

CHAPTER FIVE

THE STUDY: METHODOLOGY

5. Introduction

To link concisely with what has gone before, the theme of sibling loss has been neglected for too long. Voices from both within and outside the psychology profession have registered critical complaints about this oversight (Davies, 1999; Rosen, 1986; Vande Kemp, 1999). As a result of these challenges, researchers over the last two and a half decades have tried to break the silence.

Nevertheless, a dominant concern which is still being expressed is that "few insights into sibling bereavement have come from psychologists" (Vande Kemp, 1999: 355).

Personal or dynamic issues have possibly helped to keep the theme shrouded in the shadows.

However, in terms of the literature review, it is clear that methodological issues dominate.

Mainstream quantitative procedures do not lend themselves to the existential complexity of the phenomenon that has been outlined. Sibling loss cannot be measured or causally explained. While qualitative methods have performed a yeoman's task in bringing the plight of the bereaved sibling to our attention, positivistic science still dominates. A radical breakthrough has not appeared.

Explicating the lived meaning of losing a brother or sister to death, and revealing its psychological structure remains to be explored and understood.

From the foregoing literature review, it is clear that sibling loss is a complex human phenomenon that merits study by psychologists and yet one requiring an exploration into its *meaning* and content. In order to do justice to the phenomenon a method is required that is comprehensive and that can provide a coherent sense of the phenomenon as a whole; can illuminate the experience as a Gestalt. Simple reactions to the loss of a sibling are only a small part of this loss experience. The questions arising from the literature review call for an exploration of "*what* it is like" to experience the loss of a brother or sister and "*how*" the surviving sibling lives this loss as its meaning unfolds. It is *understanding*, not interpretation, explanation or verification, that can ground effective action in helping bereaved siblings.

Since the aim of the present study is to discover the psychological meanings expressed implicitly or explicitly by surviving siblings to the loss of a brother or sister, a qualitative approach is used. The question, "*What* is the experience of sibling loss?", requires a descriptive response rather than hypothesis testing and/or explanation or interpretation. Rather than using a quantitative approach, the loss of a sibling will be approached inductively, as a human phenomenon that needs to be understood on a phenomenal level and approached within the attitude of "subjective openness" (Moustakas, 1994)

and discovery. A qualitative research approach seems to be the obvious alternative to a natural scientific method since it focuses on the lived experience, on the struggles, pain and suffering experienced by others, rather than on theories removed from day-to-day living (May, 1958: 33).

Given the objectives of the research, i.e. to explore the meaning of the loss of a brother or sister as the individual actually lives and experiences it and to give a voice to surviving siblings who frequently sorrow in silence, I decided that an existential-phenomenological perspective would be the most effective one to use. By employing a *human scientific* approach as elucidated by Giorgi (1970), I hope to discover and describe the structure of the experience of sibling loss. The study uses data obtained in the form of spontaneous descriptions based on the concrete experience of losing a brother or sister, as it appears in the life-world of three participants. The methodological approach is open-ended, and the emphasis is on discovery, on revealing what the bereaved siblings themselves have to say.

5.1 Methodological Orientation

Of the qualitative methods (i.e. case studies, hermeneutics, grounded theory, and the heuristic approach), the descriptive-phenomenological method developed by Giorgi (1975, 1983, 1985, 1989a, 1989b, 1994) is the one most tailored to psychological phenomena and also meets the criteria of science in the sense that "it is methodical, systematic, critical and potentially intersubjective" (Giorgi, 1989b: 40). More specifically, it is well suited to providing greater depth and richness to the meaning that the individual gives on *his/her own terms* to the loss of a brother or sister.

While it is important to note that the phenomenological psychological method has a very sound philosophical base, the intention of the following section is not to review phenomenological philosophy, but to focus on the concepts and methods regarding the structural approach to be used in this study.

5.1.1. Philosophical Ground of the Phenomenological Approach

Within existential-phenomenological psychology, and in using phenomenological methods for investigating and describing phenomena, the following roots can be traced:

During the 1850s, the Danish thinker, Søren Kierkegaard, by examining his own personal struggles, found in them examples of the universal struggles of being human. In 1900, Edmund Husserl's (1913-1962) *Logical Investigations* launched phenomenology, a systematic effort to found both philosophy and science on a rigorous basis. Husserl privileged consciousness and experience in the everyday life-world as the basis of knowledge and leaned upon intuition and imaginative free variation as the basic research tools. Martin Heidegger's book, *Being and Time* (1927/1962), joined these two streams of thought, and existential-phenomenology was born. It is important to note that in contemporary

writings "phenomenology" and "existential-phenomenology" are terms that are used interchangeably (Valle and Halling, 1989).

Giorgi's empirical phenomenological psychological method grew out of continental phenomenology, and is based especially on the phenomenological philosophy of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) but applied specifically to the study of psychological phenomena. As noted above, Edmund Husserl, concerned himself with opening up the phenomena of everyday lived experience. For Husserl, consciousness could only be studied in relation to the world in which we live. Our perceptions are not just inside our heads, they are *out there* with the *real outer object* (Kruger, 1984/1987: 56). Husserl's philosophy was based on the premise, "Back to the things themselves" and involved the understanding of man's everyday existence through a "descriptive psychology" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Husserl claimed that the life-world (where everyday lived-experience takes place) was prior to the institutions of the sciences and he stated that we would have to go back to the experience itself in order to access the experience as it is lived. All human experiences and all knowledge originate in the life-world.

Within the existential-phenomenological perspective, consciousness is viewed as intentional, that is, consciousness is always directed *towards something*, towards an object of experience. This means that meaning exists within certain horizons and that the individual creates meaning within those horizons. Von Eckartsberg (cited in Gildenhuys, 1989: 879) sums it up as follows:

"Husserl's fundamental contribution was to call our attention to the study of the meaning constituting power of the acts of consciousness. He developed systematic reflection as a research method."

Phenomenological research bears heavily upon Husserl's (1913/1962) original thesis of intentionality. With the development of systematic reflection, Husserl discovered the complexity of the 'horizontal nature' of consciousness. This means that a certain intentionality exists and that it cannot be separated from the horizon in which it is directed. Thus meaning is co-created within the meaning-horizons that are given. In other words, "it is not the subject which has a directedness-to-the-object ... but the subject is the world" (Van Den Berg, 1980: 33). As stated by Merleau-Ponty: "The world is not what I think, but what I live through. I am open to the world ... " (1962: xvii). Thus, from the perspective of consciousness as intentional, consciousness must be seen not only as a focus on the world as seen from within the present or as directed towards "real" objects (existing in time, space, and causality), but also as consciousness directed from previous experiences or towards "ir-real" objects (not existing in time, space, causality), objects such as loss and death; nothingness. This has relevance to the study

of sibling loss. Stated somewhat differently, Husserl advocates the epoche or reduction which "brackets" the "real" and withholds existential consent in order to study meanings.

