Bereavement, Grief and Juvenile Delinquency: A Participatory Study
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The story of this work is one of the love, support, encouragement, wisdom and experience of many, shared over a long period of time in subtle and in complex ways, and as such it should be considered a collaborative effort; a fabric woven rather than a tale spun.

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lives dedicated to issues of child and adolescent welfare, so it is to them that I am eternally indebted for the values and a commitment to young people that they have lovingly bestowed.

Without the support, patience and understanding of my friends I could not have completed this work. Thanks also for providing life affirming and love filled distractions.

This work is about my students, by my students and for my students. At all stages leading up to this research process, it is their experiences that have taught and guided me, and I hope to have honored them here with my earnest attempt to share what, thanks to them, we learned. I owe a special debt of gratitude to the two young women who were brave enough and generous enough to speak directly of their grief and loss and its impact on their lives. Without their trust and openness there would only be conjecture and second hand news written on these pages. Their willingness to share their truth and the resilience that it documents is humbling, courageous and a testimony to the leadership potential that can be fostered in young people in the juvenile justice system when they are given a voice, a purpose, and an opportunity to work through the pain and chaos of their lives in a safe, supportive and structured environment. Thank you.

I can hear the music playing; it must be time to stop…..
This study is dedicated to the memory of Monte Frierson.

Wishing your story could change the world.
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Based on ten years worth of observation of adolescents involved in the juvenile justice system, this study explored the relationship between bereavement, grief and juvenile delinquency. The nature of the connection between childhood and adolescent bereavement and juvenile delinquency was investigated using a psychologically and sociologically based multidisciplinary framework. After considering the implications of Western bereavement theory, developmental theories of childhood and adolescent bereavement, and Agnew’s (1992) general strain theory as it applies to juvenile delinquency, a dialogic participatory research project was implemented to explore the impact over time of bereavement on the thoughts, emotions and behavior of two young women who are on probation. After a deep exploration of their grief related journeys, the participants were also invited to suggest strategies that might be supportive of other young people experiencing similar loss, and to reflect upon the outcomes of participation in this research process.
INTRODUCTION

Marlena is angry. She has been sent out of the classroom for play fighting with a peer. Marlena is often disciplined for her poor anger control which demonstrates itself in the classroom in her loud outbursts, constant verbal and physical provocation of peers, and her snappy comments to the teachers and counseling staff.

Marlena was recently released from a group home which had been assigned by the court as a condition of her probation. She is now living back with her mother, but within two weeks of returning home, Marlena arrived at school with a broken jaw after being in a fight on the weekend.

I interviewed Marlena during the time that I was working to complete the California State Teaching Credential as part of an assignment. I asked Marlena about her family and about what she remembered of her early childhood and schooling. Marlena’s father died when she was seven years old. Life had been good up until that point. She got on well with her father and she still thought of him often. When questioned about what kind of counseling support she had received after her father’s death, Marlena stated that she had not received any, and that she had just gone back to school and carried on with her life, as did her mother, returning back to work, to both of her jobs.

Rico is depressed and angry. He has been sent to this probation school against his wishes after being charged in several cases that involved the defacing of private and public property; Rico is tagging mad! Rico’s depression is displayed in the classroom by his isolation from his peers, his poor personal hygiene, his lack of engagement in lessons and his antagonistic attitude towards staff. When I interviewed Rico for the same project as the one described above I was surprised to learn that his father had passed away only
seven months earlier, just before he was charged in his first criminal case. An extra challenge that Rico was facing was getting used to his mother’s new partner, who was now living in the house (his parents had separated before his father got sick). Since his father died, as the oldest son in an El Salvadorian household, he felt that he was to take over as the man of the house. Not only was Rico coping with the loss of his father and its impact on his siblings, he was now on probation, too. Rico had not received any kind of grief counseling following the death of his father. Several months later, Rico’s younger brother was also assigned to our school after being convicted of several robberies. He was charged with in his first criminal case just after his brother was detained for the first time.

At Martin’s IEP review, the teaching staff learned about the impact the death of his grandmother had had on his life and those of his siblings. Martin’s grandmother had taken care of Martin and his brothers and sisters since infancy. Martin’s mother was drug addicted and his father was incarcerated. When his grandmother died four years ago, Martin’s world, by his own account, “fell to pieces” and is still in pieces to this day. Martin was in therapy before the death, but after the death he refused to attend any longer. It was at this time that Martin started cutting school and using and selling drugs and it was not long before he was facing several criminal charges as a result.

Michelle, an 11th grader, was sitting beside her boyfriend in his car when someone opened fire on the vehicle. Michelle was not injured, but her boyfriend was killed. Michelle was very aggressive and negative in class, though able to complete her work and perform at grade level. The considerable disruption she caused was usually directed at her peers, especially towards other females if they threatened her connection with the
young males in the class in any way. Therapy was offered to her but she refused to participate; not ready. Michelle got close to Mike, an 11th grader too, and they started dating outside of school. Of all the students I have worked with, Mike was perhaps the student who had experienced more loss than any other. He was witness to a violent murder at the age of seven, and this was the first of many deaths of both friends and family members that he would experience. Mike was emotionally articulate and on days when he was low or looked depressed, he would talk privately about how many funerals he had been to and the hopelessness that he felt in trying to escape the violence of the streets and the neighborhood where he lived.

Despite his softness in one-on-one discussion with school staff, Mike had a tough reputation on the streets. On days when he was rude or disruptive in class it usually turned out that he was in fear for his life, and that he believed someone was trying to find him. Even with this fear, he was able to share his feelings with staff when given an opportunity to discuss why he was behaving poorly in class. Both Michelle and Mike graduated after attending our school. Mike got a job with the Conservation Corps and was doing well. Two months after graduating, on a warm August evening, Mike and his friends were standing on the street corner of a block known for gang activity. The group was shot at from a passing car, and after the gunfire stopped and the vehicle gone, both Mike and his friend lay dead. Michelle had lost her second boyfriend to the violence of the streets. She has since been charged with robbery and assault and is thought to be using drugs on a regular basis.

Thomas’ mother died when he was seven from cancer. His mother was African American, and his father is African, an immigrant from Nigeria. Tomas’ father is
incredibly supportive, stable and loving towards his son. He provides a comfortable and
organized home, and makes sure that his son is well fed and dressed and cared for. He
has high standards and high expectations for Thomas.

In the classroom, Thomas often mentions the loss of his mother, his plans for
tattoos to memorialize her. He also glamorizes her supposed drug use and street
credibility to his peers. It is hard to know what the truth is about his mother. He has
created an image of who he would like her to have been at this stage of his development,
as at the same time, he tries to justify his own involvement with street life. His attention
seeking strategies, especially directed towards female teaching staff, present themselves
as those of a much younger child, much closer to those of a seven year old than a
seventeen year old.

Thomas does not receive therapy and has not received therapy in the past, and as a
teacher it is impossible to investigate in depth his bereavement issues due to lack of
clinical training. Additionally, it is the teacher’s job to focus on his literacy and academic
issues. However, if Thomas’ acting out in the classroom and his acting out in the
community are directly related to his emotional needs, stemming from the loss of his
mother, surely an assessment of his grief related needs and an appropriate therapeutic
intervention could provide him with the emotional support necessary for him to reframe
the loss in such a way that will help facilitate healing and help him move beyond his
anger and his pain, so that he can focus in the classroom on his school work and on
strategies that will help to get him off probation and onto a healthy path.

In the course of working as a teacher with adolescents in the juvenile justice
system in both New Mexico and California over the past ten years, I have become
familiar with the individual stories of over 200 students and how they came to face criminal charges for a wide variety of offences. As these stories illustrate, many students passing through the probation school where I teach have suffered the death of a parent, the death of a guardian (often a grandmother) or the death of a sibling. In addition to the family deaths that these students have experienced are the deaths of peers, lost to the continuing cycle of street violence that takes the lives of many school age adolescents annually, school age adolescents with school age siblings and cousins. Many of the students that I have worked with who have experienced a familial death of this kind claim to have never received any grief counseling or therapy. When adolescents lose friends in street wars there is very little therapeutic or supportive follow up beyond the funeral, but if the wearing of commemorative tee-shirts and name tags are read as a visual indication of a bereaved young person’s ongoing grief, then the message to the rest of us is loud and clear.

These are just a few of the stories, but there are so many more. For young people in the juvenile justice system the incidence of life stressors is no big surprise; divorce, single parenting, physical and sexual abuse, illiteracy, invitro drug or alcohol exposure and so on. But over and over again, as I get to know my students better, unsupported childhood and adolescent bereavement seems to be a common phenomenon, and yet one for which there is little research data. In the past fifteen years, there has been a significant growth in research on how children and adolescents grieve, but if my informal observations over the past ten years do in fact represent a wider phenomenon for young people involved in the juvenile justice system, then it seems that those who could most benefit from the research are not the beneficiaries of it.
Driven by the stories that I have heard and the lives that I have been witness to, I have become increasingly sensitive to the impact of unsupported bereavement after the death of a close family member or peer in relation to juvenile delinquency. It seems for many of my students who have experienced such a loss that the death, or the series of deaths, becomes their point of departure; the time when they stopped caring about consequences and started externalizing their grief in harmful, destructive and criminal ways.

It is the goal of this study to explore issues pertaining to grief following childhood or adolescent bereavement and to come to an understanding about what kind of evidence exists to suggest there might be a causative relationship between bereavement and subsequent juvenile delinquency. Dialogic participatory research methods are used to explore the effects that bereavement and grief have had over time on the thinking, emotions and behavior of two young women currently on probation and attending the Principals Center Collaborative High School in San Francisco, CA. These two young women, in the role of research assistants, developed research questions in collaboration with the researcher, and spoke in their own voices about their experiences of grief and bereavement. These young women are also part of a discussion about what kinds of support might be helpful to children and young people experiencing similar losses.

* Note: student names have been changed for the purposes of protecting confidentiality

**Statement of Problem**

Is there a relationship between childhood and adolescent bereavement, grief and juvenile delinquency? For the purposes of this study, bereavement refers to the death of a
close relative or friend. Grief is the feeling of great sadness that follows a death.
Childhood is the time between infancy and adolescence, from age two to ten or eleven.
Adolescence is the time of developmental transition from childhood to adulthood. David E. Balk (1995), a leading voice in research on adolescent bereavement, states that adolescence is commonly considered to comprise three age periods. Early adolescence spans the years between the ages of ten and fourteen. Middle adolescence continues from fifteen to seventeen and late adolescence begins at eighteen and finishes at twenty two.
When a researcher has stated a definite period of adolescence for the purposes of his or her study that differs from those stated by Balk, they are reported accordingly. Juvenile delinquency refers to “violations of the criminal law by minors” (Agnew, 2005, p.4) and in California a minor is anyone under the age of 18.

Purpose Statement

This purpose of this study is to consider the impact that childhood and adolescent bereavement and grief experiences have had on young people in the juvenile justice system, drawing upon previous research from the fields of both psychology and sociology as they relate to child and adolescent development and Western theories of bereavement, together with models of juvenile delinquency and with special reference to Roberts Agnew’s General Strain Theory (1992). Dialogic participatory research methods are used to investigate the relationship between bereavement, grief, and juvenile delinquency as two young women in the juvenile justice system explore the effects that bereavement and grief have had over time on their thinking, emotions and behavior, as well as the support needs of young people experiencing similar losses.
Research Questions

This study utilized a dialogic participatory research process which inquired into the relationship between childhood and adolescent bereavement and juvenile delinquency by asking questions based on the following:

1. What does the word ‘grief’ mean to the participants?
2. What was the nature of the loss experienced by the participant and what was its impact at the time when it occurred in relation to thoughts, emotions and feelings, and behavior?
3. How have thoughts, emotions and feelings, and behavior around the grief and loss changed over time?
4. What are present day thoughts, emotions and feelings, and behavior connected to the grief and loss?
5. Do participants know other children or young people who have gone through similar loss and how do they believe that it has impacted them? What kinds of support do the participants believe might help other young people experiencing losses similar to their own?
6. Participants provided some biographical data.

Based on a comparative analysis of the findings generated by these questions, a second set of questions was developed in an attempt to investigate in more depth the themes produced by the first and to reflect upon the research process and outcomes for the participants, in order to assess the value of this particular methodology within this particular research context. Details of the second set of questions can be found on page 59.
Theoretical Rationale

This study explores issues that are both psychological (human response to grief and bereavement) and sociological (juvenile delinquency) in nature. As a result, the theoretical constructs upon which the research is predicated are various, and each is clarified in depth in the literature review. These theories fall into four basic categories:

1. Western theories of bereavement: beginning with the work of Freud, and progressing through stage based, task based and phase based theories that have evolved over the past forty years.

2. Developmental models of adolescent bereavement: a life crisis model of adolescent adaptation to death and bereavement is considered, followed by a Sociocultural model of psychological development.

3. Robert Agnew’s General Strain Theory (1992), which describes the types of strain that leads to delinquency and the conditions under which strain is most likely to lead to delinquency.

4. Paulo Freire’s theories of institutionalized oppression challenge the traditional hierarchical relationship that exists between teacher and student in a banking model paradigm of education. Dialogic participatory research provides a methodological framework for joint inquiry that seeks to empower all participants in the research process, by raising critical consciousness through a process of collaborative questioning, reflection, and action.
Assumptions

In approaching this research topic several assumptions have been made:

1. A belief that delinquency can be an external response to an internalized narrative based on experience and circumstance.

2. A belief that young people can respond positively to experiences of grief and bereavement and that healing from such a loss is a process that takes time and manifests differently for different people.

3. A belief that bereavement can be considered a legitimate source of strain on a person.

4. A belief that young people in the juvenile justice system who have experienced grief and bereavement are the best source of data on how their thoughts and emotions about the loss have impacted and continue to impact their behavior.

5. A belief that young people in the juvenile justice system who have experienced grief and bereavement have a valuable contribution to make in developing support strategies and programming for other young people experiencing similar losses and behavioral problems.

