CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCUSSION

Until recently, the empirical and therapeutic literature on grief, and even the self-help genre have paid scant attention to adult sibling loss. Such silent, benign neglect speaks volumes. Overlooking it seems in itself to be a metaphor of the phenomenon.

The aim of the present study was to discover what it is like to experience the loss of a sibling through death by gathering direct descriptions of the lived experience from surviving siblings themselves. Exploring this experience was undertaken both to gain a more integrated and comprehensive understanding of what it means to lose a brother or sister and to fill a gap in the psychological literature. Giving a "voice" to surviving siblings, who have been described in the literature as "silent", "invisible", or "forgotten" mourners, constitutes an essential aspect of the aim of this study. By approaching the phenomenon from an experiential-qualitative, rather than from a quantitative perspective, this study makes explicit the implicit structure regarding the way in which an individual lives and experiences the loss of a brother or sister and the unique personal meanings that such a loss has for the survivor.

Since all the participants were in their early twenties at the time of the death of their sibling - and all were still living at home - results were based on descriptions of the loss at a time when the participants had acquired a degree of independence from parents and were moving in different directions to that of their siblings, but, their lives were still closely intertwined with their families.

The present study reveals that the loss of a sibling is an experience that turns the surviving sibling's whole world upside down, confronts her with changes on many levels (i.e. self, parents, others) and shakes the sense of self, wholeness, rootedness and belongingness. With the loss, the self is confronted by a void: an emptiness that threatens to fragment self and significant others. A powerful desire endures to retain primary attachments and to recover a sense of continuity and stability. An emotional struggle, characterised by ambiguous, paradoxical and confused emotions, evolves and persists. Although the grief that accompanies sibling loss has many elements common to grief over the loss of any loved person, the context of sibling loss is unique and grief over the loss of a brother or sister should not be confused with other losses or with separation. It is a radically relational but extremely silent phenomenon that leaves the survivors feeling confused, bewildered and very alone. Everybody around them is so torn and vulnerable that bereaved siblings "bracket" their own grief. The resulting conspiracy of silence closets - contains and conceals - their sorrow. They begin to feel like "involved outsiders", part-of but also apart-from the whole grief situation. Surviving siblings attempt

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to synthesise a continuous sense of self in the absence of their sibling by holding on to, and cherishing, memories. The dimension of the impact of the death of a brother or sister is a salient feature of this unique loss experience. The impact of sibling loss is long-lasting and demands radical mourning and reorganisation; the challenge to meet with change and separateness and to move on. Submitting to the changes and acknowledging their grief forwards the mourning process and allows for a different form of transformation: one based on forgiveness that liberates the self on different levels and allows for a reclaiming of the self and for reintegration.

In this chapter, the brackets of all preconceptions (personal, theoretical, moral, and religious) regarding the loss of a sibling are lifted and the findings of the study are discussed. Where the voices of bereavement theorists, of other researchers or personal writings, amplify the voices of the participants, these will be acknowledged. However, the study remains grounded in the actual experience of the participants. The study is descriptive, reflective and based upon phenomenological thought. It privileges the life-world of bereaved siblings. The focus of my writing is concerned with actuality; with the real lived experience of sibling loss. Thus, writers like Freud, Kierkegaard and C. S. Lewis, while each come from very different orientations, converge in ideas and descriptions and their contributions are cited. Where relevant, themes emerging from the preliminary study (in Appendix D) are also cited. The present chapter includes a description of the pattern of sibling grief, implications for support and psychotherapy, and professional and cultural perceptions and conceptions of the sibling bond and sibling loss. The chapter ends with a re-visiting of the method used, and suggestions for further research.

For ease of reading, and because all the participants (and volunteers in the preliminary study) are female, "she", "her" and "herself" will be used throughout this section to refer to the surviving sibling. When writing about the sibling who has died, "he" or "she" and "his" or "hers" will be used. The participants' assigned pseudonyms are retained throughout this chapter. Volunteers in the preliminary study have also been allocated pseudonyms.

7. Introduction

This study found that the most salient aspect of sibling-loss is the essentially relational aspect of the loss experience. The loss of a brother or sister - someone from our own generation and family line, a childhood playmate/rival, someone who fought, cried and laughed with us, who affirmed us in many ways, and who witnessed our transitions through childhood to young adulthood - is an intensely painful experience. This loss does not occur in a vacuum but has echoes that reverberate and impact on the lives of many others: parents, extended family, spouse and/or children of the deceased, friends, neighbours, and even the community. When a child or young person dies, the loss touches us all and evokes grief informed by the relationship that each had with the deceased. For the bereaved sibling

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this can be quite bewildering and confusing. Paradoxically, it is in relation to others who are also mourning that the surviving sibling experiences her comfort and also her pain. She wants to mourn the loss of her brother or sister, but where does she find the space to do so amongst all the other mourners, particularly the parents who have suffered such a severe blow? How does she deal with the loss of such a vibrant and fluctuating relationship with all its ambiguities? Again, it is in the remembered relationship with the deceased brother or sister that the bereaved sibling finds her solace and her pain.

Heidegger (1927/1962) demonstrated trenchantly that death is life's most singularising experience. According to Heidegger (1927/1962: 294-296), our death is our "*ownmost non-relational possibility*" that cannot be bypassed ("outstripped"). It is our most personal, unique and unavoidable experience. It is *definite* "that" we will die; "when" and "how" remain "*ownmost*". Death is non-relational. It dissolves all bonds. We die alone. No one can substitute for us when it comes to dying. Death wrenches us away from the crowd, from the "they self", from "das Mann".

In the way it has given death its due, Heidegger's (1927/1962) analysis of Dasein as being-unto-death is unsurpassed. Borrowing generously from Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, Heidegger makes us mortal again: *bodily and finite*. To him, we are on this earth as our home and not a way-station. He locates us in time; he shows that we co-exist with and for one another. Kierkegaard (1845/1988: 425) provokes us to live as if we were "already dead". Nietzsche admonishes us to learn how to die at the "right" time.

From the point of view of the one who dies, it is true that death is non-relational. It dissolves all bonds. I die alone. The *greater truth*, however, seen from the perspective of the survivors, is that death is very much a relational phenomenon, it certainly does *not* dissolve all bonds; my death is mine alone but I leave a legacy of pain and suffering to many others - my family, siblings, perhaps a spouse and child. I bequeath existential chaos. For the survivors, a death in the family, as this research demonstrates, is potentially the most relational phenomenon of life. Who-I-am is being part of my *people*, is being anchored in my roots. I am never "unto myself alone". As noted by John Donne (Devotions, XII):

> "Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee."

The death of a sibling underlines this connectedness. I always am, have been and will be a-part-of my family no matter how much I have "moved" apart-from it, no matter how fiercely independent I am or have become. Even if over the years I have uprooted, disengaged from my family, in the face of the death of my mother or father, of my brother or sister, roots surface in this soil at this moment in time:

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> "I am part of the sun as my eye is part of me. That I am part of the earth my feet know perfectly, and my blood is part of the sea. My soul knows that I am part of the human race … as my spirit is part of my nation. In my own self I am part of my family".
> (D.H.Lawrence, Apocalypse, in Rosen, 1986: 39)

Who would contradict the truism that grief is as personal as one's fingerprints? It is my grief. Only I can feel it. I can tell you about it, but, no matter how sympathetic or empathic you are, you will never feel it as I do. Who would doubt the well-researched and well-articulated general process of mourning: that we all grieve in a more or less similar way? The story of sibling loss does in fact, to some extent, follow this general process. It is a story of individual pain. And much of the experience can be captured by the accumulated wisdom of theoreticians and clinicians and writers who have struggled to understand this inescapable dimension of life.

However, the story of sibling loss is *qualitatively* different. It is also a family loss. Even as tracing the phenomenon shows us one example of the grief process as generally experienced, it forcefully jars us out of our complacency of drawing a blueprint, of confusing the grief experienced by a surviving sibling with the grief experienced in other losses. Grief over the loss of a sibling reveals a whole different texture. In this respect, it enables us to see the general grief process in a fuller light. In particular, it attunes us to the fact that death is not only singularising as Heidegger (1927/1962) asserts, but a family matter as well, and the ways in which various members in the family cope with the loss of its member, co-creates the grieving of all as Dia powerfully elucidates:

> "Okay, how you cope with it [the loss] is certainly your affair. But … but the demands that are made on you, apart from the fact that your brother or sister is dead … the immediate demands … that is determined by the personalities of the other people in the family. And this can be even more taxing than the fact that you have suffered a loss. That was something that I realised afterwards. *That* was for me the thing that stood out … … that was a *double* thing for me."

In the course of this study it became increasingly evident that grief over the loss of a sibling ranges beyond the existing view of individual psychology and the mere acknowledgement of man's social nature. It is evident that one cannot truly understand the pain of the surviving sibling if one does not attend to the rupture in the total fabric of the family and the interplay between individual and relational factors: the fundamental interconnectedness among the members of a family that is so powerful that it inevitably accompanies us throughout life.

The use of a musical chord as a metaphor for the family can help us better to understand what is shaken and/or ruptured by the loss of a sibling. This metaphor inspires the imagination to "see" and to "hear" a particular sound created by the combination of notes. Each note is essential in giving this chord its characteristic and harmonious sound. The notes are related to one another insofar as they are

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co-present to each other, but they are also connected to each other by a certain contiguity in time. Should one of the notes be removed, this chord is not only significantly diminished or impoverished, but it is no longer the same chord - it changes completely. Moreover, whenever this chord appears in the piece of music, even if practised religiously with loving care and the chord becomes harmonious once again, it is apparent that it is no longer the same chord. In Gestalt language, if you transpose an entire piece, it is the same music, albeit in a different key; but, if you change or remove one note, the whole changes.

Similarly, with the loss of a sibling, the family is diminished by the death of one of its members. It is not the same family that it was before the loss and part of the survivor's grief is to mourn this loss as well as the loss of the sibling. Kierkegaard (1843/1959a: 154) in his discussion of the Greek tragedy, "Antigone", points out that: "[it is] not an individual who goes down, it is a small world … ", and I would like to add, that it is the surviving sibling who seems to experience the desire and the implicit obligation to piece this world together again and to recreate the fullness and wholeness that has been lost.

7.1 Findings and Theory

The presentation of the discussion in a coherent manner presents a dilemma, as the loss of a sibling and the loss of a child are intertwined. It is not as if the experience of the sibling or the experience of the parents comes first. It is a matter of fluidity, of flexibility, of looking at the whole from one angle, and then again from another angle. Neither has priority; you cannot understand the one without the other. I have, therefore, chosen to focus on the themes in the experience of the participants and, where relevant, to relate these to the parents' grief. In an attempt to present the dynamic structure of the whole, a shift away from a linear perspective of this experience was necessary: a shift away from split variables, away from detachment to a view that privileges the relationship between siblings and paradoxically also privileges the family. Some repetition is therefore inevitable.

7.1.1 The Fragmentation of the Familial Holding Environment

An important dimension of the special pain, confusion, fear and ambivalence experienced at the loss of a sibling is the fragmentation of the familial holding environment. The death ruptures the total fabric of the family and with it the sense of wholeness, rootedness and belongingness. There is a huge gap: a "hole" in the whole.

Before the loss, the participants felt at-home within the familiar network of parental and sibling relationships. Within the family they had a place and a role, a sense of self as part of the family and the family as part of them. They felt anchored in their roots and shared history, and lived the conviction of belonging, of being at-home. Heidegger (1977: 3-25) elaborates the notion of lived-

space to showcase the human realities of "residing within", "inhabiting", "being familiar with", and also "cherishing", "preserving", "looking after" and "caring for". In brief, he calls it "dwelling". It provides the horizon from which humans move out into the wider world and meet the future, the existential platform from which they can stride forth.

In the face of the loss, the participants are ripped from the above familiar order. Their perception of self and world is dramatically changed. They have not only suffered a loss of a significant other, a part of self, but the death exposes the vulnerability of their parents and evokes considerable anxiety over the possible loss of these primary bonds as well: bonds which provided the centre or anchorage from which the first encounters between self and world occurred. T. S. Eliot (1955: 22) points out that *"[h]ome is where one starts from*". In developmental psychological terms, the parent provides the "holding" (the feeling of rootedness) that allows us to move out into the world and form other attachments. Winnicott (1990) points out that when the environment is "good or good-enough", the infant is not even aware of the environment as environment - it is taken for granted. The environment induces reactions when it fails in some respects. With the loss of a sibling, the familial environment is fragmented and induces anxiety. Even in young adulthood, if we are not held we "fall"; if we are not attached, we are "lost".

It has been well documented (Gelcer, 1986; Gilbert, 1996) that when a member of a family dies, the structure of the family changes; roles and tasks, responsibilities and expectations shift, and the family must reorganise itself. This study shows that this is as true of childhood sibling loss as when the loss of a sibling occurs in young adulthood. Pape (2002: 6) avers:

> "For many families who lose an adult child, that child's role seems to get placed on the front step with a 'free' sign attached to it, ready for one of the other siblings to adopt and take into themselves".

The findings of the present study concur with Pape's (2002) observations. Although their parents do not openly make any demands on them, living at home and witnessing their parents' profound pain, the participants experience their parents' grief as an appeal from which they cannot turn away. All respond to the "free" sign, the vacant space, albeit in different ways. This is particularly stressful when the surviving sibling becomes an only child (Cathy and Dia) or the only child still living at home (Elena). The "free" sign signifies a demand, a tug at the living heart.

- **The Double Loss**

The present study trenchantly demonstrates that losing a sibling is not simply a matter of losing a role that must and can be filled within the family. The change following the loss is more pervasive than a process of modifying external relationships or taking up new roles. The gap in the family signifies an

existential emptiness that remains forever. The tear in the fabric of the family is bigger than the absence of one person; it changes the *meaning* of the entire family.

In the way the participants had known them, parents and "home" are also "lost". That is the basis of the experience of deep and pervasive insecurity and the fear that their parent(s) might imminently collapse. At risk is the participants' connectedness to life. The parents with their family intact, or at least, the parents whose family, only moments ago, had the now-dead child in it, *alive*, were different parents to those who are now in profound grief. Elena expresses this dramatic transformation of parents, of world and self, poignantly:

> "And from then my mother has not been the same. My father is not the same. Our lives are not the same. We are just not the same people … There is a hole in our hearts, in our lives …It feels like I've *lost* my … not *lost* my family but, it's ja, definitely changed us in many ways…"

Already it is clear. It is a *double* loss - a loss accompanied by its own grief and fears of further fragmentation. The change in their parents is experienced as another loss: another "death". In brief, a phenomenological death multiplies the physical loss.

But how are the parents different? And who are the parents that the participants encounter after the loss? In this time of grief, the parents, and particularly the mother, become totally preoccupied with the lost child. The parents' *presence* in the sense of really being *available*, being there *with* and *for* the remaining sibling/s, is experienced as an *absence*. The participants experience that their parents lack the energy to attend to anything or anybody else while coping with their anguish over the loss of their child. Living at home, surviving siblings feel the heaviness of their parents' pain. The participants do not question that the severance of the parent-child bond is one of the most extreme situations that one can ever encounter; nevertheless, they experience the isolating effect of grief and the absence of a familiar, "inviting" presence. They become aware that although their parents have both lost a child, their way of being-in-their-grief is different. These differences distance them from each other and subtly also from the participants. In the aftermath of the death, the surviving sibling reaches for someone that is no longer there. The parents with whom the bereaved sibling reconnects after the loss are distraught and emotionally fragile. In many ways the parents are like "strangers". This is evidenced by all the participants. In Cathy's situation, where the family had suffered previous losses, the "new" mother she encounters is even more alienating, angry and rejecting than before the loss. Dia's father, whom she dearly loved, unwittingly threatens her stability as he attempts to draw her out to speak about her felings. Elena cannot recognise her mother as she sinks deeper into her grief. Their parents' "otherness" deepens the participants' sorrow and they do not know how to be in this "new"

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relationship. The unique burden of the surviving sibling is to want at all costs to recover the family that they had.

- **The Dialectic of "Holding" and "Holding-On"**

Although the family structure has been ruptured and the parents are "lost" in the way the participants had known them, has the "holding" also gone? Optimal "bonding" as used to describe family unions, inspires us to see the loving "embrace" between husband and wife, between parent and child, and between brothers and sisters. However, besides the image of embracing, "bonding" can also carry the connotation of "binding", "restraining", "lack of freedom", "disallowing". After the death, the participants in fact seem to experience the "holding" as more intense; but it is more one of "bondage", one that restricts mobility and the freedom to "be" (Cathy), a "holding on" or "clinging" (Dia), rather than a "holding".

The "holding" experienced after the loss is paradoxically both *distant* and *close.* Parents experience the void of the loss and need to fill the emptiness, but the deceased child remains powerfully in their minds. This is evident in the present study. Although most of the participants experience their parents' attention as being focused on them, they simultaneously feel that they themselves are not noticed or acknowledged. They feel excluded from the intense dynamic between the parents and the deceased brother or sister, who is often remembered in idealised terms. Rubin’s research (1996) into the impact of the deaths of adult sons in the Arab/Israeli conflict found examples of parents who, years after their bereavement, still appeared to have a closer relationship with the deceased than with their surviving sons. Phenomenologically speaking, the meaning of the dead child assumes greater significance than the physical presence of the live one. The "live one" begins to feel like a cipher.

Freud used the German word "besetzen" ("attachment","tie", "bond", "investment", and "occupation", "bondage"), to capture his insight into the power of the 'Trieb' or 'drive' that binds human beings to one another. The mother is attached to her infant by libidinal bonds and the child becomes attached to the father, to siblings and to others, through this primary bond to the mother. The mother-child bond is difficult to loosen at any time. It is especially difficult to loosen at the time of death. Indeed, a profoundly painful dimension of mourning is that the survivor "hyper-invests" in the significant other that has been lost. Death does not break the bond, it strengthens it. By focusing on this attachment the parents cling to their lost child. Thus, grief work leaves little space for anything or anyone else or for other attachments. The parents become totally absorbed with the deceased, whose significance is strengthened by "a thousand links" (Freud, 1917/1959). These links, Freud tells us, can only be unravelled "bit by bit."

While the intense mourning of parents is appropriate and may indeed last "forever" (Brice, 1991), what about the surviving sibling whose unique relationship with the brother or sister is also strengthened by a thousand links? How does he or she begin to grieve? What are the obstacles, the barriers?

Even as young adults, their parents' intense mourning confuses and frightens the participants. In the face of it, they cannot risk also becoming submerged in their grief. They watch their parents disintegrate, or perhaps witness the parents' marriage starting to crumble. These emotional perceptions limit their capacity to focus upon self. On the other hand, to ignore or fail to acknowledge their parents' plight, courts a different danger. Paradoxically, to ignore parental disintegration is to risk personal fragmentation. The survivors need grounding, rootedness. From a Winnicottian perspective, the child holds and is held by the mother. With the loss of a child/sibling, we may perhaps speak of this "holding" as one where the mother (parent) holds-on and is held by the (surviving) "child".

Grief, to flow and run its course, requires "holding", *grounding*, rootedness. The study reveals that all the participants initially experience the need to maintain the integrity of the parents. They put the self and their own grief aside. First and foremost, they protect and care for their parents. From within this sheltering orientation, they attempt to recover the sense of wholeness and stability that they experienced prior to the death. Thus a "*bracketing*" (rather than a *denial*) of their own mourning over the loss of their brother or sister is a salient aspect of the grief process of the surviving sibling. There is a need to be attached, to be anchored, "held". If we are to become absorbed in our loss, we must first make sure that we are grounded, rooted. It is significant in this regard that all the participants were still living at home at the time of the loss and had not yet formed intimate attachments to significant others who could provide the anchor or support which would enable them to enter the space and to grieve openly.

7.1.2 Space and Nothingness

The loss of a sibling creates a space not only in the family but also in the participants' lives and they become very divided and reflective. The participants are caught in the vacuum and confronted by the "nothingness". Where formerly there was relationship, or at least strife, now there is emptiness and a deep sadness. The space-between that the participants formerly welcomed and even fought for and which allowed for growth, for related-separateness, becomes a gaping void that cannot initially be faced.

With the loss and the emptiness comes a deeper awareness of the significance of their brother or sister in their lives. For some, a fear of existential loneliness in later life gradually surfaces. The future, as it was anticipated before the loss, is irrevocably changed. A particular future - support, sharing,

companionship, assistance with aged parents - is lost and anticipatory grief is experienced. As the participants move through various transitional phases in their lives, they experience the gap and the loneliness anew. This was evidenced by most of the participants. Dia becomes more acutely aware of the absence of her sister as she prepares for her own marriage. Later, when her father dies, she re-experiences the lack of sisterly support. Elena feels the emptiness and the deep longing for her brother on the occasion of her becoming a godmother and anticipates the loss of future relationships and possibilities (when she gets married and has children) with deep sorrow. In the preliminary study, Angie experiences the absence of her elder sister who would have provided support and guidance through "all the new milestones". The empty space persists, it would seem, forever.

This "growing-up-with-the loss" was experienced by all of the participants and in many respects is similar to the empty space experienced by a parent at the loss of a child. Rando (1991: 240) defines this component of a parent's grief as "a variation of anniversary phenomena" where the parent experiences pangs of grief at the time of events that will never happen - e.g. graduation, getting married, having children. Kubler-Ross (1982: 178) refers to this as "going through the … dying" again. It is this "dying again" that the participants evade. As expressed succinctly by Cathy: "You think of the future and the pain that lies ahead and you just don't want to accept [the loss]".

