you" - to reference herself to that company of people; bereaved parents; who understand the totality of the pain in surviving a child's death.

The next excerpt in this section describes the more particular situation of a bereavement "professional" whose adult daughter died:

I had the advantage of being a nurse. I was always interested in grief and bereavement, and had, ironically, finished a 5 day bereavement facilitator seminar just days before Alison's death. I guess she thought I needed on-the-job training. I think it was an advantage to have theoretical knowledge. It did not decrease the excruciating emotional pain, but I knew I was not "going crazy". I was just experiencing the most life altering event imaginable. I accessed the help of my bereavement colleagues shamelessly. They gave it freely . . . I used her death as an opportunity to teach others about loss. When people made thoughtless or insensitive comments, I told them (I hope politely) why their words were not comforting. I think that some of the people with whom I shared my sorrow will be kinder and wiser in relating to other bereaved individuals. Each time I talk or write about my experiences, I feel pride that Alison can still contribute to the world. I facilitate a bereavement support group at a local church, and offer classes at the hospital on bereavement.

[SWRIT-011 = PWRIT-007]

This participant, who is a nurse-bereavement educator, also orients to the possibility of "going crazy", but suggests that her "theoretical knowledge" allowed her to normalize her experience. However, she also emphasizes that having bereavement training did not immunize her from the tremendous pain of grief, which she constructs through extreme case formulations - "excruciating emotional pain . . . the most life altering event imaginable." Her particular community of support is described through her
context as more professionally privileged ("my bereavement colleagues") in the area of
grief and loss, although this same mother had previously described "other grievers" as the "real midwives."

In an Internet discussion, two mothers appear to be finding common ground in their grief as well as invoking membership category in the company of bereaved parents:

_Nancy_ 01:55 am March 4, 1998 EST
To [name of another bereaved parent on chat line] We understand what you are going through. We lost our 19 Yr. old son in a car accident 10 years ago. The pain, the tears, we know it all too well. My husband drives the same road twice a day to go to work and back, 5 days a week. He says when he passes the "spot" his heart stops for a minute and he can't breah, myself, I try to avoid this road. It's been 10 yrs, but I still find myself waking up in the middle of the night with a tightness around the chest, and have a good cry. Take care of yourself. [ICHAT-001]

_Joan_ 08:04 pm March 5, 1998 EST
NANCY our [son's name] was also 19. To go shopping we have to pass the spot where he died. It is something that nobody can explain to people who have not suffered that agony. [ICHAT-002]

_Nancy_ 11:28 pm March 5, 1998 EST
JOAN - I know what you mean. When you are driving, you could be thinking about something wonderful, and then, you see IT, and burst into tears. Some people can not understand that I still feel this way, and others will take the long way around to spare me the agony. How long ago did you lose your son? I always thought my kids would bury me, not the other way around. My heart goes out to you, and all the other parents that lost a child. It is a cross we will carry for the rest of our lives. Like you, I hang on to memories and take one day at a time. Lots of hugs to you Joan. [ICHAT-001]

_Joan_ 05:44 pm March 6, 1998 EST
Hello Nancy. [son's name] died 17 1/2 years ago and [other son] 6 1/2 years ago. To go to the small town where we shop we need to pass where David died. Any other way is right out of the way. My problem comes when I see peanut butter. The problem comes when I am not expecting it. [son's name] loved peanut butter and [other son] loved Weetabix and ketchup. Not normally at the same time but one time he
was ‘hung over’ and put ketchup on his Cornflakes. The others never let him live it down. [ICHAT-002]

Nancy, in responding to the post of another bereaved parent, begins a thread about **grief triggers** by talking about the significance of the “spot” on the road where her adult son died a decade earlier. She is attempting to convince the other person that she “understand(s)” their grief as a bereaved parent. Nancy also describes the physical nature of her and her husband’s grief. Joan, reading Nancy’s post, responds briefly the next evening. She immediately establishes a point of contact by stating that her son was the same age (“also 19”) when he died in what implicitly is also referred to as an automobile accident. In fact, Joan uses the exact same words as Nancy (i.e., “the spot”) to describe the location where her son died. The use of the descriptor -“the spot” - in this context serves as another example of the occasioned and performative nature of discourse. Notice in her initial post, that Nancy never actually says that her son has “died” or was “killed”, but rather turns to the word “lost.” She also does not explicitly identify “the road” she is talking about as the one that her son died on; yet when it comes to that point in her discourse when Nancy describes her husband’s reaction when passing (daily) the “spot”, it is unmistakably heard as the location where her son died. In the context of talking among other bereaved parents, this particular use of description helps establish a discursive “shorthand” where a tacit understanding is taken for granted, and serves to underline membership in the “in” group (i.e., bereaved parents). This is demonstrated in Joan’s “uptake” of Nancy’s post, where she orients to the latter’s concern by using the same words - “the spot” - to more explicitly name the place where her son “died.”

Further evidence of the participant’s orientation to the unique nature of membership in the company of bereaved parents is furnished when she adds: “It is
something that nobody can explain to people who have not suffered that agony.”

[ICHAT-002] Here, the bereaved mother utilizes an extreme case formulation (“nobody”) to emphasize her assertion that it is impossible for anyone who has not experienced the death of a child to comprehend what it is like to be a bereaved parent. Once again in this interaction, a type of shorthand is invoked by the use of the word “It”, which could be referring to what it is like to pass “the spot” where the child died, or something else (e.g., the broader experience of “being” a bereaved parent). The subject of discussion is clarified immediately upon Nancy’s response, when she orients to “It” and even upgrades this to “IT”. Somewhat similar to Wooffitt’s “I was doing X . . . when Y” construction, Nancy contrasts the “doing” of mundaneness (“When you are driving, you could be thinking about something wonderful . . .”) to the sudden, unexpectedness of the grief trigger (“and then, you see IT, and burst into tears”). Nancy then turns to categorization to distinguish between non-bereaved “others” (“Some people can not understand that I still feel this way”) and bereaved parents (“My heart goes out to you, and all the other parents that lost a child.”), marking her membership in the latter by further description, which includes an extreme case formulation to emphasize the never-ending nature of their grief (“It is a cross we will carry for the rest of our lives. Like you, I hang on to memories . . .”).

Finally in this section, a collection of brief excerpts utilizing metaphorical constructions demonstrate the availability of this discursive resource to very efficiently summarize the “essence” of the lived experience of bereaved parenthood:

Carol’s death left a huge void in my life that can never be filled. The loneliness is indescribable. [SWRIT-017]

The greatest stress in life is the loss of a child. [PWRIT-005]
After Peter died, his body was cremated. "The hardest thing I ever did was take the ashes and put them in the hole," she said. "As long as he wasn't in the ground, he wasn't gone." [PWRIT-011]

"Right now, my faith - I don't have it," said Michael, an X-ray technician. "I've tried very hard but this is killing me and I have such anger." [PWRIT-015]

Losing a child is the worse pain I ever felt. It's like losing a piece of yourself. [SWRIT-015]

5.19 Summary

The bereaved parents in this study demonstrated the availability and use of a number of discursive strategies for accomplishing various social actions in the context of their bereavement. The task that they most often oriented to was that of reconstructing their deceased adult child, as well as the relationship that they had, and in some cases maintained, with that child. In the course of doing this, the participants also found ways of constituting themselves as bereaved parents, and as parents. I have attempted in this analysis to demonstrate the active and descriptive work involved in this process. The settings and contexts in which the participants produced their discourse were broad and diverse; from responding to direct research questions in writing and speaking, to addressing legal forums, to conversing with other bereaved parents in a "virtual" community. As was evidenced through variability, these diverse settings helped reveal the occasioned nature of their discourse, in serving different purposes (e.g., describing, convincing, justifying, explaining) depending on the social context. The overall findings are summarized in Table 3 (see p. 305).
Table 3: Summary of Findings

**Discursive Devices/Strategies:**

- extreme case formulations
- categorization
- description / details
- characterization
- comparison
- paradox
- contrast (juxtapositioning)
- evidence-based character (re)building
- metaphor
- “I was just doing X... when Y”

**Social Actions Performed by Discourse:**

- constructing/reconstructing
- convincing
- remembering/not forgetting
- evaluating/assessing
- describing the indescribable
- demonstrating investment in adult child

**Discursive Content:**

- specialness/uniqueness of adult child/relationship with parent
- ultimate irreplaceability of adult child
- injustice
- constancy of thoughts
- memories/reminders
- pride/love
- embodiment
- dreams
- feeling close/unexpected presence
- gender
- linking objects
- bereaved parenthood/the company of bereaved parents
- continuance (never/forever)
In positioning their deceased adult children as ultimately irreplaceable, many of the participants used extreme case formulations. This same discursive device was used flexibly by the bereaved parents in constructing themselves as having experienced the most catastrophic life event possible. They accomplished their business of descriptive reconstruction by using extraordinary language to portray the character of the child, the nature of the relationship, as well as “what it is like” to be a bereaved parent. Extreme case formulations were also used to signal the participant’s investment in the descriptions themselves, whether it be of the child (e.g., valuable) or the relationship (e.g., caring), thus demonstrating their wider use as a discursive “practices” (Edwards, personal communication, August 10, 1999).

Another discursive practice which allowed for the significance of the loss to be “built up” was to engage in highly descriptive detail (e.g., listing of secondary losses). This facilitated a being there type quality, as well as the production of accounts which were hearably believable. Description was also a resource that some participants drew upon to communicate the various paradoxes involved in being a bereaved parent. Descriptive details were central to the process of developing categories.

The invocation of categories by the participants served as a flexible device that helped establish the deceased child as special and unique in various ways, whether this was via their birth order, gender, or membership in some other category. The use of categories allowed both for the reconstruction of the adult child as well as activities that they engaged in, as exceptional, thus underlining the magnitude of the loss for the parent. As Potter (1996, p. 111) has stated: “a description formulates some object or event as something; it constitutes it as a thing, and a thing with specific qualities.”
Categories were also used by participants to describe the nature of their relationship with their deceased child (e.g., "best friend"), which at times was also combined with extreme case formulations. This same combination of devices was variably employed to characterize the adult child more ‘negatively, yet still as ultimately valuable and thereby missed.

A discursive practice that bereaved parents were seen to use in this study was that of citing (behavioural) evidence as a means to reconstruct their deceased child’s (positive) character. In exemplifying the occasioned nature of talk and text, this practice of evidence-based character (re)building was most common in judicial settings, where the discursive task was mostly one of convincing. The typical scenario was one where the child had been killed by a drunk driver and the bereaved parent was submitting either a written or verbal account in the hopes of influencing the sentence.

Participants also enlisted the use of contrast and comparison in highlighting the unique nature of their children, their relationships, and their experiences of grief. Contrast, for example, was one way to achieve the doing of injustice and "unnaturalness", by juxtaposing the potential of a young adult life against the sudden ending of that life. Here again, the use of details and extreme case formulations helped to further emphasize the "needless" tragedy of the adult child’s death.

Many of the bereaved parents in this study made flexible use of metaphor in their attempts to describe the indescribable. In the context of a discursive analysis, imposing analyst’s categories onto the data is antithetical, and so this was avoided. “The validity of the analyses comes from looking at what the participants themselves treat as salient and relevant in their exploration of various issues and topics” (Stokoe, 1998, p. 236). By focusing on the performative functions of metaphor, beyond just their availability as conceptual resources, participants were seen to accomplish a range of activities
including description, explanation, justification, and reconstruction. The flexibility provided by metaphors allowed bereaved parents to carry out actions from assigning blame as well as to expressing and talking about emotions. The selection of some metaphors over others permitted participants to say what they were feeling (e.g., the "neverness"), and allowed for extreme description of what they had acknowledged was very difficult to describe in words.