Background and Need

As a Youth Treatment and Education Center teacher at the Principals’ Center Collaborative in San Francisco, CA, I work closely with approximately one hundred 15-18 year olds per year who have been court ordered to attend this probation high school based on their status as juvenile offenders. It is my intention as the researcher to establish a better understanding of issues relating to childhood and adolescent bereavement and
juvenile delinquency, to give the young people attending the school the opportunity to
voice their experiences in a safe and supportive environment using dialogic participatory
research methods. It is hoped that by so doing, the research assistants, participating
students, will experience increased awareness of their own psychological and behavioral
relationships in the grieving process, and that this increased awareness or consciousness
will lead to a feeling of increased power and control in managing their responses to it. A
secondary goal of this research is to consult with the research assistants on the topic of
support that might be helpful for young people experiencing grief and bereavement, with
a view to therapeutic program design and implementation.
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In considering the relationship between adolescent bereavement and juvenile delinquency, it is necessary to consider both psychological and sociological sources and to bridge the gap between the two disciplines by acknowledging the intersections and associations generated when viewing the research problem through multiple lenses.

This review of literature begins with a survey of Western bereavement theory by considering the contributions of Freud, and progressing through the stage based theories, task based and the phase based theories that have emerged over the past forty years. Since the aforementioned research is based predominantly on work with adults, research into the developmental aspects of bereavement addresses the implications of age and maturity on the grieving process through a variety of behavioral models. While multiple theories pertaining to causality in juvenile delinquency exist, it is in the work of Robert Agnew and his General Strain Theory, GST (1992) that the greatest crossover can be found between the sociological inquiry into juvenile delinquency and the psychological investigations into grief and bereavement that have already been noted. Since a dialogic participatory research method has been selected as the vehicle with which to approach the particular research problem and questions stated earlier, it is necessary to briefly consider the pedagogy of Paulo Freire. The philosophical underpinnings of this method have evolved from his significant contribution to the field of literacy development and critical consciousness.
Review of Previous Research

*Western Bereavement Theory*

In their review of Western bereavement theory, Rothaupt and Becker (2007) explain that much is currently under review in relation to theories of bereavement, which have historically been rooted in different disciplines that have mostly had psychoanalytic or stress and coping theoretical orientations. They refer to the work of Stroebe et al. (1993) in their claim that “old paradigms of regarding grief and loss are changing.” They write:

Beliefs regarding stages of grief, children’s ability to mourn, the need to do grief work and emotionally let go of the deceased, and what comprises complicated grief are examples of theoretical constructs that current grief researchers are challenging (Rando, 1985; Silverman & Klauss, 1996).

Rothaupt and Becker begin their review by discussing the theories proposed by Freud. From Freud’s point of view, grief and mourning required a working through of the loss of a loved one with emotional detachment and the letting go of hopes for a future relationship with the loved one representing the end point of the grief work process. “Grief work is described as the process of acknowledging the permanent absence of the person who died while attending to feelings and memories of the deceased while not suppressing or isolating them (Fraley & Shaver, 1999)” (p. 7).

Freud considered ongoing emotional relationships with the deceased as pathological, despite evidence to suggest that in his own response to his daughter’s death he maintained an emotional connection as a way of ensuring the continuance of the love that he was not willing to surrender. Subsequent psychoanalytical theories perpetuated
the idea that complete severance of bonds with the deceased indicated the healthy conclusion of the grieving process.

At the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s new theories on grief and mourning emerged that focused on the different stages of processing considered integral to the completion of grief work by the bereaved. According to Routhaupt and Becker (2007), theories proposed by Kübler-Ross (1969) and Bowlby and Parkes (1970) were the most prominent of these stage theories. Kübler-Ross identified the linear pattern of denial, bargaining, anger, despair, and acceptance, as the normative stages of grieving. This was based on her work with dying patients, rather than with mourning survivors. Bowlby and Parkes (1961, 1980) identified a process of grieving that cycled through numbness, searching and yearning for the bereaved, depression and reorganization, as the various stages leading to recovery from the loss. “Bowlby (1961, 1980) applied his theory of infant attachment to grief and loss. He spoke of the need to reorganize representations of the deceased that allow the bereaved to return to normal activities and reengage in social relationships” (Rothaupt & Becker, 2007, p.7). Contemporary work on child and adolescent bereavement draws heavily on the work of Bowlby in particular, and he is referred to again in this research project, as recent models proposed to describe patterns of adolescent grief are explored.

Following from their discussions of the contributions of Freud, Kübler-Ross, and Bowlby and Parkes, Routhaupt and Becker introduce the work of Worden (1982, 1991, 1996, 2002), who prefers a task model to a stage model of bereavement, citing his concern that novice clinicians and bereaved families take the names of the stages too literally. By 1996 he had refined his theory of task based mourning to include (a) working
through the pain of grief, (b) adjusting to the loss, and (c) finally “to relocate the dead person within one’s life and find ways to memorialize the person” (Worden, 1996, p. 15). This final stage represented a shift in the field, according to Rothaupt and Becker, because it moved away from a completely linear model of what was considered successful resolution of grief. They quote Worden to illustrate this point, who stated, “the use of a task model is superior to a stage phase model because of its dynamic fluidity and because it is a useful model for the clinician who may be intervening with bereaved individuals and families” (Worden, 1996, p.12).

Rothaupt and Becker (2007) state that until the 1980s it was assumed that the bereaved would only feel resolved and ready to move on with life once these tasks were completed, “letting go of emotional ties with the deceased.” “If a person still felt a great deal of longing and distress years later, he or she would be considered to have complicated or unresolved grief and be pathologized by the mental health community” (p. 8).

In considering a causative relationship between adolescent bereavement and juvenile delinquency, there appears to be an opening for further exploration around the issue of unresolved grief. In more recent commentary there has been a movement away from ideas that impose expectations of fixed stages of grieving or that “pathologize individuals’ unique experience with grief” (p.8).

Rothaupt and Becker also consider Walsh and McGoldrick’s (2004) model which sought not to impose fixed expectations of the stages of grief. The four major adaptational tasks for grieving families that they propose are: (a) shared acknowledgement of the reality of death, (b) shared experience of the loss, (c)
reorganization of the family system, and (d) reinvestment in other relationships and life pursuits. They felt that an outcome of adaptation to the loss and bereavement in the family could be the strengthening of the family as a functional unit. “This systemic model acknowledged the relational aspects of mourning. Open communication, sharing the grief, family involvement with the funeral and mourning rituals, and expressions of feeling were encouraged” (p.8). Rothaupt and Becker draw attention to the differences between the models of Worden and Walsh and McGoldrick with regard to restructuring or regaining a sense of equilibrium,

For equilibrium to be regained, Worden (1991) stated that mourning was necessary and the tasks of mourning needed to be completed. Walsh and McGoldrick stated that the equilibrium was regained by adapting to the role changes, being flexible by not trying to hold on to old patterns that didn’t work anymore and, on the opposite extreme, not making life changes that additionally disrupted the family (such as a move). Here the goal was to maintain a sense of family cohesion while remaining flexible enough to adapt to the family loss.” (p.8)

For young people who have lives with multiple additional disruptions and stressors, it appears logical that the process of task completion will be interrupted and unfinished, and a consideration of factors relevant to child and adolescent bereavement now becomes more salient. However, before shifting the focus of this review in that direction, there are still several points that call for consideration from Rothaupt and Becker’s research.
Understanding the continuing bonds that persist between the bereaved and the deceased has become a key issue in the most recent studies of bereavement processes. Attachment theory has been applied to the grieving process by Field, Gao, and Paderna (2005). They apply their theory to continuing bonds as away of conceptualizing effective and ineffective coping. “The maintenance of continuing bonds as adaptive coping ‘depends on whether or not it deviates from the normative course of continuing bond expressions’” (p. 205). For example, hallucinations of the deceased are considered to be normal immediately following the death, but become abnormal if they continue for an extended period of time. Rothaupt and Becker refer to the authors’ recognition of the influence that both cultural and religious beliefs have on definitions of what normative patterns of maintaining bonds are and how the bonds are maintained.

Further research referred to by Rothaupt and Becker challenges the notion that bereaved people must mourn in prescribed ways in order to adapt to living without the deceased, quoting the recent emergence of growth models that have replaced the more prescriptive models discussed earlier. They contrast the work of Stroebe, Stroebe, Schut, Zech and van den Bout (2002), which concluded that there was little evidence to support the belief that emotional disclosure facilitated psychological adjustment after a loss, with that of Feifel (1977) who asserted that failure to lament the death of a loved one soon after the death would lead to more discordant lamentation later, stating that “significant increases in physical and emotional illness among bereaved persons have already been linked to a negligent mourning” (p. 9).

Several models are offered that move towards a more growth-oriented paradigm of bereavement, starting with the work of Nerken (1993). He worked with a concept of
identity reflected in the core self. The core self includes: talents, idea, opinions and dreams and is where feelings reside and emotions are expressed, mediated by the reflective side of self. Following a loss, he postulated, the reflective side of the self suffers and feels the absence of self. However, the core self remains whole, and with reflection upon itself, can acknowledge that it still exists as a whole, in spite of the loss. Schaefer and Moos (2003) redefine bereavement as a process with many positive possible outcomes, since it can act as a catalyst for increased coping skills and personal growth:

The ultimate outcomes reflected enhanced personal resources, such as increased self-esteem and self-efficacy, greater compassion and appreciation of life, and increased bereavement altruism. The authors explained that empirical research in the area of bereavement had previously focused primarily on the pathology and how the crisis led to impaired functioning. (Rothaupt & Becker, 2007, p. 9)

Marrone (1999) proposed four phases of bereavement. Cognitive restructuring was involved in the assimilation of the reality of the loss. Emotional expression was the manifestation of the feelings of pain and loss. Psychological reintegration involved the development of new strategies for coping without the deceased, and finally, psychospiritual transformation was the deeply significant “growth-oriented, spiritual or existential transformation that fundamentally changes our central assumptions, beliefs, and attitudes about life, death, love, compassion or God” (p.9).

Other useful perspectives that have implications for research design offered by Rothaupt and Becker, focus on gender differences in bereavement. Much of the research that they have referred to presents conclusions that “fall along the socially acceptable gender role continuum” (p.10). Women have been found to express their feelings of grief
and loss more readily than men. Cook (1998) concluded that men are in a double-bind and at a disadvantage in their grieving when considered against women since they are expected to be strong and not too demonstrative in their expressions of feelings, but then are judged critically when they conceal.

The work of Crose, Nicholas, Gobble and Frank (1992) raises concerns about women’s normal grief and mourning responses becoming pathologized. Knudsen-Martin (1994) expressed concern about the potential compromising of female experience and the development of healthy family functioning if models of human development stressed autonomy and objectivity, at the expense of connection and emotional expressiveness. In all the literature that has been considered in preparation for this literature review none has referred to differences in the way adolescent males might grieve in comparison to adolescent females.

Rothaupt and Becker conclude that the theoretical foundations of such bereavement theories are in a state of flux. What has been pathologized in the past as unresolved grief due to a continuing emotional bond with the deceased is being challenged by “new methodologies (that are) providing in-depth exploration into the art and transformation of bereavement” (p.13). However, for the diagnostic stage of this research undertaking, further consideration of the characteristics of bereavement and delinquency that are particular to adolescents is required.

*Childhood and Adolescent Bereavement*

Baulk is a leading figure in the field of adolescent death and bereavement, and there is plentiful relevant material for the purposes of this study in his book co-edited with Corr (1996) *Handbook of Adolescent Death and Bereavement*. He offers ways to
understand adolescence and to illustrate the developmental tasks which confront
adolescents in conjunction with coping with unanticipated and traumatic life events, such
as death and bereavement. Balk and Corr (1996) base their work on the assumption that
during adolescence in the post-industrialized world, “the death of one’s parent, sibling,
friend, or oneself is not a normative event” (p.5), but qualifies as an example of
unanticipated life crises. Life crises of this nature present “dangerous opportunities” (p.
5) that can result in growth and maturity if they are responded to well: however,

…they presage harm and maldevelopment if responded to poorly. Consequently,
the occurrence of a traumatic, unanticipated life event in the life of an adolescent
– such as the death of that individual’s mother or father - might threaten healthy
resolution of his or her development. (p. 6)

Balk and Corr divide adolescence into three subperiods in order to consider the
developmental tasks that might be disrupted or might affect a response to an
unanticipated life event such as bereavement. They also note that there are many
differences between adolescents so that these subperiods are useful in describing the
staging of developmental tasks, but also that individual differences are to be expected due
to the nature of adolescence. They refer to the work of Blos (1941, 1979) who, in his
psychodynamic interpretation of adolescence, maintains that early adolescents are faced
with the following tasks:
Decreased identification with parents, increased identification with peers, fascination with hero figures and interest in opposite-sex peers. “These early adolescent phenomena herald the efforts to form new ego ideals, separate from dependency on parents, gain more focused heterosexual relations, and develop a mature identity”. (Balk, 1995 p. 18)

For Blos, failure to cope with and surmount obstacles unique to early adolescence leads to ongoing difficulties with maturity. Stages identified by Blos (1979) for resolution during middle adolescence include the development of autonomy from parents and the forging of a “distinctive, mature identity” (Corr & Balk, 1996, p. 7), which offers another opportunity to develop “greater ego resourcefulness by considerably reorganizing the values internalized from their parents” (p. 7). This reorganization creates an opportunity for a second individuation process.

For Blos, late adolescence is the time when a young person achieves stable character formation by addressing four specific challenges of the second individuation process, dealing with traumatic life events, historical continuity, and sexual identity. According to Corr and Balk the achievement of closure in the second individuation process is critical. Coping with traumatic life events could provide adolescents with the means to achieve personal strength. As Corr and Balk note, death and bereavement would certainly count as traumatic life events. Historical continuity involves accepting one’s past, resulting in “freeing oneself for growth and maturity” (p. 7).

Balk and Corr note that scholars in this field, especially those interested in psychological disturbances, have found that the division of adolescence into distinct
developmental periods has been useful, and consider poor responses to these psychological tasks to be signs of psychological problems during adolescence. They use these subdivisions as a framework for their own work on death related developmental tasks.

The researchers use three case studies to explore how early, middle and late adolescents face different challenges in coping with grief after bereavement. They discuss the case of a thirteen year old girl whose brother died in an accident. Her feelings changed over time, ranging from those of shock, emptiness and numbness. She stopped studying temporarily, but by the age of fourteen a sense of purposefulness had reentered her life, and she felt able to focus on her goal of getting to college. For early adolescents, early or late maturation can interfere with bereavement since a correlation has been found between early maturing girls and delinquent behavior (Calhoun, Jurgens, & Chen, 1993; Rhodes & Fischer, 1993).