With everything changing, the empty space cannot be dealt with immediately. In the study, the participants resist the changes and attempt to retain a sense of continuity through links to the familiar. This is evidenced by all the participants, and is most cogently described by Angie (in the preliminary study): "I did not want to feel her absence and so I learned to close off myself to what I was feeling. If it had been up to me, I would have just ignored that anything had happened at all. I merely wanted to continue with life as it always was." In avoiding the confrontation with the gap, the participants put on a façade as they attempt to cope with the more immediate reality (their parents' disintegration) and the demands of "normal" everyday life (academic task; maintaining the family businesses) while hiding and protecting the torn and tattered inner self.

All the participants concealed their deeper emotions from significant others in their lives. Although Heidegger (1927/1962) alerts us to the risk of alienation pursuant on a lingering sense of "inauthentic" living, for the bereaved sibling the façade appears to be a necessary initial step in coping with the inner emptiness and the existential chaos of all the other significant others who are also in such deep pain. The participants put themselves aside. First they need to reintegrate their external world. They need to maintain continuity and stability by sustaining their parents and, in some instances, filling the gap created by the deceased sibling; they must somehow bring their parents "back into life" before attending to their own grief. The present study reveals an awareness of this divided self. Reflective of

the experienced inauthenticity is Elena's description of her experience: "I mean I would smile at them [i.e. friends] although inside me you could see that I was hurting and like sad…". In retrospect, Elena is surprised by her initial strength as she copes with everyday tasks; yet she is acutely aware that internally she felt "very weak". Although the circumstances were different in Cathy's situation, her description of the experience conveys the same message: "I felt like an outsider… ja, sitting outside the whole [thing]…but being very torn as well and very upset." Dia becomes aware that her mastery and control in relation to the world was false but that she needed to maintain this façade in order to avoid "collapsing altogether". For all the participants, their inner feelings remain hidden for a long time as they struggle to cope with their parents' grief and to protect them from additional pain. However, internally most of the bereaved siblings remain active and think constantly of their deceased brother or sister. It is only when the inner truth is repeatedly ignored (by self and others) that entrapment ensues and freezes the mourning process. This was evident in Cathy's extreme situation, and for a long time she could not move beyond the initial shock, fear and disbelief.

7.1.3 Oneness and Separateness

Although the participants recognised their uniqueness and the differences between themselves and their siblings, the sense of separateness, both from parents and from their sibling, could not be confronted immediately.

Whereas before the loss there had been a relatively comfortable dialectic of oneness and separateness, of solitude and presence, of distance and relation, of attachment and freedom, after the loss there is a feeling of radical separateness and distance and a sense of not-being-at-home: an estrangement from their familiar world. The participants no longer feel "at-home" in this "new" world. The "dwelling" that made a space become a place, that offered safety and allowed freedom of movement over time, and within which she could most freely be a "me" and engage in a "we", is ruptured.

The experience of the loss brings about a disruption to the sense of oneness and wholeness, and threatens the surviving sibling's integrity and identity. Participants knew themselves in a particular way through the unfolding relationship with their sibling, and through the roles that they played within the family and in the sibling group (which frequently differed from those in the family). With the loss, this unfolding is abruptly and permanently ended. There is an emptiness not only in the outside world but also in the inner world of the surviving sibling - "Am I still a sister?", "Am I still the younger/older one?". Carse (1980: 4) observes: "Often we do not know how closely our self-understanding is developed in relation to another person until that person has been taken by death". This is especially true of the loss of a sibling, someone who shared the early landscape of the participant's life.

Participants experienced a sense of oneness and sameness with their siblings, while at the same time recognising that they were different and separate. It was clear from the interviews that the participants had many shared experiences with their siblings, but that they also had many non-shared experiences. The former reinforced the sense of oneness and the latter created a feeling of separateness. For some, the brother or sister represented the other part of self, the "shadow" (Jung, 1953/1966). Bank and Kahn (1982) refer to the splits that are more likely to occur within the sibling relationship ("me-not me", "good-bad", "responsible-daring") as brothers and sisters strive to differentiate themselves from each other and to establish an identity separate from their siblings. This "dialectic dance", as Bank and Kahn (1982) refer to the fluctuating rhythm in sibling relationships, of oneness and separateness, of closeness and distance, is abruptly broken by the loss. The task of the bereaved sibling becomes one of attempting to recover the part of the self that has been lost through the death of the brother or sister: an attempt to unify their dual nature.

Although as young adults the participants and their siblings did not play such a prominent role in each other's lives, and not all the participants felt close to their siblings at the time of the death, their siblings were there and pre-reflectively the participants lived the conviction that they would always be there for each other. Their relationship was continuously changing, but what remained constant was the assumption of enduring contact and relatedness. As noted by Dia, a friend or a husband can choose to stay in the relationship or not but a brother or a sister (as well as one's child) *must* be there. The sibling relationship, whether positive or negative, continues throughout the life span. The boundaries between siblings are different to the boundaries in other relationships. What one can demand or expect from a brother or sister is not the same as what one can demand from others. Having siblings implies being a sibling for life - there are no laws which make or break these bonds (Bank & Kahn, 1982), but the faith and trust that they will be there for each other in the future is stronger than any law.

In the present study, the sudden and extreme separation from their brother or sister breaks the rhythmic alternation between closeness and distance and evokes intense existential anxiety. The sibling realises that no matter how strong the connection with another, their lives are distinct and the break in the sense of oneness now assumes another texture - a sense of absolute separateness.

That the mourner either hopes to find the deceased, or in one way or another tries to fuse with him or her, is part of every mourning process (Freud, 1917; Klein, 1940; Bowlby, 1979, 1980; Parkes, 1972/1975). By integrating characteristics of the deceased, one can bring about a union with the one whom one has lost and retain a sense of relation, of oneness with the loved one. Elena, whose loss was fairly recent (brother died two-and-a-half years ago), experienced a strong sense of her brother-being-in-her and was delighted whenever she spontaneously uttered a phrase or word as *he* would

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have used it, because it reminded her of him. Abandoning her own career and taking over her brother's business also became a way of maintaining the attachment to him. Implicitly, as long as she was filling in for him (doing his work), he was in some way still out "there".

According to the present research, it is not only those participants who had a very close relationship to their siblings who tend to this fusion. There seems to be a stage of longing for closeness to their deceased brother or sister that almost all the participants go through. The study reveals that all the participants were affected by the loss of their brother or sister (although not in the same way) and not only those who were emotionally very close to their sibling. The sibling relationship is a fluctuating, vital relationship and what may once have been a very conflicted or distant relationship can change and a brother or sister may become more central to the sibling at a later stage in life. This was evidenced by the responses of all the participants. Cathy, who had a distant and somewhat ambivalent relationship with her brother, started drawing closer to him as he matured and they were able to share more. As a child and adolescent, Elena fought a lot with her brother but later grew very close to him, and she was aware of his strong affection for her. Dia, who was the polar opposite of her sister and was aware that they were not really "pals" at the time of the death, recognised that the closeness would "have come later". For all the participants the loss was experienced as a deep wrench. The study concurs with Cicirelli's (1995) observations that the sibling relationship can only be understood using a life span perspective. The deeper meanings of the experience of the loss of a sibling can only be fully understood as these unfold over time.

Pertinent to the loss of a sibling, the danger of comparing losses (e.g. that the siblings did not get on well together, that the deceased was not central in the life of the survivor, and/or that he or she was young and therefore did not get to know the brother or sister that well), is that the grief of these frequently unacknowledged mourners may go unnoticed. This is evidenced by all the participants and also demonstrated in the preliminary study where Angie notes: "My brothers were young. Only later that I realised how badly the death had impacted on my nine-year old brother. He never really wants to talk about her, but I know it affects him badly." It may seem obvious that one would not mourn the loss of a sibling who was not very central in one's life as much as one would someone with whom one has shared a great deal; but this statement cannot be taken at face value, as is evidenced by Mary in the preliminary study. Although she did not have much contact with her eldest brother, she idolised him, and his death had a tremendous impact on her. In addition, her mother's grief was profound and Mary's whole world was turned upside down by the loss. Unfortunately, nobody seemed to realise how much Mary was hurting and that she too needed to mourn her brother.

Even the loss of a brother or sister that the sibling has not known has significance and impacts on siblings and their parents. Cathy, whose mother had lost a child (three years old) during her pregnancy

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with Cathy and another child (neonatal death) when Cathy was two years old, lived with the ghostly "presence" of these losses all her life. She felt that she could not get close to her mother, that she was not "good enough", and never really overcame feelings of being-to-blame and existential guilt when her only living sibling died much later.

During this time of upheaval, the desire for oneness and wholeness is also initially experienced in relation to the parents, who too have been robbed of the possibility of relating to their child. This is the unique dilemma of the sibling in grief. Elena's yearning is heartfelt:

> "I would have *loved* to have spent more time with him [i.e. brother] but I guess that is impossible … my mother says the same…"

The participant's dilemma refers to her own grief and missing of her sibling and the awareness of her parents' pain which, like an echo, duplicates her bereavement, and amplifies it. Thus, grief for the lost sibling and grief for the "lost" parents seem to run parallel but independently of each other, the one amplifying the other in a continuous push-pull motion. Externally the participants have to cope, but internally they remain active as they silently attempt to make sense of the loss and to fill the gap. Retaining the connection, holding on to their sibling through lived memories, and outwardly continuing with life as "normal", holds them from slipping into the abyss, from breaking down completely. Initially the participants avoid confronting the intensity of their own grief. This is a form of preservation; the preservation of the sibling relationship, of self and of the family. They put on a mask. While this conceals the truth, it also has positives. Had they grieved simultaneously with parents, they would have disintegrated. There is a genuine need not to fall into the "void". If we all grieve together - one goes down, we all go down. They cannot afford to face the emptiness. Keeping occupied, having a task to complete, helps to structure "time" and provides a purpose in their lives. Heidegger's (1927/1962) "care"/solicitude (Fursorge) becomes an anchor point that provides the illusion of wholeness and helps them to recover a familiar sense of self, assisting them in getting through the early part of the grief process. Memories become significant in retaining the attachment to the lost sibling and in recovering the part of self that had been lost through the death.

7.1.4 Remembering and Forgetting (Memories)

In the desire to bridge the gap of separateness and to retain the closeness with their lost sibling, memories were significant. With the loss, the missing and the sense of loneliness, memories provided the connection to the deceased brother or sister. Bereaved siblings repeatedly reviewed and reinterpreted experiences with, and memories of their sibling, thereby maintaining a sense of continuity; filling the gap in the present and the emptiness that threatened in the future.

Freud (1917/1957) emphasises that with the loss of a significant other, each of the memories and expectations that are bound up with the loved other is brought up and attachment to the lost "object" is hyper-invested in the service of resolution of the grief. Memory helps us to retain a sense of unity and oneness with the lost loved one and enables us to continue with life in the absence of the significant other. Memories span the gap between the past and the present and open up the future once again. Remembrance - memory - brings the deceased sibling back into the life of the surviving sibling. In order to remember, however, we have to acknowledge the truth; we must confront our grief and the pain of loss. There is no way around it. With the thought of the lost loved one, grief wells up as we are confronted by this reality. Indeed, memory is sustained by sorrow. As Alapack (1995) notes:

> "Sorrow safeguards truth, preserves it. It endures in making present and sustains as present even as it moves forward into the future ... Sorrow recognises its pain and re-members it, without being overwhelmed by it or wallowing in it."

Memory makes present what is absent. While in life, the sibling may have been absent in his or her presence; in death, the sibling becomes "present" in his or her absence. The deceased sibling, although not physically present, is reinstated within the self and within the family circle through recalling and re-"membering". Attachment to memories and meanings of the past helps to maintain a sense of continuity in the present with which to move forward. In recalling, reviewing past interactions, and particularly in sharing stories of the deceased sibling, new meanings emerge. These provide comfort and enable the bereaved sibling to synthesise a new relationship with the lost brother or sister.

However, memories can also entrap us. We can be haunted by memories and/or live in the past. Anxiety about losing precious memories can block the grief work as we dwell on the past, on what we did or did not do. The process of remembering and recalling all facets of the relationship, although painful, facilitates the grief work, frees the imagination and opens up the future. Remembering and sorrowing lessen the pain and enable us to put the memories to rest; we do not forget, but in fact remember our sibling better: not as a correlate of our projections or needs, but as a real and whole person. When the pain subsides, we find the closeness that we yearned for. This is poignantly expressed by C. S. Lewis (1976: 52) following the loss of his wife: "And suddenly, at the very moment when, so far, I mourned H. least, I remembered her best…It was as if the lifting of the sorrow removed a barrier".

In the present study it was apparent that the participants had reflected deeply on their sibling's life and death and what he or she meant to them. Recall provided presence, maintaining the attachment to the lost brother or sister in the demand to deal with the reality of the loss. However, the way they remembered and perceived their brother or sister depended on what they chose to remember and

understand of the past. Images that remained frozen/fixed preserved the sibling relationship as it existed, providing continuity and maintaining a familiar sense of self (Dia and Elena).

Although some memories were painful, remained hidden and were often difficult to recall, they were nevertheless not lost: they emerged later as and when the participants were able to deal with more. Schopenhauer, 1851/1970 (in Alapack, 2006: 11) asserts: "The memory may well become confused by what is put into it, but it cannot really be forfeited…memory is bottomless." Following the loss of a loved one, we are wrapped up in our memories. Sometimes we believe that that is all we "have". At other times, it seems that the memories, in fact, control us. They hold us captive and will not let us go. Being able to remember our loved one with pleasure and delight, without being overcome with grief all over again, and without fear that we will forget (causing us desperately to cling to each memory to guard against "losing" him or her altogether), enables us to engage in life more fully. In the knowledge that he or she is forever a part of us, we do not have constantly to work to assure ourselves that this is true.

However, for some participants, memories were so painful that these were blocked in order to cope with the intensity of the pain. If she is to remain functional, if she is to support parents and not be overwhelmed with emotions that she cannot deal with immediately, she cannot remember everything. Yet in "forgetting", as Cathy notes, one does not lose the memories; rather, one "forgets" to remember. With anguish, she acknowledges:

> "Sometimes it dims and then at other times the things that you can't remember, you remember very well again. I think it depends on your emotional state, perhaps. You want to remember, and what you don't, you don't."

Forgetting is therefore not a mere lapse of memory, it is a "backing away *from* one's ownmost having-been in a way that is closed off from oneself" (Heidegger, 1927/1996: 311-312); it is a backing away from what is too dreadful to contemplate. Frederick Nietzsche, 1887/1992 (in Alapack, 2006) conceptualises forgetting as an *active* and intentional process. He discusses the "ability to forget" and links memory to health and happiness:

> "Forgetting is no mere force of inertia as the superficial imagine; it is rather an active… positive faculty of repression that is responsible for the fact that what we experience and absorb enters our consciousness little while we are digesting it (one might call the process 'impsychation')…To close the doors and windows of consciousness for a time; to remain undisturbed by the noise and struggle of our underworld…; a little quietness, a little *tabula rasa* of the consciousness to make room for new things…that is the purpose of active forgetfulness, which is like a doorkeeper, a preserver of psychic order, repose…so that it will be immediately obvious how there could be no happiness, nor cheerfulness, no hope…no *present* without forgetfulness" (Nietzsche, 1887/1992, in Alapack, 2006: 13).

Pertinent to the experience of sibling loss, Nietzsche's elucidation of "forgetting" as a "work" or labour reveals that the health of bereaved siblings within a family context depends upon the balance of knowing how to forget as well as how to remember. Nietzsche writes that the inability to forget sabotages decision-making, blocks healthy action and compromises creativity. Unable to forget, we hold on to our grief impeding forward mobility and unable to imagine that we can ever be happy again. Forgetting is not pathological. Rather remembering and forgetting can co-exist, not as incompatibilities, but in a dynamic synthesis. *"Remembering* is possible only on the basis of forgetting," writes Heidegger (1927/1996: 312), "not the other way around".

This study reveals that in the process of coping with the loss there is a vacillation between remembering and forgetting as the participants approach and evade the pain of the loss. Vacillation arises at the outset as they struggle to digest what has happened. Later, in the awareness of their parents' intense pain, the struggle intensifies to the point of existential chaos. Dia felt the need to "close the door against the storm" outside (i.e. her parents' grief) so that she did not have to be reminded of the pain all the time. Elena did not want to remember her brother with pain and held on to positive memories of him. Because of her indirect involvement in the circumstances of the loss, Cathy closed herself off from painful memories in an attempt to forget what had happened. Forgetting here served the function not only of trying to un-do what could not be undone ("If I had not insisted that he drive me to the station, he would still be alive"), but also of coping with the devastating loss. As with Kubler-Ross' (1969/1985) stage of "Denial and Isolation" and Bowlby's phase of "Numbing", "forgetting" acts as a buffer against the pain, allowing the bereaved sibling to collect herself and regain some stability.

Though overpowering, and at times immobilising, the remembering-forgetting dialectic decreases as the loss is assimilated a "bit" more. However, this is not accomplished within a year or two. In addition, returning to the past is not always intentional, and hidden memories can break through unexpectedly, evoking feelings of pain and instability. This can occur many years after the loss of the sibling.

For some participants revisiting the past was avoided since this evoked intense pain, hurt and/or guilt. However, in most instances returning to the past provided clarity in the present and accessibility to the future. In returning to the past, new meaning emerges which allows the bereaved sibling to move forward.

7.1.5 The Developmental Challenge (Intimacy vs. Isolation)

Although before the loss the participants' pre-loss selves appeared to be unified towards their own goals, the loss of their sibling interrupts the natural rhythm of individuation-separation that has been

going on between parent and child, and between siblings, over the course of their lives. In this extreme situation, while there is a need to individuate, there is a desire not to be separate. In order to separate, we need to feel related/attached. Thus, although as young adults the participants had started to move in different directions to their sibling and were fairly independent of parents, the death of a sibling *forces* an inevitable step in the direction of absolute separateness (the sibling is dead; the survivor is alive) and awakens feelings of loneliness (isolation) and longing. Because it is an irreversible step without any hope of recovering the lost sibling or repairing what has happened, Bowlby's (1973, 1979, 1980) attachment theory would have it that a step backwards can be expected. For most of the participants though, the "step backwards" is initially a step *towards* the parents: an involvement with preserving and sustaining primary attachments without falling back into the oneness with mother. With the loss of one significant relationship, there is a desire to prevent further loss. The need to protect parents, to make a difference, to effect some change, no matter how small, becomes paramount.

Young adulthood is a time of beginnings. According to Erikson (1982/1994: 32-33), the task of the young adult is the challenge of establishing interpersonal *intimacy* and the conflict that needs to be resolved is *isolation*. Other tasks include: working to establish emotional and physical separation (leaving home), and achieving competency and mastery. Erikson believed that the virtue that defines intimacy for young adults is *affiliation* or *love*. When the loss of a brother or sister coincides with this psychosocial developmental stage, the bereaved sibling is faced with having to cope with a significant loss and with the developmental crisis of *isolation.* Corr (1998: 151) refers to this as a "double crisis"; Hogan and DeSantis (1992) call it the "double jeopardy". This study confirms this notion. However, it is evidently more than a "double" crisis/jeopardy; it is, in fact, a triple crisis. The bereaved sibling is faced with having to cope with the *symbolic* loss of the family and the *real* loss of a brother or sister as she stands on the threshold of *leaving home*. Can she risk letting go of the family at this stage?

Winnicott (1958b/1990) observed the need, in relation to the child, for a secure base that holds the possibility of "refuelling" and allows the child to move away from primary attachments and to explore the world. This has relevance for young adults as well. Gail Sheehy's (1976) concept of "pulling up roots" and the "rebound home" reflects this need for a safe haven to which we can return when things get tough as we move out and face the world alone. During young adulthood one is acutely aware of the isolation/loneliness that threatens. However, with the loss of a sibling, all sense of relatedness is felt to be lost. One has not only lost, but one is also lost. Not only is the family fragmented, but the sibling structure has also been ruptured. Thus the conflict of "isolation" that one is dealing with in this normative developmental stage is accentuated in mourning and challenges the bereaved sibling even more. Faced with the challenge of interpersonal intimacy and the fear of isolation, one needs to feel that one's roots are intact. With the loss, this does not seem possible … at least for a while. Time is

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needed to deal with the loss before one can face the developmental conflict of isolation, of letting go of familiar structures, of leaving home.

Letting go of early attachments, breaking away from the "magic circle of the mother and family" (Jung 1974: 168) and the anticipation of being alone, is itself a loss. Even without a death, separating from parents is an extremely difficult developmental task and the need to feel connected is always present, but with the death, this does not seem possible at all. As Alapack and Alapack (1984: 66) assert: "Frightfully, earnestly to leave home is a death experience". Separating from parents now would be tantamount to another "death"; it would create another space that could fragment the self and the family even further. The participants themselves could also lose the final link to their sibling and their roots. Thus, the loss of a sibling delays the natural separation process. The being-at-home appears to have the function not only of protecting their parents and allaying the participants' fears that they could lose other significant people, but also helps to maintain the connection to their sibling and gives them time to recover a continuous sense of self before moving on with their own lives. This is evidenced by all the participants as they struggle to cope with their loss. Although on the threshold of leaving home at the time of the death, Cathy makes a conscious decision (a "pact") to stay at home for a certain period (3 years) in order to support and protect her parents. Dia, a radically “free” spirit, experiences tremendous conflict between her own needs for independence and the realisation that for her parents separation would be another "loss", an abandonment, and she too delays her departure. In Elena's situation, where leaving home was contrary to cultural values and norms, staying at home was not so much an active decision *not* to leave home but one of "being there" for her parents as much as possible.