Martin Heidegger radically extended Husserl's intentionality of consciousness and postulated that "being conscious is an intentional act through which man lets the world appear to him" (Kruger, 1979/1988: 28). Heidegger (1927/1962) introduced the concept *Dasein* (being-there-in-the-world) in order to explicate the mode of being of humans. It is the essence of *Dasein* to "be with" others. "The world of man's Being-in-the-world is ever and primordially one which I share with others. The world of *Dasein* is essentially *Mitwelt*" (Boss, 1982: 55). Our life is always structured in terms of our relationship to the world in which we live. This too has relevance for the study of sibling loss as it occurs within the context of the family.

In exploring the lived experience of the loss of a sibling it is accordingly appropriate to use the above philosophical foundations. They are ways of thinking that focus upon the way we, as human subjects, co-constitute our perceptions of the world in tune with our lived experience.

5.1.2 Empirical Phenomenological Psychological Research

Phenomenological research is descriptive and qualitative but differs from other qualitative approaches in that it focuses on the experienced meaning of the phenomenon under investigation with a view to discovering and describing the structure of the experience. In contrast to mainstream psychological research that is deductive and usually starts with a hypothesis and attempts either to confirm or to reject the researcher's theory, phenomenological research is *inductive* and *discovery* oriented, beginning with the subject's/participant's description, which is then transformed into psychological language.

Phenomenological research focuses on the meaning that an individual gives to the experience rather than on a concern with causality or the frequency of certain actions, behaviour patterns or occurrences (Polkinghorne, 1989: 44) for, as noted by Giorgi (1970:165), "psychology should be the study of experience and behaviour as it is experienced and behaved". It is the individual's *experienced meaning* of his/her overt actions or behaviour that is of psychological relevance. In this respect the phenomenological approach also seems to be the most appropriate to use, since it serves to overcome some of the complex methodological issues involved in sibling research. A sibling's grief and/or the ongoing experience of loss and its long-term effects transcend(s) space and time. Phenomenology, because it is a discipline of meaning, is uniquely suited to studying the time lapse, the subtle relationship between chronological and psychological (phenomenal) age, the meaning of gender differences, and the experience of *position* within the family. The latter refers not only to the eldest/youngest child but also to phenomena such as "favourite" child or which gender is more highly

valued within the family. Thus, in a phenomenological study, what have been assumed as the factors that predict reactions to sibling loss, are *bracketed* in favour of what the participant will report as meaningful.

Broadly speaking, "the phenomenological approach addresses the life-world; the world as it is lived and shaped by people" (Fischer & Alapack, 1987: 104). To understand the experience of sibling loss, we concern ourselves with the phenomenon in the conscious world of everyday living, what Husserl identified as the life-world or *Lebenswelt*. This is the world as given in awareness and immediately expressed rather than interpreted scientifically. The phenomenon to be studied has to be described exactly as it presents itself, neither adding to, nor subtracting from, what is *given* (Giorgi, 1994: 206). As already discussed, this is based on Husserl's conviction that true knowledge involves going "back to the things themselves" (Giorgi, 1985: 8). Phenomenology considers it more rigorous to stay with the data; to account for all the data, and to make no knowledge claims that cannot be demonstrated out of the data themselves. It is a question of "evidence". For Husserl it is not rigorous evidence to view data in some theory that is extrinsic to the data themselves. According to him, one does violence to the data, to the "given" (i.e. the "intentional object") when one views these in the light of a theory that tries to make sense of the data. As stated by Giorgi (1989b: 45): "In phenomenology one gets a straight-forward description of what is happening that is neither explanation nor reconstruction". The quest is to understand the "what" rather than the "why" of the lived experience and to reveal the structure or essence of the phenomenon as it is given in awareness.

While phenomenological research focuses on human experience, it is not a direct report of the experience but a search for the structural meaning of the experience. Thus phenomenological research provides a *descriptive* structural analysis of any lived experience and thereby identifies the styles and structures of everyday phenomena. As expressed by Giorgi (1989b:41):

"Phenomenology is the study of phenomena as experienced. Phenomenologists seek the logos (patterns, structures) of the phenomena they are studying. ... Experienced reality is what phenomenologists are interested in, not reality as it may be conceived or reality understood objectively or reality understood as it might be 'in itself'. It's always the experienced phenomenon that is being referred to..."

In general then, the phenomenological approach seeks to discover the *structure and form* of a phenomenon, to understand the experience, not the cause and effect relationship that might serve as an explanation of the ontology of the phenomenon. Giorgi (1975: 83) defines phenomenology as:

"... the study of the structures, and the variations of structures of the consciousness to which any thing, event or person appears. It is interested in elucidating both that which appears and

the manner in which it appears, as well as in the overall structure that relates the 'that which' with its mode or manner [i.e. with the 'How']".

This is an important distinction with regard to the method's applicability to the present study. Firstly, as already mentioned, there is very little knowledge about the structure and meaning of the phenomenon of sibling loss; secondly, in his or her being-in-the-world, the research participant is inextricably linked to the world (i.e. to a family, a sibling group, an extended family, and a community); and thirdly, it is clear that the experience of sibling loss and the grief which accompanies it is a process and not an event or situation that can be circumscribed in time and space. The phenomenological method allows for the shifts/changes as the process unfolds and evolves over time; it also allows for the many variables that surround and engulf the phenomenon, and their interrelatedness.

Heidegger (1927/1962) purports that *Dasein* and the world are interrelated. The human is a network of relations. This is particularly relevant in the situation of a family loss. When a sibling loses a sibling, parents lose a child, a spouse loses a wife/husband, a child loses a mother/father, a grandparent loses a grandchild. In this respect, the phenomenological method is most suited to addressing the questions, "What is the experience of sibling loss?" (i.e. the structure on the individual and general level); and "How is it lived?"; this indicates the course/progression of the loss experience and the changes that take place over time as well as what gives rise to these changes.

Another appealing aspect of the phenomenological approach in terms of its suitability for the present study, is its comprehensiveness (Giorgi, 1994: 192). Paradoxically, it is for this reason that the approach has been perceived as primarily "propaedeutic to science", that is, as a preparatory or preliminary research method. However, as Giorgi (1975: 84) notes, the phenomenological psychological method is concerned with "more than the point of departure of research; it has relevance for the entire investigation". It is precisely because it has value for the entire research project that phenomenology can make a contribution to the psychology of sibling loss.