By the time adolescents reach the middle stage of their development, the process of maturation moves on to matters of cognition. Changes occur in social understanding and the work of Elkind (1967, 1979) is used to extend that of Piaget (1929) and notions of egocentrism. Balk and Corr claim that the development of formal operations or “the capacity for abstract, conceptual thinking provides the means to overcome the obstacles of egocentrism by allowing adolescents to reflect on their own and others’ experiences” (p.10). This capacity is over-ridden in early adolescence by a preoccupation with physical appearance. This developing sophistication which allows for “complex, abstract, symbolic representations of reality” (p.10) tends not be constant since middle-adolescents frequently make swift switches from “short-term interest in what the other
person is saying to a long-term preoccupation with turning the focus of conversation on themselves” (p.11).

Balk and Corr consider the experience of a middle adolescent whose brother died from illness. She was immediately aware of how adults and peers acted anxiously around her after the death. She learned that some “real friends” were there to support her and were comfortable talking about her brother. She also found that she had much greater empathy for others and now was able to support them through painful experiences. Balk and Corr attribute this growth to a significant “transformation in social consciousness” (p.11) that seemingly happens in the lives of bereaved adolescents, a change that facilitates the reaching out to and understanding of the experiences of others. This empathetic evolution can bring about accelerated maturation, a process which is unique to adolescents who have experienced such loss.

Late adolescents tend to switch their socially focused concerns to those of careers, establishing intimate relationships and autonomy away from family, and in particular, parents. Balk and Corr describe the differences between the process of separation from parents between males and females, suggesting that females have greater access to reserves of internalized personal relationships than do males, which makes them less emotionally dependant on their parents. Males can struggle more with the emotional detachment. They consider the case of a young woman whose father died of leukemia in her freshman year. This normal process of achieving separation from her father became significantly complex due to her grief over his death and her ongoing attachment to him. Balk and Corr express the need for further research into the interaction between the need for separation from the parents and the complications of grief.
Balk and Corr appear to caution against “storm and stress” theories of adolescence by referring to Weiner’s (1985) conclusion that such theories are based on psychoanalytic formulations that wrongly make generalizations about adolescents at large, since they are based on work with clinical populations. The work of Coleman (1978) is referenced, who offers a strategy that young people use to manage multiple stressors. His “focal theory” maintains that adolescents cope by dealing with the resolution of one crisis at a time. He believed that problems arise for adolescents when they are unable to isolate the stressors and focus their attention singly, attempting to deal with everything all at once, such as early maturation, divorce and changing schools. Balk and Corr reiterate the point that bereavement can be an opportunity for growth and resiliency, “Rather than producing insurmountable obstacles to development, the trauma of bereavement often promotes growth” (p.14), and caution against making stereotypical assumptions about an entire generation.

In his later solo work, Balk (1996) discusses alternate models for understanding adolescent bereavement. In this work, again, he asserts that, “most adolescents emerge from their bereavement more emotionally and interpersonally mature than unaffected peers of their own age” (p.369). He does admit however that for some the outcomes are troubled. He introduces the work of Hogan and DeSantis (1992) who found that ongoing, intense grief reactions were associated with adolescents whose self-concepts were weak. Balk asserts that these adolescents brought a predisposition of vulnerability to the crisis, and that bereavement alone was unlikely to have caused such a reaction. He supports this assertion by referencing the work of Josephs (1981) who concluded that “personality disturbances do not emerge because of bereavement but rather are reinforced when a
parent dies during a person’s adolescence. Personality forged the bereavement experience.” (Balk, 1996, p.369) In his later work, Balk looks again at developmental studies referencing further research that identifies linkage between developmental markers and issues that bereaved adolescents face. Fleming and Adolph (1986) claim that bereavement requires adolescents to cope behaviorally, cognitively and affectively with the five core maturational issues of: (a) predictability of events, (b) master/control, (c) belonging, (d) fairness/justice and (e) self-image. The content of these responses is dependant upon the young person’s maturational development. Balk condenses Fleming and Adolph’s work on cognitive reactions to the core issue of belonging when grieving a family member’s death:

Bereaved early adolescents are likely to think that only their peers will understand them. Peer rejection is a possibility, however. While belonging to a group enhances confidence in middle adolescents, this perception is usually fleeting, and for bereaved adolescents the more common belief is of not belonging. For late adolescents belonging in another person’s life is seen as giving a purpose to life and providing meaning that has been missing since the loved one’s death. Diminished meaning occurs if the other person has to be used to attain a purpose for living. (p.371)

The work of Balmer (1992) examined several aspects associated with adolescents grieving a sibling’s death. She found that older adolescents experienced more psychological distress and younger bereaved adolescents reported more physiological distress. Based on her later study with Fleming (Fleming & Balmer, 1996) she held that younger grievers were more self-conscious about appearing different from their peers and
were, therefore, less likely to talk to their peers about their feelings. Psychosomatic symptoms were more likely to be experienced by this younger group. Fleming and Balmer (1996) also “suggested that maturity eliminates denial as an ongoing coping strategy for late adolescents; lack of denial produces more psychological distress than is reported for younger adolescents” (Balk, 1996, p. 372). It was found that lower self esteem resulted in higher depressive symptoms for older adolescents. Balk’s own research suggests that older adolescents were more angry about their sibling’s death than younger adolescents, especially if the sibling had been younger than them (Balk 1981, 1983).

A second model that is offered in Balk’s 1996 piece is one that sees bereavement as a life crisis. This is where the idea of bereavement seen as the presentation of a dangerous opportunity comes from. Moos and Schaefer (1986) identify six factors associated with outcomes for coping with a life crisis, these being: (a) background and personal factors, (b) event related factors, (c) physical and social environmental factors, (d) cognitive appraisal, (e) adaptive tasks, and (f) coping skills.

Background considers gender, race, belief systems, experience, physical and environmental factors, self-concept and intelligence. Event related factors are situation specific and could, for example, include anticipation of the death or responsibility for the death, and Balk states that an unexpected death often has worse outcomes than an expected death. Physical and environmental factors might include type of family relationships, availability of mental health professionals, friendships, and a supportive school environment.
How an individual responds to these factors determines his or her adaptive tasks or coping skills. Moos and Schaefer (1986) identify the adaptive tasks that human beings must face when in crisis:

1. to establish the meaning of the event and to comprehend its personal significance;
2. to confront reality and respond to the situational requirements of the event;
3. to sustain interpersonal relationships;
4. to maintain emotional balance; and
5. to preserve a satisfactory self-image and maintain a sense of self-efficacy

(Balk, 1996, p.373)

In much of the research presented as seminal to the Life Crisis Model, self-concept appears consistently as a determiner of bereavement outcomes but the loss itself can perpetuate a loss in self-confidence and “threaten a person’s self-image”, thus exacerbating negative outcomes. “The intensity and duration of grief can lead to doubts that a sense of balance will ever return” (p. 374). Balk concludes in this section that, “it may be that adolescents struggling with feelings of inadequacy and lacking confidence in themselves find that coping with grief poses an enduring challenge” (p. 377).

The third model offered in Balk’s discussion of models for understanding adolescent coping with bereavement is a Sociocultural Model of Psychological Development. This is linked later in this paper to Agnew’s work on Strain Theory (1992).
The Sociocultural Model emerged from the research led by Alexander Leighton in the 1940s and 1950s. Leighton and his team carried out research on the relationship between the sociocultural environment and the emergence of psychiatric disorders. Balk lauds the team’s work, the findings of which were that “socially unstable and disorganized communities produce two systemic problems, these being:

1. They frustrate individuals from achieving ten essential human sentiments that all human beings strive to attain and that are the mark of a healthy human personality

2. They contribute to the development of mental illness” (Balk, 1996, p. 378)

Leighton asserted that one’s personality changes throughout the duration of life, as one travels along “the Life Arc.” (p. 378) He perceived human personality holistically. “The temporal thickness of any life crisis involves previous experiences, the experience of the life crisis, (the cross-section of the moment), and the aftermath of the event.” (p. 379)

Leighton identified ten “essential human sentiments” that are fundamental objectives that all human beings strive for that operate in a continual and dynamic flux. These sentiments are:

1. to possess physical security

2. to achieve sexual satisfaction

3. to express hostility

4. to express love

5. to secure love

6. to secure recognition

7. to express creativity

8. to be oriented in terms of one’s place in society
9. to secure and maintain membership in a human group, and
10. to belong to a moral order

According to Balk, Leighton (1959) recognized that bereavement was a typical experience obstructing achievement of the sentiments and that a disturbed psychical condition exacerbates the crisis resolution. Balk links this to Josephs’ (1981) conclusions that “distressed personalities forge bereavement experiences apparently lacking any resolution,” (Balk, 2001, p. 380) and refers also to the work of Hogan and DeSantis (1996) who concluded that there was an association between “dysfunctional patterns of self-concept and chronic acute grief reactions” (p.380).

Balk ties this work specifically to the types of unexpected deaths that many of the students with whom I work have experienced:

Consider the cross-section of the moment formed by the death of a friend in a drive-by shooting. An adolescent whose friend dies from a drive-by shooting has considerable opportunity to express hostility, but, I suspect finds nearly all of the other human sentiments blocked. A sense of physical security is gone. Securing love from the dead friend is gone, although expressing love for the dead friend is acutely present. The sense of belonging to a moral order is shattered. Severe questions replace a sense of being oriented in terms of one’s place in society. The kind of recognition attending the aftermath of the shooting is something the bereaved adolescents would prefer had passed them by. (p. 381)

Balk’s deft application of Leighton’s essential human sentiments to an unexpected and violent death typical of those experienced by urban youth on probation elegantly
links us to the final piece of the puzzle for this research project. There is a gap to be bridged between developmental theories of adolescent bereavement: Life Crisis theories, the Sociocultural Model of Psychological Development, and theories of deviance, especially the types of deviance that manifest in juvenile delinquency.

**General Strain Theory and Juvenile Delinquency**

Strain Theory, Social Learning Theory, Control Theory, and Labeling Theory are all well developed strands of thought within the field of sociological inquiry into juvenile delinquency and criminology. Yet it is Agnew’s General Strain Theory (GST) (1985) summarized in his overview of juvenile delinquency (2005) that corresponds most closely to the hypothesis proposed in this paper, that adolescent bereavement, if considered a form of strain, might contribute to delinquent behavior. According to strain theorists:

When juveniles experience strain or stress they become upset, and they sometimes engage in delinquency to reduce or escape from the strain they are experiencing. For example, they may engage in violence to end harassment from peers; they may steal to reduce their money problems; or they may run away from home to escape abusive parents. They may also perform delinquent acts to seek revenge against those who have “wronged” them. And they may engage in illicit drug use to feel better. (p.110)

Agnew states that while there are variations in the versions of strain theory that have been put forward over the past seventy years, each version attempts to do two things: “Describe the major types of strain that lead to delinquency and describe the conditions under which strain is most likely to lead to delinquency” (p.110).
Agnew emphasizes the point that strain theorists do not assume that strain necessarily leads to delinquency, but that they recognize a set of “conditioning variables” that influence the likelihood of a delinquent outcome. Agnew (2005) offers a generic overview of strain theory that draws on the central tenets common to all strain theories, but draws most heavily on his own general strain theory (1992).

Agnew describes researchers’ attempts to measure juvenile strain by presenting them with lists of strain inducing events in order to identify the stressful experiences that they have encountered. Agnew states that items typical on such lists include, “things like parents divorcing, parents arguing or fighting, a close friend dying or becoming seriously ill” (p.110). Based on this statement in Agnew’s review, the research link becomes evident in the research questions proposed in this paper in considering the premise that childhood and adolescent bereavement are a legitimate source of strain, and that juvenile delinquency might be a consequence.

Agnew states that all strain theorists “argue that a major type of strain is the failure to achieve your goals” and that for teenagers these goals include, “money, status/respect, thrills/excitement, and autonomy from adults” (2005, p. 111). Here we find a connection with Baulk’s work on adolescent development and the challenges and developmental complications faced by a teen trying to establish autonomy from adults at a time that coincides with the loss of a parent or close grandparent.

The second major category of strain described by strain theorists involves the “loss of positive stimuli/presentation of negative stimuli” (p.114). This category of strain differs from the first in that it involves the loss of something that was valued, or some
kind of negative treatment rather than the “nonevent” typical in the first category, generated by unmet expectation.

Agnew links juvenile delinquency to the following types of negative treatment (2001a, 2001b):

1. Parental rejection

2. Parental supervision and discipline that is very strict, erratic, excessive given the infraction, and/or harsh (use of humiliation, insults, threats, screaming, and/or physical punishments)

3. Child abuse and neglect.

4. Negative school experiences.

5. Criminal victimization.

6. Homelessness.

7. Experiences with prejudice and discrimination based on ascribed characteristics like gender and race/ethnicity

Understandably, as Agnew states:

Strainful events and conditions make juveniles feel bad – angry, frustrated, depressed, anxious, and the like. These negative feelings, in turn, create pressure for corrective action. That is, juveniles want to do something to alleviate their bad feelings. And delinquency is one possible response. The emotions of anger and frustration are said to be especially conducive to a delinquent response, since they energize the individual for action, create a desire for revenge, and lower inhibitions.(115)
Agnew (1992) stresses that there is more than one response option available to adolescents who are experiencing strain, and that only some of them involve delinquency. He identifies three coping strategies that may result in positive rather than negative outcomes. The first of these coping mechanisms is cognitive in nature. By changing the emphasis placed on a desired goal or outcome a young person might be able to reframe the circumstances that induced strain. For example, by saying, “it’s not that bad”, or “it’s not that important” a young person who is stressed out by lack of money might be able to reduce feelings of anger towards others, even if it doesn’t make them feel less depressed.

A second coping strategy suggested by Agnew that does not result in delinquency, is behavioral coping. For example, getting a job as a way to earn money, avoiding peers who harass them or negotiating with teachers who frustrate them are more positive behavioral responses to strain. Thirdly, Agnew suggests that adolescents may engage in emotional coping by using strategies such as exercise, deep breathing, or by using other relaxation techniques.

