



DCPsych thesis

**Men making meaning after loss: a thematic analysis of men's  
meaning making after the death of someone they love**  
**Atkinson, L.**

---

Full bibliographic citation: Atkinson, L. 2023. Men making meaning after loss: a thematic analysis of men's meaning making after the death of someone they love. DCPsych thesis Middlesex University / Metanoia Institute

Year: 2023

Publisher: Middlesex University Research Repository

Available online: <https://repository.mdx.ac.uk/item/14qqw8>

---

Middlesex University Research Repository makes the University's research available electronically.

Copyright and moral rights to this work are retained by the author and/or other copyright owners unless otherwise stated. The work is supplied on the understanding that any use for commercial gain is strictly forbidden. A copy may be downloaded for personal, non-commercial, research or study without prior permission and without charge.

Works, including theses and research projects, may not be reproduced in any format or medium, or extensive quotations taken from them, or their content changed in any way, without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder(s). They may not be sold or exploited commercially in any format or medium without the prior written permission of the copyright holder(s).

Full bibliographic details must be given when referring to, or quoting from full items including the author's name, the title of the work, publication details where relevant

(place, publisher, date), pagination, and for theses or dissertations the awarding institution, the degree type awarded, and the date of the award.

If you believe that any material held in the repository infringes copyright law, please contact the Repository Team at Middlesex University via the following email address: [repository@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:repository@mdx.ac.uk)

The item will be removed from the repository while any claim is being investigated.

See also repository copyright: re-use policy: <https://libguides.mdx.ac.uk/repository>



**Men making meaning after loss: A thematic analysis of men's meaning making after the death of someone they love.**

**Lillian Atkinson**

**Middlesex University and Metanoia Institute**

**Doctor of Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy by Professional Studies**

**June 2023**

**Word count: 43,493 words**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration.....	p.7
Acknowledgements.....	p.8
Dedication.....	p.9
Abstract.....	p.10
<b>Preface.....</b>	<b>p.12</b>
<b>Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>p.13</b>
1.1    Brief history of sex and gender.....	p.13
1.2    ‘Masculinities’ evolve.....	p.15
1.3    ‘Masculinities’ today.....	p.16
1.4    ‘Masculinity’s’ relevance to psychological therapy.....	p.17
1.4.1    ‘Be tough’.....	p.17
1.4.2    Independence.....	p.17
1.4.3    Keeping control.....	p.18
1.5    Psychology in today’s society.....	p.18
1.6    Diversify and include for social change.....	p.19
1.7    This thesis’ focus on men.....	p.20
1.7.1    Reflexivity I.....	p.20
1.8    Structure of this thesis.....	p.21
<b>Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>p.22</b>
2.1    Chapter overview.....	p.22
2.2    Existentialism and loss.....	p.22
2.2.1    Reflexivity II.....	p.22
2.2.2    An overview.....	p.22
2.3    What is meaning?.....	p.23
2.3.1    The meaning of meaning.....	p.23
2.3.2    Baumeister’s ‘four needs of meaning’ .....	p.24
(i)    Purpose.....	p.24
(ii)   Value.....	p.25
(iii)  Efficacy.....	p.25
(iv)   Self-worth.....	p.25
2.4    Meaning and loss: what the literature says.....	p.25

2.5	Who benefits from meaning making?.....	p.26
2.6	What variables affect the process of meaning making?.....	p.29
2.7	Themes of meanings made.....	p.30
2.8	Limitations of the existing research.....	p.31
2.8.1	The gap in the literature.....	p.32
<b>2.9</b>	<b>Grief and age.....</b>	<b>p.32</b>
2.10	Research on gender differences.....	p.33
2.11	Contribution to counselling psychology.....	p.37
2.11.1	Rationale.....	p.37
2.12	Objectives of the research and the research question.....	p.38
2.13	Reflexivity III.....	p.38
<b>Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY.....</b>		<b>p.39</b>
3.1	Chapter overview.....	p.39
3.2	Ontological position.....	p.39
3.3	Epistemological position.....	p.39
3.4	Positioning counselling psychology in the research.....	p.41
3.5	Qualitative research.....	p.41
3.6	Thematic analysis.....	p.42
3.7	Alternative methodologies.....	p.44
3.7.1	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.....	p.44
3.7.2	Narrative Analysis.....	p.45
3.7.3	Grounded Theory.....	p.45
3.8	Conducting the research.....	p.46
<b>3.8.1</b>	<b>Reflexivity IV.....</b>	<b>p.46</b>
3.8.2	Data collection method.....	p.47
(i)	Interview schedule.....	p.47
(ii)	Advertising the study.....	p.48
(iii)	Inclusion criteria.....	p.48
(iv)	Recruiting participants.....	p.49
(v)	Sample size.....	p.49
(vi)	Interview process.....	p.50
(vii)	Data storage.....	p.52