In phenomenological research, the description always takes place within the attitude of the phenomenological reduction, that is, the researcher mentally "brackets" or puts into abeyance all past theories or knowledge about the phenomenon in order to be present to what the participants have to report (Giorgi, 1994: 212; 1989b: 45). What the reduction offers is the possibility of a fresh and different way of experiencing the phenomenon that may provide new intuitions about the phenomenon under investigation. The phenomenological reduction also means that the researcher withholds "existential assent" of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 1989b: 45; 1994: 206). This means that the phenomenologist is studying what appears to human consciousness, what someone experiences and

can report on, and does not make any knowledge claims outside of what is given. Edmund Husserl's dictum was to stay within "brackets", suspending credence in the existence or truth of what was being reported. My data, therefore, are what subjects report: the objects of their consciousness, without being burdened with the epistemological question that plagues normative science: "Did it really happen that way?".

As already noted, the phenomenological research method uses *description*, as opposed to interpretation or explanation (Giorgi, 2000). It also uses an open-ended research question allowing the participants to describe their loss experience, to speak for themselves, rather than leading them into a direction that the researcher may consider important or relevant to the phenomenon, or in order to verify a specific psychological theory or hypothesis. In this respect, research takes place within a context of *discovery* rather than of verification; of *understanding* rather than explanation or interpretation. A methodology that makes use of description and language in order to capture the psychological essence of the phenomenon, seems to be the most appropriate choice for the study of the experience of sibling loss. As noted by Kruger (1986, in Gildenhuis, 1989: 838): "Language is our first and last method and framework for understanding...".

In sum, in building on to the qualitative work of Davies (1999), Pape (1999, 2002), and others mentioned in the previous chapter (researchers and clinicians who place themselves within the *human scientific* rather than within the traditional natural scientific model), the phenomenological perspective seems to be the best way to approach this study since it gives priority to the phenomenon under investigation and is able to reveal the meaning of human experience while still maintaining a systematic, rigorous and reliable methodology (Giorgi, 1989).

Moustakas (1994: 101) succinctly sums up the phenomenological research method as follows:

"Through phenomenology a significant methodology is developed for investigating human experience and for deriving knowledge from a state of pure consciousness. One learns to see naively and freshly again, to value conscious experience, to respect the evidence of one's senses, and to move toward an intersubjective knowing of things, people, and everyday experiences".

5.2 The Research Process

In structuring the research process, the following steps were taken in order to answer the question, "What is the experience of sibling loss?"

1. The investigation began with a literature review and with an examination of key theoretical perspectives on grief and of themes that emerged in other research studies. This provided an

orientation to the phenomenon and alerted me to possible themes that might require clarification if alluded to by the subjects. I also did a self-reflective search, noting my own meaning as a sibling and my personal experience of sibling loss. In addition, I noted what my clients have shared about their own losses of a brother or sister. These early reflective steps allowed me to articulate my own presuppositions and biases so that I might bracket them, not impose my own expectations but remain open to discovering what the participants themselves would communicate.

2. The next step required the formulation of a research question that would be open-ended and reveal the lived experience of this loss experience in a spontaneous, pre-reflective and concrete manner.

3. A descriptive approach was used to gather information from individuals who volunteered to take part in a preliminary study. Both written descriptions and a recorded interview were obtained and, on the basis of their responses, the interview emerged as the most appropriate form of data collection (as the sense of not being alone allowed for a fuller unfolding of the experience). It was also appropriate in this study to participate directly in data gathering because of the importance of the encounter and also in order to give a voice to survivors. (This aspect will be discussed in greater detail under section 5.3.2: "The Preliminary Study").

4. The recorded interviews were transcribed and analysed. Data were retrospective as the impact of the loss of a sibling is a process that unfolds over time. Although retrospective data may be considered "unreliable" from a strictly scientific perspective, Giorgi (1994: 203) attests that "... it is the perceived reality that phenomenologists are interested in, and often 'distortions' are more vital than veridical perceptions".

Polkinghorne (1989: 48) clarifies this as follows:

"The data of phenomenological research are descriptions of experience as it presents itself, not descriptions of objects or actions as they are assumed to exist outside of experience. The subject's reports are taken as descriptions of their experience, not as statements of an independent reality. The interest remains focused on the subject's experience even when researchers doubt the existence of objects being described".

5. Once the interviews had been transcribed, the lived experience as it presented itself to the participants was analysed using Giorgi's phenomenological psychological method and leaning also on the work of Wertz (1983), Colaizzi (1978), Bargdill (2000), and Qualls (1998). The steps used in the data analysis and explication will be discussed in detail under section 5.4.

5.2.1 On Bracketing

As stated earlier, the phenomenological psychological approach to research takes place within the context of openness and discovery and not within the context of verification or legitimisation. Thus, in the study of any meaningful experience, self-reflection is central and involves a process that is known as "bracketing". This involves the process of identifying one's preconceived notions (i.e. biases) regarding the experience being investigated in order to minimise their effects on clearly explicating the meaning of the subjects' descriptions (Qualls, 1998). Husserl (1913/1962) calls this suspension (or bracketing), the *first phenomenological epoche*. Stated simply, what have been *assumed as factors* that predict reactions to sibling loss, are put into abeyance so that the researcher can attend to what is present or given in awareness, that is, in favour of what the participant himself or herself will report as meaningful.

Accordingly, in using the phenomenological approach, I momentarily "bracketed" or put aside all psychological theories related to loss and grief as well as existing research models of grief. Likewise I put in parentheses my own presuppositions about the phenomenon under investigation. This phenomenological strategy, i.e. "bracketing" of what is already known about sibling loss from any standpoint, is in the service of genuine objective knowledge. It is the method for controlling bias and prejudice by constantly cross-examining and holding in check assumptions and presuppositions - personal, theoretical, moral, and religious. As stated by Giorgi (1994: 201):

"... descriptive science practitioners within a phenomenological framework are meant to provide as results only descriptions of structures that appear to the researcher's consciousness, precisely as they appear. They are meant neither to speculate nor to interpret".

After an independent survey of this phenomenon had been obtained, the brackets were removed so that there might be a genuine interface between the findings of the present study, psychological theories relating to loss and grief and the results that have been articulated from other research.

Thus, the review of the existing literature and a self-reflective search constituted a necessary and important first step in my research program, and also a necessary last step. Apart from controlling for bias, this step was also undertaken in order to be more aware of significant themes of this less-understood phenomenon and to explore these themes in greater depth should they emerge spontaneously during the interviews. Explicating dimensions of the experience also assisted in the formulation of a *research question* that would do justice to the phenomenon under investigation.