The logical question to follow this discussion of alternatives to delinquency for adolescents experiencing strain is why some juveniles are more likely to choose or resort to delinquent coping strategies in response to strain than others. Agnew (2005) posits that, “strain is more likely to lead to delinquency when it involves areas of life that the individual considers important” (p.116). Arguably, there can be fewer things more important in the life of a child or adolescent than the presence and death of a parent, grandparent, or sibling, depending, of course, upon the nature of their relationship.

Agnew further itemizes variables that may impact delinquent vs. non-delinquent responses to strain (p116):
1. Strain is more likely to lead to delinquency among individuals with poor coping skills and resources.
2. Strain is more likely to lead to delinquency among individuals with few conventional social supports.
3. Strain is more likely to lead to delinquency when the costs of delinquent coping are low and the benefits are high.
4. Strain is more likely to lead to delinquency among individuals who are disposed to delinquency.

In reporting on factors that impact coping outcomes for adolescents experiencing strain, Agnew reports that research to test these theories has produced mixed results, because of the difficulty in “detecting conditioning effects in survey research (see Mazerolle & Maahs, 2000, p.117). He does cite his collaborative research in Agnew et al. (2001) as evidence that strain leads to delinquency among individuals who are irritable and who have low levels of self-control, and refers also to Mazerolle and Maahs’ (2000) findings that juveniles who associated with delinquent peers and who had weak moral beliefs were more likely to engage in delinquent behaviors. He closes the review with the assertion that “certain recent research suggests that at least some of the above factors influence the likelihood that individuals will respond to strain with delinquency” (p.117).

De Costa and Kort-Butler (2006) use Agnew’s GST in assessing determinacy and indeterminacy of GST across “Life Domains.” The type of delinquent responses to strain that Agnew identifies fall into the camps of: (a) retaliatory: as in violence or vandalism, (b) escapist: as in drugs or truancy, or (c) instrumental: as in theft or cheating. De Costa and Kort-Butler’s research sets out to explore the crossover between the domains in
which the stress is generated and its relationship to the domain in which the response is
acted out. They consider the idea of spillover and aggression displacement arguments in
relation to determinacy and indeterminacy. They use a sample of middle school students
to test family stress as it relates to their hypothesis. They specify the elements that were
considered to contribute to family stress: “parental divorce or separation, arguments
between parents, arguments with parents, money problems at home, illness or deaths in
the family, parent job loss, home break-in, sibling moving out of the house, and parental
remarriage” (p.307). They state that these types of family stresses have been the focus of
previous research, providing examples of researchers who have used similar lists.

Jang and Lyons (2006) use Agnew’s GST to explore strain, social support and
retreatism among African Americans, who, they claim, are neglected in GST research.
Their study provides empirical evidence to support the notion that depression and anxiety
have larger effects on withdrawing behavior than anger. They are also able to support
their hypothesis that social support tends to weaken or buffer the effects of non-angry
emotions on withdrawing behavior. They consider in greater depth the nature of outer-
directed behavior and inner-directed behavior resulting from strain. Joon Jang and Lyon’s
research also considers the strain-aggravating effects of delinquent friends on
delinquency and drug use. Considering the relationship between strain related deviance
and the effects of friends seems particularly relevant to the grief responses of early and
middle adolescents discussed earlier, since we know that perceptions of the self within
the social group are developmentally relevant to this group of young people in particular.
In the appendix to their research, (p.269) Joon Jang and Lyons also itemize “death of someone close, death of a pet, etc.” (p.7), in the possible responses that they offered research participants to the strain analysis question.

As he developed his theory, Agnew (1999) considered GST and its relationship to community differences in crime rates. He provides a succinct review of previous research and theory on community differences in crime rates which is not discussed further in this paper, but which may be useful for further consideration in extensions of this discussion. Agnew does not itemize death and bereavement specifically as a source of strain in this list. However, he does identify “Family disruption and related factors like abuse”, in figure 1.(p.129), as an intervening mechanism that contributes to aggregated negative affect which in combination with certain conditioning variables contributes to a community crime rate. The full list of community characteristics that contribute to strain are: (abbreviated in this list)

1. Selection and retention of strained individuals
2. The failure to achieve positively valued goals; “goal blockage”
3. Relative deprivation
4. The loss of positive stimuli/presentation of negative stimuli
5. Aggregate levels of negative affect
6. Increasing the frequency of interaction with angry/frustrated individuals leading to further increases in the level of strain and anger in the community, increasing the likelihood of criminal response to strain
7. Community crime rates have a direct and an indirect effect on strain, since the high crime rate is a source of strain itself. Criminal victimization is one of the
most serious types of strain that individuals are subject to, and data suggest that it is a major source of subsequent crime (Dawkins 1997)… Crime undermines relationships among those who stay in the community. The result is an amplifying loop. Deprived communities generate strain and crime, whereas crime contributes to a further deterioration in the community and more strain. (Agnew, 1999, p. 126-129)

It is interesting to note that some parallels can be drawn between Agnew’s conclusions and the work of Leighton who, as detailed earlier, identified “essential human sentiments” that are fundamental objectives that all human beings strive for. In particular, sentiments 1-9 relate directly to Agnew’s central tenet that failure to achieve positively valued goals may affect crime rates. Leighton’s tenth sentiment of “needing to belong to a moral order” could connect with the work of Agnew in several ways. Agnew refers to the work of Anderson (1994) in “The Code of the Streets”. The code of the streets certainly represents a moral order but could qualify, using Agnew’s terminology, as the loss of positive stimuli and presentation of negative stimuli.

**Dialogic Participatory Research**

Dialogic Participatory Research has evolved from Paulo Freire’s critique of traditional pedagogy that rejects what he calls a “banking concept” of education (Freire, 1998, p. 67). In the banking model, students are perceived as empty vessels who come to the teacher in need of being filled with knowledge. A power dynamic exists between teacher and student that positions the teacher as the subject of the learning process and the students as “mere objects” (Freire, 1998, p.67). Freire extends his critique of the traditional teacher student dynamic to fundamental epistemological concerns of
knowledge creation. Freire rejected the position of the researcher as an expert and as the creator of knowledge, replacing it with the notion that research is a reciprocal learning process. Philosophically, this methodology positions the participant as the subject of his or her own history. In this position, the participant shares in the control of the knowledge generation process.

Dialogic participatory research aims to be humanizing and emancipatory in nature, since it restores subjectivity and voice in the research process to participants by removing the hierarchy common in the ‘researcher’ and ‘the researched’ relationship. Freire identified three stages in this collaborative process, these being: investigation, education and action. Freire defined dialogue as a “moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it” (Shor & Freire, 1987, p.98). Based on work, Kronenburg characterizes participatory research as follows:

(It) rests on the assumption that human beings have an innate ability to create knowledge. It rejects the notion that knowledge production is a monopoly of “professionals”; (It) is seen as an educational process for the participants…as well as the researcher; It involves the identification of community needs, augmented awareness about obstacles to need fulfillment, an analysis of the causes of the problems and the formulation and implementation of relevant solutions; The researcher is consciously committed to the cause of the community involved in the research. This challenges the traditional principle of scientific neutrality and rejects the position of the scientist as a social engineer. Dialogue provides for a framework which guards against manipulative scientific interference and serves as a means of control by the community. (1986, p. 255)
Participatory research has been posited as an alternative research paradigm to that of the positivist, objective-scientific research paradigm. The focus, as Servaes notes “is on authenticity as opposed to validity. However, referring to generalizability and validity addressed in relation to qualitative research, it can be argued that validity in its less esoteric sense is participatory research’s hallmark” (p.83). It also seems particularly poignant to be using dialogic participatory research for a study on adolescent bereavement, since Paulo Freire himself experienced the trauma of the death of his father when he was thirteen years old (Freire, 1998, p. 233), one of the factors that he attributes to his character development and development as an educator.

Summary of Major Themes

Based on ten years of experience working with young people in the juvenile justice system, the researcher has developed a line of inquiry into the relationship between childhood and adolescent grief and bereavement and the incidence of juvenile delinquency. The implications of Western bereavement theory have been considered, starting with the early psychoanalytical work of Freud: progressing through stage-based theories, task-based theories, attachment-based theories and ending with current constructivist thought on the maintenance of continuing bonds with the deceased.

The discussion of the stages of adolescent development and how they potentially intersect with the psychological consequences of grief and bereavement was extended in the ‘Life Crisis Model’, which reinforces the importance of self-concept as a determiner in adolescent bereavement outcomes (Balk, 1996, p. 374). Personality is considered as a
dynamic and determining human characteristic in the holistic Sociocultural Model of Psychological Development that intersects with the drive to achieve “essential human sentiments” common to all human beings, a drive which is potentially disrupted by bereavement.

General Strain Theory suggests that stress and strain experienced by juveniles leads to negative emotions. A range of delinquent and non-delinquent cognitive and behavioral coping strategies are available to young people experiencing strain, but the selection of negative as opposed to positive strategies is determined by a set of variable conditions.

Paulo Freire’s work on literacy and oppression offers an alternative research methodology that seeks to humanize the teacher-student relationship in the quest for knowledge development by placing the student, rather than the teacher, as the subject in discourse. This methodology can be characterized by three stages: the first of dialogue, the second of reflection, and the third of action.

How Present Study Extends the Literature

By using a dialogic participatory research methodology this study has jointly inquired into the relationship between childhood and adolescent grief and bereavement with two young women who are on probation and who attend the Principals’ Center Collaborative High School, a joint project of the Youth Treatment and Education Center, San Francisco Unified School District, The Superior Court of San Francisco, and the San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department.
This study provided the participants with an opportunity to name and reflect upon their grieving and bereavement processes and experiences, and the impact that they currently have and in the past have had on their thinking, emotions and behavior. In addition, participants considered possible support strategies for other young people going through similar experiences.

This study followed the accepted practice of participatory research methodology wherein joint question making and dialogic reflection are intrinsic components of the joint inquiry. By engaging these young women in the process of dialogic participatory research, the discussion of the potential impact of grief and bereavement and its relationship to delinquency is lifted beyond the theoretical realm and grounded in the experiential reality of two young people attempting to respond to and recover from their loss.
DISCUSSION

Summary of Major Findings

By initially focusing on theories of Western bereavement we saw the evolution of understanding around the nature of grief work, the cyclical stages that the bereaved may progress through as part of their grief, and changing perceptions of what is considered to be an appropriate signifier of finality in the relationship with the deceased. In her stage theory Kübler-Ross (1969) identified anger as the third step on the road to acceptance that the person has died. Worden (1982, 2002) considered working through the pain of grief to be one of the bereavement tasks that preceded the emotional relocation of the deceased. Marrone (1999) acknowledged a phase of emotional expression in his growth oriented model. From Agnew’s GST (1985) we learned that anger in particular plays a major role as a catalyst for delinquency since it provides a mechanism for reprocessing stress and an opportunity for an angry individual to “seek revenge against those responsible for inflicting stress, escape stressful situations or achieve thwarted goals” (Agnew 1985, 1992) (De Costa & Kort-Butler, 2006).

Let’s return to the stories from the young people that were introduced earlier. Why is Marlena angry? Is the anger partially a product of the unresolved attachment issues pertaining to the loss of her father? Is Marlena obstructed from achieving the “essential human sentiments” as identified by Leighton (1959) resulting in a disturbed psychical condition that exacerbates her crisis resolution issues? Is the general strain in Marlena’s life responsible for the anger that she struggles to contain, a component of which is the loss? We cannot know what other traumas Marlena has experienced. As a gang affiliated young woman in a male dominated gang, it is hard to even imagine what
experiences she may have endured and perpetrated on others. Obviously, a deeper investigation of Marlena’s story, with questions that might establish the etiology of her anger would be necessary to answer this question authoritatively, and to map out the cognitive, emotional and behavioral changes that she has experienced in relation to her grieving process. The great news is that since this review was started, Marlena has graduated high school, is now attending college and has an internship position in the field of medical billing. She is excelling in the program, and very proud to be able to meet the challenges of the job.

Several factors in Rico’s story show clearly how intertwined his developmental issues are, as a middle adolescent, with the pain of his grief, and the extra strain in his household due to the arrival of an unwanted stepfather at a time when he is exploring his masculine role in a community with well delineated gender related tasks and expectations. It’s hard to imagine how Rico might work through these issues to resolution without support, and easy to see how his anger and depression could be considered a “normal” response to the intense stress that he was experiencing. Rico continued to use drugs during his time at our school and after several months was sent to a residential treatment program.

In Martin’s case it seems clear that his inability to approach the bereavement tasks associated with the loss of his grandmother keeps him developmentally stuck. He has no resolution. He has not worked through the pain of his grief, and he has not adjusted to the loss or emotionally relocated the deceased (Worden, 1982, 2002). He has not completed any kind of cognitive restructuring, and has certainly not experienced any kind of psychospiritual transformation, (Marrone, 1999). For this young man, at the time of
writing, there was nothing but anger, and in his pain he frequently victimized others as a strategy for the amelioration of that pain. This victimization of others made his placement at our school more vulnerable, and because of his unhealthy and entrenched behavioral problem it feels like he is at great risk by being placed in a more restrictive setting. He has not made it through his life crisis to a state of accelerated maturation. He is still in crisis, and is still engaging in delinquent behaviors that endanger himself, others and his freedom.

We have no recent reports of Michelle and how she is coping with her baby and the loss of her boyfriend. She was offered private therapy by the school therapist, but she declined to take up the offer.

Thomas graduated from high school and made his father very proud. I last saw him at Mike’s funeral. In the Baptist service he came to the front of the church to “be saved”. Psychospiritual transformation? I hope so. He gave all the school staff hugs and then went off to be with his friends. As far as we know he has stayed out of the justice system.