While Wooffitt (1992) had previously identified speakers' use of the two-part discursive device described as - "I was just doing X . . . when Y"; in paranormal and parapsychological contexts; this study recognized for perhaps the first time, the availability of this device to bereaved parents in describing unexpected presence experiences of their deceased adult child.

The struggle to "really be understood" was reproduced in the discourse of the participants via their talk about "others" (i.e., non-bereaved parents). Bereaved parents were able to construct themselves as members of "[t]he club that nobody wanted to join" (Carverhill, 1999), by virtue of their shared extreme experience. In so doing, participants created an exclusivity to their lives, which was ultimately occasioned by the death of their adult child.

Finally, there was indeed evidence in the language of these bereaved parents for the potential construction of the relationship with the deceased child as continuing in some way. This was witnessed particularly in talk about "remembering" the child and carrying on various legacies; in descriptions about dreams; in accounts of embodiment; in reports about linking objects and relationships; and in stories recounting moments of pride.
Chapter 6 - DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter will begin with a discussion of the value of using a discursive psychological approach to studying parental bereavement. It will highlight the unique contribution of the present study as the first to utilize discourse analysis in the field of grief and bereavement. This will be followed by an examination of the limitations of a discursive approach as well as my own role as investigator in the study. The discussion will then turn towards the relationship between the current findings and various existing models of grief and mourning, focusing on the recent model proposed by British sociologist, Tony Walter (1996). In this context I will present a discursive model, which summarizes the present findings in relation to both the “existing” and “new” paradigms of grief. The uniqueness of parents bereaved of adult children will then be discussed, as well as the relevance of the discursive findings to grief counselling and therapy. Following this I will revisit the research considered in Chapter 2 in conjunction with the present findings and considerations for future research. The chapter concludes by positioning this discursive study of bereaved parents among a growing corpus of “dissident” literature in the field of grief and bereavement.

6.2 A Discursive Approach to Loss

Potter and Wetherell (1987) referred to “fruitfulness” as the most important criterion for validity in discourse-analytic research. This “refers to the power of the analysis to produce some novel findings, provide a new way of looking, or in some other way increase understanding of the subject matter” (Madill & Barkham, 1997, p. 241). The present study would appear to be “fruitful” in a variety of ways, in that it makes original contributions to the particular area of parental bereavement, as well as to the wider fields of grief and loss, and discourse analysis.
In comparison to previous research in the area of parental bereavement (e.g., Goodman et al., 1991; Rubin, 1990; Shanfield et al., 1986) following the death of an adult child, the present study differs in a number of ways: The (qualitative) data is subjected to an analysis which focuses on language usage; there is no appeal made to presumed internal (i.e., mental) states, the participants encompassed a wide range of demographic variables, and both the data and the method were significantly triangulated. So what does this particular discursive approach contribute to our understanding of bereaved parents of adult children?

First, the discursive analysis demonstrates how bereaved parents manage the paradoxical dilemma of describing with words, that which is indescribable - the loss of their adult child. An important feature of this analysis is the identification of particular discursive devices and practices in the realm of parental bereavement. The use of extreme case formulations in particular, is distinguished as a primary resource with which bereaved parents were able to reconstruct their deceased adult children. Through the use of extreme case formulations, the child was hearably reconstructed as “special”, “unique”, and thus entirely “irreplaceable.”

This study afforded the opportunity to examine language usage among bereaved parents of adult children at a level of detail which has previously not been attempted. Fine-grained analysis of these data thus revealed a range of discursive devices and practices which were available to bereaved parents in reconstituting not only the child, but their relationship with the child, themselves, and the experience of bereaved parenthood. These findings included the use of extreme case formulations, detailed description, characterization, categorization, contrast/paradox, comparison, metaphor, “I was just doing X . . . when Y” and evidence-based character construction.
What does it mean then as a bereaved parent to have these various resources available? Well, for example, the availability (as a discursive device) of describing the child’s actions (i.e., evidence-based character construction), signifies that besides its use in describing who the child was, it also allows the bereaved parent to remember (talk about) their child by what they “did” - by their activities and accomplishments. This type of discourse is characteristically less an “emotional” type of talk, so perhaps what parents are “doing” in this case is managing their emotions, or “dosing” their grief in manageable amounts (Wolfelt, 1996), by focusing on talk of activities and achievements, versus the person of the child, or the nature of their grief. As well, by focusing on achievements in the context of describing activities, they may also be “doing being proud” in a way that they hear as both more “acceptable” and believable by others.

Additionally, the findings shed light on to the various ways in which a “bond” between the parent and adult child may be talked about as continuing after death. In particular, bereaved parents in this study spoke of the constancy of their thoughts:

“He’s the first thing I think of when I wake up and the last thing I think of when I go to bed at night.” [PWRIT-011]

There isn’t a moment that goes by that I don’t think of him and to say that I miss him terribly doesn’t even come close. [SWRIT-013]

A day never goes by that I don’t think of her. Her presence is around me all the time. Even after twenty-one years . . . [SWRIT-009]

Reflecting the variety of linguistic resources available to them, participants also called upon relationship discourse to underline the continuing nature of the bond with their deceased adult child:

I realized that when he was alive he was always there for me and even though he had died he was still there for me [SWRIT-013]
Now - she's still my daughter... She will always remain my shining star.

By grounding these findings in observable data, I have been able to provide direct discursive evidence for the emerging theory which posits a (constructed) continuing bond between the "survivor" and the deceased. Such findings move us beyond the investigator simply purporting to identify "emergent" themes in the narratives of the bereaved, which often seems to be the case in other forms of qualitative research.

Finally, there appears to be no published discursive analytical studies of parental bereavement, or bereavement at all for that matter. Even a search of unpublished dissertations and theses yielded negative results. In a recent review of qualitative research in the field of thanatology, Owens and Payne (1999) were unable to cite any discursive studies of grief and bereavement, although they identified one investigation of palliative day-care units which utilized a discursive approach (Langley-Evans & Payne, 1997) with patients, volunteers and staff. Two British investigators, Gordon Riches and Pam Dawson, have published a series of articles describing various aspects of their research with bereaved parents (Riches & Dawson, 1996a; Riches & Dawson, 1996b; Riches & Dawson, 1996c; Riches & Dawson, 1997). While at one point they suggest that their methodology "resembled discourse analysis" (1996b, p. 360), further clarification reveals their "constructionist approach" to have been a combination of narrative analysis and "a mixture of induction and deduction" along the lines of grounded theory (Gordon Riches, personal communication, November 9, 1998).

Within the field of discourse analysis; which has so far tended to focus on topics such as conflict (Beattie & Doherty, 1995); racism (Wetherell & Potter, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1995); dispute; and politics (Potter, 1996); there appears to be a complete absence of discursive research on grief and bereavement. An informal survey of a group
of experienced discourse analysts, attending a recent international conference (Reconstructing Health Psychology: First International Conference on Critical and Qualitative Approaches to Health Psychology; St. John's, NF, July 1999) reinforced the evidence that there have been no studies of grief and bereavement utilizing a discursive psychological approach, prior to the present study. While all of this information collectively signals the present research as an original contribution to both areas, it has also involved some frustration with the lack of any "contrast cases" and perhaps more comparable (in subject content) "analytic start(ing) points" (Potter & Wetherell, 1994).

6.2.1 Limitations of a Discursive Approach

With the attempt in discursive psychology to ground any claims as demonstrably present in the data, this leaves my analysis open to criticism that it is too close to the data, that I could have made other potential claims (e.g., that bereaved parents were trying to defend against potential minimization of their loss by others).

It is not clear to what extent my analysis may apply (or not) to parents bereaved of younger children, and no attempt was made to compare the present data with the wider age range of child loss. As Wetherell and Potter (1988, p. 182) have noted in regard to such a limitation, discourse analytic work is "not suited to the production of the kind of broad empirical laws which are commonly the goal of social psychological research." However, Gill (1996, p. 155) counters this potential criticism by citing its misplacement:

Discourse analysis does not set out to identify any universal processes. Indeed, discourse analysts are critical of the idea that such generalizations are possible, arguing that discourse is constructed from particular interpretive resources and always designed for specific interpretive contexts . . . In short, all discourse is occasioned: there are no trans-historical, transcultural, universal accounts, except those that might be 'produced' by the artificiality of the research context.
In further naming some of the disadvantages of discourse analytic work Margaret Wetherell and Jonathan Potter (1988) have also oriented to the "sheer effort involved." The present study entailed significant time, labour, and energy requirements and challenged me to continually question my reading and analysis of the data. In conducting a discursive analysis I had to avoid the learned temptation to read for gist, and refocus my attention on the details of language. Even though Potter and Wetherell (1987) have laid out a systematic framework for carrying out discourse analysis, one still faces the task of "learning the trade", which seems only possible through doing. Wetherell and Potter (1988, p. 182) are entirely accurate in describing discourse analysis as a "craft skill which takes times to develop and is slow to conduct."

Similarly, in terms of triangulation, I have selected a range of data (i.e., data triangulation) and collection techniques (i.e., method triangulation) that serve as opportunities for establishing validity, as opposed to interpreting the data from a variety of theoretical viewpoints (i.e., theoretical triangulation) or involving multiple investigators (i.e., investigator triangulation). Regardless of the my efforts at triangulation "[w]e must remember that we are not gaining the impossible, a complete picture" (Bannister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, & Tindall, 1994, p. 147).

Gill (1996) raises another objection to discourse analysis related to the issue of representativeness. It might be argued for example, that the material I selected for analysis in this study is not representative of accounts of bereaved parents of adult children. To borrow Gill's characterization that "this criticism somewhat misses the point" (p. 155); as a discourse analyst I am not primarily interested in quantifying how often a particular device is used, but rather identifying and explicating the availability and use of various discursive resources as ways in which bereaved parents can talk about their experience.
A particular limitation of discourse analysis stems from its novelty as a qualitative research approach, especially in the North American context. There is a clear lack of geographically available mentors in Canada from which to learn and discuss discursive analysis in the style of Potter and Wetherell (i.e., discursive psychology). However, with the availability of e-mail I attempted to overcome this obstacle by making use of a virtual community of scholars in this area, who were extremely helpful and challenged me to think discursively about my data and my approach to the data (i.e., Anita Pomerantz, Jonathan Potter, Derek Edwards, Linda Wood). Readily available answers are elusive, however, in this relatively new field, as there are many matters at issue which are actively being debated on several fronts. An additional challenge in terms of novelty, was the lack of any analytic reference point specific to bereaved parents. This is a result of the absence of discourse analytic studies in the area of grief and bereavement.

6.2.2 Reflexivity: My Role as Researcher

Gilbert (1997) has raised concern over the issue of how transcribers and research assistants (as well as researchers themselves) are potentially affected by the data (the human stories) that they have to work with. In the absence of these (human) resources, I transcribed and transferred all of the data myself, and spent many, many hours reading, listening, re-reading and analyzing the discourse of bereaved parents of adult children. There were most certainly times when I could read no more, the sadness of the parent’s account overtaking me, I would well with tears. During those times I would try to switch my focus to a more mundane research task, or sometimes would have to stop altogether. At times it helped to debrief in an anonymous way so as to prevent “emotional burnout” (Gilbert, 1997). Through a very unexpected personal illness experience I was also “given” a temporary leave from my research.
I realized that a large part of my own emotional reactions to the material emanated from the fact of my being a parent, albeit of much younger children. At times I struggled with my mind projecting into an imagined future, worrying about the safety of my own children in years to come. Ultimately, I think this process has resulted in my adopting a greater appreciation of "the moment", as well as attempting to live more in the present and appreciating my children’s lives as they are lived.