In terms of the *self-reflective search*, writing down my own experience of the loss of a sibling (still-born) and reflecting on other losses in my family of origin, gave me a better hold on my loss experiences and made it possible to be receptive to what the participants were experiencing and

describing; as expressed by Giorgi (1989b: 41), "to discover and describe the structure of the 'given' as experienced by the participants".

With my own history of loss in mind, I discovered a number of biases within myself that needed to be put into abeyance regarding the experience being investigated. In the early stages of this study, I had anticipated that the siblings that I interviewed would describe a profound individual/personal pain and that the focus would be on the significance of the loss of the relationship with the deceased sibling. During the course of my research, I discovered that these were presuppositions about the nature of sibling loss. Identifying my own biases regarding the loss of a sibling gave me a sensitivity which enabled me to put in abeyance my preconceptions and assumptions in order to maximise my openness to the experience of others. In this study, the participants describe their own loss as they lived and experienced it. In the process, the relevant contextual variables emerge from their descriptions and form part of the structure of the experience.

5.3 Data Gathering

To perform a phenomenological study, data are required that reveal the lived experience of the loss of one's sibling in a spontaneous, pre-reflective ("naïve") and direct manner. Although it is unusual for individuals who have suffered the loss of a significant other not to have reflected deeply on their loss and they cannot, therefore, be totally "naïve" regarding this experience, Giorgi (1989a, 1989b) maintains that respondents are nevertheless "naïve" with respect to psychological understanding (i.e. making psychological sense of the data).

5.3.1 Research Participants

In a phenomenological study the main requirement for selection is that the participant "has had the experience", and is able to provide rich and fruitful *descriptions* of the phenomenon being investigated (Polkinghorne, 1989: 47). What matters, phenomenologically speaking, is that the phenomenon "is present to someone's consciousness" (Giorgi, 1975: 84) and that the individual is able to report on his or her concrete experience of loss. As the aim of the present study is to illuminate the meaning of sibling loss as it unfolds over time, rather than to focus on the more immediate manifestations of grief, an additional requirement was to speak with survivors who had lost a sibling at least two years prior to participation in the study.

Volunteer research participants were recruited by word of mouth through friends and colleagues who were aware of my interest in the phenomenon. The response was positive with approximately fifteen possible participants being mentioned. However, because of the potentially painful and sensitive nature of the topic, only seven candidates, who qualified in terms of the above requirements, were approached. Thus, it is uncertain whether they would all have been *willing* volunteers. As a clinician,

I myself struggled with ethical aspects of opening up memories for individuals who themselves had not expressed a need to explore or to revisit their loss. Yet, as I began the process of contacting these individuals in order to ascertain their willingness to participate in the study, most of them responded readily and with varying degrees of interest; even with some enthusiasm. For some, because of the absence of available self-help literature on the subject of sibling loss, there was a keen interest to explore and understand their emotions and to gain a better insight into the meaning of their loss. For others, there was the expressed hope that, by sharing their story, others who had experienced a similar loss could be helped or could find some comfort. For still others, there was an expressed desire to speak about and remember their deceased brother or sister.

The volunteers who made themselves available were contacted telephonically and, once their interest and willingness to participate was confirmed, they were verbally informed of the research design and each participant was assured of confidentiality and anonymity regarding personal information. Following the telephonic discussion and their verbal consent to participate in the study, an orientation-invitation letter (in Appendix C) was sent to five volunteers.

Over the course of three months, open-ended, unstructured interviews were conducted with these volunteers (four women and one man), all of whom had experienced the loss of a brother or sister in a very real and intense way. All the participants that were interviewed provided rich and adequate descriptions necessary to generate common themes and the essential structure of the phenomenon. Because of the length of the interviews and the space constraints in a study of this nature, only the first three respondents are included in the study.

Although the number of subjects selected for phenomenologically-based studies varies considerably (Polkinghorne, 1989), a review of dissertations and published research using Giorgi's phenomenological method reveals that three subjects are adequate. As noted by Polkinghorne (1989: 48), what is important in phenomenological research is to obtain richly varied descriptions of the phenomenon, not statistical generalisation.

Giorgi (1985: 12) also points out that the everyday life-world is richer and more complex than the psychological perspective. Thus, one cannot cover all empirical, concrete, specific eventualities in a single research project. How the research situation is constituted provides certain strengths and other weaknesses but, as proposed by Giorgi (1989b:44), "[t]he clarification of context is one of the chief ways of achieving rigor in qualitative research".

With this focus in mind, it is important to summarise some of the biographical details of the three participants in the study. Also important to note is that the participants were all volunteers and that I

did not select bereaved siblings on the basis of gender, from a specific cultural group, within a certain age range, or from a specific family size.

The following information emerged from the interviews:

While the participants' ages ranged between 25 and 62 years, all had lost their siblings in young adulthood; all were still living at home at the time of the loss and, in all cases, the death of their sibling was sudden and due to accidents. Each had lost his or her sibling when he or she was old enough to begin to move away from the family and had established a degree of independence from the family, but when the deceased sibling was still relatively young and the loss was sudden and could be considered "a-normative" or "off-time" (Moss & Moss, 1986).

The participants were all female and between the ages of 21 and 23 years at the time of the loss. The age gap between the participants and their deceased siblings ranged from 3 to 5 years. All were university graduates from middle-class families, were born in South Africa and exposed to both English and Afrikaans. The language used by two of the participants was English, which is the home language of the one and second language of the other (as well as that of the researcher). The other participant chose to speak in Afrikaans, which is her home language (and in which the researcher is also proficient). Her interview was translated into English; an attempt was made to stay as close as possible to the participant's own words and the subtle nuances of meaning, thus the translated interview may not flow as well as the transcribed interviews of those who reported their experience directly in English. However, it is significant that *all* the interviews were replete with hesitations and pauses that seemed to be due more to the profoundly emotional and sometimes overwhelming nature of the experience than to the specific language used. (The original, unedited, interview in Afrikaans is included in Appendix B).