Limitations/Gaps in the Literature and Implications for Future Research

By considering the psychological and sociological aspects of grief, bereavement and juvenile delinquency in this review of literature a potential link between childhood and adolescent bereavement and juvenile delinquency has been established, but there remains a significant gap in research with a primary focus on this relationship.
Agnew (2005) refers to the mixed results that research has produced with regard to factors that condition the effect of strain on delinquency (p. 117). He attributes these mixed results partially to the difficulties in detecting conditioning effects by the use of survey style research methods. For a process as complex as grief, there may be limitations to survey style quantitative research methods. In order to better understand the relationship between grief and delinquency it seems that a qualitative research methodology may lend itself to a broader mapping of a grief experienced in a young person’s thinking, emotions and behavior which may better inform our understanding of the relationship between the two. For this reason, dialogic participatory research has been chosen as a research methodology with the cooperation and two young people who have experienced bereavement and who are currently on probation, as a result of behavior deemed by the Superior Court of San Francisco as delinquent. By generating research questions with the participants and by giving them the chance to speak on this topic in their own voices and with the opportunity to reflect and change their responses, it was hoped that authentic conclusions might be generated from the research and that the participants would be empowered by coming to voice on such significant events in their lives. By using a dialogic participatory methodology to explore the relationship between adolescent bereavement and juvenile delinquency, it was the researcher’s hope to overcome some of the objectifying aspects of survey based research strategies, since the very nature of the grieving process is so subjective and complex. As stated earlier, the researcher holds that young people in the juvenile justice system who have experienced grief and bereavement are the best source of data on how their thoughts and emotions about the loss have impacted and continue to impact their behavior, together with a belief
that young people in the juvenile justice system who have experienced grief and bereavement have a valuable contribution to make in developing support strategies and programming for other young people experiencing similar losses and behavioral problems.
METHODS

This is a dialogic participatory research study which jointly inquired into the bereavement and delinquency experiences of two high school students attending the Principals’ Center Collaborative High School, a San Francisco Unified School District School and project of the Youth Treatment and Education Center in San Francisco, C.A. The intention and direction of the study was to investigate and shed light upon the bereavement, grief and delinquency experiences of the participants in relation to their thoughts, emotions and behavior over time, and to consider possible support strategies for other young people with similar experiences.

The study followed the participatory research practice of joint question making and dialogic reflection. The study incorporated the audio-taping of all conversations with each participant beyond the initial conversation to establish interest in the research project. After the first set of research questions had been generated with the participants, two dialogues took place. Each dialogue was between forty minutes and one hour in duration. The first dialogue was transcribed into hard copy text and read aloud to the participants for review, analysis and comment. After comparative analysis of the two reviewed and revised transcripts, common themes and omissions were identified. These formed the basis for the second set of questions, and the process was repeated.

This study was a way of sharing with the participants an academic vehicle which gave them an opportunity to voice their experiences of bereavement in a safe and supportive environment in order to view their grief related journeys. It also provided the participants with an opportunity to suggest what types of support might be helpful for other young people experiencing similar losses.
Sample and Site

The initial challenge of this research method, given the sensitivity of the population and research topic, was to select suitable potential participants from the student body. No data is collected from the students relating to whether or not they have experienced loss when they are assigned to the school; staff just knows from experience that many of them have. In consultation with Dr. Ernest Brown, the clinical director at the site, several students were suggested as potential participants, based on their relative behavioral stability and maturity. However, we were still uncertain about which of these students had experienced such a loss. Since I am the orientation teacher at the school I have experience of working for at least a full week with each of the students on our campus.

In most cases this initial concentrated period of time results in the building of strong rapport between myself and these students, and several of them are also students in the yearbook class that I teach. The first student that I approached had come to our school with a half written essay about children and grief, and I had worked with her on polishing this piece for publication at the school. Since she and I had had previous conversations on the topic of grief as a result of working on her essay, I was very comfortable when asking if she was interested in participating in the study. She immediately responded positively when provided with a brief description of what would be involved. Three other students were approached. The first of these was a sixteen year old young man who is very mature and supportive of his peers. He listened carefully to the description of the project, but said that he wouldn’t be interested in participating, since he had lost a father figure, but didn’t like to talk about it. The next student that I spoke with was a very articulate
fourteen year old young woman. As I began to describe the project she said that she had lost her brother in July of 2007. She said that she didn’t feel grief but did feel very sad after he died. This conversation raised my awareness about the language that I was using and my note to self in the journal cautioned against using the term grief in my introduction and the need to simplify the language that I was using to describe the process. This second student was not interested in being a research assistant/ participant. The third student that I talked to said that though she had experienced many traumatic experiences, including the shooting and paralysis of her father, she had not lost anyone close to her, though she lived in constant fear of losing someone close. I thanked her for sharing with me, and let her know that I was so happy that she didn’t qualify. It seems that the student who didn’t qualify must have passed on the news that I was looking for research assistants because at the start of my next class a student approached me and announced loudly that she had heard that I was looking for mature students to participate in a project on grief and loss. I asked if she might be interested and she said that she wasn’t because, “I wasn’t asked!” At the end of the class I approached this young woman and said that perhaps if she heard more about the project she might be interested. We went to a private space and I explained what the study was about and why I was doing it, and she agreed that, yes, she would like to participate.

All conversations and dialogues were conducted in a comfortable room that was normally used for therapy on the school site. All conversations and dialogues were preceded by the sharing of food and a general catch up check-in about how the participants were doing. This helped the two young women and me to relax before the beginning of the research conversations, and made the transition to dialogue very natural.
This naturalness was interrupted however, just before the start of the first dialogue with Julia, after I commented on something that I saw sticking out of her jacket pocket. It turned out to be a cell phone which led to some very awkward moments since students are not allowed to have cell phones on campus or to have access to them if they are in a group home, and this awkwardness came from attention being drawn to my position as an authority figure at a time when we were about to engage in a discussion of joint inquiry as participants of equal status in a process deliberately designed to recalibrate the power differential of the hierarchical nature of our pre-existing relationship. I decided to ignore the cell phone, but did confirm that I had seen it later in the day after other staff had seen her trying to hide it. Julia was happy to continue with the research in spite of the phone incident, but I cannot be sure that it didn’t affect her comfort level in the first dialogue.

All conversations took place between the beginning of February and the end of April, 2008. All dialogues were audiotape recorded and the researcher maintained a journal to record her thoughts and procedural details as the project progressed.

Access and Permissions

Access and permissions were obtained from the appropriate parties including the participants, the participants’ parent/guardian, the Principal of SFUSD County and Court Schools, Kevin Kerr, and the Assistant Chief of San Francisco’s Juvenile Probation Department, Allen Nance. Individual participants were afforded the opportunity to willingly take part in the study and were provided with information about the study prior to embarking on the project and again at every stage of the project. Participants and their parent/guardian were also provided with the Research Participant’s Bill of Rights. An
informed consent, approved by the Dominican University of California’s Institutional Review Board was provided to and collected from each of the willing participants. Appropriate measures were provided and taken to assure and protect the participants’ confidentiality including, but not limited to, dis-identifying participants in this paper.

Data Gathering Strategies

The data collection procedures were specific to three phases: The Preliminary phase, The First Dialogue, and The Second dialogue.

The preliminary phase involved:

1. The upkeep of a researcher journal to record significant observations, reflections and procedural details.

2. The initial conversations with participants that were held to ascertain their interest in participation. These were not recorded, but noted in the researcher’s journal. Once the potential participant had agreed to take part in the project she was apprised of the consent agreements and confidentiality parameters of the study and provided with the Research Participant’s Bill of Rights. The researcher checked that the participants were clear about the implications of these rights, especially with regard to their right to withdraw from the process at any point without adverse effects. Parent/guardian permission was sought after each of the young women had confirmed their desire to participate.

3. A conversation with each participant about the collaborative design and possible questions for the first dialogue. These conversations were recorded. Given the age and or personal characteristics of the participants, it was useful to have the
pre-dialogic conversations recorded as on several occasions they began to go into
the detail of their experiences during the question development stage. Having a
detailed record of the preliminary conversations meant that participants could be
referred back to their earlier comments during the dialogues themselves.

The first dialogue:

1. After the first set of questions had been developed they were organized as
follows:

Guiding Questions:

Definitions:

- What does the word ‘grief’ mean to you?

The Loss at the time:

- Who have you lost? What was your relationship like with that person?
  How old were you when they passed away? What happened? What was
  the situation? What did you think about what was happening at that time?
  How did you feel when that happened? What did you do with your
  feelings and emotions? How did you behave at that time? How did you
  show your feelings and emotions? Did you get any support from anyone at
  that time?

- (Who did you get support from?) (How did they help you?) How did your
  family react to the loss?
The Loss over time:

- How did your thoughts about what happened change over time? How did your feelings and emotions about what happened change over time? What did you do with your feelings and emotions over time? How did you show your feelings and emotions over time?

Present day feelings about the loss:

- How do you feel about the loss today? When you start thinking about the person that you lost what do you do? How do you show your feelings and emotions about the loss today? What have you learned from this experience of loss? What kind of support would help another child or young person who is going through what you have been through? Do you feel that you need any more support around your loss and if so what kind?

Loss in the community:

- Do you know any other children or young people who have gone through a similar loss? How are they doing? What advice can you give to them? What support can you give them?

Biographical:

- Age: Sex:

- Age when you first started getting in trouble at school:

- Age when you first started getting in trouble outside of school:

- Crime/s resulting in probation:

The first dialogue was conducted and transcribed. After the transcript had been generated I read back to the students what they had said, and asked them to clarify or
make corrections as they felt necessary. The first dialogues were then subjected to a process of comparative analysis, and common themes and omissions were identified, leading to the development of the second set of questions.

The second dialogue:

The second dialogue was guided by the following questions and topics:

- The researcher introduced more information about her own bereavement and grief having noted this as a significant omission from the first dialogue

- (For Julia after explaining the metaphors of the door, and the soccer ball) Do you have any metaphors to symbolize the experience of grief?

- In the first dialogue you guided us through the journey of your grief experiences and you seemed to express feelings of coming to terms with the losses, of finding a peace with what has happened. How would you explain this process of “getting over it”?

- One suggestion that came up as a positive strategy to help people process their feelings after a death is to write in a diary. When we experienced loss in our community the students wrote and recorded a song for the student who had died. Can you think of any other strategies or activities that might help young people to process their feelings after losing someone?

- Looking back on this research process what are your thoughts and feelings about the experience?
When I read the transcript of the first dialogue back to you, you were very engaged and seemed to get something out of hearing your own words. What did you get out of that part of the process?

This is the first time I have done this type of research so I have been learning how to do it as we have gone through the process. Do you have any advice or recommendations for me if I am to continue with the project?

Once again the second transcript was transcribed and both transcripts were read to the students and analyzed for commonalities and findings based upon their individual merits.

Data Analysis Approach

The first dialogue transcripts were read several times and read while simultaneously listening to the audio-taped recordings in order to check their accuracy. It was extremely important to look at the language shifts within the conversations and to analyze the use of rhetorical devices such as pauses, the use of the term “I don’t know” after the making of a strong or definite statement, and the use of tense changes mid sentence, which gave clues to the temporality of the thoughts and feelings under discussion at the time. The transcripts were then read aloud to each participant so that she could clarify or amend as necessary. The transcripts were then organized and analyzed according to their relevance to the research questions, and the second set of questions was generated. The participants reviewed the second set of questions and gave feedback. The second round of dialogues was held and the process repeated.
Ethical Standards

This study adheres to Ethical Standards in human Subjects Research of the American Psychological Association (Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 2007). Additionally, the project was reviewed and approved by the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board, number #5110.
FINDINGS

Description of Individuals and Data

Sharnell is sixteen years old. She lost her nineteen year old brother when she was eleven years old to murder, her mother when she was thirteen to cancer, her grandfather when she was fifteen to age related health problems. Sharnell first got into trouble at school in the eighth grade after the death of her mother, “after I started not doing my work”. She was put on probation in the 9th grade after a self-defense/violent incident with her alcoholic father. She was sent to a group home after violating the conditions of her probation order.

When reflecting upon her thoughts, feelings and behavior at the time of the losses, Sharnell’s responses varied depending upon her relationship with the deceased and the circumstances of the death. Her responses also varied according to her age at the time of the death. She expressed great concern for other family members experiencing grief, including both older and younger family members, acknowledging the different relationships within the family to the deceased:

...I was just sad to see my mom, really, and my dad and them, I was sad to see him like that. I don’t know, I was just wondering what was going to happen in the future, and how was it going to be? Yeah, I was sad to see my sisters and brothers like that when they had spent their lives with him, all through the years and stuff and then my little sister didn’t know what was going on...

With the most significant and personally impacting death, the death of her mother, Sharnell described feelings of immobilization and her attempts to escape her feelings through evasive acts such as denial, substance abuse, refusal to acknowledge limits set by others, and not caring about the consequences of her actions:
I understand because when somebody dies, or whatever, you don't really have your right mind anymore, and it depends on who that person is, and how close you was, but it's kind of like half of your brain is gone 'cause you done went crazy or something, and you just can't think or (?) no more and you just do whatever... The door is like you on one side, and your feelings is on another, and it's like, OK, you are smoking weed and drinking and partying or whatever you're doing on this side of the door in general, and your feelings are on the other side trying to push in, trying to push through the door to get to you, 'cause they know that's how you feeling; they trying to push in the door to get to you but you not letting them; you doing something else to forget about all that... it's like the door can go two different ways, like either in a good way or in a bad way; you can keep yourself busy with something positive, or you can keep yourself busy with something negative; the door goes two ways...when my mom passed, it was like, that's when I started doing a whole bunch of stuff, just nothing really, just smoking and drinking and being outside late and going to my friends’ houses, and I don't know.. I think it did change my attitude, it got even worse, like I don't even know how to deal with stuff like that, this is before I even got on probation...Yeah, before I got on probation and I didn't have no support and have me going to therapy and stuff, so that's when I was on just going crazy...like not caring about anything, 'cause I felt like, “I don't care about school, I don't care about nothing else but my family, I don't care about school!”

Sharnell’s coping mechanisms mirrored her family’s coping model of substance abuse, arguing, and alienation from other family members, accompanied by a reinvestment in their spiritual beliefs:

...they’d start getting they habits, like they’d get more in their drinking habits, smoking weed, or like using how those things make them feel to try to make them feel or seem happy or fighting, or whatever, arguing and doing drugs, and stuff...

...it seemed like to my dad’s side of the family, they was glad that she died! That’s how I feel, they was glad ‘cause they never liked my momma, and all that stuff, they just don’t like her from a long time ago and it’s like they really started not liking her ‘cause of my brother, when he died, and so I’m like, OK, yeah you’re sorry, but you don’t care...(then, after grandfather’s death)...I was, I don’t know, I didn’t really feel nothing to tell you the truth; I feel like I don’t care. I mean that’s wrong to say, but that’s how I feel. I ain’t going to say that I’m going to throw it in my aunties’ face, ‘cause “now your daddy’s dead!”’, but that’s what they did to me, they throw it in my face, talking about my momma, now she’s gone, and they talking about her in a bad way and trying to tell me stories of
what she had done did a long time ago, and fill my head up with lies, or half of the truth!..