From the point of view of someone who has been trained in a traditional empirical/experimental model of psychology, I found it a conscious and continuous challenge to focus on the fine details of language rather than the "gist." Although I had previously conducted phenomenological research, it took some time to develop a discourse analysts’ stance. I was also challenged in having been involved clinically with bereaved parents, to not "take on" or presume the participants’ concerns; to leave that as their business:

It is participants’ business, just like the topics of their talk (being bereaved, having feelings, etc.) are their business. The analytic task is to see how those things are handled in talk, not to join in with the participants’ concerns and make our own set of judgements on what they are actually thinking or trying to achieve. (Derek Edwards, personal communication, August 10, 1999)

There was no intent, or need, on my part, to take preconceived categories of language or parental bereavement into the study. It was quite clear that participants oriented to them themselves. I attempted to stick to making claims that could be supported through the data, to stay close to the data. A large part of my decision not to use a qualitative data analysis software package related to the danger of distancing myself from the data and being lulled into technological complacency.

In collecting the data and analyzing it, in choosing to investigate parental bereavement and not something else, I have already played a part in constructing this
research account, which is by necessity a partial account. How do my values and my
gender, for example, affect the research process? Might bereaved mothers, who chose to
write directly to me or be interviewed, have responded in different ways had I not been
male, or had I been older or younger? Had I been a bereaved parent myself, would
participants have responded with a different discourse if they knew this to be the case?
They certainly talked about how only another bereaved parent can truly understand what
they are going through (i.e., the “company” of bereaved parents). Had I been a bereaved
parent I may have been drawn to a more autobiographical research approach within the
qualitative paradigm, hermeneutics for example.

While it is difficult to find answers to these questions, I attempted to approach
this research with reflexivity, so as to hopefully pre-empt or at least reduce bias and
distortion (Davidson & Layder, 1994). At the same time I utilized a triangulated
approach of multiple data sources and data gathering techniques (Denzin, 1978), so as to
maximize the degree of confidence with the findings (i.e., validity). As Davidson and
Layder (1994, p. 55) suggest:

When used in conjunction with the practice of reflexivity, it [triangulation] is
perhaps possible to surmount some of the methodological and philosophical
problems which arise from the fact that there are different versions of the truth,
and that social researchers do not and cannot observe neutrally.

I did in two data (source) categories constitute the audience; the receiver; for the
participant’s discourse (i.e., solicited writings, interviews). In that language is seen as
socially performative, the fact of my being the receiver meant that I formed part of the
occasioned nature of the talk. Therefore, what participants were doing with their
language in this context varied from what they were doing if, for example, they were
directing their account to a judge. In discursive psychology, this does not represent an
impediment to the study, rather it was seen as an opportunity for variability, and therefore provided for further analysis of "occasioned" language function.

6.3 Discourse and The Language of Grief Theories

When the findings from this study are considered in the context of various theories of grief the implications are intriguing. There are some fairly clear thematic examples from the data in which one could hear the ringing of certain grief theorists loud and clear. Take the following excerpt as an example of the link between these theories and the words of a parent bereaved of their adult child: "I feel guilty that he is dead and I am alive. It is not supposed to be this way, he should have buried me, I should not have had to bury him." [SWRIT-013]. In this case, it is Rando's (1993) notion of the "changed assumptive world" which is reflected in the mother's statement. By focusing on the particularities of language use ("not supposed to be . . . should have . . . Should not . . ."), one can see detailed evidence that indeed the data supports the theory.

In the "should not" and "not supposed to", we clearly hear the expectations that a parent is supposed to die before their offspring, they "should" not be predeceased by their child.

The following excerpt highlights the importance of words in the application of a particularly influential theory of mourning, that of Worden's (1982; 1991) task-based model:

I will never accept Steven's death. I have learned to live with it because that is what I need to do in order to keep on living. For a long time I was stuck in this very dark place and was petrified to move on. I felt that by going on with my life I would be leaving Steven behind. I knew that staying where I was would be easy, moving on would be very hard. I felt guilty that I was alive and he wasn't. [SWRIT-013]

Worden's first stated task of mourning is "To Accept the Reality of the Loss." While both versions of his widely-read book contain this wording, he has on at least one occasion used the word "Acknowledge" interchangeably with "Acceptance" (Worden,
1996). The discourse above directly orients to the word “accept” by asserting with an extreme case formulation (“never”), the impossibility of “accepting” the adult child’s death; and thus, for this bereaved mother the irrelevance of Worden’s first task. However, it would be interesting to be able to ask this and other bereaved parents whether they have been able to “acknowledge” the death of their adult child. The alteration of one word illustrates the power of language to potentially validate or negate the bereaved parents’ experience. In preparing an upcoming revision of his classic book on grief therapy, Worden is in fact considering making the aforementioned change in the wording of his first task (J. William Worden, personal communication, October 18, 1999).

This participant’s orientation to “never accept(ing)” her son’s death is also an interesting example of what Walter (1996) calls “our reflexive society” (p. 20). He suggests that “what bereaved people do and how they talk about what they feel is influenced by theories of grief” (p. 20). How is such influence achieved? It is not unreasonable to speculate about the impact of reading various books on grief upon the bereaved parents’ lexicon. If parents attend bereavement support groups (as the mother above had) or counselling, they may also be exposed to particular vocabularies of which they were formerly unaware. Recall the bereaved mother, who reflecting on her involvement in The Compassionate Friends, brought the reader’s attention to her use of the word “die”:

You may notice I use the word die frequently. This was stressed in support group. Face up to it. People don’t “pass on”, “go to heaven” and the like. They just plain die. But I seldom hear other people use the word ... [SWRIT-018]

Overall, the findings in the present study are most synergistic with a “new model of grief” that has recently been proposed by a British sociologist, Tony Walter (1996).
Walter summarizes the main elements of his “biographical” model of grief as follows (p. 19):

1. Many bereaved people want to talk to others who knew the dead person.

2. Talking about or expressing feelings to a counsellor or in a self-help group may be helpful but it may be a poor second best to 1. Bereavement counselling fails to acknowledge this possibility.

3. (a) The purpose of grief is not to move on without those who have died, but to find a secure place for them. (b) For this place to be secure, the image of the dead normally has to be reasonably accurate, that is, shared by others and tested out against them.

4. Unfortunately, these others may not be readily available in a mobile, secular and bureaucratic society which separates work from home, and disrupts tradition, ritual and rootedness in place. Longevity compounds this.

5. This new theory of grief may be grounded in Gidden’s [1991] theory of identity in late-modern capitalism. Bereavement is part of the never-ending and reflexive conversation with self and others through which the late-modern person makes sense of their existence. In other words, bereavement is part of the process of (auto)biography, and the biographical imperative - the need to make sense of self and others in a continuing narrative - is the motor that drives bereavement behaviour. Without claiming all this to be unique to late-modern society, my theory is sociological in that it roots contemporary grief in the problematics of identity construction that characterizes this society . . .

6. Though elements (1) and (3a) have been noted in the psychological literature for some years, (1) remains but a minor theme in the literature and only recently is (3a) becoming a major rather than minor theme - amounting to a Kuhnian revolution in the study of grief. The other, more obviously sociological, elements in my model have not been brought together before.

Walter’s model is reminiscent of White’s (1989) paper: Saying hullo again: The incorporation of the lost relationship in the resolution of grief, as well as other “dissident literature” (Walter, 1996, p. 9) which has been challenging the conventional (i.e. existing, traditional dominant) grief work hypothesis during the last ten years (e.g., Wortman &
Silver, 1989; Stroebe, 1992; Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996). He emphasizes that the process by which people grieve is not so much (or at least exclusively) by working through their feelings, but by talking about the deceased to others who knew them; and in so doing, placing the dead within their own continuing lives. White (1989, p. 29) has also argued that grief work along the lines of the normative model, emphasizes the "saying goodbye" metaphor and only complicates the matter further. He alternately suggests that "establishing a context in therapy for the incorporation of the lost relationship" is far more helpful than "further efforts at encouraging the forfeiture of this relationship". The data here would suggest that is accomplished discursively, through the reconstructive talk and writing of bereaved parents.

This is contrasted to the emphasis in bereavement counselling based on Worden's (1991) and similar models, where the goal is to move on without the deceased. For example, Wolfelt's (1996) model of mourning suggests that one of the needs of the bereaved is to develop a new self-identity based on a life without the deceased. Walter (1996) also implies that much of grief counselling concerns itself with the feelings of the bereaved "rather than with the character of the deceased", thus contributing to the "withholding (of) permission to hold on to the dead" (p. 9).

As was witnessed in the present findings, bereaved parents oriented much of their discursive resources to reconstructing this very "character of the deceased" adult child. Their talk of their daughters and sons, however, was not limited to "those who knew the child", but as well to "the stranger", whether that be a judge, myself, or a "virtual" listener in an Internet chat group. Therefore, one element of Walter's model which I have some disagreement with is his insistence on the "accuracy" of the picture of the deceased, and the necessity for this being jointly constructed, in order for the continuing representation to "remain stable." He describes this as a social process (Walter, 1996, p.
13), whereby one mourner’s view of reality (of the deceased) is necessarily tested against another’s (using his own experience following the death of a close friend):

But what helped me were not the ‘internal dialogues with the deceased person’ but the external dialogues with others who knew her . . . Nor was it a matter, as the bereavement literature so often portrays, of friends ‘supporting’ the bereaved . . . This was not social support for an intrinsically personal grief process, but an intrinsically social process in which we negotiated and re-negotiated who Corina was, how she died and what she had meant to us. Because this was an external process, it was possible for others to add to, even to challenge and correct, my own understanding of her.

In that Walter took an autobiographical approach, his persistence in suggesting the necessity of talking to others who knew the person well in order that a “stable place” be found, may reflect an artifactual limitation of his method. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to use a discursive approach to study the collective process of grieving among various people who knew the deceased child. That being said, a social constructivist interpretation would not suggest that any one “understanding” of the deceased is necessarily “correct.” This is similarly why discussions of idealization of the deceased are somewhat pointless. What does it matter, and how do we ever really know, if the constructed account of the deceased child is an “idealized” one? The interest of discourse analysis, rather than suggest the existence of mental states and constructs, is in demonstrating the functional use of language by staying as close to the data as possible. My business as a discourse analyst was not to presume the “correctness” of the parent’s account, but rather to elucidate how participant’s constructed their discourse and what they oriented to . . . what was of importance to them.

The findings of the present study also demonstrate that the bereaved can and do benefit from talking to someone who did not know the deceased. While no effort was made to provide grief counselling or therapy in conducting this research, several parents commented on the “therapeutic benefits” of participating in the study. An interesting
piece of research might be to study the perceived “therapeutic” effects of bereaved parents taking part in research on parental bereavement! I cite the following data from this study as evidence which supports my contention, that to be useful to the mourner, “talk” of the deceased need not necessarily be shared with only those who knew them well. This excerpt represents the final statement by a 75 year-old father bereaved of his 47 year-old daughter from breast cancer:

As I write this I feel again the regret that Heather is gone and that her life was cut short. Writing about the experience of her death has been therapeutic, and has provided an opportunity for me to really examine and evaluate our relationship which I had not done heretofore. I had not written about this to anyone else and would probably never have done so. I do appreciate the opportunity to do so now, and I hope it will be helpful. [SWRIT-012]

What the data in this study do reflect is Walter’s assertion, that what may be helpful are the external dialogues with others as opposed to any presumed internal dialogues with the deceased. This leads me to speculate whether one of the reasons why Worden’s (1991) fourth task (i.e., To emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life”) and other similar proposals for grief, remain so elusive; is because of their essential reliance (explicit or implicit) on the notion of internal representations. But even what may be considered the closest thing to such a construct in the present data - memories of the deceased child - are formulated as “external dialogues”, often within an action orientation (e.g., remembering, legacy).