For these participants, concern/*affiliation*/*love* (Erikson, 1982/1994) initially revolves around the parents. Sustaining parents and helping them get back into "normal life" becomes the main *challenge*. They put aside their own needs and hold on to daily routine and familiar structures that provide continuity and stability. By holding on to the "now" (caring for parents) and the past (through memories), a degree of continuity is maintained. This is an important initial step in coping with loss in the family. It is only when there is a lingering in the primary relationships or a holding-on (clinging) on the part of parents, that the challenge of establishing interpersonal *intimacy* with others outside the family is delayed and the conflict of *isolation* may remain unresolved. Dia's brother-in-law alerts her to this risk: "You will never get a husband if you stay!" Although extremely traumatic for some, most of the participants in this study finally did succeed in moving away from home and establishing other intimate relationships.

Pertinent to the findings of the present study, it would seem that sibling loss, within the context of the family, also calls into question previous developmental crises and challenges, which have already

been encountered by the individual on her journey through life, i.e. trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. shame/doubt, initiative vs. guilt, industry vs. inferiority, identity vs. role confusion, and challenges surviving siblings to deal with these again. Unresolved developmental issues, Erikson tells us, can recur later in the life cycle - if a conflict is not resolved, it is returned to later in an attempt to find resolution and move forward. If during the individual's development any of these conflicts were not adequately resolved, the death of a sibling will intensify that conflict. Therefore, one meets it again in the new context if healing is to take place. This becomes a major challenge, as many of the developmental tasks parralel the tasks of normal grief: loss shatters one's sense of trust in a predictable world and one's identity is shaken. The confusion and difficulty in making sense of the loss, and the constant internal review of one's life and the life and death of the deceased sibling, may facilitate resolution of these issues or, conversely, may affirm mistrust, doubt/shame, guilt, inferiority or role confusion. In addition, the way that the parents deal with the loss (e.g. silence and secrecy surrounding the death, idealisation of the deceased, and anger and rage over the loss) may compound these issues and evoke doubt, guilt, and a sense of being devalued, particularly if primary attachments were not secure to begin with. This was evident in the present study. Cathy, who did not experience a secure relationship with her mother, experienced even more guilt, loneliness, alienation and a sense of worthlessness following her brother's death, and was compelled to deal with these issues again. For Dia, the loss of her sister brought into focus the fact that her sister was special and that she had had a closer relationship to her mother than Dia had. Although Dia's relationship with her mother was satisfactory, the loss evoked doubts about her own worth and her right to survival, and she too was challenged to deal with this issue again. Thus, sibling loss is not only a *chronological* event, it is also a *developmental* challenge.

In terms of individuation-separation, it has been documented (Graham, 1988; Engel, 1975) that this involves mother, father *and* sibling and that frequently a brother or sister can assist us in breaking away from home. Accordingly, could the presence of other surviving siblings have eased the sense of responsibility experienced by these participants to support parents and somehow facilitated the separation from them? Dia feels divided in this respect. On the one hand, she is very clear that if she were to have had other living siblings it could have been helpful in the sense that they would have understood the desire to help parents to cope with their devastating loss ("Come let's help mom and dad cope"). Their presence could also have diluted her parents' focus on her (the only remaining child), thus making separation less traumatic. On the other hand, she also realises that having younger siblings could possibly have left her with even more responsibility (i.e. to care for them as well), since she recognised that her parents were immobilised by their grief and unable to cope with any other demands. This would have been an even heavier burden.

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Bowlby (1961a, 1961b, 1973, 1979, 1980) sees separation as loss, but is separation the same as loss through death? How do brothers and sisters experience a natural separation from each other? From this study, it would appear that the participants do not experience serious problems in "separating" from each other in the sense of travelling overseas, going to university, establishing other intimate relationships, getting married, etc. Indeed, as young adults, all the participants had started to move in different directions to their sibling. But the potential for dialogue, for relation, is ever present. Even if they have gone their separate ways, and even live in different continents, "potential presence" implies that the siblings can still be present to one another at some point. This type of separation is very different to loss through death and siblings are very aware of the difference.

7.1.6 Paradox and Polarity

Another salient feature of the experience of sibling loss is the intensely ambiguous and paradoxical nature of the experience. Confronted by the reality of the death of their sibling and the meaning of the loss for themselves and parents, the participants find themselves in an existential crisis not knowing whether to grieve or not to grieve, "to be or not to be".

Ambiguity and ambivalence are intrinsic aspects of the sibling relationship where conflict, rivalry and even hostility, as well as love and loyalty, and concern and caring, exist side by side and constantly fluctuate. Freud (1917/1957) tells us that for normal mourning to proceed, one needs to be aware of "*who*" and "*what*" has been lost in the losing of a significant other. Unlike the loss of a parent, a child, spouse, or friend, where one can immediately identify who and what has been lost, with the loss of a sibling there seem to be no simple or immediate answers to these questions.

All the participants were painfully aware of *whom* and what they had lost; yet, for some, confusion arose as they perceived the loss primarily in terms of the parents' loss of a *child* and only secondarily as a loss of their brother or sister. This perception was strengthened by the responses or lack of responses of others, who frequently rallied around the parents or the spouse of the deceased brother or sister, and in the process the bereaved sibling was forgotten. Also, because the sibling relationship is such a taken-for-granted relationship, the deeper (and fuller) meanings of "what" had been lost in the losing of a brother or a sister only emerged over time. For the bereaved sibling, therefore, the experience is intensely polarised.

On the *individual-side*, the surviving sibling wants to grieve the loss of her brother or sister but also desires to retain the connection to her sibling, her "other self". Her grief allows an involvement with her sibling, but also confronts her with the pain of loss and the fear of further fragmentation. There is ambivalence about accepting the reality of the death. She wants to forget the death, but at the same time desperately wants to keep her sibling's memory alive and thinks constantly about him or her.

By the time they had reached young adulthood, the participants had experienced many different kinds of relationships with their siblings. Thus, a variety of emotions and meanings were experienced and emerged over time. The sometimes close and loving, sometimes hostile and even rivalry-filled sibling relationship that had been fraught with ambiguities even before the death, reactivates emotions, that for some, cannot be dealt with immediately. Thinking about the loss of future possibilities and relationships, Dia realises that there would have been many positives and many negatives. It would have been helpful to have had the support of her sister in coping with their aged parents but it could also have been more difficult because she and her sister handled situations very differently. The longing for sisterly support is polarised by the awareness that they were not really "pals" at the time of her sister's death, yet Dia knows deep down that they would have been there for each other. She also recognises the possibility of greater closeness in the future.

On the *family-side*, the experience of being overwhelmed by the loss of a brother or sister is polarised by the equally strong awareness of the parents' deep sorrow. There is a tension between, on the one hand, mourning the loss while not being drawn into, and being swamped by the intensity of the parents' grief and, on the other hand, the desire to support and protect the parents and not to burden them with additional pain. Simultaneously, the participants attempt to deal with their own grief and to make sense of their loss. Cathy reflects that she herself was "emotionally destroyed" after the loss, but, "with all the pain and guilt", she still had to contend with her mother's grief and rage. Elena was aware that, like her parents, she also felt like "stopping life" but realised that she was the only one that could sustain her parents and had to be strong for them. In this respect, the participants' grief for the lost sibling and grief for the “lost” parents truly overlap and flow into each other, creating a "whirlpool" of shifting, fluid emotions. For Dia, keeping her grief separate becomes essential in maintaining a sense of stability and integration within the prevailing existential chaos.

With everything changing and external roles shifting, participants find themselves wanting to hold on to a familiar sense of self yet, in some instances, they also attempt to compensate for their parents' loss by becoming more like the deceased sibling. Thus, another polarity for the surviving sibling is the tension between the concern for their parents and the frustration, helplessness, hopelessness and despair that emerge as they realise that there is nothing that they can do to mitigate their parents' pain. Anger erupts in time over their parents' unremitting sorrow and their tendency to idealise the deceased sibling. For some participants, the idealisation of the deceased sibling almost borders on "idolatry" and gradually begins to erode the surviving siblings' confidence and self-worth. As they relate and continue to relate to the very person that is suffering (i.e. mother), they question their adequacy, their very right to *be*. Paradoxically, while the surviving sibling may feel that she is lacking (Cathy and Dia) in comparison to her deceased brother or sister, and may also feel that she herself is not noticed, she also experiences the attention focused on her. In the present study the participants felt entrapped,

not able to be themselves and yet not able to be the person that mother longed for the most - the deceased brother or sister. For all the participants it becomes a strange dialectic where the surviving sibling feels bound by the parents' anxiety associated with loss, while simultaneously the parents remain preoccupied with the deceased child.

Closely associated with the experience of increased attention is the tension between wanting to move on with their own lives and simultaneously not being able to ignore their parents' suffering. They need to be there for their parents, but, paradoxically, and on a deeper level, they also need time to deal with the emotional chaos within; they need to deal with the past before moving towards the future. The confusion of ambiguous, conflicted and paradoxical emotions cannot be faced immediately, and the participants struggle against the changes. Keeping themselves occupied gives them a sense of purpose and a degree of control over an unpredictable world and the illusion that life need not be altered.

On the *social/relational-side*, the participants become aware of changes in their relationships with others, and ambivalence arises. Paradoxically, the bereaved sibling wants others to be around, but she also needs to remain functional and not to lose control of intense inner emotions. While initially there is a spontaneous distancing or even withdrawal from others, later some of the participants find that others cannot cope with their grief or find it hard to be with the grief-stricken family and so avoid them. In most instances, attention is focused on the bereaved parents, the primary mourners, in the belief that a child's death is unbearable. This resonates with the surviving sibling's own perception or belief, and the participants withdraw even further. Elena's ambivalence becomes apparent when she mentions that she sensed that her friends were uncomfortable talking about death and loss, and that she wanted to spare them any embarrassment by *not* talking about her feelings. Later, however, she acknowledges that her tendency to conceal her pain from her friends in fact placed *them* in an awkward position. Dia also acknowledges that her friends were there for her, but that she did not expect much support from them because she realised that they all had other priorities. Yet, she too realised that she would not have been able to talk about the loss for fear of "collapsing altogether".

The present study suggests that a bereaved young adult sibling is continually engaged in the paradoxical projects of wanting to grieve and attempting not to grieve. In the final analysis, while the pain of loss is intense, for these participants the loss remains too little mourned.

7. 1.7 The Pain of Loss (Grief)

Parkes (1972/1975) defines loss as the absence of the loved one (deprivation), and grief as the reaction to the loss. In terms of the findings of this study, it is apparent that a bereaved sibling's grief embraces many of the emotions experienced at the loss of any significant relationship as outlined by Lindemann (1944), including: shock, disbelief, fear and numbness; a sense of distance from the world

of others; emptiness; a sense of not being physically well; anger; remorse and guilt; sadness and missing; and not wanting to "let go" of the deceased. However, there are various factors that distinguish sibling loss from other losses: the way the grief unfolds, its duration and impact, and the essentially relational and paradoxical nature of the experience. The present study reveals that the loss of a sibling in young adulthood is first and foremost a mourning of the "living-dead" (the parents) and only later a mourning for the lost sibling. The participants' *postponement* of their grief concurs with Lindemann's (1944) observation that when the bereaved individual needs to maintain the morale of others, the mourning process can be delayed or postponed.

Freud (1917) regards sorrow as a normal reaction to the loss of a loved person. He avers that mourning is an inevitable, normal and healthy response to the loss of a significant other. Bereaved people know "*whom*" and "*what*" they have lost in the losing of the loved one and yearn for the return of the lost person. In normal grief, the bereaved person is conscious of the *meaning* of his/her loss, is aware that he or she has suffered a significant loss, and can tolerate the ambiguity that every attachment carries, with its joy, inevitable loss and pain. He emphasise that the painful mood of mourning generally lasts for a long time because people do not readily let go of a loved one.

Bowlby (1980) identifies four phases of grief through which the bereaved adult must pass in order to accomplish the work of mourning: "numbing" (lasting from a few hours to a week); "yearning and searching"; "disorganisation and despair"; "detachment and reorganisation". While these provide a map of the grief of adults, they do not adequately conceptualise the process of sibling loss. For the participants there is indeed an experience of tremendous shock, fear and numbness, but the numbness seems to last a lot longer than suggested by Bowlby (1980). The fact that it is fundamentally a double loss makes it difficult to understand sibling loss in terms of the general ideas of grief and mourning. Siblings may seem to be "pathological" in their mourning if viewed from this perspective, when in fact they are not. In this study, the bereaved siblings seemed to move from the initial shock, fear, disbelief and numbness to a phase of supporting parents and reorganisation of the self within the family, to a phase of emotional chaos and despair surrounding the relentless grief of parents and their deterioration, and only much later were they able to let go of their intense emotions and openly grieve over their brother or sister.

Kierkegaard has also helped to deepen our knowledge of loss and sorrow (normal grief). Based on his own suffering, he provides us with an acute understanding of what it means to lose a loved one, which seems more closely to depict the grief of bereaved siblings. Kierkegaard (1843/1959b:167) posits that "grief is secretive, silent, solitary, and seeks to retire into itself". Grief is not visible in the same way as, for example, joy is. The loss of a loved one leaves the survivor "heartsick" and in perpetual longing. The bereaved person questions whether or not he or she is guilty (Kierkegaard, 1847/1962;

1845/1988). Kierkegaard notes that the bereaved will blame himself or herself, no matter how or why it happened. At some level we will accuse ourselves of something that we did, or failed to do. Depression, according to Kierkegaard, arises only when there was something wrong in the relationship to begin with (Freud's concept of ambivalence).

This study reveals that the grief of the bereaved young adult sibling is indeed "secretive, silent, solitary…" and invisible, and concurs with Kierkegaard's description of sorrow. Siblings who live together over an extended period of time, and share a space and the attention of parents, create a bond that is intrinsically ambivalent and evokes strong feelings of love and anger/hate, and of rivalry/competition and loyalty. When the sibling dies, there are many opportunities for guilt or self-blame. Within the family, there is also the risk of being blamed by or blaming others, for something that we did or did not do - particularly if relationships between the siblings, or between parent(s) and the surviving sibling(s), were hostile before the loss.

Pertinent to the grief of the bereaved sibling, the individuals that I interviewed had also experienced a psychic trauma. The sudden and violent death of someone close in age and from one's own family (Moss & Moss, 1986) is a particularly traumatic experience. As succinctly expressed by C.S. Lewis (1976:1): "No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid…At other times it feels like being mildly drunk, or concussed". The sense of unreality, the feeling that this "cannot be happening" is strengthened by the awareness of their parents' profound grief and aspects of traumatic stress as described by Lindemann (1944): detachment, efforts to avoid conversation about the loss, restriction of affect, surfaced in these participants. The warding off of unpleasant affect becomes central and avoidance defences come into play.

Within the context of the family, there are positive and negative aspects to the participants' tendency to close in on themselves and to suspend their grief. For Dia, remaining functional served the purpose of maintaining emotional stability and avoiding being overwhelmed by intense emotions, while still having time to deal with her own loss; for Elena, the desire to be there for her parents as much as possible, to be "strong" for them, precluded the open expression of her intense pain. For Cathy, remaining stuck in the feeling of not owning the grief was amplified by her own sense of guilt related to her brother's death, and by her mother's attacking behaviour, and the lack of acknowledgement from others that she too had suffered a significant loss.

- **Distancing and connectedness**

Freud (1917) reminds us that the mood of mourning is painful, and is accompanied by a loss of interest in the outside world, a loss of a capacity to invest in a new love object or ideal, and a turning away from any activity unrelated to the loved object. We become absorbed with the lost loved one

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and everything else seems unreal: "There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me" (C. S. Lewis, 1976: 1).

The present study reveals that the loss of a sibling involves a sense of distancing of self from the world and others. Although generally experienced at the loss of any significant relationship (Freud, 1917/1957; Bowlby, 1979, 1980; Lindemann, 1944; Parkes, 1972/1975), this sense of distancing is amplified and extended in the case of sibling loss. Not only do the participants experience a sense of unreality and distance from the world and others but also from their parents, who, much as they would like, cannot be the same towards them as they were before the loss; yet, there is still the need to remain connected to others. Even if the surviving sibling wants the space, actually asks others to leave her alone (Dia) or feels unable to talk about her feelings (Cathy, Dia and Elena), she still needs to feel linked to others. As noted by Lewis (1976: 1), "… I want the others to be about me…If only they would talk to one another and not to me". For Dia, it was important to have others around, since it relieved her of the heavy responsibility of sustaining her parents and of the pain of involvement in the family grief. She needed the space in order to deal with her confused emotions privately and realised the importance of the presence of others, not for what they *say* but for what they *do*. Cathy, on the other hand, did not want the space. Left as an only "child", feeling excluded from the family grief and haunted by her guilt, she desperately needed to feel linked to others so that she could confront her grief and move forward. Although Elena could not talk about her deeper emotions, she valued the presence of her brother's friends and the opportunity to listen to "happy" stories about him.

Essentially for survivor siblings all they want to know is that they are connected and that their parents have support. This enables them to enter the emptiness and deal with their loss. In the present study, the open expression of their grief only becomes possible later, usually in the presence of a trusted other: someone outside the family grief (e.g. a spouse or counsellor), who does not have any expectations as to "how" the surviving sibling should grieve and does not impose his or her own meanings on the loss.

- **Anger, Pain and Sadness**

Bowlby (1973, 1979, 1980) views anger, including anger at the deceased, as part of the normal grief process. For Bowlby, anger follows the phase of "numbing" (shock and disbelief) and is part of bereaved person's attempt to recover the lost object; to scold or reproach the deceased for abandoning him or her. Similarly, for Kubler-Ross (1969/1985), "anger" follows the stage of "denial and isolation" and signifies a point where we cannot deny the death any longer and are then freed to become angry.

In this small sample, none of the participants expressed any anger towards their deceased sibling, only a deep sadness about the loss. Implicitly, there may have been some anger, as participants variously described their siblings as nervous and even somewhat reckless at times. Dia described her sister as "panicky" and felt convinced that *she* (her sister) had pulled at the steering wheel (and, by implication, had caused the accident); Elena acknowledged that her brother was a "speed freak" and that this ultimately (almost wilfully) led to his death. Cathy reported that her brother had had a previous accident and had been hospitalised. Yet, the participants themselves never recognised this as anger.

However, is the absence of anger towards the deceased sibling simply a question of "denial"?

Freud (1917/1957) and Klein (1940) offer other possible understandings of the absence of anger towards the deceased. Freud's observations led him to believe that, for the most part, most of us protect the lost loved one; we honour the dead one toward whom we feel ambivalent. In the process of working through the loss, we hyper-invest in the lost loved one, idealising and glorifying the one who is dead and gone. It is only when we split and aim the anger at the self, absorb the blame and experience guilt, that there is a risk of depression.

Klein (1940: 158) views "idealisation" as an essential intermediate step in mental development, where the idealised mother is essential for security and for life itself. In normal mourning, idealisation becomes a way of reinstating and preserving the loved person, the "good object" (idealised) within the self. Klein argues that when anger is experienced towards the lost loved person, the process of idealisation is disturbed. This shakes the mourner's belief in his or her "good inner objects" and threatens with annihilation. The mourner derives great relief from recalling the lost person's kindness and good qualities. This is partly due to the reassurance he experiences from keeping his loved object for the time being as an idealised one. Like Freud, Klein recognises the risk of the mourner becoming depressed should the anger be directed towards the self.

We can recognise in some of the participants the applicability of the above theorists' descriptions of grief as a state often characterised by a turning away from the reality of the loss (i.e. "denial"), identification with and idealisation of the lost brother or sister (Elena), and ambivalence and the presence of "guilt" (Cathy and Dia). Thus, based on the findings of the study, it would seem that there is indeed denial, but that it is more than this. The absence of anger may be accounted for not only by the fact that it is difficult to be angry with a young vital person who has died (a "victim"), but also by the fact that, in the relationship between the siblings, anger, irritation and frustration would be openly expressed while the sibling was still alive. This was evidenced by all the participants. In addition, it is clear that there was a powerful bond between the siblings that transcended the satisfaction of own needs, and siblings were aware of this. For example, Elena frequently fought with her brother, but just

as frequently yielded to his requests for assistance and supported and protected him. The bond prevailed irrespective of how angry she became with her brother. Similarly, Dia was very aware of the differences between herself and her sister and while she would become irritated by her sister's fearful and "panicky" behaviour, she was equally aware that she would have protected her sister should anyone have treated her with disrespect. Although Cathy also became angry with her brother (as on the night of the accident), implicitly she too would have done anything to protect him. However, because of her involvement in the circumstances of his death, she directed the anger at herself. Remorse, guilt and self-reproach, strengthened by her mother's rejection of her, grew out of proportion and haunted her for a long time.

