



VRIJE
UNIVERSITEIT
BRUSSEL



Walking the grief journey with siblings aged 60 years and older



Deborah Deeter

WALKING THE GRIEF JOURNEY WITH SIBLINGS AGED 60
YEARS AND OLDER

by

Deborah Ellen Deeter

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF PSYCHOLOGY AND
EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Vrije Universiteit Brussel

2017

© Deborah Ellen Deeter, 2017

Abstract

In this dissertation, I explore the grief process in older adults (60 years and older) after they have experienced the death of a sibling. My focus was on the collection of stories from the lived experience of grief.

Previous research has focused on grief in childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, and middle adulthood. Existing research on older aged adults has focused primarily on mental health concerns for the surviving sibling.

I combined 2 sources of narrative inquiry to create the narrative methodology. Narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and dialogical narrative analysis (Frank, 2005, 2010, 2012) provided the parameters for the creation and analysis involved in this inquiry. I share 6 stories in this inquiry: 5 from the participants and 1 from me as the author. I gathered the stories by engaging in and recording conversations. Each conversational partner participated further by reading and reviewing her/his retold story. I included the conversational partners' responses as integral aspects of the told story. I obtained data when coding excerpts from the stories into unique themes and group themes. The unique themes in each story linked into the 5 group themes identified: on grief and death; the family footprint; holding connection; story reflections; and how we met. The discoveries offer

insight into the grief experience of the older sibling. The four unique learnings are grief is influenced by other stories; shock is the response to the death of a sibling; relational time is not chronological time; and siblings create the bridge for the transforming family story. The learnings from the inquiry describe the importance of understanding grief as a process in the primary relationship of older siblings.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	4
Table of Contents	7
List of Tables	14
Prologue	15
Chapter 1: Introduction	19
Questions Guiding the Inquiry	19
Establishing the Sibling System.....	19
Creating a Discrete Number on Age for the Inquiry	21
Attending to Grief as a Story.....	21
The Unfolding Inquiry	23
Social Constructionism	24
Organizing the Inquiry	27
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	31
The Evolution of Grief as a Contemporary Concept.....	33
Descriptions of melancholy, sorrow, mourning, and grief.....	34
There is work in gaining resolution of grief.....	38
Grief exists because of attachment.....	44
Processing a grief experience.....	49

WALKING THE GRIEF JOURNEY	8
The pursuit for meaning during grief work.....	54
Grief in Sibling Relations.....	56
Perinatal.....	58
Childhood and adolescence	59
Adult siblings.....	63
Siblings over the age of 60.....	67
Summary.....	74
Call for research.	75
Chapter 3: The Story Behind the Inquiry Process	77
Orienting the Inquiry	77
Introduction	77
As a clinician-inquirer.	78
Guiding the inquiry.....	80
A qualitative orientation.	81
A mixed field in narrative design.	83
Learnings from narrative inquiry.....	87
Guidance from dialogical narrative analysis.	90
Elements in support of story.....	92
The Landscape of Design.....	95
Inviting the story.....	95

Locating conversational partners.....	97
Conversational partners.....	100
In consideration of informed consent.....	100
Management of the shared conversations.....	104
Unexpected problems.....	105
Steps to story synthesis.....	105
Delimitations.....	109
The value of transferability.....	110
Chapter 4: Bereaved Sibling Stories	112
Inquiry Rationale.....	113
Conversational Partners.....	118
Anne	119
How we met.....	119
The footprint of the family.....	121
The fragile time.....	124
Multiple deaths in Peter's life.....	130
The protection of an older brother; an unheard voice.....	132
On grief and death.....	133
Holding connection.....	134
Story reflections.....	137

WALKING THE GRIEF JOURNEY	10
Anne's reflections.....	142
Cathy	144
How we met.....	144
The footprint of the family.	145
A continued relationship.....	148
On grief and death.	151
The hidden story.	155
Holding connection.	157
Story reflections.....	159
Cathy's reflections.....	160
Edward	161
How we met.....	161
The footprint of the family.	164
Unexpected story.	166
Lost opportunities.....	168
On grief and death.	171
Holding connection.	173
Story reflections.....	175
Edward's reflections.....	177
Marlow	179

How we met.....	179
The footprint of the family.	183
On knowing death and grief.	186
Becoming a sibling orphan.....	189
Tragedy as the catalyst for change.	190
Holding connection.	193
Story reflections.....	196
External dominant meta narrative.	198
Marlow's reflections.....	200
Paul.....	200
How we met.....	200
The footprint of the family.	203
The lost years.....	205
The reconnection.	207
On knowing grief and death.	212
Holding connection.	214
Story reflections.....	215
External meta narratives.	219
Paul's reflection.....	225
Deborah	226

WALKING THE GRIEF JOURNEY	12
On knowing death and grief.....	228
The footprint of the family and the footprint of this inquiry story.	229
Holding connection.....	235
Summary	239
Chapter 5: The Deepening Story.....	245
Overview of the Inquiry	245
Designing the inquiry	247
Conversational partners.....	248
Engaging in the inquiry	250
Process of investigation and story synthesis.	252
Discoveries From the Inquiry.....	253
Grief is influenced by other stories.	253
Shock is the response to the death of a sibling.....	255
Relational time is not chronological time.....	257
Siblings create the bridge for the transforming family story.....	258
Limitations	267
Clinical Implications	268
Future Research.....	271
Epilogue	273
References.....	278

Appendix A: Letter of Invitation	294
Appendix B: Demographic Table of Conversational Partners	297
Appendix C: Informed Consent.....	298
Appendix D: Transcription Services Agreement.....	302
Appendix E: External Literary Voices.....	304

List of Tables

Table B1: Demographic Table of Conversational Partners	297
--	-----