Similarly, recalling the words of a bereaved mother who commented on her need to talk, and what it was like writing to me about her deceased daughter:

Being a bereaved parent has been difficult. The hardest part for me was letting go. I didn’t want to stop thinking about her. I wanted to talk about her to others but no one wanted to listen. It was an embarrassment to them. Eventually I found the support group, Compassionate Friends, which I found helpful but this caused a lot of pain to resurface . . . . Answering your questions reminds me of my first visits to Compassionate Friends - it stirs up the ashes and reopens old
wounds. But maybe that's good - as the hurt is still there and I think always will be. [SWRIT-018]

The discourse of this participant is one of the clearest examples of the bereaved orienting to this need to talk, to engage in an external dialogue with an "other". While I did not know her adult child, this woman entered into a social dialogue with me to describe who her daughter was, what their relationship was like, as well as her experience of being a bereaved parent.

Talk was also oriented to by participants as a means by which to include the deceased adult child in the ongoing life of the family (i.e., continuing bond) (see Figure 1, p. 326):

We each miss them in our own ways, but hold them present whenever we gather - they aren't gone if we include them . . . We all talk frequently about Doug among the family and friends - I, probably more than others. Rebecca is always included when we talk about the grandchildren. [PWRIT-010 = SWRIT-019]

I will continue to talk and pray to him. Sometimes good things happen after talking to Chris. [SWRIT-014]

6.4 A Discursive Model of Grief

The following model is proposed as a discursive formulation of the grief process, and one which also expands upon Walter's (1996) "new model" of grief. This model encompasses the findings of the present study, beginning and continuing with the central metaphor of "pain" (i.e., the pain of losing a child). Key to this model is the role of "talk" (i.e., discourse which may also encompass writings) and the performative nature of discourse (i.e., discourse devices, discourse as social action). According to the present findings, the answer to the question of whether the child is replaceable is an emphatic "no", whereas this is contrasted to the existing paradigm of grief work, where moving on (i.e., detachment) ultimately resulted in replacement of the deceased. Rather than
speculate about hypothesized internalized representations of the deceased, this model grounds talk, as the external representation of the deceased, in observable discursive data. A continued relationship with the deceased is also demonstrated in “reminiscence” talk and in descriptions of “feeling close.”
Figure 1: A Discursive Model of Grief
6.4.1 Talk of the Dead

The model proposed here is in some sense analogous to Rubin’s (1996) "Two-track model of Bereavement" (previously discussed in Chapter 2). Recall that Rubin proposed two distinct dimensions of bereavement; the first (Track I) focusing on outward behavioural and psychological functioning (i.e., dimensions of function), and the second (Track II) emphasizing the ongoing relationship to the representation of the deceased (i.e., dimensions of relationship). The current model, however, is distinctly different in that it further elucidates this relational dimension in the context of a social-discursive, as opposed to intrapsychic, worldview. This model is more a social psychological conceptualization, as compared to Rubin’s, which rests upon a psychodynamic formulation, albeit implicit. While trying to emphasize the importance of considering the continuing relationship between the parent and deceased child, Rubin’s (1996) model nevertheless constructs this largely in terms of an internal representation brought about by an individual process, and fails to adequately account for the socially interactive process of this (re)construction of the child. This same criticism applies to Worden’s task-based model of mourning (1991), which also implies intrapsychic processes of a psychodynamic nature (i.e., internal representation of the deceased), while failing to specify how this transition in the relationship between the mourner and the deceased (i.e., 4th Task) actually happens in a social context. The present discursive model acknowledges the role of “talk” in both the personal and social reconstructions of the child, the relationship, and the mourner. While being constrained by the medium of presentation to two-dimensions, the model might better be perceived by imagining the availability of a third (depth) dimension, and that talk is not mutually exclusive to either the internal or external worlds of the individual mourner, but that these experiences are in fact overlapping and intersecting (similar to a hologram).
Rubin has argued (1996) that the majority of existing studies have focused on overt symptomatology (i.e., Track I) in the attempt to measure bereavement outcomes/coping, at the neglect of the relational dimension (Track II) of loss. More recently, Neimeyer (2000) has also highlighted the bias in thanatology research in relying on supposed outcome measures of overt symptomatology in various attempts to quantify grief. The present study helps correct this bias and in so doing offers a more detailed model of the social dimensions of loss and mourning, which occur through the action of discourse. The model presented here rests firmly on observable data, whereby “talk” of the dead happens in two essential domains; internal and external. The internal dialogue with the deceased, about the deceased, and about the relationship, constitutes the “existing” paradigm, whereby the work of grief was thought to occur via the movement of the dead to an internalized representation, ultimately leading to resolution of grief. While Worden (1991), in the second edition of his influential book, tried to counter earlier criticisms of his first edition (1983), his model of mourning still maintains an essential reliance on this psychodynamic formulation on “internal representations”. In its purest form, the grief work hypothesis suggests the ability to replace the deceased with either another relationship or activity. In terms of individual grief activity, the internal dialogue essentially takes place via thinking and feeling, not actual talk. Bereavement counselling and therapy attempts in part to externalize this internal activity via the medium of talk. By talking to the therapist/counsellor, bereaved people have the opportunity to put outside of their internal selves, the thoughts and feelings that they experience in relation to the deceased and the process of their loss. Experientially, they may express a range of emotions in the presence of the therapist/counsellor, and often receive validation that what they are experiencing is a “normal” part of the grieving process.
There is an interesting interplay between the internal and external dialogues in that the development of a stable internal representation may in fact be dependent upon the social (i.e., external) dimensions of discourse. In observing the external/communal reminiscences that family members share about the deceased after their death, Rosenblatt and Elde (1990) as well as Silverman and Nickman (1996b) have emphasized how this (social) process actually aids individual mourners in developing their own personal construct of the deceased. In the context of researching bereaved parents, Klass (1988, 1996) also found that the deceased children became the focus of the communal talk of the group to the extent that they may have been reconstructed in a way not possible in the talk among others who in fact knew the child before death. Klass has proposed that this shared social reality aids each bereaved parent in establishing a secure place for their child in their own heart (i.e., solace).

In addition to recognizing the presence of an internal dialogue, the current model elucidates within the “new paradigm” of grief, the external dialogue which takes place, allowing for the creation of an externalized representation of the deceased, and a continuance of the dead in the ongoing life of the community as well as the individual. Walter (1999) has argued that in order for someone who has died to exist as an ancestor, they must be remembered in communal memory. “(To) have some existence in the ongoing life of the group, then the group must continue to talk about me” (p. 69). Talk is the essential social action of remembrance. Discourse, whether talk or text, is central to this externalized process, and accomplishes the “doing” of mourning (i.e., variety of social actions) be means of various discursive devices. It is through discourse, both spoken and written, that parents in this study demonstrated the range of possibilities for describing the indescribable. Walter (1999) additionally notes that in traditional societies, talk of ancestors “would be as likely to occur in specific rituals as much as in everyday
conversation” (p. 69-70). In contemporary Western societies, where ritual behaviours seem less and less apparent, it may be that talk itself is the modern-day ritual. Perhaps one of the best examples of how this ritual is more formally manifested is to think of the therapist-client arrangement, where the primary purpose (implicit or explicit) is to talk to another person about “a problem” in an attempt to ultimately alleviate suffering. The purpose of grief counsellors and bereavement support groups in many cases may be the provision of a place to tell the loss story that others have tired of, or not wanted to hear in the first place (Walter, 1999). So in a sense it seems that for some bereaved individuals, professionals and mutual support groups have supplanted the role that may have traditionally been played by members of one’s family and community.

In understanding the model presented here (Figure 1), the right-hand side in a sense may be seen as “mourning”, in that it describes grieving in a social and socially constructed context, while the left-hand side is more easily conceptualized as “grief”, in that the dialogue is internal, individual and thus private. By means of an external dialogue about the deceased, the relationship with the deceased, and the grief process itself; the bereaved person is able to reconstruct these elements in a social context (i.e., externalized representation), and in so doing to also continue a relationship with the deceased.

The data from the present study does not deny the availability of an internalized dialogue, rather the model stemming from the data incorporates this personal formulation alongside a new emphasis on the performative nature of language in understanding the process of grief and mourning to also be socially constructed. This model allows both grief theorists and clinicians to appreciate the discursive activity involved in grieving the loss of a loved one. By orienting not only to content (which is the natural/usual inclination of counsellors/therapists), but also to the discursive devices
employed by bereaved individuals, the clinician may gain insight into the client’s orientation and ultimately to their current concerns. In focusing in on the fine details of language construction, in addition to hearing or reading for gist (e.g., themes), grief therapists have available to them an additional, and distinctly different level of meaning through which to interact with the bereaved client. Discursive analysis leads to an understanding of the business in which the bereaved are engaged. For example, in noting the extensive use of a particular discursive device (i.e., extreme case formulations), bereaved parents are able to be heard to be doing things (i.e., social actions) such as: establishing the absolute irreplaceability of their adult children; convincing others of the injustice of their child’s death; blaming perpetrators for causing the death; expressing the absolute depth of their pain; and demonstrating their investment in their adult child. Emotions and thoughts are by no means absent from this process, but the process itself (i.e., mourning) is demonstrable as a social activity, and is achieved through the action of talk. The building blocks of this social, linguistic process are the various discursive devices, which as this study has demonstrated, form a wide array of flexibly used resources, which therapists would do well to become acquainted with. In discussing the particular uses of some metaphors over others for example, Edward’s (1991) emphasizes their purpose as “to enable certain things to be said, and not just thought” (1997, p. 189). The grief process moves beyond thoughts by means of language as social action and activity.

6.4.2 Applications of the Model

Therapists relying on this discursive model of grief and mourning first need to be challenged to hear differently than they have perhaps been trained. A fundamental orientation which stems from this model is to practice listening to how the client’s discourse is constructed in addition to hearing the content of what they are saying. In
essence, any separation of these two is in fact more contrived than real, analogous to trying to dissociate form from function in the world of biology. However, the overall emphasis in most models of therapist training is an almost exclusive focus on hearing the content of a client’s talk along with observing any apparent emotional experiences which may accompany that talk.

The discursive model presented here alerts the therapist to the existence of a range of flexible linguistic tools (i.e., discursive devices), the ways in which they might be used (i.e., discursive practices), and the potential (social) actions which they help achieve, as well as the issues they reveal as being at stake for the client. In using this “discourse in action” model to help the bereaved, the therapist is continually forced to interrogate their own interpretations of the client’s talk; to ask themselves: “Why am I hearing this in this way? What is the client’s talk doing? How is it doing this? What kind of psychological or interactional business is it handling?” In shifting from a more common cognitivist stance to a discursive one, it is not the aim of the therapist to impute motives for talking, or infer internal states of mind; which usually results in therapists interpreting why people say what they do, where “why?” presumes that talk is produced or driven by some underlying (yet ultimately speculative) state of mind, intention, motive, or what have you. Rather, this discursive model argues that it is these mental states and such that are the client’s business/concern and are being handled and managed in talk. The therapist’s (like the analyst’s) task is to see how these client concerns are handled in talk, not to make presumptions and judgements about what the client is “thinking or trying to achieve” (D. Edwards, personal communication, August 10, 1999).