3.9	Ethical considerations.....	p.52
3.10	Transcribing interviews.....	p.53
3.11	Reflexivity V.....	p.53
	3.11.1 My position as a researcher.....	p.53
	3.11.2 My gender.....	p.54
	3.11.3 My approach to masculinity.....	p.55
3.12	Data analysis.....	p.55
	3.12.1 Familiarisation with dataset.....	p.55
	3.12.2 Initial codes generated.....	p.55
	3.12.3 Emerging themes.....	p.56
	3.12.4 Review themes.....	p.57
3.13	Quality in qualitative research.....	p.57
	3.13.1 Sensitivity to context.....	p.58
	3.13.2 Commitment and rigour.....	p.58
	3.13.3 Transparency and coherence.....	p.59
	3.13.4 Impact and importance.....	p.60
<b>Chapter 4: ANALYSIS.....</b>		<b>p.61</b>
4.1	Chapter overview.....	p.61
4.2	Overarching theme one: Inexorable death.....	p.61
	4.2.1 Sub-theme one: Making sense of death.....	p.62
	4.2.2 Sub-theme two: The Sisyphean burden.....	p.67
	4.2.3 Reflexivity VI.....	p.71
	4.2.4 Summary: Inexorable death.....	p.72
4.3	Overarching theme two: Identity shift.....	p.73
	4.3.1 Sub-theme one: Changing relationships.....	p.74
	4.3.2 Sub-theme two: Action Man?.....	p.79
	4.3.3 Summary: Identity shift.....	p.83
4.4	Overarching theme three: Meaning in human connection.....	p.84
	4.4.1 Sub-theme one: Sharing experiences of loss.....	p.85
	4.4.2 Sub-theme two: Language matters.....	p.89
	4.4.3 Sub-theme three: Man, find your own words.....	p.93
	4.4.4 Summary: Meaning in human connection.....	p.97

4.5	Chapter summary.....	p.98
Chapter 5: DISCUSSION.....		p.100
5.1	Chapter overview.....	p.100
5.2	Meaning in life now.....	p.100
5.2.1	Meaning in action.....	p.101
5.3	Meaning in continuing attachment.....	p.103
5.3.1	Identification with the lost loved one.....	p.105
5.4	Meaning in relationships and human encounters.....	p.106
5.4.1	Meaning in language.....	p.108
5.4.2	Resentment and anger after bereavement.....	p.109
5.5	What does it mean to be a (bereaved) man?.....	p.110
5.6	Strengths and limitations.....	p.113
5.6	Clinical recommendations and implications.....	p.114
5.7	Future research.....	p.117
5.8	Final reflections.....	p.118
5.8.1	Power dynamics.....	p.118
5.8.2	My family's privacy.....	p.119
REFERENCES.....		p.121
APPENDIX A: Interview Schedule.....		p.140
APPENDIX B: Advertising the study.....		p.141
APPENDIX C: Participant Information Sheet.....		p.142
APPENDIX D: Extracts from research journal.....		p.148
APPENDIX E: Informed Consent Form.....		p.150
APPENDIX F: About you and your bereavement.....		p.151
APPENDIX G: Debrief to Participants.....		p.152
APPENDIX H: Ethical approval letter.....		p.154
APPENDIX I: Research Ethics Application Form.....		p.155
APPENDIX J: Extract from George's annotated interview.....		p.181
APPENDIX K: Initial codes from Graeme's interview.....		p.183
APPENDIX L: Initial four themes generated from Ishan's interview.....		p.246
APPENDIX M: Master overarching themes and sub-themes with quotes.....		p.283
APPENDIX N: Research supervisor confirmation of consent.....		p.317

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table 1:</b> Participant demographics.....	<b>p.50</b>
<b>Table 2:</b> Initial themes and sub-themes.....	<b>p.56</b>
<b>Table 3:</b> Overarching themes with their sub-themes and the prevalence among participants.....	<b>pp. 61, 73, 84</b>

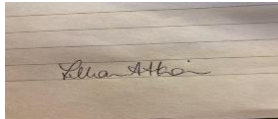


## DECLARATION

I declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own, except where due acknowledgment has been made. No part of this thesis has, to my knowledge, been submitted for examination by any other institution.