.. the only reason why they putting up with it right now, in my religion, Jehovah’s Witness, they said that it’s going to be a paradise and God’s going to destroy all the bad people and stuff, and all the good people are going to come back to life, and if you are on his side you get to see them again and live forever in paradise. That’s the only reason why the people in my family don’t really be sad, and like mourning like all day ‘cause they’s depressed, because they know, they know they can get to see him again, they gotta do what they gotta do down here in this world, and I know, and I don’t care if people don’t believe me or not, but that’s what I believe!

Sharnell’s comments demonstrated a tendency to reframe the deceased in a positive light, to gloss over their negative traits and to focus on the positive aspects of the relationship, with an emphasis on forgiveness. When asked about where she got support at the time of the deaths, she identified a variety of sources, beginning within the family and then moving into the community:

...My sister, she was calling me, we’d talk about it, or when the Witnesses, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, they would come over and talk to us, or whatever, and just start talking and stuff and that used to really keep our spirits up, them and my sister and my grandma...

When discussing how her feelings changed over time, Sharnell referred to the secondary long term consequences that the deaths of her brother and mother had on the family and how she is still affected today by the disharmony and finger pointing that followed her brother’s death:

...they was like, “OK, you are going to see him again if you did this, if you did that”, like God says, and that’s when my family really started to go apart, split apart, ‘cause my mom blamed my grandma for letting him be outside doing all that stuff, and then my grandma blamed my momma, for letting him live over there at her house; it was like this big, unnecessary argument they still going through, and that’s why we don’t like each other no more, and that’s affecting me right now, like I was telling you earlier, that’s affecting me right now, all that stuff...
She acknowledged that her feelings changed as she got older and reprocessed the deaths and her reactions changed as her thoughts changed:

...When I got older, like my mom, when he had first passed, like she would have thirty pictures in the house of him and it was like every time we would walk in there, we would see his picture, and we’d be like, “That’s sad that we don’t have a brother here no more to help us, protect us” and stuff, and I started to just think about it or whatever when I got older ’cause I could understand what death was...

...I don’t be crying and stuff, until I got older and I was like fifteen, fourteen years old, and started thinking about it and stuff, and you start asking yourself stuff like, “what are you going to do about her?” and that; it just makes me want to cry, and it makes you just think about like, “Oh my god, how’s my life gonna be?” ’cause she was the only one who really took care of us and she didn’t even have custody of us, and so what was my daddy doing?...I don’t know, that was like our source, you know, that was like our source, and now she’s gone and now my big sister is our source and I don’t even really get along with my big sister, so I really kind of feel guilty about that”

Sharnell has relied upon her spiritual beliefs to help manage her feelings over time and reported still feeling sad, but that she doesn’t show it so much on the outside, since finding a strategy to help manage her feelings:

...I don’t know. I don’t feel sad, I really don’t, I mean I do inside but I just try not to show it, and when I do I show it’s in my diary when I’m by myself ... I write in my diary, I write in my diary about everything that some people, it’s like, when I write in my diary it’s something that don’t nobody else want to hear but me, so I tried to talk to my friends, and they’d be like, “I don’t feel like talking”, or it could be about a boy, they don’t want to hear about what I got to say (laughs), so I just write it down, about my momma, I write it down, brothers, I be too shy to express myself really to people, so I just write it down.

When reflecting on her present day thoughts, feelings and actions in relation to the losses, Sharnell demonstrated how far she has progressed in her grief work. She expressed some feelings of guilt about not having had a better relationship with her
mother, and guilt for doing things that her brother would not want her to have done. She expressed the lessons she has learned clearly and was able to use the memory of her brother as a moral guide, even though she didn’t always respond behaviorally in the moment to what she imagined he might want her to do, it still demonstrated that she had moved on significantly from her time of not caring about anything:

...(I learned) that the streets is nothing good. I know he died from the streets, all the stuff he did, I just don’t want to end up in that situation messing with the wrong people, having bad associations and, I don’t know, just being outside, doing bad things; even smoking weed and doing that stuff is going to get you in trouble, and I’ve learned from that, ‘cause, and I know my brother, there’s certain people that I hang around with over there in (my grandma’s neighborhood); I know he didn’t want me hanging out around them, but I was standing outside with the people that I really don’t know nothing about, and this smoking, and all kinds of stuff; it’s like I think about it sometimes and I know he didn’t want me out here, I know he didn’t want his little sisters out here doing something like this, I don’t know, but I’d be like, “I better stop!”’, and I’d be like “sorry”, and be wanting to apologize, but I can’t apologize and keep on doing it, everyday! So that’s why I was like, “I don’t want to apologize yet!” (laughs)...

And the lessons from her mother’s death:

...Yeah, not to abuse yourself, ‘cause drinking can kill you, smoking can kill you, stressing yourself out can kill you, just like, if you going to live life, live it the right way, and I’m really trying, I’m going to do that. Everybody say you got one life to live, but not me. From what I believe, I got two; this is just the first one, second one is if I be with God, and do everything that he said, I will go and see my momma again, and live together, forever ...Um, so while I’m here, I need to do that. It’s time to start your life over again! (said as if talking to herself)...

And her present thoughts about her previous behavior:

...I feel like I gotta be good now. I don’t know, I feel like the group home did help me though. It’s just made me think that all that I did was uncalled for. I could have been finished that, but it was just stress and sadness, trying to be hidden or whatever. I just try to do something with myself, to not think about it, to deal with it...
Sharnell was also very clear about what kind of support she feels in need of currently:

...I do need somebody to talk to me, just listen, and don’t criticize me, somebody who don’t know me, or like somebody I don’t know, so people won’t just be saying like, “Oh so she did that; she did that a long time ago” they ain’t really going to ask the question, “So why do you love her?”, or something, because I need someone to listen who don’t know me, like a friend I can just tell everything I feel, so they won’t just tell me negative feedback, and like, I can’t talk to my grandma, ‘cause she, “OK, your mom, she left you all a long time ago, and she did this and that”, oh they are irritating loud! I need a new person to talk to, somebody who don’t know my momma; somebody who just listens to me...

Julia is fifteen years old. She experienced the death of her grandmother at the age of eight due to ill health, and the death of her cousin at eleven as the result of a car accident. She first got into trouble at elementary school due to fights with students and talking back to teachers. She first got into trouble outside of school at the age of thirteen due to a fight that turned into a robbery and assault charge. She is currently living in a group home.

When reflecting upon her thoughts, feelings and behavior at the time of the losses, Julia’s responses varied primarily due to her age at the time of each loss, but also based on what else was happening in her life at the time of the deaths. The death of her grandmother occurred at a time when her mother was absent from her life. When asked about her feelings at the time of her grandmother’s death:

...Well I was young, so, I mean, I loved her though. I remember things that we did, like she used to get us out of a lot of trouble, but I don’t really remember her all like that, so I can’t really say too much... Oh, I was going through it though, I do remember that, because at the time I was staying with my aunt, and all that stuff had happened with my mom, and stuff, and so like another family member had went away...
Julia’s feelings of sadness and isolation were exaggerated by being separated from her immediate family:

(So did you get any support from anyone around the loss of your grandma?) Yeah, my brothers and sisters, but we were all separated, so it’s like we all, I was the youngest, and I had my family, my aunt, but we weren’t as close as my family, like my mom and my brothers; that’s our little family, but, I mean, I had my brothers and stuff to lean on, but they were older, and they were doing their own thing, and then, like when I was staying with my aunt, me and my cousins and I would get into it; so not really, no. (So did you do anything to support yourself?) I was nine or eight, right? I couldn’t do nothing. I wasn’t thinking about doing anything for myself at that time!...

Julia also expresses a time of disassociation from her feelings, after the loss of her grandmother:

…I felt bad, and I felt like, …I used to always fight a lot at elementary (And do you think that that was connected to those feelings?) Probably, and a lot of referrals, too. (For what kind of stuff?) Getting into it with the teachers, students; behavior problems basically…(And what were you thinking at the time that you were having those behavior problems?) I wasn’t thinking! (How did it feel when you were getting in trouble?) Normal! (laughs)...

Julia also expresses regret at being denied a deeper relationship with her deceased cousin later in life and examines her behavioral responses:

…Me and him, we had a good relationship, but with his younger brother, that was who I was the closest with. Moe (the deceased), he had a warm relationship with my older brother, but that was my cousin and I loved him of course, but we didn’t have a close relationship, but I loved my cousin… I was more so sad and mad that my cousin had passed. We didn’t really get to bond like I wanted to, so (I) was probably mad and sad at the same time. I mean, I mean, ever since the loss of my grandmother I have shown more anger, so it was probably the same, anger and fighting, talking back...

In the case of Julia’s second bereavement her family pulled together and guided her through expectations of the mourning process:
...I was with my brother, and all of us came together as a family, so I had people. It helped 'cause we talked, we had like a family group and discussed the loss of my cousin, and we were all together that lightened me, it was there... We were all going through it, so we had to be with each other, we were all really wanting to support each other...

As was the case with Sharnell, Julia to some extent followed the model of grieving demonstrated by her family members. It seems that Julia hasn’t moved on as successfully as Sharnell has in the grieving process, since she was unable to specify any healthy strategies that she uses to help manage her feelings:

(How did your thoughts about what happened change over time? Did they change a lot?) Not really. Still the same. I cry, I used to, especially fourth and fifth grades, those were the worst times; I used to have her obituary on my wall and every time I’d look at it I’d just start breaking down and crying (So what do you do with your feelings and emotions now?) I don’t do nothing with them, I really don’t but cry, that’s if I’m really thinking about the losses, but other than that...

Even though Julia claimed that her feelings haven’t changed much over time, she had successfully managed to reframe the losses at a cognitive level:

...I got older and I, it came to me like, like I said, everything happens for a reason, and that probably happened to make me stronger, I don’t know, I feel that a lot of stuff that happens in my life is to make me stronger so that I can benefit from it and learn from my mistakes, and become a better person, really. I still look back and reflect on that but my feelings; when I was younger I was more, what’s that word? A lot more sad, but now that I am older I get stronger, I realized what happened since the second death; that was the first death I went through, and then my cousin had passed as well, so it’s like, I don’t feel that you are supposed to be sad at a funeral, you are supposed to be happy, but it’s hard though when you lose somebody... A part of me still is hurt, but another part is it made me stronger... Life goes on, basically. (How does it make you stronger?) For my emotions, emotionally wise, it’s like if he, if he was alive he wouldn’t want me to be crying over this, he would want me to better myself, same with my grandmother, so I have to, sometimes when I think about it I have to suck it up. He wouldn’t want that for me!...

Julia elaborated further in the second dialogue and included more details of her spiritual beliefs:
...Like you've gotta go through your grief stage, and all your tears and stuff and all your sadness, but one day, like, you're going to have to live life; this happened for a reason, it's going to make you a stronger person. My grandmother or my cousin wouldn't want to see me like this, and keep 'em still next to you, and I always remember what they did, that you loved 'em, that was your family, but you've got to move on with your life, slowly but surely, always know that they are there for you, regardless of if they are gone or if they are alive, they are always going to have your back!..(In what way are they going to have your back?)...Well by you knowing for one that they loved you when they was here, and they had your back when they was alive, I'm pretty sure they are going to be watching over you while they gone; they are just in a better place, that's all, really...(So do you believe that they are still watching you?)...Oh yeah, most definitely, I still believe that my grandmother's still watching me, to this day; I know she's still watching me because on my transcripts it says her name, and we never ever wrote her name on my papers; if they put address 1177 but under Maggie L. Hill, it is supposed to say Joseph L. Patten, but it says her name and we don't ever remember writing it on the paper; why do they put my grandmother's name in there, and I realized that even when the counselor printed out my transcript last time I asked her for it, it still indicated that it was Maggie L. Hill as my guardian; it's not true but I'm not going to say nothing because that's my grandmother and I feel like she's still saying "I got your back!" I know, I know it's weird, but who else is going to put my grandmother's name...I know she's got my back...I know that, for a fact!...

Julia also used her spiritual beliefs as a way of letting go of the things that she felt she shouldn't have done:

...I believe that even if you, I don't know, I don't believe in hell, I try not to talk about that, I do believe in heaven though! I feel that everybody gone, went to a better place and that's up there and I don't feel like God will punish us by sending us down there to weep; we ain't perfect! We have all done things in our lives that we shouldn't have done, but that's how we learn from our mistakes, and as long as you ask for forgiveness you are forgiven, yeah...you are forgiven...

When asked if she felt that she needed support currently and if she did, what kind of support that would be, she replied:

...No, I don't think so. Just my family...
In both sets of dialogues the young women talked about loss in the community.

Sharnell talked about another child that she knows who experienced the death of his father:

…I know this boy, Tyler) his dad passed away, I don’t know when, he was young; I guess he got shot or something, and Tyler, after he died, he just started to be real bad, he was doing everything, and I saw that in him, and then after my mom told me why, I was like, “Oh, well, that’s why” I kind of knew that his parent died; I mean, how are you going to deal with something like that if you don’t have support, so everybody kind of understood why he was acting like that, and he was acting bad everyday, at school, period, he didn’t care about nothing. It seemed like his dad was his, his idol, he admired his dad…

She also discusses the impact of the deaths of so many young men in her community and reveals that she has in fact experienced more loss that she had previously indicated. She describes the impact of the losses on her relationships with boys:

…I hate when people die, that pisses me off, ‘cause like of the boys that I grew up around, there are three or four of them dead, and I’m like, what the fuck! and I don’t know, I’ll be like, oh my God I can’t believe this, I mean I didn’t know you like that like that, but I knew him, we grew up together, we played outside together when we were little kids… That’s why I don’t like boys, I don’t really get close to boys because they are more easier to die than girls are, that’s the way it seems, that’s why I really don’t want to have a close boyfriend, and plus they are all trifling, and they bad and they don’t listen, and it’s like, “why is y’all doing this?” That’s why I be thinking about my ex everyday, like what is he doing? He’s still out there doing stupid stuff and I’d get so worried about him, and think, “Oh my God, what’s going to happen to him?” I be so mad, that’s one thing that still makes me mad and stresses me out. And these boys at school, I worry about them too, and I know y’all and I know stuff about y’all and I don’t want nothing to happen!...