For some participants, anger/irritation/annoyance later becomes an issue. It flares up more in response to their parents' way of handling the loss (Cathy and Dia), or is directed towards God (Dia) for allowing such a terrible thing to happen. In this respect, the anger, rather than being "displaced", may be seen as a reaction to the changes wrought by the death and an attempt to make sense of the loss.

The pain of the loss is initially intense and spontaneous. Later, the pain is amplified by the parents' deep hurt and by their responses to the loss. Letting go of the pain does not really feel possible. There is a sense of evading the pain but holding on to the negative feelings (the fear, hurt and guilt), which must be distinguished from earlier phases of more spontaneous hurt and pain. This holding on appears to have the function, at least for some, of moving the surviving sibling from her "inner" feelings and having to confront her own grief. This grief concerns both the loss of what was and of what might have been. On a deeper level, it is the loss of a particular way of viewing herself that the participant tries to avoid. This reflects the deeper level of meaning that is not yet entirely clear.

A deep sadness was experienced by all the participants. The lingering sadness entails a preoccupation with memories of the deceased sibling. This preoccupation appears to involve two dimensions: the immediate obvious felt longing for the physical presence of their sibling, and the deeper meaning that the loss has for her life (the gradual awareness of the loss of future possibilities and relationships, and the anxiety of being confronted by loneliness in later life). All the participants expressed sadness about the irreplaceable loss of a person who grew up with them, someone who shared the same history. Dia and Elena both expressed sadness about a future without their brother or sister, an important referent throughout life, a source of support, sharing and companionship. For all the participants, it was also their deceased *sibling's* loss for which they grieved: the fact that the life and potential of such a young person was cut short. Again, the surviving sibling will not typically attempt to uncover the deeper meaning of the loss during the earlier part of the grief process. It is the more immediate experience, involving the missing of the physical presence of the brother or sister and the concern for parents, that absorbs them.

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The loss of a brother or sister *is* very sad, and the sadness and missing is present and persists. It would appear from the findings of the study that as surviving siblings move through different passages in their lives, they realise the fuller significance and meaning that the loss of their sibling has for them and their sorrow is reactivated. In this respect, sibling loss can be seen as a developmental "crisis" - in the Eriksonian sense of a turning point, a crucial period of increased vulnerability and heightened potential. In the preliminary study, Angie comments: "The loss of my sister was a pivotal moment in my life…"

- **"Guilt": Concern and Responsibility**

Although not all the participants in the study experienced "guilt" over the loss of their sibling, it has been documented as one of the pervasive emotions of bereaved siblings. Particularly when the death is violent, or is sudden and unexpected (as with all the siblings in this study), there are countless reasons for surviving siblings to feel responsible or "guilty".

In many respects, the "guilt" of a surviving sibling resembles that of a parent. Although parents remain the primary protectors of their children, siblings frequently share in the sense of responsibility for the welfare of their brother or sister. Just as parents are prepared to die for their children, so too, it would seem, are siblings. When death strikes one of their "own", there are countless opportunities for pointing a finger at themselves. Where the sibling is somehow involved in the circumstances of the death (Cathy), the feeling of being-to-blame may be deeply seated, and can even be felt as a finger pointed by parents (or from the grave) for not having taken good enough care of their brother or sister. This form of guilt is unlikely to be shared with anyone, and is intensely damaging. This is evidenced in Cathy's experience. She becomes locked in her “guilt” and this not only delays her mourning but also impacts negatively on her physical and emotional wellbeing.

In the context of the experience of the loss of a brother or sister, the term "guilt" has meanings, overtones, and dimensions beyond its use in the "natural attitude". The spectrum of guilt experienced by bereaved siblings is broad and subtly nuanced. It manifests itself in different ways at different times during the grief process of the bereaved sibling. There are also variations of this emotion not only between participants but also within the same participant at different times. Our understanding of the term requires amplification and clarification. Some preliminary distinctions of the specific ways that "guilt" reveals itself, or rather plays itself out, in the experience of sibling loss, seem to be in order here, as this has been referred to in much of the bereavement literature relating to childhood and adolescent sibling loss.

The ready-at-hand use of the word "guilt" or self-blame - namely of "being responsible for an offence or wrongdoing"; "culpability for crime or lesser breach of regulation"; "remorseful awareness of

having done something wrong" (American Heritage Dictionary); and "the fact of having committed a wrong", "a crime, debt" (Klein, 1971) - does not adequately encompass all the meanings of this emotion for the surviving sibling. Only one participant (Cathy) experienced guilt feelings in the sense of "doing wrong", of feeling "responsible", or "being to blame" for the loss. Cathy's guilt arose through her indirect involvement in the circumstances of her brother's accident, and to this day she feels responsible for his death; something which she has never shared with her parents. However, it is not only guilt in relation to her deceased sibling: there is a sense of being-to-blame for the loss *and* a fear of reprisal/retaliation from her mother for not having taken greater care to ensure her brother's safety. This haunted her for many years and effectively stopped her mourning even before she had begun the grief work. Later, when her mother angrily acknowledges that she had lost her "favourite child", Cathy's "guilt" intensifies as she realises that in her mother's eyes her brother had always come first. She doubts her ability to achieve anything, her right to exist, and even her entitlement to mourn. It is evident that the "guilt" that Cathy refers to is far more encompassing and damaging than the term denotes. She feels "guilt" in relation to self (she is "worthless"), in relation to her deceased sibling (for not caring enough), and in relation to her parents (she had not been a good "keeper of her brother"). Thus, within the context of sibling loss, "guilt" is a multifaceted, undulating and dynamic concept that evolves over time, and its texture contains what Buber (1957: 117) refers to as an "ontic" character, i.e. "the fact that man can become guilty and know it".

Although most of the participants use the word "guilt", the meaning of the lived emotion varies. For Cathy it is a feeling not only of having done wrong, but of *being* wrong, i.e. feeling "guilty" that she is still alive while her sibling has died; a felt sense that the wrong child had died. This feeling is one also shared by Dia. For Elena, there is regret that she did not spend more time with her brother while he was alive. For Dia, a sense of "guilt" is almost implied in the intense inner conflict which emerges as she attempts to separate from her parents while realising the importance of her supportive role in the family. Similarly, Elena experiences some conflict and "guilt" for focusing on her own needs (being "selfish") as she tentatively moves into her own career. These different dimensions of "guilt" are apparent as the participants grope to express themselves and, as evidenced by the following quote from Dia's interview, they do not always feel entirely satisfied that they have adequately communicated the precise meaning of this emotion:

> "But I really felt…if I ever felt in the least bit guilty, I felt guilty because it was not me [that died] … I wouldn't say that I really felt guilty…how shall I describe it? But I know that I had such thoughts…['why her and not me?']…"

Significantly the Greek word for guilt, "enochos" ("ενοχος"), is defined as "held in", "liable *to*", "subject *to*" and the verb "enecho" ("ενεχω"), "to hold within"; (passive form) "to be held", "caught", "entangled in a thing" (Greek-English Lexicon, 1889/1961). In turn, "liable *to*", i.e. "legally bound",

"answerable for", "subject to penalty", "under obligation to do" (The Concise Oxford Dictionary), is derived from the French word, "lier", i.e. "to bind". These additional images reflect more fully the subtle nuances and the textural quality of the feelings of "guilt" or "conscience" of the participants. Implied in the passive form of "enochos" is the meaning of being an accessory to the wrong-doing. Members of a family feel "bound", "held in" by unwritten and unspoken rules to be there for each other. When a death occurs in the family, all experience a sense of personal responsibility, particularly if the loss was preventable. Faith and trust are values that are deeply embedded in families within most cultures: members of a family will be there for each other, are "answerable *for*", and "under obligation" *to* work towards, the good of the family, and care for each other (even if they do not always get on well with each other). When a family member dies, faith and trust are shaken, and every member of the family will experience a sense of "guilt"/responsibility to a greater or lesser extent.

This seems to concur with Levinas' (1979) concept of the "passivity of conscience", which is founded on the experience that the face of the Other calls my egoism into question (Kunz, 1998: 44). Faced with a crisis as a member of the family, we do not first think that we must help our mother/father/siblings. We simply do it. Our conscience is assigned to us simply by being a being that is vulnerable to be called, by being human: "To love is to fear for another; to come to the assistance of his frailty" (Levinas 1979: 256). In this respect, some of the participants become aware of having taken their sibling for granted, of neglecting to focus on their sibling and being more concerned with their own needs, with the self, and of getting on with their own lives and not recognising the significance of the other. When the sibling dies, there is a tremendous loss: an emptiness in self and world, and a gradual awakening of the meaning that the lost sibling had for one's life and for parents.

Another aspect of the "guilt" experienced by the participants is what existential philosophers refer to as "existential guilt", the guilt of not living up to one's potential or, as Yalom, 1980 (in Qualls, 1998: 354) posits, "[feeling] guilty to the extent that one has failed to fulfil authentic possibility". The findings of the present study seem to concur with the concept of existential guilt. With the loss, there is a continual call to respond to the needs of their parents, who are suffering, and an ongoing internal struggle and feelings of helplessness at not being able to reduce their pain. The inability to ease their parents' suffering becomes a transgression of self. Some experience existential guilt not only for the fact that their sibling had died at such a young age and had no possibility of fulfilling his or her own potential, but also for not fulfilling their own potential as surviving children. The perception of self as "survivor" is challenged daily as they witness their parents' grief and as they themselves struggle with the vicissitudes of life and their own human fallibility. They compare themselves to the deceased sibling, whose image has become frozen, and find themselves lacking. Dia, for example, questions the adequacy of her support of her mother following her father's death, and feels that possibly her sister would have provided better support because she was closer to her mother than Dia was.

Although not inevitable and not unique to sibling loss, survival guilt is more likely to be felt deeply with the loss of a sibling (or a "soul" brother or sister, a peer) than with other losses (e.g. loss of a parent or spouse). Because the sibling relationship is an egalitarian relationship - a relationship between peers - and because the survivor is one of "the children" and in some sense can fill in, substitute for the other, the question, "why her/him and not me?", is more likely to be asked. Significantly, in his comparative study of the loss of a sibling and the loss of a parent in childhood, Worden (1996: 119) found that "survivor guilt" is more likely to be a feature of sibling loss than of parental loss.

Participants become aware of "guilt" because of their tendency to focus on self and because of neglecting to appreciate the significance of their sibling. This awareness of focus on self, and of forgetfulness of the other as they get on with their own lives, brings to the foreground the need to care for the other. They think of their parents. Heidegger (1927/1962) speaks of conscience as "care"; care for the other. Faced by the death of their sibling, the participants' response is not to focus on self and on own needs. Where formerly they had taken the sibling for granted and had carried on with their own lives, suddenly everything changes. There is a desire to care for significant others because they "will not be there forever" (Elena). The greater sensitivity to, and heightened awareness of finitude, expressed by most of the participants, is not simply a matter of identification or empathy. It goes beyond empathy. For Heidegger (1927/1962), it is part of authentic being and an awareness of what really matters in life.

Buber's (1957) concept of “real” or “personal” guilt, adds a further dimension to “existential guilt.” Conscience, according to Buber (1957: 120-121), is the capacity of man to distinguish between those of his actions, both past and future, that should be approved and those that should not be approved. In Buber's terms, conscience distinguishes and either confirms or condemns - actions and omissions to act, decisions and failures to decide, and even thoughts and wishes. Man alone is able to distance himself from himself and to reflect on his actions, decisions, thoughts and wishes. Buber notes that, while the context of conscience is in many respects determined by social and religious values, conscience itself is more than the internalisation of these values; it is more than Freud's concept of the "superego" and the internalisation of parents' and cultural values, demands and prohibitions. For Buber (1957: 121), the "shoulds" and "should nots" of society or of a particular faith determine only "the conceptions in the conscience", but not its existence itself. The type of guilt which Buber terms "existential guilt" is guilt that a person takes on himself or herself as a person and in a personal situation, and is grounded in the capacity to distance the self, to reflect and to distinguish - qualities that are essential to being human (1957: 121).

Significant in this respect is that the bereaved sibling encounters her guilt following the loss (i.e. in the absence of her sibling), as a survivor. According to Buber (1957: 120), guilt arises whenever "the human order of being is injured". Even though the bereaved sibling may not have been involved in the circumstances of the loss, and has not herself done anything to "injure the human order", the order has nvertheless been "injured" by the death of her sibling. Central to this "injury", for the bereaved sibling, is the break in the parent-child bond. It is in relation to their parents' intense suffering that some of the siblings feel most guilty. Cathy's guilt is compounded by her knowledge that her mother had lost her "favourite child". For Dia, the awareness that her sister's death had such a devastating impact on her parents and also affected other significant others, also evoked a lingering sense of existential guilt. For most of these participants, it seems that it is the *survival* itself that stood at the core of the inner conflict, anxiety and "guilt". This is cogently expressed by Dia:

> "You know that I always said that I…And I definitely felt it…I honestly felt, 'Why not…why her and not me?' I mean, I was not in a relationship. I was not married. I was almost *disposable* at that stage…it wouldn't have been so bad for everybody…"

Significantly, it is also in relation to primary attachments (more specifically to mother) that attempts are initially made to restore the "human order" - where attempts are made to compensate for the deep wrench suffered by significant others.

Can one ease the existential guilt that some of these surviving siblings are still facing in their lives? According to Buber (1957: 122), "'illuminating" (facing) the guilt and its meaning for one's life, rather than silencing it, creates the possibility of reconciling the guilt through a newly acquired authentic relationship to the world and others, in which the individual's best qualities can unfold. Stated differently, confronting one's existential guilt transforms it from a limitation into a strong basis for inter-human living, of concern for others, because, as Buber (1957: 122) has it, "the wounds of the order-of-being can be healed in infinitely many other places than those at which they were inflicted". The "confession", he says, "is the door springing open" (1957:126). Only then can the person realise his or her highest potential. Truth is freedom (Heidegger, 1927/1962).

It is significant that Cathy held on to her secret guilt. For a long time she could not share this with anybody. It was only much later when she went for counselling that she was able fully to confront her guilt and attempt to understand its essence and meaning for her life. Although she still carries a lot of guilt about her brother having been in the car and has not been able to share this with her mother, she has integrated her loss experience to a certain extent through her empathic understanding of the pain and confusion of bereaved children. Realising how traumatic a family loss can be, and recognising the value of support outside the immediate family, she remains devoted to the world of bereaved children and has provided relief for many.

But what if her parents had revealed the truth about previous losses in the family and/or if she had been informed about how profoundly parents are affected by the loss of a child: that her mother's anger and alienating resentment had been part of her intense pain and grief? Would this knowledge have made a difference? While Cathy may not necessarily have felt less guilty about her involvement in the circumstances of her brother's death, she is of the opinion that if her parents (particularly her mother) had been counselled after the first loss and if she, Cathy, had also received support relating to her mother's behaviour, that this could have changed the whole story of her life. Several researchers and writers (Krell & Rabkin, 1979; Cain *et al*., 1964; Rosen, 1984-85; 1986; Davies, 1999) agree that the way parents and other significant others respond to the surviving sibling's hurt contributes to the degree to which a bereaved brother or sister is able to sort out his/her involvement in the loss. This seems to be as true of sibling loss in young adulthood as of childhood bereavement.

In his developmental theory, Winnicott (1958a/1990) makes thematic the close relationship between guilt and the capacity for concern. He states that "… the sense of guilt is very little more than *anxiety with a special quality*, anxiety felt because of the conflict between love and hate…" (1958a: 16). Thus, according to Winnicott (1963/1990: 73), guilt-sense implies tolerance of ambivalence. He places ambivalence in a central position in the individual's development of the "capacity for concern" (1963/1990: 73). Thus, guilt sense implies tolerance of ambivalence, which in turn implies a considerable degree of psychological growth and health, and a capacity for concern. "Concern refers to the fact that the individual *cares*, or *minds*, and both feels and accepts responsibility" (1963/1990: 73). It may therefore be said that guilt-sense fosters empathy, and concern implies a sense of responsibility and respect for relationships. The concern and sense of responsibility was experienced deeply by most of the participants, who felt compassion for their parents in the loss situation. "Guilt" is the ready-at-hand word we use even when we do not intend any negative connotation. Viewed from Winnicott's (1958a/1990, 1963/1990) perspective, namely that guilt is sometimes on the way to concern, we become aware of the positive aspect of this emotion. We see, too, that it is close to Heidegger's (1927/1962) *Fursorge* (Care), Buber's (1957) "personal" or existential guilt, and Levinas' (1979) "passivity of conscience" or "love" and responsibility.

7.1.8 The Trapped Position of the "Involved-Outsider"

This study found that the experience of sibling loss is an experience of being an "involved-outsider". Initially there is a feeling of distancing, of being outside the grief situation. While the sense of distance from the world and others is part of the normal grief response to the loss of any significant other, what is unique to sibling loss is the feeling of being a-part-of, yet also apart-from, the grief situation. This persists for a long time and should not be confused with the initial sense of distancing and unreality. This is evidenced in all the protocols as the participants, confronted by the pain of their

own loss, their parents' anguish and intense suffering, and the sorrow of other significant others in the life of their deceased sibling, find themselves without a place to grieve.

In her comprehensive study of childhood sibling loss, Davies (1999: 199-201) found that the long-term effects of sibling bereavement in childhood brought to light additional responses, one of which, "I don’t belong", arises in part from the changes in the family following a loss. Davies notes that with the disruption of tasks and activities of daily living, the heaviness of emotion in the home, and the reorganisation of roles, children begin to feel that they are not part of what is happening and as if they "don’t belong" in their family; they feel that there is no place for them.

These findings resonate with the present study and suggest that the feeling of “not belonging” as described by Davies (1999) is also experienced by siblings who lose their brothers or sisters in young adulthood, although this is manifested somewhat differently. It would appear from the present findings that it is more than "not belonging". It is, as has been stated, paradoxically a feeling of being very much *a-part-of* but also *apart-from* the grief situation. As young adults, most of the participants in this study were actively involved in supporting their parents through the loss; they cognitively understood what was happening, and some were initially surrounded by people; yet, like their childhood counterparts, they felt very separate and alone in their grief.

The feeling of being a-part-of yet also apart-from the grief situation is encountered on three levels: the individual, the familial and the social/relational; all of these are interrelated but have been separated here for the purpose of the discussion.

On the *self*-side, the pain of the loss alone, the loss of someone who has been part of the surviving sibling's world since childhood, her "other self", someone who lived through her adolescence with her and could have assisted her in breaking away from parents, initially creates a distance between the surviving sibling and the world of others, and paradoxically removes her from her lived-world. The isolating effect of loss is almost tangible. Not only is she unable to be with others in the same way as before, but those around her also change and treat her differently. Before the death, the participants were part-of but also apart-from their sibling, part-of and also apart-from their parents, but, with the loss, everything is a-part. The sense of related-separateness that is so essential as they ready themselves to meet the challenge of "intimacy" (Erikson, 1959/1980; 1968/1971) with others outside the family, is shattered, and they are confronted by the developmental crisis of "isolation".

Burying a brother or a sister at any age can be a very lonely experience, but the loss of a sibling in young adulthood, a time when the participants experienced themselves more as part of the (lateral) brother/sister relationship than of the (vertical) parent-child relationship, also contributes to the

feeling of being an "outsider". Within the sibling "underworld" as Bank and Kahn (1982) refer to the sibling sub-group, the participants shared experiences, ideas and concerns that were not always shared with parents; they assisted and affirmed each other in many ways and had a place and a role that was unique to the sibling relationship and defined who they were. With the loss of this significant relationship, the participants lose a unique recipient of many different emotions. In an attempt to work through the loss - to make sense of it - memories of their deceased sibling's life, rather than visiting his or her grave, are important to most of the participants. The different way that the participants deal with the loss also separates them from the world of others and from their parents.

On the *family*-side, being an "outsider" is encountered by some participants through the lack of acknowledgement of their grief. For others it is the different way in which the siblings cope with the loss that separates them from their parents. Cathy felt like an "outsider" through a history of experiencing herself as the less favoured or "outside" child in relation to her deceased brother, by her personal guilt, as well as by a feeling of being excluded from the family grief. For Dia, the sense of apartness is based on an inability to share her deeper feelings for fear of breaking down. Initially the experience is one of not being part-of (Cathy) or, as in Dia's situation, not *wanting* to be a-part-of, the family grief. This realisation is encountered not only through the participants' evasion of the pain of the loss, but also through the awareness of their parents' profound grief. The bereaved siblings' perception that the loss of a child is the most devastating of all losses, and that they cannot possibly know the depth of their parents' profound anguish, overshadows their own grief and also sets them apart. They begin to feel like an "insider" that is "outside" the grief situation.

Thus, while the surviving sibling is very much part of the grieving family, she feels separate and apart from it - a participant-observer. The underlying feeling of apartness and alienation is co-constituted by an awareness of their parents' deep grief and total transformation, their inability to be available to the surviving sibling in the same way as before, and by the change in communicational value within the family. The discomfort of either the one or both parents in talking about the death and loss, also sets them apart from their parents. Significant in this respect is that, in contrast to parents (particularly the mother) who visited the grave religiously and found solace in this ritual, all of the young adult participants resisted going to the cemetery. The study reveals that for the participants other "rituals" were more meaningful, i.e. through remembering the sibling as he or she was in life (Dia and Elena) and the sharing of stories of the deceased sibling (Elena). Elena felt strongly that remembering her brother's death should not outweigh the significance of his life and the legacy that he had left her. Unfortunately, when others were unable to speak about her brother without being overcome with the tragedy of his death, this increased her alienation and distanced her further from the world of others.