I agree that Middlesex University and Metanoia Institute may lend or copy this thesis upon request.

**Signed:**

A photograph of a handwritten signature in dark ink on a light-colored wooden surface. The signature is cursive and appears to read 'Lia Attia'.

**Date: 23 June 2023**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research would not have been possible without the accounts of the men who generously shared with me their experiences of loss. I am hugely thankful to them for their time and reflections.

Massive thanks to Dr. Michelle Ruger, my research supervisor, for all your support and insights, from the very beginning of this project, to its completion. You are an integral part of my research journey.

Huge thanks also go to those friends and colleagues who have thought about and commented on this project. Your words have been invaluable to me.

Finally, I have felt love and support from all my family; special, heartfelt thanks go to my parents, whose support in many areas of my life, over the course of my life, is enormously appreciated and valued. I love you guys: this is for you. To Neil, what a journey we are on. Thank you for the kindness, love and confidence in me. We have done this together. And thank you to our fabulous kids, who have also shared in this journey and supported it: your lives are precious and give meaning to my every day.

*In this study, I relate some events around my sister's death that were difficult for my whole family. The perspectives and beliefs represented here are my own, and may be different to those of other family members involved.*

## **DEDICATION**

For Hilary, whose short, precious life inspired this work.

## **ABSTRACT**

The death of a loved one is a significant life event which can have devastating consequences for the bereaved, as the meaningful structures of their lives may be shattered and destroyed. The reconstruction of meaning can be helpful for those bereaved individuals who search for new meaning after the loss of a loved one as they incorporate their loss into their lives. Reviewing previous studies on meaning making after loss highlights that the majority of participants in these studies were women, with men's voices not being robustly included. Any gender difference is therefore not demonstrated. Assuming that men and women make meaning in the same way potentially dismisses the gendered experience of men, and may leave them feeling increasingly alienated and isolated at an already difficult and isolating time. This is significant: although the numbers of men who are referred for psychological therapy are increasing, they remain low. This research aims to include male voices in the body of research about meaning making after loss. Eight male participants were interviewed about their meaning making after the death of a loved one, using semi-structured interviews. A reflexive thematic analysis was conducted to analyse what helped and what hindered this process, as well as the themes of meanings made. Three overarching themes were identified from the data: 1. Inexorable death; 2. Identity shift; 3. Meaning in human connection. What emerged was that each participant became aware of death, and the burden of loss, as a fact of life, often leading to a meaningful re-evaluation in their sense of themselves, their relationships and their actions. Sharing their experiences of loss with others was helpful, meaningful and influenced by language. Cultural understandings of masculinity affected the participants' meaning making, and preconceived ideas of what their meaning making 'should' look like, as well as stereotypes of what bereaved men would like, were unhelpful. Recommendations based on the research findings include active, empathic listening to each individual bereaved person, demonstrating a curiosity and interest in their gendered experience and how this impacts their meaning making process. Future longitudinal research would be beneficial to understand the process of bereaved men's meaning making over time.

“Grief is forcing new skins on me, scraping scales from my eyes. I regret my past certainties:  
*Surely you should mourn, talk through it, face it, go through it.* The smug certainties of a  
person yet unacquainted with grief.”

(Adichie, 2021, p. 13)

“Dying is not an event; it is a phenomenon to be understood existentially.”

(Heidegger, 1963, p. 284)

“The patriarchal order prohibits forms of emotion, attachment and pleasure that patriarchal  
society itself produces. ... Men no more than women are chained to the gender patterns they  
have inherited.”

(Connell, 1995, pp. 85-86)

## Preface

Almost twenty years ago, my younger sister, Hilary, was killed in a tragic car accident on her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. This personal experience of loss initially shattered the meaningful structures of my life; nothing made sense and it felt impossible to understand why she died. I was bereft and my family was broken. In time, this became a bittersweet opportunity: while I wish she were still alive, the fact of her death allowed me to re-evaluate my life and what mattered to me. When Hilary died, it was as if my life came into focus: I slowly realized that it was my one and only life, and I was determined not to fritter it away. The resulting process has been a poignant gift and rebuilding the structures of my life to incorporate losing Hilary has been a fulfilling and freeing experience. I have made decisions to travel the world and retrain as a counselling psychologist and psychotherapist; a profession I believe in, working alongside likeminded people with an aim to offer help and support to others at difficult times in their lives. In short, living with meaning has been vital to adjust to and incorporate living with the loss of my sister.