Although the initial aim was to obtain more diversity, that is, by selecting male and female subjects of different ages who had lost a sibling to death through a variety of circumstances, as is evident from the above, this particular aim was not achieved. Salient similarities between the participants (female, lost their siblings through accidents, etc.) raise the question as to whether the essential structure developed under these circumstances would hold for the phenomenon in other situations (for example, if the sibling had died in middle-adulthood rather than in young-adulthood or from suicide or chronic illness). However, while criticism may be levelled at the present study because of the homogeneity of the subjects, this may also be considered a *strength* because of the complexity of the phenomenon under investigation. As Giorgi notes, a "depth study" already includes more variations than the number of participants would indicate because of multiple expressions from the participants. This natural diversity was in fact evident from the interviews, for instance: diversity in terms of

experienced closeness/distance between the siblings at the time of the loss, the position of the sibling within the family (eldest, youngest, middle child), and the gender of the deceased sibling. Moreover, time elapsed since the loss ranged from two-and-a-half to thirty-nine years, and there was diversity in terms of culture and religion. Two of the participants were left as only children, while the third has one remaining elder brother. One was indirectly involved in the circumstances surrounding her brother's death and her parents had also experienced multiple losses to death (had lost two other children), while the other two participants were totally uninvolved in the circumstances of the loss and their only family loss, prior to the death of their sibling, was that of a grandparent.

An argument can also be made that the first three participants gave very rich accounts of the phenomenon - rich enough to be explicated - and that to have selected the fourth or fifth subject in favour of any of the others may have been perceived as researcher bias; selecting subjects to fit the researcher's needs. For this reason only the *first three* volunteers were selected. Had these subjects not provided rich and adequate descriptions necessary to generate common themes and the essential structure of the phenomenon, then the number of participants would have been increased.

5.3.2 The Preliminary Study

The word "preliminary", in the sense of an exploratory study, is used throughout this study, in order to distinguish it from the mainstream quantitative approach with its research concept of "pilot" study.

Although phenomenological psychological research is descriptive, within this frame of reference it is not possible to say *a priori*, whether written descriptions, interview data, or video recordings would be the best form of data collection. Each is equally useful and fruitful as evidenced in the studies by William Fischer (1989) and Richard Alapack (1975; 1984), who have made use of written descriptions. Optimal suitability, however, is situation-specific and is dependent on the nature of the phenomenon under investigation. A "preliminary" study was mandatory in order to reach an informed choice regarding the most appropriate form of data collection for the present study.

My initial request to three research volunteers was for written descriptions of their experience of losing a brother or sister through death. Only two of the three volunteers succeeded in providing a written description. The written accounts, although varied in length, were somewhat analytical and reflective, and emotions appeared to be contained. (These written descriptions are included in Appendix D as Report A and Report B).

The third volunteer wrestled with this task and finally contacted the researcher to say that she had made several attempts to put words to paper but was unable to do this because "writing it down would make it (i.e. the loss experience) *real*". She was, however, willing (even eager) to share her

experience with me in an interview and a mutually convenient date was arranged. My sense of the word "*real*" is that the written word would limit her, not allow for the shifts and ambiguities of the "real". More importantly, I realised that her story had to be told *to* someone. It was also appropriate in this study to participate directly in data gathering as the process of engaging in the interview gave a voice to the participants, helped to break the silence surrounding the loss and restored a sense of community. The material obtained in the interview was rich and intense, and her description is included in the main body of the study. The interactive process of the dialogue provided a wealth of information of the lived meaning of the loss that was not apparent in the written descriptions. The depth of this participant's description of the loss of her brother would not have been possible if the journey had been travelled alone.

My experience with this volunteer made it very clear that the *interview* was the most appropriate form of data collection for the phenomenon under study. The story of losing a brother or sister to death had to be *told*. It is in the "saying" (speech and discourse) rather than in the "said" (Levinas, 1979: 195) that truth reveals itself. The interview situation, with the moral presence of an Other, provides the holding or containment that makes it less likely that the describer will be self-contained and closed to feelings; makes it more likely that the describer might revisit painful moments and touch pain not yet visited. My experience with her validated the fact that the face-to-face *interview* was not just the *preferred* method of choice but the *only* method by which I could ethically gather data from participants in a study of this nature. (Ethical considerations will be dealt with in section, 5.3.4: "Protection of Research Participants").

With the request for a written description of the experience of sibling loss, the following question was initially put to the volunteers:

"Could you please describe how you felt at the time of the death of your brother/sister and how you experience the loss now"

This constituted the initial research question and was phrased in such a way as not only to gather descriptions of the initial response to the loss, but also to allow participants to describe the process as it unfolded over time. Through the preliminary study, however, I became aware that the use of the word *death* punctuated the experience; it was perhaps too static and might limit the descriptions, not allowing for the full unfolding of the process but rather encouraging descriptions of mere reactions to the *death* (focus on end-state). I decided that these possible difficulties could be overcome by modifying the research question. Thus, the preliminary study not only contributed to the choice of method for gathering data for the study, but also to the refinement and reformulation of the research question; one that would facilitate "the full emergence of the phenomenon in all its aspects: the

situation, the behaviour and the experience of the subject" (Stevick, 1971: 135). I contend that this is the authentic sense of "piloting" and that such preliminary data are also legitimate data, not to be discarded but rather tapped for their meaning.

In the interviews, participants were invited to share with the researcher the details of their loss experience by posing the following question:

"Would you please describe in as much detail as possible, just as the thoughts and feelings come to you, what you experienced at the loss of your brother/sister. Please focus on your feelings, on what it was like for you, at the time of the loss and how you experience the loss now. Please keep in mind that there is no one right or proper way to experience this loss. I am really interested in your experience. You may take as long as you like".

This question was successful in eliciting the experiential nature of the process as it unfolded over time, with all the ambiguities and temporal and spatial shifts that were part of the experience.

5.3.3 Research Interviews

The research interview followed the criteria as set out by Kvale (1983, 1996) and the client-centered approach of Rogers (1951). Thus the interview was open-ended and unstructured, allowing the participants to lead by expressing "what it is like" to lose a brother or sister. The emphasis was on *discovery*, on remaining open to learning what the participants themselves had to say. As noted by Kvale (1996: 1), "[t]he qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subject's point of view, to unfold the meaning of people's experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to any scientific explanations". In this respect, the interview was in harmony with the philosophy of phenomenological psychology.

After posing the research question, I discovered that I needed to speak very little. The participants had clearly reflected deeply on their loss and their stories were begging to be told. Intervention was necessary only to ask for clarification or amplification of what each subject offered, or to redirect the participant to his or her felt sense of the experience. An attempt was made not to ask questions that were disguised statements or to lead the participants into an area that was of interest to me.

Throughout the data collection and interview procedures, the phenomenological reduction was used in order to be fully present to the experience as described by the participants.