On the *social/relational*-side, the feeling of loneliness and apartness, of being an “outsider”, is strengthened by the responses (“Have your parents got over the loss of your brother?”) or lack of responses of others (silence about the loss or avoidance of the bereaved). This creates a distance between the surviving sibling and her world and in many ways it is as if the participants are expelled from the world along with their deceased sibling. While it is very difficult when one loses a spouse, a child, or a parent, for others not to notice and to acknowledge the significance of the loss for the survivor, in the case of sibling loss, it is possible to slip into, or be placed in, the background and hide one's grief. The relational complexity of the situation is amplified when the deceased brother or sister also leaves behind a husband, lover and/or child, so that for the surviving sibling a question arising may be “who owns the loss?” or even, as in Cathy’s situation, “Am I allowed to be sorrowful?”

The participants' own concern, and the natural concern of others, with the parents' grief, as well as their own inability to share their pain with anybody, make this a profoundly lonely experience. It is the experience of being an involved-outsider, a "stranger-onlooker" who is, nevertheless, caught right in the middle of all the grief situations.

Alapack's (2004) notion of the “implicated alien”, i.e. one who is central to the deceased but who, after the loss, is overlooked, ignored or stays on the “outside” and remains invisible, unnoticed and alienated, more aptly describes the loss experience of the bereaved young adult sibling. Whether it is the sibling herself who withdraws in an attempt to find a safe space to mourn, or family members and others who, in the emotional turmoil following the loss of a child, forget about or do not know what to say to the bereaved sibling, all the participants experienced themselves as “implicated aliens.” In the present study, while Dia and Elena felt more comfortable with (and Dia even welcomed) the apartness and aloneness/solitude as an opportunity to deal with their loss on their own and in their own time, and Cathy felt excluded from the family grief and ached for some validation that she was also grieving; implicitly they all needed acknowledgement that they too had suffered a significant loss.

7.1.9 The Silent and Lonely Journey.

The feeling of being apart-from the grief situation is accentuated by the silence surrounding death and loss. Confronted by the devastating experience of the loss of their sibling, the participants have no words that can adequately describe the maelstrom of emotions that threatens to overwhelm them. Initially, silence emerges as a natural response to the overwhelming and confusing emotions experienced immediately following the awareness that a significant other has been irretrievably lost.

Later, the silence is perpetuated by the participants' acute awareness of the grief of their parents and of other significant others. The power of silence is evident in the present study but the power of words

within a grieving family can have equally powerful and sometimes damaging consequences. As evidenced by Cathy:

> "… and she (i.e. mother) said, 'I just want to tell you my *favourite* child died!' (very emotional and unable to continue) ... … I think it was devastating … it was hurtful …for many years I thought I had no worth."

Apart from the fear of burdening their parents with more pain, participants become increasingly aware that breaking the silence may expose the intense emotions associated with mourning. A tacit understanding develops to maintain the silence. Within the family, silence becomes the solution to further fragmentation by protecting each other and themselves from painful emotions. While some members of the family may wish to talk about the loss and to express their feelings, others resist any communication, and the silence is protracted. Concealment of emotions and a refusal or inability to talk about the loss freeze the mourning process in its earliest stages and allow minimal opportunity for healing to take place. The silence is enhanced by the participants' perception that others are uncomfortable in being with the bereaved - they are also hurting (Elena); they have other priorities (Dia); or they simply cannot cope with the family grief and so avoid contact (Cathy).

Whether it is the survivor herself who is unable to talk (for fear of breaking down or of exposing her secret guilt), or one or both parents that prefer to deal with their grief privately, or her friends who become "embarrassed", the fact is that, for all participants, a protracted silence prevails. The bereaved sibling then, as well as suffering the pain of loss, experiences a denial of the full meaning of this pain and the opportunity to share her feelings or concerns with others. The participants' experience of the loss of their brother or sister becomes a silent and lonely journey. Although some of the participants in the present study had spoken briefly *about* their sibling with a close friend shortly after the death, none of them had discussed or shared their *feelings* with parents or friends, even after many years following the death.

Most grief theorists stress the importance of talking, sharing and recalling in the healing process. As Stated by Weizman and Kamm (1985: 186): "It is not the passage of time itself that is healing. It is the *expression* of grief over a period of time that leads to the healing of painful memories." The importance of articulating felt or pre-reflective knowledge is generally emphasised by phenomenologists, who concur with Gendlin (1988: 52) that "to articulate is to live further". The power of language to transform painful emotions is evident in psychotherapy. Something like the "working through" that occurs in therapy can occur in everyday life. Yet, silence frequently surrounds sibling loss. In our Western world, the absence of cultural prescriptions regarding loss and mourning also plays a role in terms of how the grief is dealt with (Gorer, 1965/1987, 1973).

Several researchers (Cain *et al*., 1964; Krell & Rabkin, 1979; Rosen, 1984-85; Lukas & Seiden, 1987/1990) have discussed the nature of the silence in families surrounding death and loss, and its powerful consequences. The concept of a "conspiracy of silence" or "the bargain of silence" (Lukas & Seiden, 1987/1990) following a loss within a family seems to concur with the findings of this study. For all participants, it is apparent that silence does not emerge out of the world alone or out of the self alone; it emerges out of a dialogue between the two. Like the musical chord referred to earlier, the thematic link of parents' grief and siblings' grief blend, and harmony is restored ... supposedly. By maintaining the silence, parents/others/siblings are not burdened with emotions that may overwhelm. On the surface, life can continue as "normal". However, by remaining silent, by assuming the position of silent conspirator, the bereaved sibling cannot do the "work" of mourning necessary for healing to take place.

In the present study, the participants manifest some ambivalence about the silence. On the one hand, there is the relief brought about by an avoidance of communication that initially helps to contain and conceal emotions; on the other hand, and over time, there is a nagging sense of being excluded and not being noticed that subtly (and sometimes, very pointedly) devalues the bereaved sibling. Significantly, silence conceals and reveals. In fact, Alapack (1987: 7) points out that "inauthentic silence roars". This is clearly demonstrated in Cathy's situation where her mother's silence is experienced as an accusation feeding Cathy's personal guilt. Holding on to her guilt, Cathy is left feeling totally worthless. For Dia, however, who wanted to deal with her grief privately, maintaining the silence was important and having time alone aided her in making sense of her loss and incorporating the loss into her life in a personal and intentional way.

Still the question of why the bereaved sibling maintains the silence is far from settled. Certainly protection of and being strong for parents are important aspects of the silence. In the present study, the protection of self also emerged as significant, as did the reality that different members in the family deal with the loss differently and that the bereaved sibling frequently finds herself torn between the parents. By aligning herself with one parent, the bereaved sibling may feel that she is betraying the other.

From the present study, additional possibilities for the bereaved sibling's silence also emerged as significant factors: *firstly*, the need to retain the attachment to the lost brother or sister; and, *secondly*, a state of emotional readiness to deal with the loss openly.

In the process of grief, the participants revealed a need to retain the attachment to their deceased sibling. Kierkegaard (1843/1959b: 176) posits that "[s]orrow is always seeking its object". Holding on to lived memories of the deceased sibling (Dia and Elena), taking over roles that he or she filled,

even speaking with the same voice inflection (Elena), represent the "seeking" of which Kierkegaard speaks and what Bowlby (1980) and Parkes (1972/1975) refer to as “searching” for, and finding, the lost loved one. In the days, weeks, months and even years after the loss, the bereaved sibling longs for the deceased brother or sister. The anguish, although not constantly or acutely present, is quite specific. Only the presence of *that* unique person can make things better. Thus, a possible understanding of the bereaved sibling's silence, also related to the need to retain the attachment to their brother or sister, is that they somehow ally themselves with the deceased sibling, who, after all, is also silent. Because the sibling is no longer physically present, the dialogue becomes a silent one. In some instances, the silence is also based on a need to protect their deceased sibling's memory. This was evidenced in the preliminary study where Angie perceived others outside the family as simply "curious" about her sister's death and she angrily refused to allow certain peers even to attend her sister's funeral.

The sense of having a "*conversation cut off in the middle*" (Lukas & Seiden, 1987/1990: 138) is very strong after a sudden death and is particularly true of siblings whose ongoing dialogue, not only in the present but also in the future, is abruptly severed. Because of the intimate nature of the sibling relationship, the varied experiences that are not always shared with parents or others, and the personal memories built up over a long period, it is not surprising that initially some siblings are not able to talk about the loss. Silence provides an escape from painful, disruptive emotions and maintains a sense of stability. However, feelings that are kept in the dark fester and grow and a kind word, an acknowledgement that they too have suffered a loss, can make the world of difference to a bereaved sibling. Lifting the silence, being able to talk about death, can provide relief from confusion, guilt and depression.

For most of the participants in this study, a state of emotional *readiness* also seemed to be essential to speaking about the loss and openly expressing their grief. Contingent on this is being able to find a safe space to mourn, and an authentic listener with whom the surviving sibling can share deeper emotions without feeling threatened that the person will insist that she reveal more. Significantly in this study, it was many years after the loss that Cathy and Dia were able to break through the silence and alienation and allow their grief to move outward. All the participants describe their encounter with a trusted and significant other, someone outside the immediate family grief (a counsellor, spouse, extended family), as central to their readiness to let go and openly to grieve over their brother or sister.

7.1.10 Resolution

The study reveals that all the participants had reached some resolution of their grief - by the time of the interviews. However, Elena is still in the early stages of her grief and continues to resist the

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changes wrought by the loss, holding on to an idealised image of her brother. For Cathy and Dia, despite a thirty-year-plus time lapse since their loss, the journey is ongoing and although the acute grief is not constantly present, the trauma of the loss still bursts forth at times with all the force experienced at the moment of receiving the news of their sibling's death. For the bereaved sibling, resolution of the grief is neither simple, straightforward nor time-limited, not only because it is difficult to accept the death of a young person, someone who was deeply embedded in her life and who she assumed would be there in the future, but also because of the unabated grief of significant others (particularly the parents) and the loss of the family as she had known it.

Does this, however, mean that the bereaved sibling's loss remains "unresolved"? What does "resolution" mean? Is grief over the loss of a sibling, or any other significant other for that matter, ever fully "resolved?" These are some of the questions that arose from the present study.

In terms of the existing psychological understandings of loss and mourning, different theorists have taken up different positions regarding the "successful" resolution of grief work: the severance of ties to the deceased (Freud, 1917/1957); "emancipation from the bondage to the deceased" (Lindemann, 1944); detachment and readjustment to life without the deceased (Bowlby, 1980); adaptation to crisis and social role transition (Parkes, 1972/1975). Other theorists (Silverman *et al.,*1995) consider maintaining contact with the deceased as significant to the resolution of grief work. In Kleinian (object-relations) terms, resolution involves restoring the lost loved person inside oneself and in-so-doing realising that in essence one's relationship cannot be taken from one; he or she is within, and part of one. These perceptions of the resolution of sibling loss focus primarily on loss as an individual matter and do not take into account the individual's social/relational world.

While it is natural for us to want to maintain a connection with ("hold on to") our lost loved one, and while it is also important to "let go" of him or her in the sense that he or she does not fill our minds every minute of the day and night, in this study it would appear that the "resolution" of the grief for the bereaved sibling is neither an absolute "letting go" nor a persistent "holding on", but rather a "letting be"- not in the sense of resignation, a hopeless "giving up" (Kubler-Ross, 1969/1985: 99-100), a succumbing to what is too painful or too hard to bear, but through "acceptance." Although Kubler-Ross is referring to the dying person who finally ceases to struggle against death, confronts the reality of his or her pain and is able to sorrow his or her losses (both past and future), her description resonates with the findings of this study. At some point following their sibling's death, most of the participants cease struggling against the pain and submit to their grief.

Kierkegaard (1847/1962) reveals the helpful significance of our agony. He encourages us to dwell with our anxiety and to sorrow through our suffered losses. Sorrow-ing, he maintains, is the only deep

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"cure" for depression and despair. We must not be allowed to harden ourselves out of the pain of life. Rather than holding the pain at bay, we allow the grief to be felt and expressed. In his "Works of Love", Kierkegaard (1847/1962) counsels that suffering must be suffered. Sorrow is essential, because coherently and healthily, it "springs the trap on distorted memories" (Alapack, 1999:103). Remembering and remembering fully and correctly is essential for grief to run its course. Sorrow breaks through the deception and self-deception, and allows grief to run its course. Sorrow, according to Kierkegaard, is only truly surmounted insofar as it endures its own truth. We do not overcome our sorrow. Getting over the sorrow, surmounting it, means that we dwell enduringly, or that we abide by the truth that it discloses. As noted above, this is something different to a resignation that is a capitulation, an act of weakness, a "giving up". Genuine or authentic resignation ("letting-be") is the deepening that Alapack (1995: 10) refers to as "restorative surmounting" (Heidegger's term). When we confront the truth that is concealed and protected in our sorrow, a "restoring surmounting" takes place. Alapack (1995) refers to that endurance as a "restoration" rather than a healing.

In Kierkegaard we find that the "work" of mourning completes itself with the spiritual act of concern and forgiveness. For Kierkegaard, *forgiveness*, i.e. letting go of the need to judge or blame the self and/or others, is the ultimate resolution of the loss of a loved one. The authentic resolution to grief work is the acceptance of the loved other as fallible and flawed. Forgiveness opens the door to atonement, to making reparation. The capacity to forgive the imperfect other enables us to accept and forgive our own imperfections, our real or merely imagined crimes. We receive and we give (forgiveness) even though we may not condone or approve of our actions or of those of the other. We realise that love cannot be perfect and that even though we may not deserve it, we are still loved. It is ours by gift, by grace.

Melanie Klein (1940) richly describes the need for, and the struggle to make "reparation" for acts and wishes of greed, envy, jealousy and aggression against an other. In speaking about "reparation", she is in fact also talking about forgiveness and stresses its significance in the work of mourning. For Klein (1940: 162), it is a matter of the mourner gradually regaining trust in external objects and values of various kinds, that he or she is able once more to strengthen his or her confidence in the lost loved person: "Then he can again bear to realise that this object was not perfect, and yet not lose trust and love for him, nor fear his revenge". When this stage is reached, important steps in the work of mourning are made: "As security in the inner world is gradually regained through forgiveness, and feelings and inner objects are allowed to come more to life again, re-creative processes can set in and hope return" (Klein, 1940: 163). Others within the British School of Psychoanalysis (or Object-Relations Theorists): D. W. Winnicott, Ronald Fairbairn and Harry Guntrip, also contribute rich insights into concern or making reparation. Indeed, Elkin (1972: 408) posits that Klein and Winnicott together resolve the "depressive position" by what is essentially "a mental-spiritual" achievement -

Klein through her concept of "reparation for guilt"; Winnicott through his concept of the development of the "capacity for concern". These concepts, and Kierkegaard's emphasis on "forgiveness", provide the bridge to where Freud peters out at the end of 1917.

Pertinent to the findings of this study, forgiveness involved not only self-forgiveness but also forgiving parents for their way of dealing with the loss, which added to the participants' own pain and held them hostage. For some participants, the aspect of "forgiveness" was evident from fairly early on in the grief process. For example, in speaking about the marked changes in her parents and her resistance to these changes, Elena recognises that death happens and that nobody can be blamed for it. The loss of a child is devastating and parents cannot be blamed for being changed by the death. Similarly, while Dia may have felt irritated and even angry at times by her parents' expectations that she cope with the loss in the same way as they did, by their lack of insight into her needs, and by their tendency to cling to her, she accepts that the grief of a parent is severe and she understands their fears of yet another separation. She is able to forgive them for holding on to her and later is able to give herself permission to move on with her own life. Even though Cathy retains anger towards her mother, whose despair over the loss of three children and angry verbal attacks on Cathy left her feeling as if she had no worth and amplified the pain of her loss, she too is finally able to move towards forgiveness, albeit hesitantly, as evidenced by the following:

> "…and looking back, I realise that it was emotional instability…I mean, you lose 3 children, you can't be absolutely normal, can you? I don't think so … and I experienced it. You cannot…"

For the participants, letting go of negative feelings (anger, guilt and blame) and transforming these to acceptance, love/compassion and forgiveness, meant finding some resolution. Letting go of the negativity is liberating. It allows for reintegration, for reclaiming the self, and enables the bereaved siblings to resolve their grief sufficiently to be able to move on with their own lives.

The present study reveals that, with time, forgiveness is made possible in the revelation and acknowledgement of truth. For example, when the truth was revealed about the multiple losses suffered by her parents, Cathy was able to let go of the hurt in the relationship with her mother, recover a sense of self worth, and move on. Although she continues to struggle with guilt feelings in relation to her brother's death, and retains some anger towards her mother for her insensitive behaviour towards her, she realises that she has to let go of this as well. For Dia acknowledging and letting go of her anger in the relationship with God brought tremendous relief, and she was able to find new meaning and hope for the future through her strengthened faith. In another instance, when Dia let go of the negative (painful) meaning that she attached to the loss (all the shattered lives that it

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left in its wake), she found new meaning (i.e. her sister would not have coped well with all the hardships of life) that enabled her to move on.

The realisation that everything is not under one's control - that we must live without necessarily having the answers - facilitates the development of humility and a different relatedness to life: one of wanting to be of help to others. Levinas (1988: 159) sees this as the one meaning inherent in suffering: "Suffering is useless", he says; only in the sense that I can be of help to the Other, does suffering make sense. The liberating message lingers in Kierkegaard's, 1996 (in Alapack, 2000: 5) judgement on himself: "I have loved the world because I love it through my melancholy."

This altered relatedness to life, has relevance for the present study. In "letting-be" (i.e. authentic resignation), the participants' anxiety about death coexists with a renewed appreciation of significant relationships and a desire to nurture these. The heightened awareness of unpredictable mortal existence shatters the assumption of enduring contact, but also leads to personal growth and a transcendence of self through reflection and a re-examination of their own lives, personal beliefs and values. The significance and flawed fragility of their family is brought home to them. It brings the appreciation of relationships with others outside the realm of family sorrow (friends and other significant others). This is clearly evident in the present study and also in the preliminary study. For Elena, the awareness that death can come at any time, that it is not something that happens only to the elderly and the very ill, and her fear of death, are accompanied by a deeper appreciation of others and an awareness that time spent with significant others is valuable, that every moment counts. For some, the loss also brings into focus other important aspects of life, including compassion for those that are suffering - a compassion not shadowed by guilt. Dwelling with her own loss experience, Cathy has become very aware of how traumatic loss can be, and she has developed a deep compassion for others (particularly children) who suffer loss.

Kubler-Ross (1969/1985: 100) cautions, however, that acceptance ("letting-be") should not be mistaken for a "happy state". Although the intense emotional struggle may be over for the bereaved sibling, the sadness lingers. The future will come without the physical presence of the deceased brother or sister. While the bereaved sibling feels the intensity of the loss and knows that there is nothing to do but live through the death, she cannot fully accept this knowledge. As the bereaved sibling moves through life, there is always another situation that reveals another of the meanings of this loss. She must live with the unknowable aspects of her sibling's life and death, and his or her interrupted future. She must live with her thoughts of what might have been. Moreover, she must live with the existential incompleteness in her family of origin. The comfort is seeing her parents recovering part of their former selves again, and the perpetual presence of the sibling as constantly present in absence; spiritually present as the participant moves through the various transitional phases

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in her life. For some, there is also the hope of a possible reunion in the hereafter. Elena's longing for her deceased brother is poignant: "I don't know if you ever meet again as souls…but if you do…gee I'd be the happiest chappie!".

Like Freud, Kierkegaard stresses that sorrowing/mourning takes a long time and that it is a "work", a labour. It does not come from short-term therapy as suggested by Lindemann (1944). Sorrowing is not a time-limited process. It involves "hard work done at the razor's edge" (Alapack, 2000: 5). This study concurs with the spirit of Kierkegaard's description of sorrow and its resolution. The findings of the study reveal that seeking "closure" or absolute resolution is an illusion. Resolution is never final but only sufficiently adequate to provide the capacity to meet with fresh challenges, and to allow for the evolvement of a more authentic self and a deepening of our relationships with others. Sorrow is never completed.

7.2 The Gestalt of Sibling Loss

> "I thought I could describe a state; make a map of sorrow. Sorrow, however, turns out to be not a state but a process. It needs not a map but a history" (Lewis, 1976: 68).

Although Lewis was describing his anguish at the loss of his wife to cancer, his description of grief resonates with the findings of this study. In order to understand the process of loss, we need not "a map but a *history*" (my emphasis). This is particularly true of the loss of a brother or sister in young adulthood. It takes a whole past to build up a relationship with a sibling, and the loss of that relationship also seems to have reverberations that echo throughout the life of the surviving sibling and beyond; it impacts even on future generations. In the survivor's transitions through time and in the context of life changes, the pain of the loss can emerge as powerfully as if it "has just happened." This does not necessarily mean that the bereavement of a sibling is a lifelong victimisation from which there is no resolution, but rather highlights the infiniteness of the sibling bond and the many meanings that such a loss has for the survivor, one of which is the shared parents.