The sudden and violent loss of my sister also had a profound impact on my family and I witnessed the devastating effects on my parents. Both grieved differently. I have often wondered if it was due to the different personalities of my parents, with my mother more of an extrovert than my father, or whether there is a gender difference in their grief, or whether social stereotypes of what is 'acceptable grieving' for a man influenced my father. I have witnessed this difference over the years and it directly influenced my choice of research topic.

## Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

The British Psychological Society (BPS) Division of Counselling Psychology (CoP) has an objective to promote the “wellbeing of our diverse society” (BPS, 2022). This includes a vision to promote “fairness, equality and social justice” and to meet “the psychological needs of people” (BPS, 2022). As counselling psychologists, we therefore support *all* people in their distress and it is imperative to include a wide variety of experience in the research literature that informs this support. This thesis focuses on the meaning making of eight men after losing someone they loved. It explores the gendered experience of male meaning making after loss and contributes to the already-existing literature on the reconstruction of meaning.

Men make up just over 50% of our global population (The World Bank, 2022). In 2021, in the UK, like in previous years, men were more likely than women to die by suicide (Mind, 2020; Samaritans, 2022). In fact, men between the ages of 40 and 49 have the highest rate of suicide in the UK (Mind, 2020). Nevertheless, only 36% of referrals to the National Health Service (NHS) talking therapies are for men (Mental Health Foundation, 2021). Much has been written about the low numbers of men who seek support (Galdas et al., 2005) and this has been linked to poor health outcomes in general for men (World Health Organization, 2018). Psychological research has been done looking at possible barriers to men seeking help, including: the feminized nature of therapy; therapist-client power imbalances; and, the influence of culture and dominant masculinities (Morison et al., 2014). To understand this pattern more fully, I will now, briefly, summarize the historical social developments of gender and ‘masculinity’ and discuss their influence on our society and men’s help-seeking behaviours within it. I will then locate my research within this context.

### 1.1 Brief history of sex and gender

All societies in the world, both past and present, recognise that men and women are different (Jablonka, 2019). Nevertheless, physiologically, they share more similarities than differences; we all have physical bodies which are born, before we mature, age and die (Jablonka, 2019). The sexes are both capable of communicating through language, feeling emotions, making meaning in life and making moral judgements, and they both have the same social, corporeal and emotional needs (Jablonka, 2019). Men and women, however, are distinguished on the sexual level, with women capable of becoming pregnant and bearing children and men incapable of this (Jablonka, 2019). **Historically, men’s behaviour has been understood through the lens of their biology, and “aggression and risk-taking behaviours are naturally occurring expressions of maleness” (Creighton & Oliffe, 2010, p.**

411). The biological and sexual differences between men and women were understood to determine the feminine and the masculine characters and consequently, all societies, both historically and across the world, have attached social formalities, rights, guidelines and duties to each sex, interpreted by individuals as gender (Creighton & Oliffe, 2010; Jablonka, 2019). This overly deterministic and binary way of understanding and interpreting masculinity and femininity has been challenged by a plethora of gender theories; nevertheless, today, we each understand the mandates required of our gender from early in life, as these are difficult to escape (Carrigan et al., 1985; Jablonka, 2019). Today, individuals can reject or adjust these gender prescriptions, allowing them to abandon the binary gender paradigm; however, there is little debate about the existence of this paradigm (Jablonka, 2019).

In order to understand the modern gender order and how current ideas about 'masculinity' have been produced, I will go back to the Neolithic period, from 9000 to 7000 BC, when, in an area stretching more than a thousand miles over the Middle East, in countries including Iraq, Syria, Israel, Lebanon and Turkey, man developed the agricultural process, making himself capable of being independent from nature as he could now produce food and breed animals (Fromm, 1973). Until that time, humans had lived more nomadic lives, moving from place to place in their groups, seeking the food they needed from the land (Fromm, 1973). By 4000 to 3000 BC, agriculturalists could create an abundance of food, therefore allowing people to devote their time to other aims, including manufacturing and trading (Fromm, 1973). The result was revolutionary, with the rise of populous cities, industry and foreign trade, alongside a new class structure, with the privileged being the leaders (Fromm, 1973).