Both Sharnell and Julia had suggestions for what strategies might help another young person experiencing similar losses, but Sharnell, who had already talked about using a diary as a support strategy, had the most advice to pass on to a child or adolescent:
"... just have them talk about it with them and tell ‘em, let them tell you
how they feel, and find something for another person to do with you, and
talk about, like you been through this too, so it ain’t like, “oh she don’t
know what she talking about” or, “she don’t understand! Why am I still
talking to her?”’, you gotta tell ‘em, like, I been through the same thing
with you so I know how you feel and keep them busy, keep yourself busy,
and like not forget about it, but do something else to just not remind you;
it’s like the door can go two different ways, like either in a good way or in
a bad way; you can keep yourself busy with something positive, or you can
keep yourself busy with something negative; the door goes two ways... I’d
be like, um, “just try and get through this, and don’t let that be an excuse
for you to be doing bad”, and like, if they were doing bad, I’d be like,
“What you doing?” or whatever, “just like, get past it, don’t forget about
your daddy, or whatever, just try and get past it, don’t think about it, I
mean because she, he’s always going to be there in your heart, but just
don’t make yourself feel bad, I mean sad, and just be depressed; don’t
make yourself feel like that, ’cause that ain’t going to get you
nowhere!”..."

When initially asked about what kind of support she thought would help another
child, Julia replied that she wouldn’t know what kind of support would be helpful
because she had been through it on her own and wouldn’t know what to say. However,
when asked if she could imagine what they would want to hear from someone else:

"... Oh I would love to have support from my family, especially my mom,
but I would say you would need your family around you so they can
support you and show you how to get through it and explain to you that
this is probably for the best. I wouldn’t know what kind of help the next
person could get...(they would be helped by) therapy! (laughs) family
support! Love!..."

In addition to the diary, both young women made suggestions for additional
strategies to help grieving young people in the second dialogue:

From Sharnell:

"...Find something to make you happy about that person, like this is the
way you have lived and do something with it, you know art wise...like a
memory or something ..I don’t know... I’ve seen like sculptures and
paintings that describe people like why, like you know how some artists do
a picture and you don’t know what they are talking about? And then they
describe it and explain to you why they did this and why this is like this and it could be over anything? That’s the way I deal with it because this is my feelings. When I made my house (in art class), the only reason why I painted it like that, one reason was because I don’t like things to be one color; it’s like feelings to me, the colors and stuff it’s like different feelings that’s inside of me and I’ll just paint it like all on a house and all the different colors are heck of different feelings of what I’m feeling inside, like the colors and stuff, they represent my feelings...

Julia also made a suggestion about art:

...(have them) draw pictures of the (the deceased), of how they used to have fun together; this would be like a commemorative, just thinking back, like this is what we did when he was here, this is what we are going to do when I’m gone, you know, things from the past and the future...

As is demonstrated by the second set of dialogue questions that can be found on page 59, I was very curious to see how these young women perceived the research process that we had completed, primarily because I realized how difficult it was to shed the vestiges of hierarchy in a school-type setting. Was it possible to get anywhere close to the overarching goals of dialogic participatory research in this context? Having realized that the nuances of implementation of this method would take many more than two participants worth of practice in order to become proficient, efficient and fully aware, it became important to evaluate its impact on the young women. It had been especially interesting to observe them as I read the transcripts back to them for review, since they were both completely riveted while listening to their own words. Julia asked for a hardcopy of the first dialogue and I was wondering what she planned on doing with it.

She had a lot to say about the process:

... Like last time when we had that little talk I wanted the paper ‘cause we ain’t never, I mean I ain’t never done nothing like this, it was the first time for me; I liked it ‘cause it brought back memories and that this is another process too that can help you to try to forget about that, like, try to get through it...( In what way?)
By expressing your feelings, by just learning to talk about it and, like I said, that knowing that person is there for you, still going to be there for you, instead of keeping it all balled up inside you, let it out. It’s kind of like a therapy session, but in a different way, just talking about it, and having somebody there that’s listening to your problems, listening to how you feel about this or what you did when this happened, how you went about it, it’s just getting everything off your chest...

... HP: So when I read the transcript of the first dialogue back to you, you were very engaged and seemed to get something out of hearing your own words. What did you get out of that part of the process? It seemed like you were totally engaged at that point...

... Well, because like I said, this was my first time doing something and then I; the stuff that I was saying it was…I don’t know I’ve never heard myself; you know how you can be talk-talk-talk, but once you hear yourself, and hear what you were saying, it’s like “now did I really say that? Is that how I really felt about certain things, and it’s like, it was cool for me, because like I said it was my first time doing this, and it was just, I don’t know, I was into it, like, you got my attention by reading what I had said, and what you had asked me, and like I’m feeling it!...

...HP: So you kept the transcript; what do you plan to do with it?

... I put it in that folder that you gave to me, but I don’t know, I’ll get a frame for that! I don’t know, it’s tight! It’s tight, and then if I ever feel like I’m getting weak at a certain moment I can go back and read that, and see what I said, and this is how I felt about my grandmother and about my cousin, and these little steps are going to help me in the future as well, too, and I think that’s tight and I think I’m going to put that in a little frame and that going I’m going to be like, “that was the day that Ms. Parker interviewed me about you, and I’ve got you still in my heart. …I liked how you gave me your grief moments too, like; so basically at first how you said it was just questions and I was answering the questions but like now it’s like, you let me know too what happened to you, and how many losses you’ve had, how you felt, so it’s like it’s normal for people to feel a certain way, so they know like she felt like that as well so it’s not just how I felt, it’s normal for people to feel like this is when somebody passes away; so they can have an understanding, and like, I can relate to you, because we have losses, we have felt the same kind of grief; you’ve had way more losses than me!(laughs)… I don’t know, it’s cool!... I can relate to it now. Now I kind of understand where you’re coming from and what you felt and what you dealt with, and knock on wood, I don’t want to have any more losses!...
Julia was also positive about her experience in addition to her earlier comments about just needing someone neutral to listen and not criticize her:

…Thanks for the food!(laughs) (you’re welcome) No, I really enjoyed this though! Just talking to you about it, and expressing what I feel; I don’t really get to talk to my therapist; I do, but sometimes I don’t feel like it…

Analysis of Themes

The themes that emerged from the dialogic process relate to:

1. The participants’ age at the time of bereavement, the relationship with the deceased and circumstances of death
2. The family status and circumstance of the bereaved child/adolescent and the modeling of grief and bereavement behaviors by the family
3. Support or lack of support available to the bereaved child/adolescent
4. Delinquent behaviors that became manifest in the time period following the bereavement
5. The spiritual framework within which the deaths were repositioned
6. Positive outcomes or lessons learned after the reframing of the losses over time
7. Empathy for other grieving children and adolescents
8. Strategies to support other grieving children and adolescents
9. Reflections on participation in the dialogic participatory research process
DISCUSSION

Summary of Major Findings or Results

The findings that emerged from this dialogic process seem to be clear. The impact of bereavement on both participants was dependent upon their age, their relationship to the deceased and the other circumstances that were present at the time of and following the deaths. For Sharnell, the traumatic death of her brother impacted significantly a family that was already divided by divorce and sibling separation, already in conflict and already engaged in substance abuse. Sharnell seems to have come to terms with the losses themselves but is still directly affected by the impact of the deaths in her daily life as her family members struggle with their own grief, and continue to experience conflict associated with the unresolved family issues that have been exacerbated by all the losses. In talking with Sharnell’s father prior to the study it became apparent that he is still very much consumed by the pain of the loss of his son. Sharnell’s response to the loss of her mother mirrored that demonstrated by her family both behaviorally and spiritually. It was during the time after the death of her mother when, with little support and lots of family conflict, she “was on just going crazy”, when she herself turned to drugs and alcohol and stopped caring about school in her attempt to hide behind “the door” that was separating her from her feelings. She associated the time following her mother’s death with a negative change in attitude and behavior.

Despite the worsening and continuing conflicts within the family, and from what Sharnell describes as an intensification of drug and alcohol abuse within the family, it
seems that there was a strengthening of the family’s specific spiritual beliefs about life after death, based on the teachings of the church of Jehovah’s Witness. Sharnell was adamant about the teachings and took great comfort from thoughts of reunification with her brother and mother in particular, disassociating from thoughts about the inevitability of this reunification based on her brother’s and mother’s actions in life, though not in the case of her grandfather. Other than conversations with members of the Jehovah’s Witness community, it seemed that Sharnell had very little support in managing her grief, other than from her sister and grandmother, who she said were both struggling with their own feelings, and with whom she had difficult relationships.

Sharnell was very aware and is still very aware of the feelings of other family members in relation to the losses and how they intersect with her own feelings. Sharnell has found her own strategies for managing her grief today that include: writing in her diary, preoccupying herself with positive rather than negative activities, relocating her feelings so as to avoid becoming consumed by them, and making art that expresses her feelings. She was able to express clearly what she has learned from her bereavement experiences about “the streets”, and about the negative consequences of drug and alcohol abuse, stress, and poor associations. She expressed a strong desire to live life positively and felt that she was now in a place to start her life over.

For Julia, the impact of the deaths of both her grandmother and cousin together with her family’s situation and response was similarly significant. The death of her grandmother was worsened by the absence of her mother and her separation from her siblings. She associated her aggressive behavior problems at school with her anger following the death of her grandmother, and it was a fight that later led to her
involvement with the juvenile justice system and being placed on probation. When Julia’s cousin passed away, her family seemed to be in much more stable circumstances than they had been previously and the support that they were able to provide for each other led to a strengthening of the family and provided a healthy and loving support system for Julia. In fact, it was hard for Julia to imagine grief support strategies other than those that might be provided by a supportive and functional family.

Over time Julia was able to reframe the losses that she has experienced in a positive way, and was very clear about the difficulties that she has experienced in life, providing her with an opportunity to become stronger and to learn. She even went so far as to claim that a death should result in the celebration of the life of the deceased, and has come to accept the inevitability of life moving on even in the absence of the deceased, and that it is important to comply with their wishes by not continuing to cry. Julia also had a well defined spiritual framework within which to place the losses, and provided evidence that she believed the deceased were still very active in protecting and supporting her in her present day life from a spiritual realm.

After the second dialogue both young women were able to suggest advice for other grieving children and adolescents, together with strategies and projects that might be helpful in assisting with the processing of feelings in a positive way.

The sharing of information about my own grief experiences with Julia and Sharnell proved to be very helpful in validating their own journeys, developing mutual trust and stimulating another round of reflection from the young women. Both participants expressed very positive experiences in being part of this research process, since it did in fact provide an opportunity to give voice to their feelings and experiences in a supportive
environment, to reconnect with their memories, and to witness their own journeys, resilience and growth. Hearing their own words read back to them, with the option of editing and clarifying, appeared to be a significant moment for both participants in the facilitation of this process.

Comparison of Findings with Existing Studies

There are many intersections to be found between the findings of this research and the work described earlier in the fields of both psychology and sociology. It was stated earlier that the purpose of this study was to consider the impact that childhood and adolescent bereavement and grief experiences have had on young people in the juvenile justice system, drawing upon research from the fields of Western bereavement theory, developmental models of adolescent bereavement, Agnew’s General Strain Theory (1985) as it pertains to juvenile delinquency, and dialogic participatory research as an appropriate methodology and an authentic and empowering epistemological tool for inquiry into the bereavement and delinquency experiences of the participants.

Findings in Relation to Western Bereavement Theory

From a Freudian perspective, the participants would be pathologized based on their ongoing attachment to the deceased and their hopes, especially in Sharnell’s case, of a future relationship with family members within the context of a spiritual framework. The attachment remained for both of these young women, but it had been repositioned psychologically. There are some parallels to be drawn between the experiences that they describe and the stage theories of grieving proposed by Kübler-Ross (1969) and Bowlby and Parkes (1970). Julia talked about the anger that she felt following the loss of her
grandmother, which was most likely an extension of the anger that she was experiencing in response to the absence of her mother at that time. Sharnell’s analogy of the drug and alcohol induced door behind which she escaped from her feelings, corresponds with Kübler-Ross’ (1969) denial stage in the grieving process. Bowlby and Parkes’ (1960, 1980) cycle of numbness, searching and yearning, depression and reorganization leading to recovery, can be recognized in Sharnell and Julia’s thoughts, emotions and actions over time. Both young women refer to periods of immobilization; for Sharnell in her reference to half of one’s brain being gone after being bereaved, and Julia’s reference to the time after the death of her grandmother when she wasn’t thinking. Both young women experienced depression following the most significant deaths, and these were accompanied by long periods of crying and/or escapism. In their reflections on present day thoughts and feelings and behaviors, both young women indicated that they had reorganized their representations of the deceased and that they have returned to normal activities and social relationships, as referred to by Bowlby (1960, 1980) in the application of his theory of infant attachment to grief and loss.

The task-based model of bereavement proposed by Worden (1982, 1991, 1996, 2002), corresponds to the experiences described by Sharnell and Julia. Both provided evidence of having worked through the pain, adjusting to the loss, and finally, the relocation of the dead person in their lives and memorialization of the deceased. Julia’s reflection during the second dialogue corresponds precisely to Worden’s proposition:

……Like you’ve gotta go through your grief stage, and all your tears and stuff and all your sadness, but one day, like, you’re going to have to live life; this happened for a reason, it’s going to make you a stronger person. My grandmother or my cousin wouldn’t want to see me like this, and keep ’em still next to you, and I always remember what they did, that you loved ’em, that was your family, but you’ve got to move on with your life, slowly
but surely, always know that they are there for you, regardless of if they are gone or if they are alive, they are always going to have your back!...

It seems that both Sharnell and Julia have come to a healthy resolution of their grief, despite the ongoing conflict and dysfunction within Sharnell’s family that has been exacerbated by the losses. Walsh and McGoldrick’s (1995) model focused on the potential healthy outcomes for families based on the relational aspects of mourning such as: open communication, sharing the grief, family involvement with the funeral and mourning rituals, and expressions of feelings. Julia’s family response to the death of her cousin seemed to result in a strengthening of the family as a functional unit.