The loss of a brother or sister is an experience that many of us will encounter at some stage in our lives. It is a loss of a significant other, and, as such, all the emotions associated with normal grief are experienced and demand radical mourning, reorganisation and reintegration. Although there is no quintessential sibling survivor's story because there is no quintessential survivor, the present study reveals both what the experience is like for the individual and what this implies about sibling loss on a general level.

From the analysis of the data, the following gestalt of this unique loss experience emerges and distinguishes it from the loss of other significant others:

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The *gestalt* of sibling loss is layered grief. First and foremost in meaning is the loss-in-the-family. Clearly the individual suffers a loss of an intimate, complex and long-time connection, her brother or sister. Thus, in one sense, the bereaved sibling must pass through the work of mourning as any loss demands. However, the primary gestalt still is the loss of the family unit. The family is irrevocably changed. That is the largest loop. The dominant coil within that whole spiral is the parents' grief. An unimaginable cruelty has been visited upon them: they have outlived their child. The whole spiral of life is distorted. The chant of protest re-echoes: "It's not supposed to be that way!"

For the surviving sibling, therefore, it is in effect more than a double loss (as has been stated in the previous section); it is a triple loss. Not only does she lose her sibling, she also loses her family unit, her "holding" place. Then, too, that which is not immediately apparent but which soon reveals itself, she loses her parents in the old familiar way. In some deeply significant way, psychically they die with the death of their child. The surviving sibling watches them flounder, sees the different and often opposite ways in which each parent copes with the trauma. Their pain is palpable. Like a heavy mantle, the bereaved sibling wears the responsibility of coaxing them back to a world of new beginnings, back to life. In the process, she falls hostage to their grief.

Paradoxically, she is both intimately *a-part-of* and strangely *apart-from* her grieving family. She is an "involved-outsider". "Involved" in so far as her grief is immense for both her lost sibling and her distressed parents; and an "outsider" because her grief is postponed. She freezes her pain in order to sustain her parents. Moreover, others in her web of relationships also freeze her out.

Her existence is relegated to that of an implicated alien, central to the psychological stability of the family in its loss, but overlooked, taken-for-granted and ignored. In that existential position, the usual, normal and the necessary do not happen. Grief, which is a process, is not expressed; mourning, which is a "work", is held in abeyance; sorrowing, which perforce must be passionate, is muted. And, all the while the "waves" of grief rush and undulate, relentlessly. Meanwhile her time rightfully to come to terms with *her* loss seems to be permanently postponed. It will come as a grace when finally her enclosing reserve opens, the truth breaks through the silence, and her grief is overtly expressed. This is the existential thaw that starts the healing.

From the present study, it is clear that the experience of sibling loss cannot be understood in stasis or in terms of individual or time-limited responses to the death. This profound and long-lasting experience also cannot be understood apart from the context in which it occurs. The following section will deal briefly with the contribution of the study to the picture of sibling grief and the implications for support and psychotherapy.

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7.3 The Pattern of Sibling Grief

Loss presupposes an attachment. There can be no grief without an attachment. The predicament of the bereaved sibling, a vulnerable attached human who misses her deceased brother or sister, fits well with the pattern of "normal" grieving and supports aspects of previous bereavement theories. However, it also *qualifies* the traditional picture. The loss of a sibling reveals a different texture and quality not adequately conceptualised in the literature. The distinguishing mark of sibling loss is its radically relational nature. Occurring within the crucible of the family, it echoes and reverberates into the lives of all other members. Yet, paradoxically, the pain of those others overshadow the concerns of the bereaved sibling, eclipses her grief so that it becomes imperceptible, almost invisible.

Salient is the dialectical relationship between the grief of the bereaved sibling, the parents' immense pain, and the social acknowledgement (or lack thereof) of the sibling's sorrow. It is impossible to discuss meaningfully or to comprehend sibling grief without explicating this co-constituting dialectic. Throughout the experience we see the inter-penetration of these three dispositions: the individual, the family and the social other.

Keen sensitivity to the sibling's plight provides a new way of looking at grief *per se*. It is always a family matter, much more so than the still-too-individualistic bereavement literature acknowledges. The sibling in mourning, however, is unique in the way she must cope with personal grief, her parents' loss of their child, the sadness of other remaining siblings, the deceased sibling's friends, and/or his or her spouse and children. The overarching message is that in grief meanings flow into each other. The loss of the deceased affects each individual uniquely. However, the grief reaction of each individual shapes and is shaped by the grief of significant others, and is co-shaped by the nature of the relationship each had had with the deceased. To be a surviving sibling is to be placed uniquely at the nexus of all these overlapping and criss-crossing emotional currents. It is a unique burden.

The idea that sibling loss cannot be understood apart from the context in which it occurs has been adumbrated, even accented, by other research workers (Cain *et al*., 1964; Krell & Rabkin, 1979, Rosen, 1984-85, 1986; Davies, 1999; Mahon & Page, 1995). The focus of these studies, however, is on the loss of a brother or sister during childhood and/or adolescence. The present study extends this finding into young adulthood. Moreover, at this stage, sibling grief most vividly shows itself to be not static but a moving, fluctuating and evolving process. Different emotions emerge, not as stages or phases, but rather as parts of the whole; they manifest different meanings at different places within the unfolding process of the loss. For example, the emotion of fear is initially present in the bereaved sibling's personal confrontation with loss: the void or nothingness created by the absence of his or her brother or sister and with the heightened awareness of finitude. But it is also present in relation to the parents as bereaved siblings witness their parents' relentless grief and perceived deterioration. For

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some, fear is present in the form of a sense of responsibility for not having taken better care of their sibling and later, the fear is associated with the possibility of existential loneliness that looms in a future without the deceased brother or sister.

Pertinent to the way that sibling grief unfolds is the presence of the structure of her parents' grief. Evolving events present critical periods and bring about specifically ambiguous and defensive-supportive-alienating positions that can easily be misunderstood by others. The bereaved sibling may then become the casualty of others' over-concern with the parents' loss. Understanding the unfolding story of these critical moments has rich implications for support, for psychotherapy and for bereavement counselling.

In terms of conceptualising the complex and layered process of the grief of siblings, one may more appropriately speak of "waves" (Klein, 1940). The experience is not linear but cyclical or undulating in nature. Emotions are experienced with varied intensity, interchanging from moment to moment, hour to hour, day to day. Their variation is wide and their potency can be frightening. Resistance to the painful and untenable truth can be strong.

Grief is rightly seen as a process; mourning as a "labour". To capture the particular texture of sibling grief, its impact and power, I use the image of wave upon wave undulating and breaking. Carefully considered, neither Freud (1917), nor Kubler-Ross (1969/1985) mean that there are linear stages and phases to grieving. What these seminal thinkers tell us is that moments emerge, then stumble into one another and collide. The wave hits, recedes and then returns. Cathy describes this aptly as a "whirlpool" with different emotions surfacing and then disappearing again only to resurface later. The message I wish to communicate is that we ought not to try to harness the ocean of grief, confine it, make it time-lined and measurable, but attend to its maverick nature even as we try to come to grips with it; to understand and grasp its sense.

The following section will discuss the meaning of these waves and show how the different dimensions: sibling; parents; and the social other, impact on the bereaved sibling's grief. Implications for support during the various waves will also be discussed briefly.

- **Consciousness of the loss of the bond to the deceased sibling**

In terms of Freud's (1917) explication of the grief process, *attachment* to the lost "object" must become *hyper-invested* in service of *detaching* so that we might *re-bond*. It is a story of links, broken links and re-linking. This description of the grief process closely approximates the metaphor of waves coming and going, each different yet related: the flow of consciousness of the loss of the bond/attachment, the hyper-investment and hyper-bonding concerning it, and the de-linking in service

of re-bonding. With the loss of a sibling though, the flow of consciousness also involves the awareness of the loss of the parent-child bond, the hyper-attachment, and detachment from parents as well.

The first wave involves the bereaved sibling's awareness of the loss of the bond to the deceased brother or sister. Apart from the parent-child bond, the sibling relationship is one of the most taken-for-granted relationships that we will ever have. Awareness of the significance of this bond is not consistently present to our consciousness. We do not always appreciate the significance, or the *meaning-to-our-self*, of a brother or sister. Paradoxically we see it more fully only when it is cut asunder and no longer exists. Death drives home the reality of this bond. With the moment of knowing, comes grief. Grief is the reaction to loss. More precisely, "it is the *natural spontaneous psychological response to the loss of the loss*" (Alapack, 2006). In other words, as soon as we realise that this bond is irretrievably lost, we experience the pain of grief. The loss transforms our world. The loss can also be devastating because it alters our sense of self and identity. Whatever meaning the deceased sibling took with him or her, that part of self is felt to be missing.

With the news of the death, bereaved siblings experience a wave of overwhelming shock, disbelief, numbness and unreality. Their brother or sister is dead. Almost immediately the awareness of the significance of the parents' bond to the lost child rushes to the fore. They snap out of the numbness in order to support parents. Yet the sense of unreality persists for a long time.

For Bowlby (1979, 1980) this is the phase of "Numbing". Others refer to it as the stage of "Denial and Isolation" (Kubler-Ross, 1969/1985); "Alarm" (Parkes, 1972/1975); "sense of unreality" and a "feeling of increased emotional distance from other people…" (Lindemann, 1944). The findings of this study concur with certain aspects of the above theorists. Pre-reflectively bereaved siblings erect a barrier to overwhelming sorrow. The immense pain within the loss evokes a fear of emotional release, loss of control, of "collapsing altogether". Thus, the sibling's sense of unreality; the sense of being "outside" the grief (of the "disorientation" common to the loss of any loved person) is in the order of grief and initially it is a way of containing the overwhelming emotions. Gradually the shock gives way to free-floating anxiety. Emotions shift during this period; dramatically, drastically, fluidly. Emotion is the main phenomenon during this wave. Emotions mobilise the grief process. But for the bereaved sibling getting in touch with emotions, feeling them, expressing them, is difficult not only because of the tremendous shock of losing her sibling but also because of the awareness of the parents' profound pain.

This is the time dominated by funeral arrangements and the burial or cremation of the lost loved one. Thus depending upon culture or religious beliefs, funerals and rituals absorb the mourners during this

initial wave. What the individual mourner is feeling or experiencing collides with the traditional rituals. This collision between the individual and the group, and perhaps with the way others outside the group respond to the death, provides a space for the eruption of emotion...or for its concealment. In this wave, while emotions break through any possible denial that the loss has happened, particularly with the viewing of the body, the sense of unreality persists.

Following from this initial wave of the existential situation of sibling loss, is the tidal swell of increasing awareness of the parents' loss of their child and the surviving sibling's response to their intense grief and anguish. The dual position of dealing with their own loss and mourning and having to cope with their parents' struggle, is a heavy load to bear. The protective and supportive behaviours which emerge, while giving the bereaved sibling time to collect herself and to mobilise other resources to cope with her grief, simultaneously amplifies the sense of unreality, of being "outside" the grief. During this wave of the bereavement process, surviving siblings mask their grief. They become the comforters/protectors of parents and, for some, of other significant others (i.e. spouse, friends) but their apparent lack of emotion should not be confused with the initial experience of numbness, disbelief ("denial") as described by Bowlby (1980). It is more than denial. It certainly is not an "absence of grief" as described by Deutsch (1937). It comes closer to what may be described as dissociation or divided consciousness (Shapiro, 1994): the bereaved sibling's awareness of the "gap" and the inner disruption remain acute while in another part of consciousness, she refuses to accept this reality as the waves break and temporarily vanish. It is an attempt to maintain continuity and stability until they can deal with their overwhelming emotions. A sense of being “outside” the grief is experienced as the pain of the bereaved parents continues unabated. Sorrow turns to despair as they realise that there is nothing that they can do to mitigate the parents' profound anguish.

In this part of the experience, the sense of unreality, of being outside the grief, changes subtly to a *stance* of an involved-outsider or participant-spectator, of being *a-part-of* but also *apart-from* the grief situation. Bereaved young adult siblings present a façade of being “strong” and not needing support. The pretence is not just a way of managing life that has been totally disrupted by the loss, but a kind of stance that the sibling takes or is absorbed in. What follows from the stance of involved-outsider? From the present study, it would appear that it is a way to stay functioning when everything around the sibling seems to be disintegrating. It is a way of holding on to familiar structures and a familiar sense of self. For some, it is also an important basis for finding a safe place to grieve. In some respects the sibling's grief for a brother or sister may be said initially to be left "in potential" (Cochran & Claspell, 1987: 112). Given the pain and threat of fragmentation, efforts to control grieving and to distance one's self seem inevitable. Given the sense of responsibility to support parents, to participate in the world, when one is inclined towards withdrawal, a silent struggle ensues.

This early part of the grief constitutes a critical moment in terms of support for the bereaved sibling as, to quote Kierkegaard (1843/1959b: 172): "… in truth, grief steals through the world so secretively that only the sympathetic observer even succeeds in suspecting its presence". The initial silence of bereaved siblings is simultaneously part of the sorrow of having lost a large part of his/her world and the desire to protect parents and not burden them with additional pain. Thus, for the bereaved sibling, the sense of unreality, of detachment (isolation, withdrawal) seems to last a lot longer than the designated "few weeks after the funeral" (Bowlby,1980).

For caregivers, whether friends or extended family, this may be very confusing. It is apparent that there is deep hurt and distress but the bereaved sibling conceals her inner feelings and continues with life as normal. How can others help at this time?

Critical in this early part of the loss is the presence of others who are able to maintain a balance between getting too close (intrusive) or being too distant. For the bereaved sibling it is important that he or she can be as numb, as devoid of feeling, or as emotional as he or she is, and not be reproached for the lack of tears or for too many tears. Attempting to draw siblings out to express or speak about feelings may be perceived as intrusive or threatening. On the other hand, ignoring the sibling and focusing exclusively on the parents' visible and deep sorrow, may increase the sense of isolation and alienate the bereaved sibling even further from the world of others.

Acknowledgement of the loss; acknowledging that the sibling has also experienced a significant loss, listening, and being there as needed, seems to be the most important role of caregivers (friends and extended family) at this time. It is important that the bereaved sibling feels that he or she is not alone. It is the lifeline of warmth, empathy and trust rather than words that will cross the many barriers during this wave.

- **Over-bonding, hyper-connecting**

In Freud's (1917) language, attachment to the lost "object" must become *hyper-invested* in service of *detaching* so that we might *re-bond*. Stated differently, holding on is necessary before we are ready to "let go" and move on; to re-attach. It is a holding pattern. The attachment and "hyper-connecting" describe a double wave washing over the bereaved siblings as they attempt to sustain parents and try to fill the inner emptiness by holding on to memories of their deceased brother or sister. Freud (1917) is clear that none of us allow for a premature letting go of a significant relationship. Siblings in mourning hold on a bit longer.

With time, the pain of the loss and the swelling current of the parents' unrelenting grief evoke a crisis not only of overwhelming emotion but also of daily interaction and identity. For the bereaved sibling

the multifaceted emotional struggle that ensues, like the tide, ebbs and flows back and forth. Initially fear-insecurity and helplessness-hurt-frustration-guilt encapsulate the bereaved siblings' way of being present to their world. Fear and insecurity that they may fragment and/or lose what remains of their family; helplessness, hurt, frustration and guilt as they realise that there is nothing that they can do to mitigate their parents' grief. In the final analysis frustration emerges against the background of fear and a sense of devaluation in relation to the deceased sibling and existential guilt - a sense of "being guilty", of "indebtedness" to parents for life itself: "If I had died, it would not have been so bad for everybody"; "If she (i.e. sibling) had lived, she may have supported parents more effectively than I have"; "If I had taken better care of my brother, mother would not have lost her favourite child". These are some of the thoughts and emotions that play upon the sibling's mind. But it is a frustration/anger/guilt that is born of love and care as well, both for the deceased sibling and for the parents. As noted by Winnicott (1958a), guilt is a small step away from "concern".

Bowlby (1980) sees anger and guilt as aiding in the "search" for the lost loved one. In Freud's terms, this is the necessary over-bonding, hyper-investing. This is the only way, Freud says, to sever the thousand links, "bit by bit", in service of freeing the energy/meaning necessary to go on with life. "It is by hyper-occupying the space between the lost object and self, and by activating memorial intentionality, that mobility in the grief process is achieved" (Alapack, 2006). In this wave, it is the remembering-forgetting dimension of human existence that comes into play. Memories are brought up and examined in order to balance the subtle dialectic of remembering and forgetting. Only by experiencing the range of our own feelings is it possible to find an even keel between what we must remember and what we should be able to "forget"; to "let-be". The review of past events, if done honestly, is the way for a balance to develop. We "forget" naturally as a result of first thinking through, facing something important and letting it be what it was, and is, and probably will be.

The hyper-bonding, the "searching" is precisely a "looking for", a longing for the missing one. The specific aim of searching is to find the one who is gone, of conjuring him or her up, and to that degree keeping his or memory alive; keeping him or her close. Loneliness is very much a part of this searching. Loneliness is the reaction to the deprivation. It is the attunement to the gap that was created by the loss of the brother or sister. The loss of the *loss* is now poignant. The deceased, if he or she is significant, was a referent of the survivor's meaning; the recipient of many different emotions (love, anger, care). Without that unique other, there is nobody towards whom those particular feelings may be directed. To try and express those feelings now would be to express them in a vacuum. This absent other had been a companion, perhaps a source of inspiration and affirmation, the one who defined the survivor spatially and temporally in his or her world, the one who understood what it was like to live with these particular parents. Such a large part of the survivor's world was tied up in a meaningful way with the deceased brother or sister that when he or she is gone, the surviving sibling feels lost and

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without direction. In this situation, though, two recipients of emotions have disappeared: the deceased sibling and the parents in their old sense. In the absence of the sibling, communication with parents changes. Thus the "searching" also becomes a search for, or an attempt to recover, the parents that the sibling had known; to recover all the various parts of the self that have been lost.

The searching behaviour seems to prepare the individual increasingly to accept the loss. In the present study, Elena constantly looked for and 'found' her brother. Initially, by taking over her deceased brother's business, Elena was not only supporting her parents and attempting to reconstruct the fractured world of the family, but she was also "doing something for *him*". Stated differently, in doing what he would have done had he lived, Elena searched and "found" her brother again. This also enabled her to continue in the familiar relationship of being his helper-supporter-caretaker. In listening to "stories" about her brother that his friends shared with her, she also searched and found him. Later, she discovered that she had incorporated many of his sayings and mannerisms and she held on to these. She felt that her brother had left her a rich legacy - his "magic" and his "energy" - qualities that were part of her potential and could become part of her now that her brother was no longer there. For Cathy, the "search" was a very real experience where she would wake up thinking that her brother had not died, that it was simply a bad dream and she would hear him whistling and would listen for the noises that he used to make (much like the widows studied by Parkes, 1972/1975). However, in Cathy's situation where she felt responsible for the death, we may view this search not only as a yearning for her lost brother but also as an attempt to undo what had happened - an inability to accept the loss; a feeling that persisted for a long time. Nevertheless, the searching also mobilises her grief and prepares her, in some way, to move tentatively towards accepting the loss.

Another aspect of the searching, is the *search for answers;* seeking an understanding of the death or loss. Beyond blaming others for what happened, beyond blaming self for what we did or did not do, beyond our own regret, there is the quest for bigger answers: "Why did it happen?"; "Why to her or him and not me?"; "Why the accident?"; "Why do good people die young?"; "Why does God allow 'bad' things to happen to 'good' people?". The death of a loved one often provokes a crisis of faith, and one either grows stronger in one's faith as a result of the struggle (Dia), or moves away from God.

During this wave, as in all the waves of mourning, the various emotions that have been described ebb and flow - one day despair, another time fear or guilt, another anger or depression. It is well to remember that the feelings occur repeatedly and not in a particular sequence or order.

The search for the lost one and the quest for answers is a necessary part of the process of working through the loss and should not be dismissed as "senseless". The searching diminishes naturally as the mourner is able to express his or her chaotic emotions. Memories, remembering and recalling, provide

comfort for some, enabling the bereaved sibling to continue with life in the absent "presence" of the deceased sibling. For the mourner, therefore, it is important that he or she can share stories and speak repeatedly of her fantasies because in this way emotions are kept awake and provide new meaning with which to move forward. Unfortunately, others around them are so torn and vulnerable that sharing becomes difficult. When friends and others are also uncomfortable with death and loss, silence is maintained and effectively blocks the mourning process. Few in our society can tolerate being-with-the-bereaved and the preoccupation of the bereaved with the lost one may be perceived as “morbid.” On the other hand, bereaved siblings themselves may experience difficulties in talking about their deceased brother or sister. The emotions are too intense and there is a fear of breaking down.

Caregivers' support of, and consistently being-there for the parents in their grief, emerges as important for some of the young adult siblings in this study as this provides a space for them to breathe and to deal with their loss unencumbered by the constant concern of upsetting parents or the anxiety of being sucked into the tidal pool of family grief. Unfortunately, when this happens the sibling is frequently forgotten or ignored and her grief may remain frozen. Friends, extended family and others who are able to tolerate being with the bereaved sibling can be particularly helpful during this wave for the sibling to cry or not to cry, to reminisce and share stories about the deceased and even to discuss concerns relating to parents and, in some instances, for the sibling to clarify her part in the circumstances of the death. This can assist in mobilising the grief process as critical moments arise in relation to the persistent anguish of parents, particularly when silence surrounds the loss.