A new economy emerged, and across the world from the Middle East and China, to Europe and the Americas, agriculture meant that patrilineal societies appeared (Jablonka, 2019). These social and political changes also meant profound changes for women, who were reduced to their biological functions (Jablonka, 2019). In previous nomadic life, where women were considered both different and equal to men, women had to carry their children, therefore limiting the number they produced (Fromm, 1973). However, the introduction of agriculture and a more sedentary life meant that more women became mothers to more children and men dominated the "rest of human activity." (Jablonka, 2019). There was a divide between the 'domestic' and the 'public', with women becoming wives and mothers "anchored" to their role of caretaker for the men and children in their lives (Creighton & Oliffe, 2010, p. 411; Lee & Owens, 2002). The (male) intellect became the source of new inventions, new thinking and new ways of being, including the production, manufacture and trade of goods. This developed the idea of a state, introducing a (male) leader and accompanying laws (Fromm, 1973). Men's inability to create children was converted to a



powerful status resulting in their social hegemony (Jablonka, 2019; Schofield et al, 2000). The way human beings lived, ate, reproduced, and related to each other was changed, with the 'masculine' dominating the 'feminine' in the new social order.

In this new, urbanised society, creation was no longer natural, a power which only the Earth and women had, and creation became dominated by masculinity, represented by thoughts and words (Fromm, 1973). Over time, the 'masculine' was understood as a character structure notable for being rational and scientific, and this was opposed with a more emotional, 'feminine' character type (Seidler, 1989). 'Masculine' and 'feminine' as social constructs were attributed to men and women in a binary way: "the new patriarchal man literally 'makes' the earth." (Fromm, 1973, p. 225).

## 1.2 'Masculinities' evolve

Over the last 200 years, masculinity's evolution has been inordinately complex. Summarily, in Europe and America, the gentry masculinity, men who owned land and ruled the state, split, gradually being replaced by new forms of dominant masculinity, including the technological 'expert' and the 'protective' armed forces (Connell, 1995). Subordinated and marginalized masculinities have also emerged; for example, the 'effeminate man' or homosexual 'camp' man (Connell, 1995).

During the twentieth century, gender theorists began to examine and critique gender relations and the evolution of male and female 'roles' (Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 2008; Messner, 1997). Gender began to be understood through a more social constructionist lens, and rather than being reduced to biological essentialism, these theorists argued that gender intersects with culture, social class, and history; therefore masculinity (and femininity) is actively constructed and produced (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Gerson & Preiss, 1985). The idea of 'hegemonic masculinity' became prevalent in understanding the social practice of power, dominance and subordination and this has been an idealised pattern that men have been invested in sustaining (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Today, we see the gender order around the world in global capitalism as its structures influence global corporate markets, state bureaucracies, armies and education systems (Connell, 1995). In South Africa, hegemonic masculinity is associated with violence and male deaths (Ratele, 2008); in Japan, the work-focused 'salaryman' continues to dominate (Dasgupta, 2009); and in Brazil, gendered ideology about masculinity continues to support drug traffickers' authority (Penglase, 2010). Gender relations are therefore an intrinsic part of international social structures and relations, with gender, ethnicity, class, age and

sexuality all intersecting (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Gerson & Preiss, 1985; Jablonka, 2019). There is therefore not one 'hegemonic masculinity', rather, many versions, dependent on context (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Jablonka, 2019).

### 1.3 'Masculinities' today

Jablonka (2019) posits that there are "four triumphs of the masculine" (p. 62), which are the different ways in which a man is able to impose his authority and dominate in society. These include: the "masculinity of ostentation" (Jablonka, 2019, p.62), where men display their vigour, confidence, fearlessness and profligacy by taking risks, fighting and often ignoring financial, moral and sexual boundaries; the "masculinity of control" (Jablonka, 2019, p.62) where a man's stoical attitude is lauded, when he is self-assured, disciplined, and he dominates himself, obeying "his injunction in order to attain a higher degree of power." (Jablonka, 2019, p.63); the "masculinity of sacrifice" (Jablonka, 2019, p.63) where a man is prepared to die for his principles or his 'cause', for example his partner, family, religion or country, thus conforming to the idea that "masculinity is the idea that there are things worth dying for." (Wheeler, 1984, pp. 140-141); and, the "masculinity of ambiguity" (Jablonka, 2019, p. 64) where a man occupies a more enigmatic position, able to incorporate characteristics considered more feminine, like crying and showing sensitivity; for example, "metrosexual' soccer players like David Beckham" (Jablonka, 2019, p. 65).