One of the ways in which this model translates into practice is that in working with the bereaved individual, the therapist orients to the particular linguistic choices made by the client, and co-jointly explores the meanings of these choices. For example,
the therapist may note that from a vast array of potential metaphors a bereaved parent selects a particular metaphor to describe his or her grief (e.g., "a small room that I don’t go into very often", "a deep dark pit"). Whereas traditional approaches would perhaps explore the feelings associated with being in either of these (metaphorical) places, or make attempts to validate the client, the discursive model would suggest a dialogical focus on the use of the particular metaphor itself, as an attempt to understand what the client is doing with their language and what concern is being handled by their choice of metaphor. Why are they using one particular metaphor over another, given the range of possible choices.

To take another situation, perhaps a person who is dealing with a relationship loss in counselling talks about (e.g., describes) the actions of their partner as having "walked out" versus "left". Having oriented to the client’s lexical selection as one that is hearably active and agentive (versus passive and matter-of-fact), the therapist can then explore the business that the client is attempting to handle with their talk. So part of how the therapist hears the client is by listening for discursive choices, for talk that is not chosen as well as that which is. In any client’s narrative account of grief, the possibility exists for an examination of how agency itself is constructed by the client, where "personal agency refers to the way in which people are understood as relatively active or passive beings" (Madill & Doherty, 1994, p. 262). The discursive practice may then reveal the concern that the client is managing and the social action that is being performed. For example, discussion with the client of their use of the discursive device: "I was just doing X . . . when Y", which implies a lack of agency in experiencing the deceased’s presence, may reveal their essential concern not to be seen as "crazy" (the social action). Clients’ use of active, agentic descriptors for their grief process may point
to their concern regarding the possibility of being out of control or the paradoxical nature of grief itself.

The use of extreme case formulations (ECF) provides another example of how this discursive model of grief and mourning operates. In this case, the therapist would orient to the bereaved client’s choice of this particular device and investigate with them the purpose of its use in their discourse. Remember, the focus in this approach (i.e., discursive psychology) is on the discursive practice in the context of the content of talk, as opposed to a cognitivist psychological framework where interpretation of an underlying mental state would be typical. In the latter, bereaved parents use of extreme case descriptions of their children is seen as evidence for an internal process of idealization. In the discursive model, the therapist suspends the typical therapeutic interpretation in favour of an interrogation of the linguistic process to reveal the (client’s) concern that it is helping to manage. As an example, I commented (via e-mail) to a bereaved mother participating in this study about her use of extreme case formulations in describing her adult daughter who had died. She further discussed my comments with her estranged husband and responded to me as follows:

Ed, Alison’s father was here to start the century with me. I was telling him about our thoughts about the way that bereaved parents seem to magnify the accomplishments of their dead children. He said that he loves nothing more than the opportunity to share achievements of our living children. He can say “Jimmy is married and has a delightful son. Edward had some rough times, but now he’s teaching school. Alison is dead.” Since Alison is no longer achieving (in this physical world) he feels compelled to kind of “pad” what she did while she was alive. I instantly “got” it. It seems to me that it’s a way to compensate for the pride we expected to continue to have in our daughter.

While this was a researcher/participant interaction, it might equally as well be imagined as a therapist/client dialogue. Rather than end up with my own interpretation of the participant’s motive (e.g., idealization/sanctification of the deceased) - full stop; my
orienting to the discursive device (ECFs) led to an uncovering of the dilemma which it (the ECF) was ultimately being used to solve. What is at stake here (i.e., the dilemma) for the parent is the need to continue to exhibit pride in the deceased adult daughter, in the face of her necessarily finite achievements and in comparison to the ongoing accomplishments of her living siblings. The extreme case formulations are not a representation of an implied motive, rather they are a solution to the dilemma. They are achieving the social action of “doing being proud” and in the process constructing an externalized representation of the daughter and continuing a relationship with her memory. The presence of a discursive device, as this example demonstrates, serves as a signpost to the client’s concern/dilemma.

Walter (1999) asserts that the bereaved client’s need to tell the loss story (Nadeau, 1998; Carverhill, 1995) may be best facilitated by the grief therapist putting “on the back burner the normal counselling ethos of empathy . . . and to put on the front burner an ethos of genuine interest in the deceased, which is based on an assumption of his or her being unique and special” (p. 79-80). The therapist, he suggests, should be “as interested in the deceased as in the survivor” (p. 80). It is exactly this demonstration (social action) of uniqueness and specialness (discursive content) which bereaved parents in the present study were able to achieve by using various discursive devices (e.g., categorization, description, comparison) in reconstructing (social action) their adult children. The therapist’s awareness of how (in addition to what) language is being used leads dialogically and ultimately to what is at stake for the client (i.e., client’s concern).

As a guiding heuristic, the discursive model presented in this thesis outlines a cyclical process whereby talk with others (“External dialogue”) leads to the development of an “Externalized representation of the deceased” and further to the possibility of a “Continued relationship with the deceased”. This talk often takes the form of
reminiscence/remembering, in which case it makes sense that one of the most useful questions for a grief therapist to ask a client is “Tell me about _______ (the person who died)”. Somewhat akin to the proposition that “hope” may be present during any of the classical stages of dying (Kubler-Ross, 1969), the current model of grief suggests that “Pain” occupies that “third dimension” in various intensities and manifestations.

6.5 Uniqueness of Bereaved Parents of Adult Children?

What did this study reveal about bereaved parents of adult children, that perhaps establishes their grief as unique? The discursive evidence of the ultimate irreplaceability of the child may represent in part the nature of the “older” parent. Is this constructed emphasis different from what would be found among bereaved parents of younger children? This certainly is an area of potentially fruitful investigation. Blank (1998) has suggested that one of the features which characterizes older bereaved parents as unique is the biological impossibility for most of them of having subsequent children. “Making an affirmation of life by having another baby is something older parents cannot do” (p. 184).

Given this reality, do linking objects or relationships play a more significant role among bereaved parents of adult children, than with younger parents who are able to have another child? One of the bereaved mothers in the present study directly oriented, through her spontaneous written comments, to potential differences in the deaths of younger and older children, asserting with certainty (via an extreme case formulation) that it’s not the same:

Thank you for allowing me to be a part of this study. Although it was painful at times it has helped me. If you or anyone you know does a study on bereaved parents of infant children I would be happy to be a part of it. It’s completely different than grieving for an adult child. [SWRT-013]
In a letter that a 70 year-old mother wrote to me about her 37 year-old daughter who died from complications of juvenile diabetes, there is reference to “the difficulties of older parents” as well as the lack of studies in this area:

I am most happy to participate in your project! At last more and more research and writing is being done on bereaved parents of adult children . . . Please have a happy and holy holiday season and as soon as possible in 1999 I will sit down and complete the work for you. God Bless you for your help to we older parents. It is extremely difficult to continue on.

A reason sometimes given as to why non-bereaved parents find it difficult to be around parents whose child has died is that “it is too close to home.” The difficulty in providing social support is thus posited to lie in the threat that bereaved parents provide, that it is possible for anyone’s child to die, an idea which is too unbearable to consider. Janoff-Bulman asserts in Shattered Assumptions (1992) that victims pose a threat to non-victims through their representations that the world can be malevolent rather than benevolent. Similarly, Therese Rando (1993), in her theory of mourning proposes that for the bereaved parent themselves, the death of their child represents the shattering of a previously-held assumption that this should not happen. Both Janoff-Bulman and Rando suggest that there are predominantly held assumptions about how life should work, such as bad things happen to other people, the world is a safe place, and people get what they deserve and deserve what they get (i.e., “what comes around, goes around”). When tragedy befalls us, however, these assumptions are not helpful. As one client of William Worden’s (1991), whose adult son had died, stated: “Your expectations do you in!” (p. 19). Upon the death of a child, the bereaved parent may be faced with the “new” and harsh reality that bad things can happen to them. Alternately, the meaning that some may make of the death of a child is that they had done something terrible themselves, and that the child’s death was punishment for their own act (Nadeau, 1999).
Again, the discursive data made available in the present study provides specific evidence for the construction of the adult child’s death as an affront to a just world. Through their own language, and in particular the use of extreme case formulations, participants built up the specialness, uniqueness and ultimate irreplaceability of their adult children. They constructed juxtapositions between this immense value and potential with the ultimate senselessness of the child’s untimely death. This kind of evidence is available not through the usual reading for gist which characterizes most of North American psychology, but through careful analysis and attention to the details of language use by bereaved parents . . . through a discursive psychological approach.

6.6 Applied Discourse Analysis: “Watching Our Language”

Discourse analysis, as one of several currently practiced approaches to critical psychology (Reconstructing Health Psychology: First International Conference on Critical and Qualitative Approaches to Health Psychology; St. John’s, NF, July 1999), challenges us in particular to develop a greater awareness of the constructive nature of language (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). When considering the experiences of bereaved parents of adult children, how does our “professional” talk and writing reflect our constructions of their reality? Is it enabling of their grief process, or does it disenfranchise them from their lived experience by constructing an inaccurate reality? We can once again consider the word “preoccupation”, as an example of writing and speaking about parental bereavement, which has helped build up a wider discourse of “abnormality” surrounding the course of grief among parents bereaved of a child. In the present study, for example, my own use of the word “presence” was mostly rejected by participants in favour of alternate formulations (e.g., “feel close”) which were more accurate of the experience of these bereaved parents.
What do the present findings mean in the context of our work as grief therapists/counsellors? For one, they underline the tremendous importance of listening to the language of bereaved parents, and in particular attending to what they are trying to accomplish with their discourse (e.g., describing, reconstructing, blaming). By listening intently and with awareness to the social actions being performed by language (e.g., blaming, explaining, describing, evaluating, convincing) perhaps situations like the following might be avoided:

More than 7 1/2 years ago, my only child, my daughter Theo, was murdered by the terrorists who blew up Pan Am Flight 103 . . . Flashback to Dec. 21, 1988. I was crawling along the corridor floor of the motel room where Pan Am had placed me after my husband and I had spent hours at J.F.K. We’d been forced to go to the airport because the Pan Am phone lines were busy all day, and the only news we were getting was from TV. By the time I was in the motel it was late at night, and I had learned the truth. My charming, vibrant daughter, my Theo who sang like an angel and had a golden future, was dead at 20. Had a gun been handy I might very well have shot myself. Instead there was nothing to do but cry and scream and crawl along the floor.

The so-called grief-therapy expert assigned to me went into his act. According to him, I had good memories to comfort me and I could look into the future with hope. He started barking questions at me about Theo. What year in school was she? What were her hobbies? I told him to leave me alone. My grief was the grief of Greek tragedy, his response the verbal junk food of psychobabble. My husband sunk in his own grief, told the “expert” to leave. He refused. My husband had to threaten to grab him by the neck and throw him out . . .

The very phrase “grief process” tells it all. Bland, neutral words that have nothing to do with my personal hell. (S. Cohen, Time, July 29, 1996, p. 25)

In this piece of public discourse we once again here the extremities of bereaved parenthood. The findings of the present study indicate that “doing” extremes is normal for bereaved parents, and if this is the case, then perhaps many of the clinical clichés emanating from dominant grief theories have not served this population well to say the
least. The findings also further inform us of the reconstructed nature of the adult child and of the parent-adult child relationship, where the doing of irreplaceability is a paramount feature. If we are to serve as useful resources to bereaved parents, then we need to more accurately reflect their experiences in the language that we use in our writing and in our talking. Perhaps our professional language is too theoretical, too anemic and clinically sanitized to portray any sense that we really understand what the bereaved parent is going through. Is this part of what bereaved parents are saying to us when they talk about only being “really” understood by others like them? This study has identified the prevalence and significance of extreme case formulations as a flexible discursive resource to bereaved parents. What’s stopping those who would attempt to aid bereaved parents from using these same resources?