Movements such as Compassionate Friends (a non-denominational self-help group offering friendship and understanding to bereaved parents and siblings) and hospice-based support groups for siblings, seem to be very well suited to keeping the process of mourning moving in a positive way. Individuals who have been through a similar life experience can be of tremendous support to one another and can alleviate the sense of personal loneliness and isolation frequently experienced by bereaved siblings. This kind of support group provides an acknowledgement of the sibling's grief, and a sense of belonging, which stimulates the expression of emotion and provides a "safe" space to grieve.

- **De-linking (Detachment) and Re-bonding**

Throughout the previous waves, the bereaved sibling's energies are tied up primarily with the parents; on attempts to sustain them and recover a sense of continuity and stability while simultaneously "searching" for the deceased sibling and attempting to make sense of the loss. Each of these tasks is a major "work" on its own, but when combined extends the grief process of the surviving sibling. This study reveals that the process for the bereaved sibling continues for many years; sometimes for life.

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Gradually the survivor comes to realise that she is separate from her parents and from her deceased sibling and that she can live her own life without feeling that she is betraying her loved ones. This third wave ushers in the beginning of a new way of relating to the deceased sibling, the self and the environment. In Object Relations terms, the pre-condition for this is that the lost sibling has been "restored" within (Klein, 1940); internalised. This "inner figure", as noted by Kast (1988), becomes either an inner companion or guide who may also undergo change, or the sibling feels that a great deal that was lived out in the relationship with the deceased has now become part of her own potential. Psychoanalysis refers to this as "identifying" with the lost loved one. However, it is more than identification in the sense of simply living out the lost sibling's unlived life (doing what he or she would have done); being someone else rather than oneself. Although this is a possibility with the loss of a sibling, particularly when parents try to replace or substitute one of the survivor children for the deceased (Krell & Rabkin, 1979; Fanos, 1996), ultimately, if mourning follows a positive course, and if sensitively handled, this becomes part of reclaiming and integrating parts of the self that had been externalised onto the deceased sibling; of becoming a more authentic self. The process of identification also provides the opportunity to find the self again. As evidenced in this study, Elena realises that while she can continue with her brother's work, she would feel more fulfilled pursuing her own field of interest. This aspect of the over-bonding, in the sense of "identifying" with the deceased sibling, is well illustrated by Angie in the preliminary study: "Looking back on those two years after her death, I realise that luckily I found a balance between who I was and who I always wanted to be - *her*. I am now *me*".

For the bereaved sibling it is also important to "restore" the parents as well as the deceased brother or sister within the self. In this respect, aspects of Klein’s (1940) theory of mourning can be recognised in the grief of bereaved siblings as they struggle to assimilate the loss. The survivor is not only involved in transforming the relationship with the deceased sibling, but also needs to "restore" her primary attachment figures; the parents who have been changed by the loss. Apart from the loneliness and longing for the deceased sibling, much of the bereaved sibling's despair emanates from the difficulty in accepting the changes in their parents. In Kleinian (1940) terms, resolving the mourning is facilitated through the bereaved individual having established in her early life the "good" mother inside her. When this has not been securely established within the self, the bereaved sibling struggles with fears of losing the mother internally as well as externally. A loss in the family reactivates the object relations and bereaved siblings need to revisit the primary (maternal/paternal) attachments before they are able to re-link to others outside the family. Where these early attachments have not been securely established, complications in the mourning process can arise. This is evidenced in Cathy's situation where her parents had suffered multiple losses. Her mother's intense grief over the loss of a three year old child during her pregnancy with Cathy, prevented her from getting close to Cathy. With the loss of her brother, Cathy re-experiences the alienation and rejection of her earlier

years and struggles with fears of losing her primary attachments altogether. She uses the metaphor of the "cocoon" to describe the state of non-relatedness within the family as a response to the trauma of the loss of her brother. Yet, help comes to Cathy through the close relationship that she had with her father and she is able to recover a degree of security and stability with which to move forward.

This part of the grief process involves many strong emotions and waves of mourning already passed through. Some may be repeated as the bereaved sibling is once again reminded of the absence of her sibling as she moves into a different phase of her life. Self-doubt is also present as demonstrated by Elena as she begins to gather up the threads of her life and gradually starts to move into her own career. It helps to understand that these are not "relapses" but represent recurring opportunities to assimilate the loss. Having others around that can support the bereaved is important during this phase. To quote Klein (1940: 174): "…if the mourner has people whom he loves and who share his grief, and if he can accept their sympathy, the restoration of the harmony in his inner world is promoted, and his fears and distress are more quickly reduced".

According to Freud (1917), it is important to let go of the lost loved one. Only then are we free to reinvest in other relationships; to re-bond. Even though Freud revised this view following his experience of two severe personal losses in the 1920s (i.e. his daughter and his favourite grandson), a burdensome tendency of his psychoanalytic legacy in the field of adult bereavement is the tendency to perpetuate the belief that normal bereavement is concluded with the dissolution of all ties to the lost object. In terms of sibling loss, a problematic issue that arises from the vision of "severing ties" is the question of "replacement". While it is true that a successful mourning process allows us to be more open to other relationships and while, with the loss of a wife/husband or friend, we can find someone else to love (even though initially it seems that we never will), there is no substitute, no *replacement*, for that other who shared our years of upbringing; an individual who shares the same history. In this respect, sibling loss is unique and should not be confused with other losses. On the negative side, the lost sibling can *never* be replaced and, therefore, the grief over a sibling has an intensity and specificity that is long-lasting; on the positive side, the loss of a sibling in young adulthood does not necessarily prevent us from deepening our relationships with others as these always remain "something else".

However, problems may arise when the grief has not been sufficiently worked through or when there have been multiple deaths in the family of origin and fear of death and loss may then interfere with establishing other close, intimate relationships. When memories and/or fantasies of the bereaved sibling are limited, it is more difficult either to grieve fully or to transform the relationship. This is the situation where the sibling relationship was very distant and/or conflicted. Ambivalence then becomes an issue as the bereaved is unable to identify the *meaning-to-self* of the deceased sibling, i.e. "What"

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has been lost in the losing of the sibling. These are the siblings who require sensitive support but who, all too often, are overlooked, or slip quietly into the background.

The present study reveals that for the bereaved sibling the "letting go" or detachment is not a severance or dissolution of ties to the deceased brother or sister. Rather it seems to be a letting go of the grief itself: the pain, hurt, guilt and anger and being able to remember not only that the sibling died but also the fullness of the time travelled together. It is a submission to the changes wrought by the loss, a transformation of the sibling relationship, that liberates the self and allows for a new sense of self to emerge.

For the bereaved sibling, however, there is a very real aspect of "letting go" - in the sense of de-linking (Freud, 1917)) or "detaching" (Bowlby, 1980) - that is intensely painful and that reawakens the sorrow and stress experienced during previous waves. This involves the separation from parents as the sibling begins to move on with her own life. Dia's struggle to leave home points out once more the structural unity, or the relational essence of sibling grief. Leaving home is tantamount to another loss for the parents, another "death", or a vivid reminder of the "real" death. Levinas' (1979) ethical philosophy has relevance here. How does one look at the pain in a mother's/father's eyes and turn away from the demand to be there for them? How deprive them of the opportunity to parent, to *be* parents, when they have already lost a child? How wilfully change the family system one more time; upset the fragile emotional equilibrium achieved with such difficulty, without good cause? Once again, we see the family resisting this change. In the present study the concern/responsibility/guilt towards parents weighed heavily on most of the participants and became an additional source of pain and stress. Caregivers and extended family need to be aware of the sense of helplessness, anxiety and desperation that bereaved young adult siblings experience as they attempt to reclaim the self and move on with their lives. Having others around that can support the bereaved sibling is critical during this phase.

The pattern of sibling grief as it emerged from this study resonates with Kierkegaard's understanding that sorrow never ends; with Freud's altered view of mourning that even if a loved one's place is filled, that significant other is always with us. In the event of the loss of a brother or sister, it also highlights the infinite nature of the sibling bond. In our passages through life, there will always be another situation that will reactivate the missing and the longing. As therapists we need to be aware of this, and not label it "pathological" mourning. All the participants in the present study were coping with their lives at the time of our interview. Some felt strengthened by the experience and were also able to tolerate higher levels of involvement with the suffering of others. The establishment of a different kind of relationship with their sibling (more in recalling) and the transcendent awareness that comes with successful mourning, enables some of the bereaved siblings to grow spiritually and to distinguish

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between trivialities and what is essential in life. However, with all this, we must never deceive ourselves. Physical absence triggers acute pain and inner disruption edging toward desperation. Elena's lingering sorrow and longing for her brother is cogent.

Thus far I have traced the pattern of sibling grief, discussed the undulating waves of emotions as these emerged from the study and highlighted the essentially relational dimension of the sibling loss experience. Awareness of the layered grief of bereaved siblings and its long-lasting impact is essential if we are to help individuals to work through the loss experience. But death cannot be made painless. In commenting on how others could best "help" the bereaved sibling, I mean only that bereaved siblings in this extreme situation do not feel completely alone, that with support they can come to terms with the situation to a greater extent and therefore deal more effectively with the loss.

To this end, I would also like to discuss briefly the current professional and cultural perceptions/conceptions of the sibling bond and sibling loss and to what extent these may facilitate or hinder the grief process. This is followed by the implications for psychotherapy. It also revisits the method used in this study, and concludes with suggestions for future research.

7.4 Professional Perceptions of Siblings and Sibling Loss

Perceptions and conceptions that we hold about siblings and sibling loss are determined by our experience with our own siblings, by our cultural beliefs and by the theories (learning) to which we have been exposed. Generally we hold on to our beliefs or value systems whether personal, professional, religious or social-cultural. This provides us with a sense of security and a degree of control and helps us to "make sense" of things. But this narrows our vision and does not allow us to be open to the deeper meanings of the sibling relationship and the impact that the loss of that bond has for the lives of survivors.

In terms of our professional biases/leanings regarding siblings and sibling loss, it is significant that in our scientifically based western culture with our psychological preconceptions of the family (i.e. the individual and the parent), sibling bonds and the many meanings that siblings have for each other over the life span have been minimised. In effect, sibling relationships have not been given a prominent place in psychology and the loss of a brother or sister has also not always been recognised as a significant life event. Psychology has tended to focus solely on the parent-child relationship. Psychoanalytic theory emphasises the nuclear family (mother-child-father) and object relations and attachment theories focus on the pre-Oedipal, early mother-child relationship.

This takes us back to the question of the meaning of a sibling. While different cultures vary in terms of how siblings are perceived, in our western culture the definition of what constitutes a "brother" or

"sister" is based primarily on biological criteria (i.e. sharing one or both parents). The significance of a sibling and the meaning of siblingship is derived from the nuclear family. Siblings often substitute for the parents. When the parent is not there, the sibling is there. The relationship is reminiscent of these early primary attachments. In Winnicottian terms, there is no mother without an infant. Extending this concept, we may rightly say, "there can be no sibling without a brother or sister". Parents cannot divorce their children (even though some parents do abandon their children) and siblings cannot divorce their brothers or sisters (even though some siblings would not care if they never saw their sibling again). They are stuck with them for life. These relationships cannot be cancelled or annulled. Under normal circumstances, when a parent(s) dies, the sibling will still be there. If the sibling is also lost, there is nothing to hold on to.

In the light of existing theories of development, it is understandable that therapists are inclined to perceive most difficulties arising in adulthood as originating from the early mother-child or mother-father-child relationships. But by focusing solely on the parent-child bond we do not open ourselves to the possibility that siblings in and of themselves may have an impact on our clients' emotional and/or social adjustment difficulties. How many therapists or counsellors enquire about the sibling relationship in the initial interview with an adult client? Apart from a cursory note that the "client lost a brother/sister at the age of … years", how many therapists in fact explore this loss as a significant life event?. Bank and Kahn (1982) alert us to the risk that, by relating most of their client's strong emotional reactions to internalised mother/father images without consideration of the influence of the sibling relationship, therapists might miss valuable information and understanding of their clients that could alter the course of therapy. The loss of a sibling constitutes an instance where the "miniature world" of siblings and sibling dynamics are either ignored or minimised (either by therapist, by client or by both).

The present study affirms the significance of the parent-child bond and highlights that the parents' deep sorrow co-constitutes the grief of surviving siblings. Indeed the interviews with all three participants revealed an inherent ambiguity. Were these surviving women mourners speaking about grief over the death of their sibling or about the complex relationship between mother-daughter and its further complication of the triangles: mother-daughter-dead brother or sister; mother-daughter-father and husband. From my perspective, it would seem to be both. This highlights the point that this is a death-in-the-family: it is relational, a structure…not simply an individual matter. Grief coils within all these bonds; irritates them (Dia), sometimes soothes them (Cathy). Most of the participants experienced the changes in their parents and in their own communication with mother or father as even more stressful and traumatic than the actual loss itself. Yet, it is clear that the sibling is not simply a surrogate for the parent. Elena's longing for her brother "to be there; to be *him*", reveals that siblings have a powerful and unique relationship of their own that is independent of, or rather, that is

a-part-of and also apart-from, the parent-child relationship. The study reveals that the loss of this relationship is deeply felt and the grief over the loss is long-lasting. It is not a question of comparisons; of substituting or exchanging the one for the other, but rather a need to broaden our perspective; to recognise the perspective of the bereaved sibling, while simultaneously acknowledging the essentially relational aspect of such a loss.

Few training programmes in the helping professions prepare the student to deal with sibling loss/grief, let alone to be with it, or simply to allow it to be. Why is it not acknowledged and why has it not been part of mainstream bereavement work for so long? Certainly the emphasis in psychology on the parent-child bond may be a part of it. This focus seems to have contributed to the perception that the horizontal or "lateral" sibling relationships, particularly during childhood and even adolescence, are secondary and relatively unimportant when compared to the "vertical" parent-child relationship. For the most part, developmental theory ends with adolescence and sexual maturity. One moves towards intimacy with others outside the family and towards establishing one's own nuclear family, thus repeating the parent-child cycle all over again. Although Erikson (1959/1980, 1982/1994) does describe adult stages of development and Levinson (1978) and Sheehy (1976) have fleshed these out and presented them in more detail, still the sibling and sibling loss have remained in the shadows.

7.5 Cultural Perceptions and Social Practices

Perceptions-conceptions of siblings and sibling loss are also coloured by our cultural and social beliefs. Although children are valued in most societies and brothers and sisters (i.e. "the children") are encouraged to maintain contact with each other, as far as my reading and knowledge go, there seems to be no record from any society of the significance of the sibling relationship. In most technologically advanced societies, children grow up in small nuclear families with strong and lifelong attachments to particular members, yet “siblinghood” is not a recognised state of significant proportions. Also, socially the many roles that brothers or sisters play in each other's lives (companionship, support, as an important referent throughout life) are not visible or readily acknowledged as central ones in adulthood.

In terms of the grief process, it has to be accepted that it is embedded in cultural and social practices of which the family is a part. Practices that are acceptable in one cultural context may be viewed as pathological or maladjusted in another. For example, in some societies "letting go" of the link to the loved one is considered "normal", while for others (Budhist religions and some African cultures) a holding on persists and contact with the deceased is maintained, even encouraged.

Although, as already mentioned, the “letting go” of, or “holding on” to the lost loved one is not absolute, its meaning is also reflective of the context in which it occurs. Different cultural contexts

and beliefs give different meaning to the experience. However, rather than generalise how, when, who and for how long an individual should mourn, as therapists we need to be aware of the cultural values and practices and listen to the reality of the one who describes the experience. What religious or cultural beliefs and prescriptions provide is a sustaining environment that not only enables the bereaved to mourn the loss of a significant other, but also guides the behaviour of others towards the bereaved. Unfortunately the weakening of religious and social ties in the Western world abandons mourners (and particularly siblings) to deal with their grief alone.

In his work on bereavement in 20th century Britain, Gorer (1973: 437) reveals that the attitudes, values and institutions prevalent in a given society at a given time can make mourning easier or harder to live with, can "facilitate a benign or maladaptive outcome." His findings indicate that the majority of British society with residual or no religious beliefs receive very little help during the period of intense grief when most mourners are in more need of social support and assistance than "at any time since infancy and early childhood" (1973: 438). Gorer (1973) argues that because mourning has become de-ritualised, the help which contemporary mourners need has no explicit content at present.

Denial of death characterises our western culture (Ariès, 1974, 1976, 1981; Gorer, 1965/1987; Kubler-Ross, 1969/1985). Although the taboo surrounding death has been partially lifted in more recent years, in our contemporary western society the taboo surrounding mourning persists. Faced with grief, we acknowledge it, pay lip service to the need to express it and then hope that it will go away. We are encouraged to "overcome" it as quickly as possible, regain ordinary "control", "adapt" and remain "functional". The less we speak about it the better. This is particularly the case with bereaved young adult siblings who in their attempts to protect and sustain parents put on a façade of being "strong", of "coping well", so as not to burden their parents with additional pain.

Gorer (1973) notes that in the greater number of recorded societies, including Britain up to about sixty years ago, mourners went through what Van Gennep, 1960 (in Gorer, 1973: 424), referred to as a *rite de passage*: a formal withdrawal from society, a period of seclusion during which the mourner withdraws from certain social activities and is distinguished by his clothes or appearance so that other members of society recognise him as a mourner and treat him in prescribed ways, and a formal re-entry into society and to full social participation in one or more stages. Gorer's (1965/1987: 2-3) father died in 1915 (when Gorer was ten years old) and he recalls having to wear a black tie and having black bands sewn on to the sleeves of his suits. Despite his deep unhappiness, he remembers feeling "somehow distinguished"; he was given special attention and treated with great tenderness. He was "set apart and this was somehow fitting and comforting" (1965/1987: 3). When his younger brother, Peter, died of cancer in 1961, Gorer (1973: 425) found that there were no social rules available to guide the behaviour of his brother's widow and children, and much less his own as an

adult surviving sibling. The bereaved person was no longer recognisable by his behaviour or attire as someone who was going through a difficult time. Grief had become a private matter. Others no longer had any guidance from ritual as to how to treat a mourner and so avoided him or her. The absence of social support was brought forcibly to Gorer's (1973) attention in the months following his brother's death and was the main motivation for his research on bereavement in Britain.

Gorer's (1965/1987) findings revealed that with few exceptions (members of Orthodox Jewry, Roman Catholics of Irish origin, and members of the Church of Scotland), mourning was almost completely de-ritualised for the majority of the British. The period of intense mourning was no longer governed by religious or social prescriptions but was determined by the mourner's autonomous feelings. His research left him with a strong conviction that contemporary British (and, he believes, American) society's denial of mourning and the absence of any social ritual for dealing with mourners after the burial or cremation contributed "to much theoretically unnecessary misery" (Gorer, 1973: 436). At the same time that mourning was de-ritualised for the majority of British people, there was also social disapproval. Social responses to any public display of mourning, verbally and by action, marked it as unhealthy, "morbid". The social other withdrew from contact with the bereaved until they behaved as if nothing of significance had happened (1973: 428-429). The absence of ritual and the denial of mourning posed two particular problems: what to tell children about a death in the family, and how to handle the first contacts after the loss between the bereaved and their friends, neighbours or work colleagues. Gorer's (1973: 429) findings indicated that almost half of the informants who had children under the age of sixteen told them nothing at all about the recent death of a close relative and many parents treated the subject as "literally unmentionable."

In terms of the present study, it is apparent that the denial of mourning in our Western society persists. The loss of a brother or sister is a particularly silent experience. All of the participants were unable to talk about their loss either because of a fear of losing control over their emotions and breaking down publicly or, as in Cathy's situation, because others avoided her and her family. There seems to be a collusion between the group and the individual where the embarrassment of others in being-with-the-bereaved resonates with the mourner's own fears of giving way to grief, of losing self-control and, in the case of bereaved siblings, of upsetting parents even more. Thus, at a period when they most need help and comfort from society, siblings are left alone or ostracised.

Rituals express emotions that are too deep for words. Religious practises and ceremonies, e.g. the wake, funeral, memorial service, Kaddish, meet the needs of the bereaved. However, mourning does not end once the initial ritualised period of mourning (usually determined by culture and tradition and shared with others) is over. It is evident from the present study that it is precisely the weeks, months and even years that follow the actual burial or cremation that the pain of the loss is experienced most

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intensely, and when the presence of others can be helpful. In this regard, social structures seem to fail to meet the bereaved sibling's needs.

Like Gorer (1965/1987), Ariès (1974, 1981) also emphasises the role that ritual has played historically in guiding mourning, both in terms of providing support for the individual and maintaining the identity of the group when death occurs. By placing death in the context of a world view, ritual makes “sense” of death, and publicly reminds mourners of their shared beliefs. Ariès (1981) notes that in our individualistic and technologically advanced societies, the distance from one's own death increases and the right to mourn is taken away. This also breaks down the ability to "make sense" of death and there is a growing dissatisfaction with the ritual that supports that rationalisation.