As far as possible, comments consisted of reverberations of statements made by the participants, paraphrasing, summarisation or reflecting content and/or feelings - so as not to impose my views on the subjects' reported experience of their own loss. Thus, the interviews resembled therapeutic interviews. The focus, however, was on the *phenomenon under investigation*, not on the psychological dynamics of the person offering data on grieving. Nevertheless, because of the intensity of the

emotions expressed by some participants, it was difficult, at times, to maintain the stance strictly as outlined by Kvale (1983: 174), i.e. that the focus of the interview is on the life-world or experience of the interviewee and is “theme-oriented, not person-oriented.” Also difficult was to maintain a balance between my role of researcher and that of therapist. Nevertheless, I listened attentively to each participant's story and remained open to the presence of new and unexpected constituents in the description at all times. The power of Husserl's articulation of the achievements of consciousness is relevant here. My conscious awareness allowed me to function in multiple modes: as researcher, therapist and sibling/woman; to distinguish the difference; and to keep separate or cross-over as was situationally appropriate.

Most of the participants were interviewed in my consulting rooms but in one case where it was more convenient for the respondent, the interview took place in her home. This interview was particularly poignant, as the participant was able to point out where she and her brother had played and fought when they were little, where she had been sitting when she received news of his death, etc. However, while the immediacy of the experience was strongly felt in this specific situation, this did not differ significantly from others who were interviewed in my consulting rooms, and all participants were visibly moved by revisiting their loss experience and by recalling memories of their deceased sibling.

The duration of the interviews varied but enough time was afforded to describe the experience in depth, since the goal was to understand the experience of the participants' world through the gathering of rich and adequate descriptive data. Although I allowed for the possibility that some participants may have needed to be interviewed on more than one occasion (depending on the comfort level of the individual), a second interview was found to be unnecessary. All the interviewees felt comfortable to continue even though some were, at times, overcome by deep emotions. The participants also felt that they had sufficient time to describe their experience in full. Interviews generally lasted between one-and-a-half to two-and-a-half hours and were concluded when both researcher and participant felt that they had exhausted all aspects of the experience or, at least, had reached momentary closure.

At the end of the interview, each participant was asked about the experience of revisiting the loss. Initial responses included: "lonely", "as if I said too much", "Good. I like talking about him". Subsequent to the research interview, participants were contacted telephonically regarding the original interviews. The follow-up communication aimed at discovering how the participants had experienced the interview and whether any would require a follow-up consultation or other assistance. Some of the responses at this follow-up included: "It was very painful but I felt like a new person afterwards"; "Felt good. You made me think about a lot of things that I hadn't thought of before". For the one participant, this provided an opportunity for her to clarify certain aspects of her experience as described in the original interview.

With permission from the participants, all interviews were recorded on audio-tape and later transcribed for analysis. A personal thank-you letter (Form C in the Appendix) was posted to each participant.

5.3.4 Protection of Research Participants

Related to some of the above-mentioned aspects is the issue of protection of the participants. As mentioned earlier, as a therapist, I was keenly aware of my responsibility towards the participants and of opening up wounds because of my own interest in the phenomenon rather than as a result of the participant's expressed need to revisit the past. Although all the participants had shown an interest in the phenomenon and were willing to take part in the study, neither I, nor indeed the participants themselves, could know beforehand what would emerge during the discussion. It appeared as the interview progressed that, while the participants had reflected deeply on the loss of their brother or sister, the interview in itself was a journey of discovery. In speaking about their loss experience, participants were creating new meaning of their loss and visiting pain that had not yet been touched.

Van Kaam (1969, in Rahilly, 1993: 58) proposes that one of the requirements of selecting participants for phenomenological analyses is "the ability to sense and to express inner feelings and emotions without shame and inhibition". However, because this cannot be predetermined in a study such as that of sibling loss, ethical considerations for the researcher may arise.

Rosenblatt (1995: 141) contends that this "moral involvement" is not one-sided as he and other researchers carrying out qualitative interviews on loss are often told at the end of the interview by the person being interviewed that he or she has never revealed to others some of the things that were discussed in the interview. Cieurzo and Keitel (1999: 70) alert us to this area of ethical concern. According to the authors, when in-depth interviews focus on painful topics, "unanticipated self-disclosures could be potentially harmful for participants" and, in addition, "when in-depth interviewing is conducted in an informal setting, participants may disclose more than they had planned" (1999: 70). Furthermore, they recommend that the question of "harm versus good" for participants disclosing emotional material needs to be carefully assessed.

A phenomenological psychological study is designed in such a way that the risk of harm is low: there is *full disclosure* of the nature, purpose, and requirements of the research study; individuals *volunteer* to participate in the research as co-researchers; the interviews are open-ended and dialogal, and thus the participant is free to raise those aspects of the experience with which he or she feels comfortable; and *understanding* the experience rather than *interpreting* or analysing the individual is the primary aim, thus the so-called "power differential" (Cieurzo & Keitel, 1999: 70) between researcher and interviewee is minimised. Although the risk is thus low, I did experience the ethical dilemma

associated with conducting a lengthy interview on an intense human experience and then "abandoning" the participant once the data had been collected.

In the present study, there was a possibility that some participants could become distressed by revisiting and reliving intense emotions related to the loss of their brother or sister. As a therapist, I was very aware of the risk that participants may be left with issues that needed clarification or feelings that could not be contained. Thus, possible avenues for grief counselling were identified in case this was needed or if the participant felt the need to explore his or her experience in greater depth. I also offered a follow-up session to all volunteers should they have any issues arising from the interview that they wished to clarify or pursue further.

It is significant that such instances never arose during the research process and all of the interviewees felt that, although the discussion had aroused sad memories, this had been more positive than negative. This response has also been the experience of other research workers investigating sibling loss (Davies, 1999; Fanos, 1996). Indeed, it would appear from the responses of volunteers (both those interviewed and those who participated in the preliminary study), that participants may have benefited in some ways from the opportunity to talk about their experience. Their comments include: "This is the first time that I have said that out loud"; "I think I will visit my brother's grave this year"; "As we talk, I realise that ... I have just realised that now!"; "I don't know how she (i.e. mother) feels about this; maybe I should ask her". Significantly, one of the participants who initially felt that perhaps she had "said too much", subsequently reported that she had gained new insights into her experience.

While the interview itself, by its very nature of empathic and active listening, provided the necessary holding for the containment of painful emotions, I was prepared to reschedule the interview for a later date should the participant feel unable to continue. This never arose and indeed all of the participants, although very moved by the recalling of the details of their loss, were comfortable enough to continue and spoke at great length about their loss experience. The willingness, eagerness and generosity on the part of these individuals to share their stories were extraordinary. For some the silence was finally broken and it was clear from their descriptions that their stories needed to be told.