6.7 Revisiting the Parental Bereavement Literature:

Considerations for Future Research

In revisiting the literature reviewed earlier in this thesis, there is a clear need for more studies of bereaved parents of adult children to examine loss from a variety of causes of death. Conclusions and interpretations from the existing literature are limited by studies which have focused on singular causes of death (e.g., cancer, traffic accidents) as well as those which fail to adequately report the demographics of mortality amongst the deceased children (e.g., Goodman et al., 1991). While the majority of the deaths in the present study resulted from automobile accidents involving drunk drivers (see Table 2, p. 133-134), a range of causes are represented including: juvenile diabetes, cancer, hypothermia, drowning, pulmonary edema, complications of alcohol abuse, motor vehicle, train, industrial and skiing accidents. One of the striking features in terms of considering the cause of death as one of the potential determinants of grief reactions
(Worden, 1991) is that overwhelmingly the deaths of these adult children were sudden and thus unexpected by the parents. This appears to be demographically a part of the phenomenology of losing an adult child.

Cacace and Williamson (1996) suggest that future research might address the questions they had asked of bereaved parents, but to ask them of parents whose adult children had died of causes other than cancer. Shanfield and Swain (1984) argue specifically that while the loss of an adult child as a result of a traffic accident is relatively common, that parents bereaved in this way are largely understudied and merit further investigation. This is what in part the present study has accomplished. Shanfield and Swain cite accidental death as being the most frequent cause of death in adults under age thirty-five. More recent Canadian figures also name accidents as the leading cause of death, accounting for seventy-two per cent of deaths, for persons between the ages of five and twenty-nine (Beaujot, 1991). In accord with Shanfield and Swain’s contention that traffic accidents are a common event, Beaujot (1991) states that they constitute the largest component of accidental deaths in Canada as well. If the death of adult children from traffic accidents is such a common occurrence, then likewise there are large numbers of parents bereaved of these deaths. Shanfield and Swain (1984) suggest the need for greater documentation of the natural history of the loss of adult children from the viewpoint of these parents. This need might be addressed by a combination of ethnographic and phenomenological studies.

Another area of study which merits much more examination is that of gender differences in response to the death of an adult child (Cacace & Williamson, 1996). Fathers need to be actively recruited as participants in studies of parental bereavement. Shanfield and Swain (1984) have stressed the importance of studying what they observed
as different experiences and expressions of loss by bereaved mothers and fathers. In conducting bereavement support groups and counselling the bereaved, I have noted what are often striking differences between the grief responses of men and women. Significant problems in the family and in the marriage relationship may arise from misunderstandings of these differences. The death of a child places the family in an extreme state of disequilibrium exactly at a time when these supports are especially needed (Moss et al., 1986). As Schiff (1977) has described of the grieving couple, that although they had expected to count on each other in their mourning, “...you cannot lean on something bent double from its own burden” (p. 58). By gaining more insight into these gender, as well as other differences in parental bereavement, couples and caregivers would have more information available to them by which to potentially prevent unnecessary conflict and added family strain. In studying the discourse of bereaved parents, an area of seeming gender difference related to the use of “embodiment” language. Here, it was more common for bereaved mothers than fathers to describe physical aspects of their deceased adult children or to talk about their child as somehow being “embodied” in themselves. This discourse also served as further evidence of the variety of ways in which the continuing connection with the child was able to be represented and communicated through particular language (e.g., she will always be in my heart). The majority of bereaved parents in the study were women (84%), which reflected the general difficulty in recruiting men for studies of grief and loss.

The differential impact of family life cycle and individual life span developmental issues needs also to be considered and explored within the study of parental bereavement following the death of an adult child. How do the experiences of widowed or divorced bereaved parents for example compare to the that of married bereaved parents? (Cacace & Williamson, 1996). In the present study only three parents identified themselves as
“widowed” and one of these had remarried. It would be interesting to examine the
discourse of this sub-population of bereaved parents in greater numbers to look for any
sorts of patterns in how they wrote/spoke about their different losses (i.e., death of
spouse versus adult child). One participant in the study for example, offered her
comments that dealing with the death of an adult child was very different than coping
with an infant’s death, but she did not elaborate.

How do the transitional issues faced by parents at different points in the life span
interact with the experience of losing an adult child? What are the effects on parents
whose only child dies as compared to parents with other living children or those who
have experienced prior deaths of children? Some participants in the present study made
comparisons between their child who died and their living children, which helped them to
reconstruct the deceased child as unique and irreplaceable, while at the same time not
minimizing the other children.

How does loss history impact on the grief process for parents who suffer the
apparently had initially established the death of an only child as an inclusion criterion for
their study, but had to include mothers who had another child living because of
difficulties in obtaining the original sample. Similarly the significance of the deceased
child’s birth order as a determinant of bereavement outcome, a finding that was
suggested by Shanfield and Swain (1984), requires further investigation. Their
proposition of a “different relationship” between parents and first-borns as explanatory
of more intense grief is an interesting one, and could be explored in the context of the
nature of parent-child attachment. From a discursive point of view, it was seen in the
present study that parents used birth order as a category (e.g., first-born) to describe and
to help establish the uniqueness of the child who died.
The pressing importance of finding out more about parental bereavement in older adults has been emphasized by several authors (Moss et al., 1986; Lesher & Bergey, 1988; Goodman, et al., 1991). This takes place in the context of rapidly rising numbers of these parents in the general population. Demographers tell us that the average life expectancy of Canadians in 1986 was seventy-six years, an increase of thirty-four years since Canada became a nation. Statistically speaking, death is being delayed until later ages. Likewise, the leading causes of death have changed from infectious diseases to chronic diseases, affecting mainly people at the later stages of the life span. The most rapidly growing age group within the Canadian population is made up of people eighty years and above (Beaujot, 1991). Therefore, the likelihood of older parents being predeceased by one or more of their adult children is an ever-increasing possibility. Ages of the participants in this study ranged from 45-80 years old, with a mean age of 59 years.

Moss and colleagues (1986) cite figures from a national survey of a probability sample of 3,996 older people, that 9.7 % of those with children experienced the death of an adult child when they were themselves age sixty or above. These authors contend that at least one in every ten older parents has experienced the death of one or more of their children when the parent was in their senior years. Moss, Lesher, and Moss (1986) extrapolate this data to the end of the life span to suggest that the incidence of adult children’s deaths in the lives of the elder parents would be in excess of ten per cent. They emphasize the greater risk of suffering such a loss to be among the “old-old” as compared to the “young-old.” The authors cite a report (Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, 1977) which projected that if a woman sixty-five years or over had an adult son, there is a one in four chance that the son will die before the mother. Among a sample of ninety persons who were involved in psychotherapy in the Philadelphia
Geriatric Centre, a long-term care centre, fifteen per cent were found to have experienced the death of at least one adult child (Moss, Lesher, & Moss, 1986). Moss and colleagues further underline the potential impact of adult child loss on health and social planning in that older parents who have lost a child upon which they were dependent for care, may be at greater risk of institutionalization or need for home-care services. In the context of shrinking government expenditures, it would seem propitious to reduce the possibility of older bereaved parents needing increased health care services as a result of their loss. This goal to maintain seniors’ independence and optimal health might be addressed by developing ways to identify “high-risk” older parents soon enough to ensure adequate support is in place before a death (of an adult child) occurs.

Research into the death of an adult child may further contribute to our general understanding of the parent-adult child bond. In comparison to the mother-infant dyad, there is scarcely little known about the parent-child relationship as it continues into adulthood, especially from the perspective of the parent. Goodman and colleagues (1991) assert the significance of building a greater understanding of the phenomenon of parental bereavement following the death of an adult child, in order to inform the development of more specific theories in this area of adult development. Moss, Lesher, and Moss (1986) point to a lack of knowledge about relationships between adult children and their parents, and suggest that bereavement research on adult child death may contribute to increased understanding of this bond. Lesher and Bergey (1988) call for the need to specifically explore the themes of untimeliness, the uniqueness of the parent-child bond, the impact on the extended family, the loss of potential supports, and the feelings of hopelessness for the future. They also argue for future research to investigate how such social and psychological characteristics as family composition, sex, economic and cultural factors, coping strategies, and personality variables impact on the parental
bereavement process. In terms of the theme of untimeliness, parents in the present study spoke of the lost potential realized in the death of their adult child as well as shattered expectations and feelings of injustice. In that the context for the majority of deaths were drunk-driver related, the element of preventability and needless death was evident in some of the discourses. With regards to the nature of the parent-adult child connection, the discourse which spoke of close friendship and even “best friends” yielded interesting insights into the reconstruction of the relationship as one of adult-to-adult. The discursive content yielded evidence of reciprocity, where the parent may have depended on the adult child for emotional support as much as the reverse, if not more. Pride in the adult child was constructed through the use of evidence-building and reflected an additional aspect of the parent-child relationship. Similarly, the child as an extension of self, representative of generative continuity (e.g., “He was to carry on the family name”) was described through various linguistic devices (e.g., characterization, detailed description, metaphor, categorization).

Parental bereavement of an adult child takes place within a particular cultural context and yet this issue has received minimal attention in the existing literature. For example, in none of the three books which predominate the area of parental bereavement (i.e., Klass, 1988; Rando, 1986; Margolis et al., 1988) is there any discussion of cultural factors affecting parents whose children have died. An obvious, yet seemingly undiscussed limitation of much of the research in this area is its focus on bereaved Jewish parents (Levav et al., 1988; Goodman et al., 1991; Rubin, 1989; 1991; 1996) and mothers in particular (Lesher & Bergey, 1988; Goodman et al., 1991). Within Jewish culture, several of the studies have examined experiences of parental bereavement only within Israel (Levav et al., 1988; Rubin, 1989; 1991; 1996). The need to explore a wider range of cultural contexts as they interact with the parental bereavement process is
clearly evident. In the current investigative context it is interesting to note that cultural references in the discourse of bereaved parents was almost non-existent. One bereaved mother commented about her "style" of grieving perhaps being related to her Irish roots. Beyond this, participants only commented about cultural background when specifically asked about this on the biographical information form.

The particular ramifications of studying bereaved parents who have some involvement with The Compassionate Friends requires further analysis. While not the majority, there are a number of studies which have relied solely upon The Compassionate Friends chapters for the recruitment of participants (Videka-Sherman, 1982; Brabant et al., 1995; Klass, 1996). It has been suggested that this sampling strategy has resulted in mainly middle-class and upper-middle-class bereaved parents (who are more typically associated with The Compassionate Friends) taking part in research studies (Videka-Sherman, 1982). The characteristics of parents who join a self-help group such as The Compassionate Friends have not been fully elaborated at this point in time, although it has been suggested that they may self-select for lack of support (Brabant et al., 1995). While it may not be inappropriate to include participants who are involved with The Compassionate Friends, future research efforts should strive to study bereaved parents from a wider array of socioeconomic backgrounds. While some of the participants in this study identified their membership in The Compassionate Friends (see Table 2, p. 133-134), there was a somewhat greater proportion of bereaved parents who indicated an affiliation with MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving).