Significantly, all the participants in the present study did not find the ritual of visiting the grave of their deceased sibling meaningful or valid. The sense that such a ritual is irrelevant ("I will remember her in my head…I am not going to a *stone*!"; "I hate going to his grave…I don’t see the point of it…I really don’t like it"), may be symptomatic of the denial of mourning - a symptom of a de-ritualised civilisation - but it also seems to reflect a dissatisfaction with the existing social prescriptions for mourning. However, this dissatisfaction may also become part of a creative process. We need to find or create new ways to mourn together. In the present study possibilities for new rituals emerge that are more meaningful to the bereaved sibling and that facilitate the healing process. Elena acknowledges that, shortly after the death, what she really "loved" was to be with others who had been close to her deceased brother and to *listen* to their "stories" about him. Dia expresses the healing effect and the comfort derived from the constant presence of a close family friend who was *there*, supporting and *doing* rather than *talking* to her. The need to feel connected to others, to experience a sense of community, to have others talking about the deceased among themselves, seem to be "rituals" that meet the needs of the young adult sibling mourning the loss of a brother or sister. Community programmes such as Compassionate Friends, where a group of "strangers" all grieving a similar loss come together and discuss death and their experience of loss without embarrassment, seems to be a completely different approach to a new "ritual". However, while this organisation performs a yeoman’s task in facilitating the mourning process, this still keeps mourners isolated within an exclusive group of people who "know" what it is like to lose a loved one. Outside the rooms of such organisations, society's prohibition of mourning and the repression of grief persists.

Western individualistic and pragmatic thought-forms towards the bereaved and bereavement privilege the psychoanalytic idea that "letting go" of the dead is the final resolution to the loss of a significant relationship. The idea, as indicated in this text, is Freud's concession to naturalism and mechanism. But, "letting go" so smacks of a reality-orientation that it prevents us granting even to children the need to retain an enduring bond with the dead (Shapiro, 1994). Are we only interchangeable objects

of need gratification? If so, maintaining attachments to the dead when they can no longer gratify our needs would be inefficient or foolish. Thus, the grief-process would best be time-limited. Our health care system, with its attachment to “stages” and “phases”, mirrors the assumption and expectation that the mourner should "recover", be ready to go on with his or her life within the duration of one or two years. This study indicates, and the assertion has been echoed by many others in the field, that the labour of mourning is far more prolonged than we would like to believe. More harm than good comes from telling the bereaved that she “should be over it by now”; or from urging the bereaved to stop the “senseless” search, to “fix the problem” as quickly as possible.

Pertinent to the experience of sibling loss is that the grief of siblings is seldom acknowledged. In our "bounce back" (Mehren, 1977) Western society, there is an expectation that the loss experience of siblings is neither intense nor long lasting. They still have their parents, do they not? Although for bereaved siblings, there is a definite loss in the world, the validation, if any, is usually in respect of the loss of a *child* and not for the loss of a *brother* or *sister*. Social support for adult siblings is minimal as family and friends are concerned about the parents’/spouse’s/children’s intense grief and the bereaved sibling may experience a sense of being dispossessed of the status of mourner. We have all been to funerals where siblings withdraw quietly to one side while everyone commiserates with the parents and/or spouse of the deceased.

Because sibling loss emerges as such a silent and hidden, yet internally disruptive experience, the study has implications for interpersonal situations in which encounters with bereaved siblings are involved. For instance, it has implications for teachers/lecturers, employers, friends, neighbours, indeed, anyone who may have contact with a bereaved sibling. How would a lecturer/teacher or employer respond to an individual taking leave of absence as a result of the loss of a brother or sister? And how would these same people respond to a decline in grades or work performance following sibling-loss?. Significantly in South Africa, it is the indigenous people who will, more often than not, request extended leave of absence following the death of a brother or sister. In our society this is frequently regarded with some scepticism rather than as a genuine desire to pay respects to the lost brother or sister or to an individual who has shared a history, a cause or a "family" (the group or tribe); someone who is "like a brother". Rather than questioning the need to honour this relationship, we should learn from this. This could inform us regarding the importance of other less recognised losses, such as the loss of a close friend.

The bereaved young adult sibling, understandably, presents a front of "coping well" or of being "unaffected" by the loss. Caregivers and clinicians are also vulnerable to cultural bias and may fall into the trap of believing that what is visible, or apparent, is true. Like most human beings facing the shattering implications of death and grief, caregivers want to be reassured that grief is a blow from

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which one does in fact recover. Thus, as therapists we may overlook this significant life event and leave the survivor with intense inner feelings of fear and unresolved grief that may impact on his or her life and even on future generations. To the extent that this study can enhance social awareness through a deeper understanding of what it means to lose a brother or sister, it could make a difference to bereaved siblings. Workshops or courses using "The General Narrative" and " The General Psychological Structure" (possibly with modifications), could extend the awareness of others of the intense pain of bereaved siblings, help others to learn to speak about death, and hopefully break the silence surrounding sibling loss.

7.6 Implications for Psychotherapy

It has been documented (Moss & Moss, 1986; Pape, 1999) that few adults seek psychological help around sibling issues or sibling loss. In the present study, only one of the three participants sought counselling and did so only late in the grieving process. In the face of the parents' intense and appropriate grief, bereaved siblings frequently find themselves fighting a lonely battle in the dark. Within the family context, they slip into the background and are forgotten. Their sorrow goes unacknowledged.

What emerged from the study is that the participants were able to let go and grieve in the presence of a trusted other, someone outside the family grief who was prepared to listen, would not insist that the bereaved reveals more than she was ready to reveal, and would not impose his or her meanings on the loss or judge the survivor's responses as appropriate or inappropriate. In this respect, the unconditional acceptance, empathy and positive regard of a psychotherapist would seem to be ideal in creating a safe space for the expression of painful emotions. In the relationship with a therapist/counsellor, the client can acknowledge the story of her loss and reveal her truth. Yet, bereaved siblings seldom come to therapy with the loss of a brother or sister as the primary presenting issue. A possible understanding of this is provided by Cathy who, through her own loss experience, and as a teacher, became acutely aware of social attitudes regarding counselling/therapy:

> "I think on looking back, bereavement counselling would have helped a lot, you know. But … you know it's also still very much a new area, this counselling thing. They *counsel* children that have *emotional* problems but they don't regard a *loss* as a counselling problem..."

Granted that grief is a normal process and will subside after a certain lapse of time, the present study reveals that grief does not simply burn itself out. Cathy's cry for help reflects our lack of understanding of the dilemma not only of bereaved children but also of young adult siblings in grief. The perception that counselling/therapy is an appropriate intervention for *emotional* and/or behavioural problems but not for bereavement arises in part from some of the "myths" that have surrounded grief but which are gradually being dispelled, namely: that grief is a private affair, that

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"time heals", and that self or other referral for therapy is, in itself, an indication of a "pathological" grief reaction rather than a healthy sign of wanting to make sense of the loss.

Psychotherapy - not always easy to embrace for one who has suffered such a traumatic loss and who resists the opening of the floodgates - mobilises the grief and facilitates the mourning process. Through discourse, sharing and confiding in another, the mourner is able to re-experience a sense of community and begins to feel that she is not completely alone. This serves to make her feel that someone shares the burden of what she is experiencing, knows what she is going through. But it is more than this. The findings reveal that it is the "outsider", the one who is not enmeshed in the family grief (therapist/counsellor, spouse, friend) that liberates the mourner from the conspiracy of silence, from the dual entrapment with mother/father, and allows for the truth (the intense pain, guilt, anger) to be revealed. In the therapeutic dialogue too, the mourner breaks through the silence, confronts her self-deceptions (inauthentic self), thus unravelling the *knotted* grief and forwarding the grief process.

In the relationship with the therapist, the opportunity is created for the mourner to return to the past and to find a balance between remembering and forgetting. Returning to the past provides clarity in the present and facilitates movement into the future: "The past is a burden for those who forget it…" (Paul, 1973: 224). Each and every memory (both positive and negative) is brought up and reintegrated with new meaning to provide the capacity to move forward. With bereaved siblings there are a "thousand and one" links or memories so the process takes a long time. Remembering, and remembering correctly, is essential for the resolution of grief. Attachment to the memories and meanings of the past facilitates a sense of continuity with which to move forward but it is in *telling* her story that new meaning is created and which facilitates the healing process.

Through discussion the mourner is able to re-experience the bonding/attachment; hyper-bonding and de-tachment of the loss experience. In this respect, the therapy situation is analogous to the "work" of mourning. In the relationship with the therapist, the mourner initially recovers a sense of oneness and wholeness but, as with the loss of her brother or sister, she realises that this is an illusion and that she is separate. The termination of therapy confronts the mourner once again with the sense of incompleteness and separateness.

Particularly if transference has taken place, conclusion of therapy can either be delayed or the relationship may be abruptly ended. Awareness of the transference and working through the separation anxiety enables the bereaved to move deeper into her mourning process. Her capacity to let go of someone who had meant something to her - without losing herself in the process - is tested. Kast (1982/1988: 105) views the conclusion of therapy as involving "leave-taking in a wider context -

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death in the broadest sense". Being able to tolerate the repeated necessity to part and committing the self to a life of involvement with others reveals whether or not the mourning process has succeeded.

Counter-transference, particularly when the therapist has also experienced the loss of a sibling, is possible and this could complicate the therapy process. In such a situation, the therapist may identify with the sufferings of the mourner and may also experience depressive anxiety. Rather than allowing the client to mourn, the therapist may attempt to alleviate the pain of the bereaved sibling by providing answers, etc. However, while counter-transference may complicate the therapy situation, in effect the therapist who has experienced such a loss, and has sorrowed (Kierkegaard, 1847/1962) through his or her own losses, is frequently better able to tolerate being-with-another in his or her pain and this can be very productive in therapy. Indeed many mourners report that speaking with someone who "has been through" a similar loss is qualitatively different to discussing the pain of their loss with others.

Another issue, in terms of counter-transference, concerns the therapist's perceptions of sibling bonds (whether these are viewed as significant or only secondary to parental bonds) and the extent to which the therapist has dealt with his or her own sibling issues. In terms of psychotherapy, therefore, therapists need to be in touch not only with how they view death and dying, but also how they feel about their own sibling relationships. Working with siblings who have lost a brother or sister confronts us with our own sibling issues: the love, loyalty, jealousy, rivalry, guilt, fears. In such a situation we need continuously to examine ourselves in order to avoid projecting our own unresolved feelings (saviour, persecutor, victim) into the therapeutic relationship.

In respect of theoretical perspectives of *grief*: while bereavement theories do have value and have been acknowledged throughout the text of the present study, the findings reveal that theory *per se* and knowledge of stages and phases of grief are empty and hollow when it comes to coping with a sorrow-filled heart. What this study reveals is that theoretical knowledge is of minimal value to the individual who really needs to express her pain in the relationship with the therapist. The individual benefits from the opportunity to freely express feelings in the therapeutic relationship. It is through *dialogue with* an Other and finding a personal perspective in her own loss; it is in establishing where she *finds herself* in the present situation; *that* is valuable for the bereaved sibling.

7.7 Revisiting the Method

The purpose of this study was to contribute to an understanding of sibling loss by approaching it from an experiential rather than from a quantitative perspective. The aim was to focus on the unique personal meanings, the quality and texture, of the phenomenon as lived by the participants rather than focusing on facts derived from statistical findings. It is this specificity - the individual, the particular,

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the singular one - that the existential-phenomenological approach privileges. In an apparent paradox, this approach also privileges the family. Deep subjectivity is implicated and relational. The human is a network of relationships. Thus, the phenomenological approach used in this study reflects the experience as a gestalt.

In exploring and attempting to understand this unique loss experience, the method used was effective in providing a clear and cogent picture, heartfelt and reflective, of what it means to suffer the loss of a brother or sister. I must acknowledge that in listening to the stories of these bereaved siblings: the poignant, almost sacred memories of the many shared childhood and adolescent experiences; the intense and deep longing for the physical presence of the deceased sibling; the agony of witnessing and experiencing the changes in their devastated parents; the sense of loneliness and alienation - I was deeply touched and at times even regretted having started this study. However, in effect, I had no control over the true beginning point of this project, the loss of my brother many years ago, that has motivated my interest in, and openness to, the suffering of others and more specifically to the loss of a brother or sister. This research, in the end, provided a forum for me to revisit an experience that was far more complex than I had originally believed or imagined.

The phenomenological method as used in this study revealed many aspects of the experience that are present to the clinical psychologist: the conflicted and paradoxical emotions of sibling loss; the trauma of this unmentionable experience; the heavy sense of responsibility to protect and support parents and, in some instances, other significant others; the tendency to put aside the self and attempt to evade their own pain; the loneliness and isolation and the long-lasting impact of the loss. In this respect, the findings of this study can help to bridge the gap between research and practise; between theory and the actual lived experience.

This research, using the phenomenological method, has hopefully deepened our understanding of the experience of sibling loss. It is possible that more could have been revealed if, for example, a follow-up interview had been arranged and thus different nuances of the siblings' experiences might have been disclosed; if male participants had also been included; and if individuals from different cultural groups had been interviewed. However, it is apparent from the present study that the phenomenon is very broad and that it is not possible to deal with all the complex psychological aspects in a single study. To quote Qualls (1998: 342), "In phenomenological analysis, there is never *one* way to interpret the essence or meaning of any given set of …descriptions. Rather, on the basis of his or her self-reflective sensitivities and interpretive sense, each researcher offers *a* way in the hope of deepening one's understanding of the experience being investigated". Like the therapeutic interview, certain aspects of the experience emerge in the research interview and require further exploration. By exploring certain themes rather than others, the researcher co-constitutes the meanings of the

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phenomenon under investigation but this does not mean that the study is not empirically sound. Rather it reveals the complexity of the phenomenon and the need for further research. What the present study does provide is a deeper understanding of the loss of a sibling as experienced by young female adult siblings who were still living at home at the time of the death of their brother or sister.

7.7.1 Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of this study is that all the participants were white middle-class professional people from relatively small families, and all were young adult females who were still living at home at the time of the death of their sibling. It is possible that because all those interviewed were young adults and all were still living at home at the time of the death, the findings might reflect a greater emphasis on the participants' sense of responsibility over their parents' loss and grief. Immersed in their parents' grief and the heaviness of the atmosphere in the home, their parents' loss emerges as intensely painful and traumatic and, in many respects, delayed the participants' mourning. Although Pape's studies (1999, 2002) of the experience of sibling loss in early to mid-adulthood (participants slightly older than those in the present study and not living at home) also revealed that all of the siblings interviewed were keenly aware of their parents' pain over the loss of their adult child, none of these same siblings felt that their grief experience was in any way impeded by the extent of their parents' grief reaction. However, in a private communication with her, Pape (2002) reported that of the few bereaved adult siblings that were in therapy with her, all had reported that their parents' grief "definitely delayed their mourning". Thus, it would seem that even if the survivors are not living at home, the bereaved sibling still responds to the parents' pain and feels the responsibility (although perhaps not to the same degree) to support, and to be there for them. In the lived experience, this dimension seems to be significant and, as therapists, we need to be aware of this and enquire about this aspect as well.

7.7.2 Implications of the Study

As already discussed, this study has implications for parents, extended family, friends, neighbours, pastors, caregivers and even for teachers/lecturers, employers - indeed anyone who may have contact with a bereaved young adult sibling. Because the complex, fluctuating, vibrant and infinite nature of the sibling *bond* is too little understood, the *loss* of a sibling also appears to be more easily overlooked. While attempts have been made to redress this oversight, research has tended to focus narrowly on the "closeness" and centrality of a brother or sister in one's life as positively related to the intensity of the grief of bereaved siblings and the risk of prolonged mourning of survivors. Although the present study concurs with these findings and with the suggestion that siblings who were particularly close to each other require attention from healthcare workers, my findings also reveal that it is not only those siblings who had a close relationship to their deceased sibling who were deeply affected by the loss and, indeed, that a distant and polarised sibling relationship may also evoke deep

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sorrow. Even if the relationship was distant, the potential for greater closeness is lost and needs to be mourned, the gap is still felt, the parents' grief is still intense and impacts on the sibling's loss experience, and the externally defined roles and inter-relationships within the family still change. Indeed, those siblings whose relationship with the brother or sister was distant or ambivalent seem to require as much, if not more, support in order to clarify their part in the whole experience. Everyone who is involved with, and cares for, bereaved siblings needs to be aware of this and not neglect the sibling who was "not close" to the deceased brother or sister: e.g. siblings that fought a lot, did not share secrets or belongings, were too far apart in age to be really close. Even the sibling who did not know the brother or sister (as in the event of a stillborn sibling or when siblings have been separated for a long period of time), he or she still lives in the shadow of parental mourning. This affects the relational and communicational value of the parent-child bond and impacts on the surviving sibling(s). These aspects are most dramatically demonstrated by Cathy's painful experience of the loss of her brother.

As already mentioned, the implications of the study for psychotherapy are rich. Although it has been documented that adults seldom come to therapy with the loss of a sibling as a primary presenting issue, in clinical settings we often deal with issues that are seemingly unrelated to sibling loss (e.g. more recent losses of a parent or spouse, anxiety, panic attacks, burnout, depression) only to discover in the course of therapy that the individual had at some point experienced the loss of a brother or sister. It is important to enquire into previous losses as often crises in later life could be amplified by previous losses that have been too little mourned. In addition, it would appear from the present study that individuals who have experienced sibling loss and have either not had the opportunity to talk about the loss or have themselves been unable to express or to share their deeper emotions with others, do not always realise the full significance of the loss of a brother or sister. The deeper meanings of the loss only emerge over time and may need to be dealt with again as survivors move through different passages in their lives, in order to reach fuller resolution.

Also of significance is that, in certain instances, motherhood (or fatherhood) may afford opportunities to replace, in some way, the lost attachment relationship to the deceased sibling with all the implications of overprotection and "preciousness" of the newborn that this way of coping with sibling loss entails. Dia's awareness of the possibility of resurrecting her lost sister through her daughter is cogently demonstrated in the present study. Not all parents may be as aware of this risk as this participant was. As psychotherapists we need to be open to this possibility when a child or adolescent is referred for therapy, and enquire about all previous family losses.

It also seems possible to find the implication of this study in a counselling/student-counselling setting. The loss of a brother or sister impacts on one's sense of self. For bereaved young adult siblings, the

tenuously consolidated identity of the previous stage (adolescence) is shaken, not only because of the shift in roles and the changes in the communication patterns within the family, but also because the loss of a sibling is a loss of a part of self. The bereaved sibling questions, "Who am I *now*?"; "Where am I going *now*?" and this could also create confusion regarding one's vocational choice. For example, a bereaved sibling may involve himslf or herself in the deceased siblings' work (Elena) as a way of maintaining the closeness with him or her or in a desire to integrate some of their sibling's characteristics by recreating what had been lost within the self. It may also be a way of keeping the family together and maintaining stability and continuity. In other instances, a career choice may be based on a need to compensate for the parents' loss of the hopes and expectations that they had for their deceased child's future, or even a means of trying to make parents happy again; of filling the void created by the loss. Career counsellors should be aware of the impact of sibling loss on identity and enquire about siblings and about all family losses, both recent and past, if they are to obtain a deeper understanding of the emotional dedication of the individual seeking guidance to one or other career or field of study, or the feeling of discomfort and unhappiness in a certain course or work environment.

7.7.3 Possibilities for Future Research

Further qualitative research is indicated, particularly in the field of sibling loss beyond young and middle-adulthood, i.e. during "maturity" when most sibling losses occur. Although the present study contained some diversity in terms of culture and religion, further qualitative research is also indicated that would include a broader group of participants, both male and female and coming from a larger family. In addition, specific issues raised by the participants themselves in the present study, and closely related to the suggestion for further research in larger families, is the question of what happens in the sibling group when one of its members is lost? How does this loss affect the communication between and amongst surviving siblings? Would having more siblings be more of a burden than a support?

7.8 Concluding Comments

Brothers and sisters have been dying since the beginning of time and yet this loss experience has only relatively recently been considered to be a topic worthy of research. My experience with bereaved siblings has taught me that the lived experience of sibling-loss is one of the most traumatic and lonely events in a young adult's life, and that the impact of such a loss is indeed, in many instances, lifelong. Although there is evidence that adult siblings do return to a successful level of external functioning, they do not return, unchanged, to the way they were before the loss of a brother or sister and often the *grief work* is far more prolonged than we would like to acknowledge. Clearly the resolution of sibling loss is not simply about coping, adjustment, "being functional". Bereaved adult siblings do this well. But grief does not simply burn itself out with time. True healing requires acknowledging the past with

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its truth and transforming the anger, hurt and pain into love and forgiveness. Insofar as I genuinely forgive and "forget" whatever pain I have suffered at the hands of the imperfect "other", to that degree I am able to forgive my own flawed fragility and tolerate my own weaknesses and my mistakes.

This study was undertaken in the hope that the findings would enhance our awareness and our professional understanding of this intensely painful, existentially disruptive but silent phenomenon. When we lose a close family member, mere knowledge of the "stages" or phases of grief is comfortless. Our quest for completeness - to explain and predict outcomes - gets in the way of true dialogue and may alienate and silence bereaved siblings even further. It is through acknowledgement and concretely understanding an individual sorrow-filled heart, rather than explanation or interpretation, that empathy is enhanced. The empathic listener is what the bereaved sibling needs most of all.