The purpose of these forms of masculinity is to separate 'real men' from the "wimps, cowards, chickens, quitters and sissies" (Jablonka, 2019, p. 67), and to disparage the feminine as inferior. Marginalised 'masculinities' have included those who do not conform to the 'dominant' or hegemonic paradigm of being white and upper/middle-class: the poor, working-class, homosexual and racially oppressed (Creighton & Oliffe, 2010). For a man to 'prove' his manhood, he must therefore enact the hegemonic values of strength, power and a disregard for danger (Capraro, 2000; Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 1997). The result is a paradigm where the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' exist in relation to each other and include dichotomies of: superior/inferior; strong/weak; rational/irrational; logical/illogical; hard/soft; and, trustworthy/suspect, among others (Jablonka, 2019).

Today, these binary positions have softened, with women and men being more equal than ever before and society more accepting of difference (Jablonka, 2019). Many and various movements for equality around the world have seen a myriad of victories (Jablonka, 2019). Women, and men who do not conform to the dominant 'male' paradigm, can lead multinational corporations, be educated as lawyers and doctors and they can join the armed

forces; “under the strain of this revolution, this ongoing battle, the patriarchy has started to crack.” (Jablonka, 2019, p. 90).

#### **1.4 ‘Masculinity’s’ relevance to psychological therapy**

Despite these numerous revolutions promoting equality, which have seen increased equal rights for women, girls and ‘non-conformist men’ in society, many men around the world appear to continue to live within the constraints of ‘dominant masculinity’ and how they have learned to ‘be a man’. Indeed, it is axiomatic in our Western culture that ‘boys don’t cry’ and men are reluctant to seek help (Good & Robertson, 2010). In Eastern Thai culture, research reports that depressive symptoms are viewed as unmasculine, preventing men from seeking help with depression (Rungreangkulkij, 2019). While it cannot be denied that there have been attempts to shift this message with public announcements promoting gender equality, such as Mind’s ‘Man Up: Getting more ‘men’ in mental health’ (Cambule, 2017), it does not seem to *substantially* improve the numbers of men who are referred for psychological therapy (Mental Health Foundation, 2021). Indeed, this seems to be a global issue (O’Brien et al., 2005), where men are taught from early in their lives to be ‘tough’, ‘independent’ and ‘keep control’, in order to conform to the dominant male gender mandate (Good & Robertson, 2010; Newman et al., 2001). I will now discuss these learned male injunctions.

##### **1.4.1 ‘Be tough’**

Early in life, boys learn that to be ‘masculine’ means to be tough and strong, and not crying, not acknowledging vulnerability and not showing weakness (Good & Robertson, 2010). This is consistent with Jablonka’s “masculinity of ostentation” (2019, p. 62). If boys and men do show weakness, they risk being ostracized, shamed or even attacked by those who do conform to the dominant masculine commands (Good & Robertson, 2010). **Indeed, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue that hegemonic masculinity idealises men who are self-reliant and strong, preventing the men who conform to this gender mandate from demonstrating concern with self-health, illness, injury or psychological distress.** Men and boys who are socialized in this way assume a certain stoicism in each other and in themselves, **which they want to sustain (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005;** Good & Robertson, 2010). This reinforces the learning that ‘boys don’t ask for help’ and ‘real men are tough’ despite conversations, research and public service announcements to the contrary (Galdas et al., 2005).

##### **1.4.2 Independence**

The masculine rule of not showing vulnerability or weakness also extends to their reluctance to feel dependent; indeed, the mandate for men seems to encourage their counter-dependence **and autonomy**, where they ardently refuse any form of dependence on others (Bergman, 1995; **Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005;** Good & Robertson, 2010). This includes

the therapeutic relationship, where the therapist is the 'expert', and in a position to misdirect the man and 'use' his vulnerability against him (Good & Robertson, 2010). In particular, men may not look for therapeutic support as they feel they may be less respected and considered less skilled (Good & Robertson, 2010). This is consistent with Jablonka's "masculinity of sacrifice" (2019, p.63) where men are willing to sacrifice themselves, refusing help or dependence of any kind.