In 1986, Moss, Lesher, and Moss suggested a number of potential reasons for the lack of research on elder parental bereavement following the death of an adult child. These included: an unwillingness to investigate the painful process of bereavement in general; the intensity of feelings related to the death of a child; the painfulness and
avoidance of imagining the death of one’s own child; a perception that the incidence of adult child death is low; ageism; a bias among gerontologists to think of older adults as post-parental; a focus on the family of procreation of the deceased adult child at the exclusion of the family of origin; the perception of the older parent as less bereaved because of the presence of other children as “replacements” (p. 210). An additional reason for neglect in this area may be the tendency among both lay people and professionals to compare losses and arrive at the conclusion that the parent of an adult child at least had them for that many years, therefore the death should be somehow less severe than other losses.

Fourteen years after these observations were made, the fields of grief and bereavement, gerontology, life span development, family systems therapy, traumatology, and epidemiology have all experienced significant growth in their literatures, and hopefully, in 2000 and beyond, there will be less barriers to studying such an important topic as parental bereavement as there were a decade ago. The collection and analysis of detailed data regarding the experience of parental bereavement following the death of an adult child, will hopefully contribute to the further development of theory, assessment, intervention, and self-help strategies.

6.8 Conclusions

Although broad characterizations of the phenomenology of parental bereavement such as “the worst possible grief”, a “tragedy”, “out of the natural order of things”, are useful; what these characterizations do not reveal is the lived texture of the parents’ description and “its instantiation in everyday discursive practices” (Edley & Wetherell, 1997, p. 215). If we consider one aspect of social action to be problem-solving; and likewise view language as action that is involved in our efforts to solve social problems (Kroger & Wood, 1998); then it is through their language that bereaved parents reveal
the working through of their dilemma - to describe the indescribable. This is achieved most vividly through the use of extreme case formulations as a discursive device. What this study focused on, which those before it have not, is the detailed use of everyday language by bereaved parents of adult children.

My aim in the current analysis has been to sufficiently demonstrate the usefulness and appropriateness of a discursive analytic approach to explore language and parental bereavement. I have provided some indication of the potential of discourse analysis for offering new insights in the field of grief and bereavement. Prior to this study, the combination of discourse analysis and bereavement (parental or otherwise) have not been brought together. In fact there has been no apparent cross-fertilization of discursive studies and thanatology in any form. Similar to what Walter (1996) has tried to accomplish by incorporating sociological elements which have not previously been joined, into a "new model of grief"; I have also attempted a first by applying a critical constructivist methodology (i.e., discourse analysis) to the study of parental bereavement. One of the advantages of this approach is that it allows us to move beyond previous research by applying the principles of discursive psychology, thus revealing findings about language among bereaved parents, that remained obscured in other qualitative research. This study significantly expands the literatures of both grief and discourse analysis by applying an emerging qualitative approach to an under-researched area in the field of thanatology. Discourse analysis, while rapidly gaining usage in European research circles, is only faintly recognized by the culture of North American psychology. This study also raises a great number of fertile questions for future research with bereaved parents, questions that might otherwise have remained buried in the methodological limitations of other qualitative (and quantitative) approaches.
Further studies of this kind are needed if we are to advance our understanding of the experience of bereaved parents, in particular to elucidate more clearly the nature of the hypothesized continuing bond. More analyses of this type would also serve to expand the methodological range of qualitative research which is being conducted in the field of thanatology. Additionally, we need to balance the theoretical framework for language-based research in grief and bereavement, from the present emphasis on thematic ("big-picture") studies (e.g., Silverman & Nickman, 1996b; Normand, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996) to a social constructionist understanding of the occasioned ("micro-level") use of language to reconstruct the deceased and the particular relationship.

In adopting a discursive psychological approach to a neglected area of the grief and bereavement literature I feel like part of the company of a growing number of "dissidents" (e.g., Tony Walter, Margaret Stroebe, Michael White, Dennis Klass), who are challenging the zeitgeist of detachment as the expected norm for grieving. It is highly appropriate in this context to have studied parents whose adult children had died, for perhaps more than any other group of bereaved individuals, they have known for a long time that existing theories of grief do not speak accurately to their experiences, nor do they speak in a language that they necessarily understand. Their language of "never... always... only... most", is an extreme lexicon trying to describe the most extreme relational experience imaginable. As one bereaved mother, reflecting on a definition of grief that she had once read stated:

My definition of grief is to imagine for a moment that someone reached deep inside of you and ripped out your heart. The pain is unbearable, isn't it? [SWRIT-013]
The “classic” theory of grief that has predominated the past century has focused on grief work, on achieving emotional detachment from the deceased (see Figure 1, p. 326). This theory ultimately suffers from prematurity in that it developed into various prescriptive formulas for adapting to loss before an adequate understanding of the range of human grief experiences was properly established. Likewise, the theoretical language of detachment became superimposed on peoples’ loss encounters. Decades of quantitative studies, while helpful in some regards, have not significantly advanced our basic knowledge of bereavement and adaptation to loss. At the same time growing numbers of grief therapists have recognized the limitations of quantitative investigations of grief and bereavement, which may in part explain the widening gulf between researchers and clinicians in this field. If thanatology research does little to inform clinical practice then why clinicians ask should they bother to continue reading it? Likewise, the bereaved, especially bereaved parents, recognize the irrelevance of much of what quantitative research and traditional grief work models has offered to them in their efforts to live with loss.

The time has indeed come for what Walter (1996) calls a Kuhnian revolution in approaches to grief and loss. While this has been initiated by the proposition of the continuing bonds model, we should learn from history and not repeat the same mistakes. There is a danger that once again the model will be premature and develop ahead of an adequate base of understanding of the variety of human grief experiences. We now have at our investigative disposal a much wider selection of methodologies with which to study loss and the appropriateness of the continuing bonds model. While there have been an ever-increasing number of studies utilizing qualitative methods and methodologies, a “new zeitgeist” may be developing where adopting an approach other than say, grounded theory, might be seen as heresy. In fact the majority of qualitative studies in this field
appear to be based upon some version of grounded theory. Chamberlain (1999) has recently raised the issue of privileging methodological concerns above other considerations in qualitative research, a danger he refers to as “methodolatory.” He states that “qualitative researchers are in danger of reifying methods in the same way as their colleagues in quantitative research have done for some time.” In this vein, discourse analysis has the potential for being marginalized before it even gets off the ground in North America, under the shadow of more orthodox approaches.

If contemporary models of grief and bereavement are to reflect the reality of bereaved parents in particular, with the potential for truly helping, then they must be able to speak the same language. This development is only possible if a discursive psychological approach is taken as part of the investigative process; for to understand the use of language as a social action in the context of loss is to comprehend the nature of grief (see Figure 1, p. 326). The identification of extreme case formulations, as a discursive resource available to bereaved parents in making sense of their loss, would not have been possible had it not been for the fine-grained analysis of discourse. The “dissident” voices of bereaved parents have ultimately been revealed through the use of a “dissident” methodology . . . this is the stuff of a Kuhnian revolution!
REFERENCES

Bereaved Parents


Carverhill, P. A. (1999, August). The club that nobody wanted to join: Applying contemporary grief theories to living with chronic pain. Poster session presented at the First International Conference on Critical and Qualitative Approaches to Health Psychology, St. John’s, NF, Canada.


Kvale, S. (1996a, August). Interviews as knowledge construction. In L. H. Kidder (Convener & Chair), *Qualitative research: Spaces for critique and creativity*. Symposium conducted at the XXVI International Congress of Psychology, Montréal, Canada.


Appendix A: Worden’s Task-based Model of Mourning

The Four Tasks of Mourning (1991)

Task I: To accept the reality of the loss
Task II: To work through to the pain of grief
Task III: To adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing
Task IV: To emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life

The Four Tasks of Mourning (1983)

Task I: To accept the reality of the loss
Task II: To experience the pain of grief
Task III: To adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing
Task IV: To withdraw emotional energy from the deceased and reinvest it in another relationship
Appendix B: Distinguishing Features of Discourse Analysis
(excerpted from Edwards & Potter, 1992, pp. 28-29)

(1) Discourse analysis deals with naturally occurring talk and text, including interview transcripts understood in this way (cf. Potter & Mulkay, 1985; Potter & Wetherell, 1989). This separates it from most of speech act theory and analysis, and from most of experimental psychology’s dealings with textual materials, as well as providing for a somewhat wider set of concerns and materials than those addressed by conversation analysis.

(2) Discourse analysis is concerned with the content of talk, its subject matter and with its social rather than linguistic organization. This distinguishes it from linguistic studies of text grammar, cohesion and so on, which have the typical goal of providing content-free schemes.

(3) Discourse analysis has a triple concern with action, construction and variability (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). In saying and writing things, people perform social actions. The specific features of these actions are a product of constructing talk and text out of a range of styles, linguistic resources and rhetorical devices. Part of the interest of analysis is in this constructed process. Since talk and text are action oriented, versions are likely to show variability according to the different interactional contexts that are constructed to serve. Variation in accounts provides another important lever for discourse analytical work, revealing the situated and functional character of versions.

(4) One of the central features of discourse analysis is its concern with the rhetorical (argumentative) organization of everyday talk and thought (Billig, 1987; McCloskey, 1985; Simons, 1989). One of the major features of rhetorical analysis is the demonstration of how, in order to understand the nature and function of any version of events, we need to consider whatever real or potential alternative version it might be designed to counter (e.g., Billig, 1988, 1989).

(5) A final feature of discourse analysis has been its concern with the ostensibly cognitive issues of reality and mind. This reflects its origins in the sociology of scientific knowledge and in the reworking of psychological categories such as attitudes, learning, memory, and so on. Discourse analysis is particularly concerned with examining discourse for how cognitive issues of knowledge and belief, fact and error, truth and explanation, are dealt with (Edwards, 1991, 1992; Edwards et al., 1992; Edwards & Mercer, 1987; Potter et al, 1991; Potter & Halliday, 1990). It is a further development of these issues here which leads us to move beyond talking merely of discourse analysis and start to describe the enterprise as a discursive psychology.
Appendix C: Call to Participate

Call to Participate: Bereaved Parents of Adult Children

You are invited to participate in a research study on bereaved parents of adult children.

To find out more about this study and how to take part please contact:

Phil Carverhill
Department of Psychology
University of Saskatchewan
9 Campus Drive
Saskatoon, SK S7N 5A5
Canada

e-mail: carverhillp@sdh.sk.ca
TEL: (306) 655-8962
FAX: (306) 655-8951
Appendix D: Reflecting Questions

Reflecting Questions

Please read over the following questions. You may wish to consider any or all of them in writing about your relationship to your child who has died. On the other hand, don’t feel limited to these questions.

(1). Tell me about your child who died.
(2). Tell me about your relationship with your child.
(3). Tell me about being a bereaved parent. What has it been like for you?
(4). Who was your child to you? And what about now?
(5). Where do you think your child is now?
(6). In what ways was your child similar to you?
(7). In what ways was your child different than you?
(8). What did your child see when s/he looked at you through her/his eyes? How did s/he know these things about you?
(9). What did you see when you looked at your child? How did you know these things about her/him?
(10). Some parents say that they still feel their child’s presence, for instance, that they see, hear or smell the child. Are there any ways in which you experience the presence of your child now?
(11). Bereaved parents may have dreams about their child who has died. Do you dream about your child?

Please answer Questions 12-15 (after writing)

(12). What are you feeling right now, as you write?
(13). What was it like for you writing about your experiences of your child’s death? Have you written like this to others? (Who?)
(14). What was it like for you to write about your relationship with your child?
(15). Is there anything else that you would like to write about that you haven’t yet? Feel free to write about that now.

- Thank You -
Appendix E: “Biography” - Bereaved Parents of Adult Children

“Biography”
Bereaved Parents of Adult Children

Please provide the following important information as completely as possible.
Remember that this information will be kept confidential.