Another ethical consideration in in-depth interviewing is the question of confidentiality and anonymity. Although this aspect has been touched on in section 5.3.1 ("Research Participants"), it is necessary to emphasise that each participant was assured of confidentiality and anonymity regarding personal information obtained in the interview. In the study a pseudonym, and *not* the actual name of the research participant, has been used and all identifying information has been altered or omitted. An additional safeguard to minimise the risks related to the revelation of personal information was to

review these issues with each participant at the end of the interview and to ask them to sign the Consent Form (Form B) following the disclosure of emotional material. This was done in order to ensure that they still felt comfortable to be included in the study. Significantly, there was no hesitation on the part of any of the volunteers to sign this form.

It is perhaps also noteworthy that although none of the volunteers took up the option of a follow-up interview, two of the three participants were very interested in receiving information on the findings of the study. They were informed that this would be arranged on completion of the study.

5.4 Data Explication and Analysis

Once all the data were obtained and transcribed, the actual application of the descriptive phenomenological analyses began. Polkinghorne (1989:50) refers to the data analysis phase as the "core stage" of a phenomenological study:

"Its purpose is to derive from the collection of protocols, with their naïve descriptions and specific examples of the experience under consideration, a description of the essential features of that experience. The researcher must glean from the examples an accurate description of their contents and the particular structural relationship that coheres the elements into a unified experience".

Rahilly (1993: 60) notes that during this "scientific phase" of data explication, the researcher is required to perform a second level of bracketing, i.e. the eidetic *epoche*, where before commencing with the analysis, the researcher suspends interest in a particular protocol in order to discover the themes emerging throughout all of the protocols of the phenomenon under investigation. This is in the service of acquiring objective scientific knowledge -- a method for controlling bias and prejudice. In the process of reduction, the phenomenological researcher moves from the naïve expressive descriptions obtained, through the eidetic *epoche*, to the structural description, where naïve and diffuse knowledge is made clear through science (Polkinghorne, 1989). It is in the process of formulating explicitly what was experienced implicitly in awareness that the essential structure and constituents of the phenomenon are revealed.

The method of data analysis employed in this study follows the empirical phenomenological method as proposed by Giorgi (1975, 1985, 1989a, 1989b). Giorgi notes, however, that while concrete steps are straightforward, infinite procedural variations are possible (1989a: 72), depending on the research question and the descriptions provided by the participants. The dialectic between approach, method and content must be maintained. Thus, while the initial steps in the analysis of my data follow Giorgi's phenomenological psychological method, some modifications were necessary because of the complexity and multidimensional nature of the phenomenon of sibling loss.

Identical steps were used in the analysis of each interview and all steps took place within the phenomenological reduction. The data analysis applied to the present study followed the method as proposed by Giorgi (1975). The article by Polkinghorne (1989: 41-60) also informed the procedures that were followed in the analysis. Fischer (1974, 1989), De Koning (1979), Colaizzi (1978); Wertz (1983), Fischer and Wertz (1979), Qualls (1998), Bargdill (2000), and von Knorring-Giorgi (1998) have used similar ways of doing research and their influence is evident in the steps that follow.

5.4.1 Sense of the Whole

In the first step, the transcribed interview (i.e. the data) of each participant was read several times and the audio recordings were also closely listened to. Dwelling with the data allowed time for intuitions to develop and to gain a sense of the whole. This was done because the phenomenological psychological method is a holistic approach to inquiry. Giorgi (1985) advises the researcher neither to interrogate the descriptions nor to make explicit the general sense obtained, so as "to achieve maximum openness" (in Von Knorring-Giorgi, 1998: 38). The emphasis in this first step was on getting the self immersed in the experience of the participant; this would enable the researcher to pick up the meanings, and to discriminate natural meaning units (i.e. constituents of the experience). Colaizzi (1978: 59) speaks of acquiring a feeling for the protocols, "a making sense out of them". The reading takes place within the attitude of the phenomenological reduction (bracketing) which is maintained throughout all of the steps of the analysis. The general sense of the whole provides the basis for the following step.

5.4.2 The Emergence of Natural Meaning Units (NMU)

After obtaining a sense of the whole for each description, each protocol was read again and the transcript was divided into units or blocks (referred to as "natural meaning units"); each unit highlighted shifts in the participant's meaning as the researcher perceived these shifts. With each transition in meaning, the whole was differentiated into manageable, coherent units where the partial meanings made up the totality. While reading from the perspective of psychological interest, bracketing continued and care was taken to treat the text as a naïve and non-theoretical presentation of the participant's experience and to seek those divisions that were part of the participant's own experience. Giorgi (1975: 87) states that "the attitude with which this is done is one of maximum openness and the specific aim of the study is not yet taken into account". Polkinghorne (1989: 54) notes that "meaning units are constituents of the experience, not elements, in that they retain their identity as contextual parts of the subject's specific experience". This is further clarified by Giorgi (1985: 14) who states that "a constituent is a part determined in such a way that it is context laden. An element is a part determined in such a way that its meaning is as much as possible independent of context".

In the present study, the narrative sequence and the participants' own original language were retained in this step of the analysis. With regard to the latter, although in the actual analysis of the interviews the original description was rewritten in the third-person singular, it was felt that in order to understand and appreciate the poignancy of this loss experience, the participants' own words were more powerful and effective and were therefore retained for presentation in the thesis.

Naturally occurring meaning units were delineated in preparation for the next step of elucidating the central themes of these accounts.

5.4.3 Central Themes

After delineating meaning units, the researcher states as simply as possible the meaning that dominates each meaning unit (i.e. the central theme). This is the *first transformation* of the data from the participant's to the researcher's words. In other words, the implicit psychological aspect of each meaning unit is expressed in an explicit way in the researcher's own words. Thus, the third step involves the interrogation of each meaning unit in terms of the specific purpose of the study, i.e. its psychological significance and relevance to sibling loss, and the participant's descriptions are rephrased in simple language. Giorgi (1975: 88) notes that if there is nothing explicit about the experience under investigation within a given natural meaning unit, then the researcher leaves a blank although it may still be important to know the meaning of the statement and what function it serves in the total narrative. The relevance of the material was judged by asking, "What does this statement tell me about sibling loss?" and, "How is it lived?" This step involved "a moving away from the original fusion with the participant, taking a step back, reflecting interestedly about where the participant was, how she got there, what it meant to be there, etc." (Wertz, 1983: 205). The processes of reflection and imaginative variation were used to transform the meaning units. Thus there is a transformation of the naïve description to the psychological meaning, i.e. moving from what the subjects say to what they mean (Colaizzi, 1978: 59) in order to articulate and to clarify the *central themes* of the phenomenon, all the while staying within the realm of description and not reducing the naïve/concrete description to an interpretation. The transformation of the participants' expressions into some concept is necessary to give scientific expression to the experience, rooting it in the participant's own words but showing that it more generally fits others; in some sense fits us all. Furthermore, the researcher transforms into the language of a specific discipline - in this case, into the language of psychology. However, one might easily transform the experience of grief into the vocabulary of theology. The strength and flexibility of the phenomenological method is evident.