### **1.4.3 Keeping control**

In line with the 'be tough and independent' masculine mandates, men are often embarrassed to acknowledge they have a problem, **with hegemonic masculinity valuing self-reliance and robustness (De Visser, 2009; Kimmel, 1997;** Good & Robertson, 2010). Generally speaking, they are familiar with being 'in charge' of their careers, relationships, health and other aspects of their daily lives; they are socialized to be 'in control' (Mahalik et al, 2003). If they rely on a therapist for help, who has control of their lives? (Good & Robertson, 2010). They may adopt a 'wait and see' approach to their problem, where they do not seek supportive help, as they do not want to be misdirected and lose control (Good & Robertson, 2010). Furthermore, if men are encouraged by a partner or family member to seek psychological help, or they are mandated to by the court system, or their employer, men may feel that others have more influence in their lives than they do, and therefore they are powerless (Good & Robertson, 2010). The result may be that they do not appear for therapy, or that they do so reluctantly, to appease others (Good & Robertson, 2010). This is consistent with Jablonka's "masculinity of control" (2019, p. 62), where man is disciplined and self-assured.

## **1.5 Psychology in today's society**

Since the emergence of the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' as 'separate spheres' (Bloch, 1978), the rational, mathematical, 'masculine', 'hard' sciences have been viewed as superior to the more emotional, 'feminine', 'softer' human sciences (Jablonka, 2019). Western society has tended to view professions that are associated with the 'feminine', like caring, teaching and nursing, as subordinate to the more 'masculine' professions, like law, medicine and engineering, which are seen as 'notable achievements' (Jablonka, 2019). Psychology is positioned between the mathematical and quantitative scientific tradition of 'masculine' rationality and the 'softer', qualitative and more 'feminine' human sciences. In our culture, the more 'feminine' nature of talking therapy is represented and dominated by more 'masculine' scientific research, therefore locating talking therapy within the rational paradigm of 'evidence-based practice' (University College London, 2014). Despite this scientific supremacy, psychology and psychological therapy are mainly perceived as being nurturing and caring, using the more stereotypically 'female' methods of exploring feelings and talking about emotions. It is therefore a predominantly female profession, with 73% of counselling

psychologists (Goodyear et al., 2016) and 80% of clinical psychologists in the UK being women (Jacimovic, 2022).

One reason given by men to explain their ambivalence in seeking psychological support is this 'feminization of psychology' (Morison et al., 2014). Do women have the 'expertise', a dominant and stereotypically 'masculine' characteristic, to successfully help a man in distress? (Good & Robertson, 2010). Can a man admit vulnerability, distress, fear and other difficult emotions to a female therapist, who will occupy a position of power in his life? Within the paradigm of dominant masculinity, women were relegated to domestic duties, excluded from positions of power (Creighton & Oliffe, 2010; Jablonka, 2019; Lee & Owens, 2002). Today, in the third decade of the twenty-first century, women in some cultures do sit in positions of power, benefit from the education system and are considered experts in multiple fields; however, a mistrust of therapy does exist for many men, as they do not want to risk relinquishing control of their lives (Good & Robertson, 2010). Indeed, 'trust/suspicion' is one binary aspect of the male/female gender paradigm described above (Jablonka, 2019) and many men seem to feel suspicious of therapy and the female 'expert' therapist (Good & Robertson, 2010).

Taken altogether, patriarchal authority maintains its influence on social and gendered relations within our society, including the therapeutic relationship (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Jablonka, 2019; Kimmel, 2023). Many boys continue to be socialised in learning the 'masculine' injunctions of 'be tough', 'be independent' and 'be disciplined and in control' (Good & Robertson, 2010), with Addis and Mahalik (2003) attributing men's avoidance of health care services to the masculine mandates of stoicism and self-reliance. While this is changing in our society, with the numbers of men seeking help greater than ever before (Mind, 2020), the numbers of men referred for psychological therapy remain low, and this is potentially attributable to how they have learned to 'be a man' from an early age.

## **1.6 Diversify and include for social change**

To maximise the chances of working well with male clients, it is necessary for all therapists to engage with each male client's concerns in an understanding and validating way (Good & Mintz, 2005; Good & Robertson, 2010). This does mean having some knowledge of working with men and their gendered world (Good & Mintz, 2005; Good & Robertson, 2010). In turn, it is necessary to conduct, disseminate and engage with research where men's experiences have been included and their opinions have been heard.