PIN (assigned by researcher) ___________________
Today’s date is: ________________
Address: ___________________________________________________________
Tel: ___________ Fax: ___________ e-mail: _________________________
Your date of birth ____________ Age ___ Sex (F/M) ___
Number of siblings in your family ___ sisters ___ brothers
Your place of birth _____________________________________________
Where was your mother born? __________________ Still living? ____ Yes ____ No
Where was your father born? __________________ Still living? ____ Yes ____ No
Language(s) spoken in your home as a child __________________________
Current marital/relationship status (i.e., married, single, divorced, etc.) ______________
Partner’s/Spouse’s first name (if applicable) __________________ Sex (F/M) ___
Date of marriage ____________ Is this your first marriage? ____ Yes ____ No
Are you widowed (now or previously)? ____ Yes ____ No
(If widowed): Date of your spouse’s death ____________ Cause of death ____________
Your educational history __________________________________________
Your work history _________________________________________________
Current occupation/job/main activity _________________________________
Are you currently unemployed? ____ Yes (since ________) ____ No
Are you retired? ____ Yes (year of retirement ________) ____ No
In your partner/spouse retired? ____ Yes (year of retirement ________) ____ No
Present personal annual income ________________
Present household annual income ________________
Number of wage-earners contributing to this household income ___
Would you say that your financial situation was very different at the time of your child’s
death? ____ Yes (please explain) ______________________________________ ____ No
Religion (if applicable) ____________________
Describe the extent of your religious practice (e.g., how often you attend, is your
religion an important part of your life, how often are you involved in your religion)
How would you describe your cultural/ethnic/racial background?

Would you say that you practice your cultural/ethnic background in any particular way? (please describe) __________________________________________________________

Current family life cycle issues for you (e.g., childbirth, children leaving home, caring for a dependent parent, retirement, death of a spouse, birth of grandchildren, divorce, etc.)

Name of your child who died __________________________

Date of child’s death ______________ Date of child’s birth ______________

Age of your child at the time of death ______________ Sex of child (F/M) ______________

Birth order (e.g., youngest of four, third of five) ______________________________

Was this child adopted? ______ Was this child from a previous marriage? ______

Are you the biological parent of this child? ______ Was this your only child? ______

Circumstances / cause of death ________________________________________________

Was your child’s death unexpected/sudden ______, or expected ______?

Would you describe your child’s death as violent? ______ Yes ______ No

Do you think your child experienced pain in their dying? ______ Yes ______ No

Were you physically present with your child when they died? ______ Yes ______ No

Child’s occupation/job/main activity at the time of death __________________________

Was your child unemployed at the time of their death? ______ Yes (since ______) ______ No

Were you aware of any concerns/problems in your child’s life at the time of their death? (e.g., financial, job, marital, addiction, legal, sexual, mental health) ______ Yes ______ No

If “Yes”, please describe ____________________________________________________

How would you describe your child’s health before their death? __________________________

If your child died as a result of an illness, were you involved in the physical care of your child before their death? ______ Yes (please describe) ____________________________ ______ No

Were you involved with the legal/justice system as a result of your child’s death? ______

Did it serve you well? ______ Why or why not? ________________________________

Were you involved with the healthcare system as a result of your child’s death? ______

Did it serve you well? ______ Why or why not? ________________________________

What was your child’s own family status at the time of their death (i.e., single, partner, married, separated, divorced, widowed, expecting, number/ages of children)? __________________________

Describe any particular ways in which you depended on this child (e.g., transportation, financially, housing, supported your living independently, food, childcare, emotionally) __________________________

Were you previously a bereaved parent? ______ Yes ______ No
What were the family life cycle issues for you at the time of your child's death?
(e.g., childbirth, children leaving home, caring for a dependent parent, retirement, death of a spouse, birth of grandchildren, divorce, etc.)

Have you or your spouse/partner experienced any physical, mental (including suicidal thoughts), emotional, thinking, sleeping, or eating problems/changes since the death of your child? ___ No ___ Yes (please describe)

Were you employed outside the home when your child died? ___ Yes ___ No
If so, how would you describe the response of your workplace to your bereavement?
(e.g., amount of leave given, “bereavement leave” vs “holiday time”, responses of co-workers, responses of employer)

In general, how did people around you (i.e., family members, friends, neighbours) respond to you when your child died?

Number and dates of pregnancies (for you & your spouse)

Number and dates of live births
Number and dates of miscarriages
Number and dates of ectopic pregnancies
Number and dates of stillbirths
Number and dates of abortions (i.e., spontaneous, induced, therapeutic)

Number of live birth children who died before reaching adulthood ___
First names, sex, age, circumstances/causes of death, dates of death

Do you have living children? ___ Yes # of living children ___ ___ No
Living children (first names, sex, age, occupation, family status, health)

Are you adopted? ___ Yes ___ No
List your own family of birth members (mother, father, sisters, brothers - first names, living or deceased, date of death, ages, occupation, family status, health)
People who were most supportive to you following your child’s death (relationship to you, first name, sex, age, occupation, were they bereaved parents themselves?)

Have you moved since the death of your child? ___ Yes ___ No
Have you changed your job/main activity since your child’s death? ___ Yes ___ No
Would you say that your religious beliefs or practices have altered at all since your child’s death? ___ No ___ Yes (please describe how they have changed)

Was your child’s body buried ___ cremated ___ other (specify) ____________
Was a ceremony/service held? ___ Yes ___ No
Was your child’s body/ashes present ___, or was it a memorial service ___, or both ___
If their body was present, was the casket opened ___, or closed ___, and was this according to your wishes ___ Yes ___ No Whose wishes? ________________
Did you make any of the decisions regarding your child’s funeral, burial/cremation, memorial service? ___ Yes ___ No
Please describe what decisions you made ________________

Is there a gravesite for your child? ___ Yes ___ No
Do you visit the gravesite? ___ Yes How often? ________________ ___ No
What/who has been most helpful to you in your bereavement?

What/who has been least helpful to you in your bereavement?

Would you say that your child’s death affected your marriage (if applicable)?
___ Yes ___ No
___ Positively (please describe) ________________
___ Negatively (please describe) ________________
___ Both positively and negatively (describe above)
Are there any items which belonged to your child that you feel especially attached to?
___ Yes ___ No
Please describe item(s), its meaning, as well as what you do with item(s)
Previous losses (i.e., death of ____ from ____ , job loss, divorce, disability; dates of losses)

________________________________________________________________________________________

Have you ever attended a support group what was only for bereaved parents?  
__ Yes    # of sessions/ groups attended ______   __ No
Please describe this group (i.e., name, location, how often it met, self-help/mutual aid, facilitated by a “professional”, duration, average number of parents in group, etc.)

________________________________________________________________________________________

Please describe how this group was helpful to you or not

________________________________________________________________________________________

Do you currently attend a bereaved parents support group?  
__ Yes Name of group ___________________________   __ No
Have you ever attended a general bereavement support group that was not only for bereaved parents?  __ Yes  # of sessions attended ______   No  
Do you currently attend a general bereavement support group?  __ Yes  __ No
Have you ever gone for counselling/ therapy as a result of your child’s death?  
__ Yes  # of sessions attended ______   __ No
Why?

________________________________________________________________________________________

Why not?_______________________________________________
Describe how counselling was helpful or not to you

________________________________________________________________________________________

What type of professional did you see for counselling/ therapy (e.g., psychologist, social worker, psychiatrist, clergy, funeral home staff, nurse, physician, other)?

________________________________________________________________________________________

Was this counselling/therapy made available through an Employee & Family Assistance Plan (i.e., EAP, EFAP) at your ___ workplace, or your spouse’s ___ workplace?  
__ Yes  __ No
Did you use the services of a funeral home / funeral director when your child died?  
__ Yes  __ No
Was there bereavement “aftercare” (i.e., counselling) provided or offered by the funeral home?  
__ Yes  __ No  __ Don’t know
Did you make use of these bereavement "aftercare" services?

___ Yes    ___ No

Why?

Why not?

Describe how this was useful to you or not

How did you hear about this study?

What made you want to participate in this study?

Any other information you feel is important for me to know, but that I didn’t ask about?

© P. A. Carverhill 1996

- Thank you very much for answering these questions.
   It has no doubt been painful and I applaud your courage and generosity -

Please return to: Phil Carverhill
Dept. of Psychology
University of Saskatchewan
9 Campus Drive
Saskatoon, SK S7N 5A5
Canada
Appendix F: Interview Guide

(1). Tell me about ____________ (your child who died).
(2). Tell me about your relationship with ____________.
(3). Tell me about being a bereaved parent. What has it been like for you?
(4). Who was ____________ to you? And what about now?
(5). Where do you think ____________ is now?
(6). In what ways was ____________ similar to you?
(7). In what ways was ____________ different than you?
(8). What did ____________ see when s/he looked at you through her/his eyes?
   How did s/he know these things about you?
(9). What did you see when you looked at ____________?
   How did you know these things about her/him?
(10). Some parents say that they still feel their child’s presence, for instance, that
      they see, hear or smell the child. Are there any ways in which you experience
      ____________’s presence now?
(11). Bereaved parents may have dreams about their child who has died. Do you dream
      about ____________? Tell me about that.

Closing Questions:

(1). What made you want to participate in this study?
(2). What are you feeling like right now as we talk?
(3). What was it like for you talking about your experience of __________’s death?
   Have you talked like this with others? (Who?)
(4). What was it like for you to talk about your relationship with __________?
(5). Is there anything that you would like to say further that I haven’t asked you about?
Appendix G: Transcription Notation

The transcription notation adopted in this study are a modified version of those developed by Gail Jefferson (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984).

(.) Short pause of less than 1 second

(1.0) Timed pause (in seconds).

text Stress on word by speaker

[text] Clarificatory information

[...] Material deliberately omitted

Phil Interviewer’s turn

Name Participant’s turn

(Phil hmm) Overlapping utterance

(name) Names excluded
## Appendix H: Coding Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Category</th>
<th>Nature of Discursive Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bereaved parents subculture</td>
<td>belonging to an “in-group” of other parents sharing the common experience of the death of one’s adult child, whereby there is a sense of connection. Also expressed in this category is the exclusivity of only bereaved parents ultimately being able to comprehend what other bereaved parents are going through</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreams</td>
<td>dreams involving the deceased adult child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embodiment</td>
<td>a sense of the deceased child expressed in bodily terms, either with respect to the parent’s body, or the child’s body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceptional Child</td>
<td>descriptions of the deceased adult child which highlighted personal characteristics and qualities of “specialness” and uniqueness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>feelings of love for and from the deceased adult child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metaphors</td>
<td>metaphoric descriptions of the nature of parental bereavement (e.g., “living nightmare”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pain</td>
<td>the experience of pain in various manifestations (i.e., emotional, physical, mental, spiritual)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memories</td>
<td>remembering/recalling the deceased adult child, activities, accomplishments, interpersonal events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanence of Loss</td>
<td>descriptions of a never-ending sense of loss and grief, as well as emphasis on the finality of the adult child’s death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence</td>
<td>a feeling of “closeness” to the deceased child which is experienced as somehow different from the “status quo”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking</td>
<td>the act of thinking about the deceased child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>talk about gender (of the child/parent) or gendered roles and relationships (i.e., Mother, Father, Daughter, Son)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix H: (cont’d)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>descriptions of the relationship between the parent and the child who died</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linking Objects</td>
<td>mention of items(objects which seemed to have particular significance for the bereaved parent related to the deceased adult child)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>instances of feeling proud about the deceased child, related both to the child’s characteristics as well as their accomplishments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>