5.4.4 Situated Constituents

Once the themes were enumerated, the next step was to question each natural meaning unit and its theme in terms of the specific topic of the study. The question, "What is the experience of the loss of a

sibling?", was put to each meaning unit and its accompanying first transformation. This step is a *second transformation* in which an attempt is made to draw out from each unit of the protocol those aspects that are related to the topic under investigation and to re-describe these aspects in the language of psychology (in this case, the psychological terms related to loss). The essence of the situation for each participant was revealed by eliminating repetitive themes and descriptions within the meaning units that were not relevant to the sibling loss experience. The psychological statements reflect the participant's implied meaning, where what is implicitly stated in the original description is made explicit.

5.4.5 Situated Narrative Description (Situated Structure)

During this phase, the psychologically transformed meaning units from each protocol were synthesised and tied together into a descriptive statement of essential, non-redundant psychological meanings. The transformed meaning units were related to each other and to the sense of the whole protocol; the structural description continued to include the concreteness and the specifics of the situation in which the participant's loss took place. The description answers the question : "What is the psychological structure of the loss of a sibling as it presented itself to *this* participant in this *particular situation*?". The description of the Situated Structure developed for the whole protocol was then given. Integration of central themes and mutual implications into a descriptive statement formed the individual situated structure.

During this phase of the explication a departure from Giorgi's method becomes evident. Due to the richness of the material obtained in the interviews, and the complexity of the experience as it unfolded, a Situated Structure in the form of a Situated Narrative became the preferred way of reflecting the concrete, lived experience of each participant. By using the Individual Situated Narrative it became possible to contain all the constituents revelatory of the structure of sibling loss by placing these within the context in which they were embedded. The Individual Situated Narrative synthesised the threads of the story, the nuances of meanings and insights gained from previous steps, and provided an integrated psychological description of each participant's experience (on the idiographic level) of the loss of a brother or sister.

Presenting the Situated Structure in the form of a story facilitated the articulation of essential themes of the experience without breaking the flow of the description and also allowed for temporal and spatial shifts apparent in the description. The particular quality and palpable texture of the experience as a whole for each participant was captured by using a descriptive title for each individual narrative. A narrative was completed for each participant and provided the base from which the General Structural Narrative and the General Psychological Structure of all the descriptions were derived.

5.4.6 The General Structural Narrative

In the present study an additional step was introduced in order to unfold the bigger picture; the comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The question I asked the Individual Situated Narratives and other transcriptions was, "*What sequence of events and what personal meanings are present across cases*".

The reason for including the General Structural Narrative is that the empirical and therapeutic literature has paid scant attention to sibling loss in young adulthood. Part of my task, therefore, was to attempt to capture its emotional resonance, the vividness of the lived experience of sibling loss, and to provide a deeper and broader understanding of what it is like to lose a brother or sister.

The general narrative is presented in ordinary speech, everyday lived-language, and expressed in the second person. This aims to draw the reader into the immediacy of the experience with a view to enhancing awareness of this phenomenon. The narrative communicates the heart and soul of the experience. It captures its emotional resonance. It also depicts all the ambiguities that plague it. However, in terms of the present study and its aims, the narrative requires elucidation. It calls for conceptual clarification. Thus, the narrative is followed by a more formal outline of what is essential, psychologically speaking, to sibling loss. The General Structural Narrative forms the basis for the next phase of the results, i.e. the General Psychological Structure.

5.4.7 The General Psychological Structure

The general structure of sibling loss is the descriptive answer to the question: "What is the experience of sibling loss?". In this step I directly synthesised the transformed meaning units from each of the individual protocols into a general structural description. The eidetic *epoche* (second-level bracketing) was applied to allow for emerging themes while moving from the specific to a more universal validity.

Stated differently, after completing the situated descriptions I developed a single structural description at the general level (i.e. on the nomothetic level) from the protocols. "Free imaginative variation" was used to move beyond the *situated* description provided by each of the three participants to what was typical of the phenomenon, by comparing the constituents of each Situated Narrative with each of the others. At this point, I reflected on those constituents and structures that were common to all three individual situated narratives as well as any ways in which each structure could be considered a variation of the others. The results of these comparisons produced the general psychological structural description of the experience. This general description established the dynamics of the phenomenon that held true invariably across the specific experiences studied. During this step there was an attempt to allow for the emergence of themes that were common to all of the subjects' protocols

(Colaizzi, 1978: 59). *Clusters of themes* were referred back to the original protocols and direct quotes from the protocols were provided not only in order to *validate* the themes as suggested by Colaizzi (1978: 59) but also to allow the participants to take us deeper into their experience of loss (Qualls, 1998).

The general structural description centred on those aspects of the experience included in the protocol that were trans-situational or descriptive of sibling loss in general. Although the description does not claim to be of a universal structure of consciousness, it does claim a *general validity* beyond the specific situation of a particular subject. Wertz (1983: 228) writes that the general psychological structure "involves understanding diverse individual cases as individual instances of something more general and articulating this generality of which they are particular instances". He also describes the general psychological structure as a formulation of "... the necessary and sufficient conditions, constituents, and structural relations which constitute the phenomenon in general, that is, in all instances of the phenomenon under consideration" (Wertz, 1983: 235). The General Psychological Structure formed the basis for the following step.

5.4.8 Structural Synthesis

A structural synthesis of the experience of sibling loss was formulated, representing the essential constituents of the General Structure of losing a brother or sister through death.

5.4.9 Essential Structure

Finally, an essential structure was formulated that encapsulates the essence of the experience of the loss of a brother or sister in young adulthood. While this structure is applicable more specifically to sibling survivors in our Western society, it is possible that it has a more universal validity.

5.5 Concluding Comments

Valle and Halling (1989:6) allege that existential-phenomenological psychology "has become that psychological discipline which seeks to explicate the essence, structure or form of both human existence and human behaviour as revealed through essentially descriptive techniques including disciplined reflection". It is in the explication of the data analysis that the implicit meanings of the experience of sibling loss are made explicit and become scientific knowledge. In order to achieve this, Giorgi's (1975, 1989b) phenomenological approach requires that each step of the analysis takes place within the framework of the phenomenological reduction. The researcher remains faithful to each participant's description of the experience and does not attempt to translate the experience into a theoretical system. The following section will deal with the investigation and results of this study.