Nerken’s (1993) growth-oriented paradigm of bereavement was based on notions of a core self mediated by a reflective self. He postulated that bereavement lead to suffering in the zone of reflective self, but that the core self, remaining whole, could acknowledge its ongoing existence as the reflective self processed the loss, potentially leading to many positive outcomes, such as increased coping skills and personal growth. It was especially reassuring to see strong evidence of resilience and positive outcomes as both Sharnell and Julia reflected on their present day cognitive and emotional status based on adjustment to their losses. For Sharnell in particular, there appears to be an increased sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy and appreciation of life despite the challenges that she still faces, and in her rendition of advice that she would give to others experiencing similar losses she certainly demonstrated a sense of bereavement altruism.

Marrone’s (1999) four phased paradigm also hold merit in relation to the research findings, since both young women demonstrated a cognitive restructuring as a product of the assimilation of the deaths. There was significant emotional expression, or attempts to escape emotional expression, psychological reintegration and psychospiritual
transformation as both participants converted their experiences into present day growth oriented beliefs and attitudes towards life, death, love and spirituality.

Findings in Relation to Developmental Models of Adolescent Bereavement

In the life crises model of adolescent bereavement, Balk and Corr (1996) propose that the death of one’s parent, sibling or friend provides a dangerous opportunity that can result in growth and maturity, but can also “presage harm and maldevelopment if responded to poorly” (p. 6). Sharnell and Julia provide us with evidence to support this notion of both dangerous opportunity and growth and maturity. The dangerous phase of their grief experiences came during the time of immobilization, disassociation and escape from their thoughts and emotions, and became manifest in their behavioral responses of aggression, self-destructive substance abuse and an inability to maintain consequential thinking patterns. The growth and maturity came after the consequences of their negative behaviors became apparent. For both Sharnell and Julia as they approach late adolescence the trauma of their bereavement experiences does in fact appear to have provided them with a means to achieve personal strength. Corr and balk refer to the historical continuity that involves accepting one’s past resulting in “freeing oneself for growth and maturity” (p. 7). In her present day reflection on her behavior Sharnell’s growth is particularly apparent:

...I feel like I gotta be good now. I don’t know, I feel like the group home did help me though. It’s just made me think that all that I did was uncalled for. I could have been finished that, but it was just stress and sadness, trying to be hidden or whatever. I just try to do something with myself, to not think about it, to deal with it...

In Elkind’s (1967, 1979) extension of Piaget’s (1929) notions of egocentrism he proposed that the development of formal operations typical in middle adolescents
provided the means for conceptual thinking that allowed adolescents to reflect on their own and others’ experiences. Both Sharnell and Julia demonstrated sophistication in this way with examples of what Balk and Corr (1996) refer to as “complex, abstract, symbolic representation of reality” (p.10), especially in Sharnell’s description of the door behind which she hid from her feelings. Balk and Corr’s predictions of an empathetic evolution and transformation in social consciousness are borne out in the advice that Sharnell would give to others, and her empathy for her grieving insensitive aunts.

Moos and Schaefer’s (1986) life crisis model provided a set of factors associated with outcomes for a life crisis that are useful in helping to evaluate increased risk factors that might influence the outcomes of the “dangerous opportunity” that adolescent bereavement provides. Both Sharnell and Julia were certainly at a higher risk because of the background and environmental factors that they faced in addition to the losses, which again demonstrates their resilience and growth oriented present day outcomes.

According to Leighton’s Sociocultural Model of Psychological Development, bereavement was a typical experience obstructing achievement of the sentiments and that a disturbed psychical condition exacerbates the crisis resolution. Since both Sharnell and Julia, particularly Sharnell, appear to have transformed their bereavement experiences at this stage of their development into opportunities for growth the characteristic associated with dysfunctional patterns of self-concept and chronic acute grief reaction do not seem to apply.

Findings in Relation to Agnew’s General Strain Theory and Juvenile Delinquency

The transcripts of the dialogues with Sharnell and Julia are a testament to the increased strain and stress invoked when children and adolescents experience grief and
bereavement. Agnew’s assertion that upset and stress can sometimes lead adolescents to engage in delinquency in order to reduce or escape the strain and make them feel better is highlighted in Sharnell’s comments about her uncaring and dismissive attitude and increased substance abuse as she struggled to hide from her feelings behind a psychologically constructed door. Based on Agnew’s proposed set of conditioning variables that might influence delinquent outcomes, we can see why both Sharnell and Julia might have been more likely than other adolescents to respond with delinquent outcomes. The loss of positive stimuli and the presentation of negative stimuli seem particularly relevant to the experience of Sharnell after the death of her mother, and to Julia after the death of her grandmother. Multiple types of negative treatment suggested by Agnew (2001a, 2001b) were present in the lives of these two young women at the various times that they experienced bereavement. The findings suggest evidence to support the idea that both Sharnell and Julia had both delinquent and non-delinquent responses to the strain associated with their experiences. Both gave examples of how they were able to reframe their grief experiences more positively in a cognitive sense, and gave indications that they are now at a place of behavioral and emotional coping.

Findings in Relation to Dialogic Participatory Research

As stated in the assumptions upon which this research was predicated, the researcher holds a belief that young people in the juvenile justice system who have experienced grief and bereavement are the best source of data on how their thoughts and emotions about the loss have impacted and continue to impact their behavior. Additionally the researcher holds that young people in the juvenile justice system who have experienced grief and bereavement have a valuable contribution to make in
developing support strategies and programming for other young people experiencing similar losses and behavioral problems.

These beliefs corresponded with assumptions implicit in the work of Paulo Freire and the methodology of dialogic participatory research. By aiming to be humanizing and emancipatory in nature the researcher hoped to provide an authentic academic vehicle for the participants that would allow them to come to voice in a supportive and structured setting facilitating their engagement with and reflection upon the journeys that started for them with the loss of their loved ones. It was also hoped that they might be able to consider what types of support would benefit other children and adolescents in similar circumstances to their own in order to conceive possible action that might follow consideration of this study.

The researcher became aware early on in the research process that the facilitation of dialogic participatory research is a skill that evolves as the process of reflection and analysis proceeds. Future research of a similar nature would accommodate the lessons that presented themselves on the learning curve for the researcher, such as the difficulty in trying to remove hierarchy from a pre-existing hierarchical relationship in a high school research context.

It is not possible to establish in any meaningful way at this point in time how much or how little this project contributed to any sense of “emancipation” for the participants, in fact it would be rather arrogant and foolish to propose any measure for such a vague notion without much more clarification. However, there is evidence in the dialogues that supports the conclusion that this process proved to be humanizing and very beneficial for the participants in that it allowed them to be heard, and provided an
opportunity for them to reflect deeply on their feelings and behavior in relation to their losses. The fact that Julia intended to frame the first dialogue in order to memorialize her grandmother and cousin and celebrate her continuing feelings for them reinforced the fact that although the application of the methodology may have been clumsy in the early stages, the results were still of significant value to all those involved in the process. By using dialogic participatory research the findings were much more significant than an oral history type of methodology might have been since the participants themselves were active in both the design and application.

Limitations of the Study

By reviewing and analyzing the correlations and contradictions that appear between the findings of this dialogic participatory research project and those of previous research, the fundamental question of whether or not a relationship exists between childhood and adolescent bereavement, grief and juvenile delinquency has been extensively addressed from multiple psychological and sociological vantage points and the intersectionality of these varied perspectives considered. In addition, this research methodology was reviewed based upon the perceived benefits experienced by the participants who had experienced both bereavement and delinquency.

Limitations to the research findings might include, but may not be limited to the following:

1. This study pertains to a single location and just two participants engaged in dialogic participatory research. To researchers invested in the scientific process, this may limit the generalizability of the findings. However, the goal of the research was to provide a vehicle for juvenile delinquents to voice their experiences. It is the humanity of their
experiences and the demonstration for the potential for positive outcomes for young people in the juvenile justice system experiencing grief and bereavement that are generalizable, not any specific set of circumstances that might be reproducible.

2. One of the goals of dialogic participatory research is to eradicate the hierarchical nature of the relationship that exists between researcher and researched in many research paradigms. This proved to be difficult in this study because the researcher and the participants had a pre-existing hierarchical relationship based on the student-teacher dynamic. However, based on their feedback it appears that the participants were not intimidated by this dynamic since they fully participated in every step of the process and reported positive personal outcomes in spite of it.

3. The findings of this research project may be limited by the fact that both participants were female. References to gender differences in bereavement research were included in the review of literature and these indicated that male and female adolescents might process their grief in different ways. Only having female participants in this research project provided no possibility for the comparative analysis of delinquent and non-delinquent responses to grief and bereavement based on gender.

4. This study failed to consider the effects of traumatic grief, a death accompanied by trauma, in its discussion of emotional, cognitive and behavioral responses to bereavement. Local media attention has come to be focused on the post traumatic stress disorder behavioral characteristics exhibited by many youth in conflict ridden urban environments in a series of articles published in August 2007 by Jill Tucker in the San Francisco Chronicle.
5. This study failed to consider ahead of time research related to therapeutic strategies that might be helpful to young people experiencing grief. The focus in the study was on eliciting strategies that the participants had found to be successful themselves or that they thought might be supportive. If this project is to progress into an action phase, a more extensive review would be helpful.

Implications for Future Research

Consideration of strategies to help facilitate the lessening of the effects of pre-existing hierarchy between the researcher and the participants, for example, holding the dialogues in a suitable location away from the school site. The recruitment of male participants in any extension of this research would also be an area of possible contrastive research.

Much has been written on the topic of childhood traumatic grief and how trauma related symptoms can interfere with children’s ability to adequately mourn after a significant loss. Several researchers, such as Pynoos (1992), have focused on mapping traumatic grief reactions in children who have experienced war, terrorism and natural disasters. Psychologists and psychiatrists have developed expertise in differentiating childhood traumatic grief from childhood posttraumatic stress disorder, and offer diagnostic tools and treatments, often based on cognitive-behavioral therapy models. This body of research would be integral to a discussion of the effectiveness of treatment in relation to the prevention of and cessation of delinquent behaviors in adolescents experiencing traumatic grief and add another valuable perspective to this study.

Julia’s desire to frame the transcript of the first dialogue in order to memorialize her feelings around the deaths of her grandmother and cousin highlights the need of
adolescents to find a way to positively express and acknowledge their feelings for the deceased. Research on pre-existing memorialization projects would help to inform therapeutic action possibilities.

Another perspective that deserves consideration in the future is one which looks at peer loss in comparison to other losses, in order to develop a better understanding of what types of intervention help young people to cope and to grieve healthily. Ringler and Hayden’s “Adolescent Bereavement and Social Support: Peer Loss Compared to Other Losses” (2000) is eye opening since it maintains that young people are least supported through their loss by teachers and school counselors, and most supported by their peers. Since approximately twenty thousand 10-19 year olds die each year (Corr and Balk, 1996, p.15) it is incumbent on schools to respond constructively to the tragedy of a loss, in order to help students to achieve healthy resolution.

Overall Significance of the Study

Based on ten years worth of observation of adolescents involved in the juvenile justice system, this study set out to explore the relationship between bereavement, grief and juvenile delinquency. The study provided a multidisciplinary and interconnected framework for the exploration of a causative relationship between childhood and adolescent bereavement and juvenile delinquency. Drawing upon previous research from the fields of psychology and sociology, a research study was designed to explore the effects that bereavement and grief have had over time on the thoughts, emotions and behavior of two young women who were on probation. The participants were also invited
to suggest strategies that might be supportive of other young people experiencing similar loss. A dialogic participatory research methodology was selected for the study due to its emphasis on authenticity and quality in the process of inquiry, together with the potential for empowerment of the participants in relation to their grief related experiences as an intrinsic part of the research process. Based on the comparative analysis of the data generated by the study, the findings were considered against previous research on Western bereavement theory, developmental models of child and adolescent development, and Agnew’s General Strain Theory (1992) as it relates to juvenile delinquency. In addition, the pros and cons of dialogic participatory research were reflected upon, based on the observations of the researcher and the research participants.

The significance of the study can be summarized in the following conclusions:

1. Behavioral responses to grief were affected by the relationship of the bereaved to the deceased, the age and developmental maturation of the bereaved and other strain inducing characteristics present in the life circumstances of the bereaved child or adolescent. Research focused on the impact of traumatic grief on children and adolescents would add to and deepen this particular thread of understanding.

2. Family response to bereavement played a significant role in determining grief related outcomes for the adolescents in this study, since the evidence contained in the findings suggest that early adolescents in particular mimic the coping strategies demonstrated by their older relatives. When these coping strategies were unhealthy or delinquent, such as in the case of fighting or substance abuse, it was likely that the adolescent would have similar behavioral responses. The absence or
The presence of alternative sources of support other than the family for the adolescents in the study impacted their behavioral responses.

3. The adolescents in this study seemed particularly susceptible to delinquent responses in the early stages of grief, at a time when they were struggling to understand the significance and impact of the loss. Providing support to grieving children and adolescents in this particular window of their grief encounter could positively impact behavioral outcomes.

4. Even if children or adolescents have an initially unhealthy or delinquent response to the loss that they have experienced, they might be able to progress through the stages, phases or tasks of the grieving process to come to a place of healthy resolution and therefore able to demonstrate resiliency and to give voice to the transformative aspects of her spiritual, emotional, cognitive and behavioral experience.

5. Based on the tendency for enhanced empathy for other children experiencing similar loss to their own, the adolescents in this study did have valuable insights into the kind of support that might help other grieving children and adolescents to process their thoughts and feelings in healthy rather than destructive ways. If we ask and listen, then they can tell us what they need.

6. Dialogic participatory research is a research methodology that requires the researcher to constantly reflect upon and analyze the efficacy and fidelity of its application, since the subtleties and nuances of the discourse and socio-cultural relationships that emerge or which may already exist may divert or subvert the research process. As a result, it is the belief of the researcher that the quality of the
application of dialogic participatory research methodology would evolve with ongoing practice and increasing awareness.

7. In this research study the application of a dialogic participatory research methodology resulted in the reporting of beneficial outcomes for both research participants. Both participants found the process of voicing these experiences to be validating and affirming in the present day. Further research might be considered to investigate the validating aspects of listening to one’s own thoughts and feelings on a topic when they are read aloud by a second party.

8. These conclusions are based upon the research findings after carrying out the study with two female participants. By replicating this research process with a larger and more diverse sample of participants, the breadth and depth of the documented findings could be developed in terms of significance and potential therapeutic applications.
REFERENCES


*Qualitative Health Research, 2,* 159-177.