While the number of men who feel able to seek help and therapeutic support is increasing, the statistics also show that more men than ever are experiencing mental health problems (Mind, 2020). Therefore, it is now of the utmost importance to ensure that *all* men feel able to access talking therapies and seek support. This becomes difficult when we consider the dominant social and gender paradigm in which we live, where many boys learn early *not* to be vulnerable, *not* to ask for help and *not* to cry or show weakness (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

I believe that men and boys will be better placed to embrace talking therapy and exploring their vulnerabilities and internal worlds when the social structures inside which we *all* live and relate can tolerate these behaviours without ostracising, humiliating, attacking or shaming men, or anyone, for it. In turn, this will lead to greater equality in our society, between men, women and those who identify as both and neither. The difference between the current 'dominant' and 'subordinate' positions would be more balanced, where there is freedom and opportunity for all, and where the common humanity in each of us is recognised and valued. In the words of Jablonka (2019), "Broken up into masculinities, the masculine becomes one experience among many others. The day when men are capable of defending equality will be the day they emerge out of the archaic and become modern. It is now their turn to fight against patriarchy – which is toxic for them as well." (p. 336).

## **1.7 This thesis' focus on men**

This thesis focuses on the meaning making of eight men after they have been bereaved. In Chapter 2, I will review the literature that exists on making meaning after the death of a loved one and why I feel it is important to focus specifically on the male experience. My hope is to offer support to bereaved men in our society, and the counselling psychologists, psychotherapists and others who support them, to promote equality for all, regardless of gender, sexuality, or non-conformity to the dominant masculine injunctions that hinder help-seeking for many at their time of greatest need.

### **1.7.1 Reflexivity I**

I am a middle-class, white, heterosexual woman researching men and how they make meaning after losing a loved one. I occupy a privileged position in society as a result of my ethnicity, social class and sexuality. I am also a woman, for whom society has expectations and rules, distinct from men. I was raised in a traditional family environment, where my father was the main breadwinner and my mother worked as a teacher during my upbringing. She was the primary-carer for me and my siblings as we grew up. I was

encouraged by both my parents to be ambitious in my education and career. Nevertheless, my implicit sense of what was expected of me as a female in society, having children, becoming a mother, raising a family, was not compatible with a legal career in the City of London. I could see no way of attaining a balance between the two positions, due to the strong expectations of both environments to 'be' a certain way. In the law firm, for example, my career progressed when I worked long hours round the clock, was stoical and disciplined, and understood and applied the 'work hard, play hard' mindset. This was not compatible either with my social relationships or with my desire to start a family and raise children, while also continuing with a career.

In my current research, I realize that I have an interest in questioning dominant masculinity and my experience of its oppressive forces, not as a man, but as a woman. I believe it is important to be explicit about my interest in and experience of the dominant and authoritative paradigm, that has hindered me in the past, and which may also impact those who continue to work within its framework.

### **1.8 Structure of this thesis**

The chapters of this thesis are as follows: Chapter 2 is a review of the literature relevant to the topic being studied, male meaning-making after the loss of a loved one; Chapter 3 provides a detailed review of the methodology, the methods used in this study and the process of analysing the data; Chapter 4 describes the findings and themes of the research; Chapter 5 brings the findings and themes of the research together with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 to discuss implications, meanings, potential further studies and clinical recommendations.

## Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Chapter overview

In this chapter, I will explore what meaning is and introduce my topic of making meaning after bereavement. I will review literature that is relevant to this topic. I will then discuss my focus on men and male meaning-making. I have decided to examine death and meaning-making through an existential lens, which I will start this section by summarizing.

### 2.2 Existentialism and loss

#### 2.2.1 Reflexivity II

As discussed in the Preface, I have the personal experience of losing my sister. This devastating death initially shattered the structures of my life and was my first meaningful encounter with death, as I contemplated hers and the inevitability of mine. I became aware that life is finite. This existential awareness felt both scary and sobering, and part of my frustration was that I had lost a 'relational home' for my feelings of grief, sadness, reverence and horror (Stolorow, 2019). I had lost my sister, a human connection that I had taken for granted in my childhood and that was hugely important to me. Over time, I realized that I was entirely responsible for my life and its meaningful structures. Living with meaning has been vital to me in order to incorporate her death into my life and to help me make sense of it. For me, looking at bereavement through an existential lens makes sense as this has helped me to understand my own loss at a deeper level.

#### 2.2.2 An overview

Existentialism is a philosophy that addresses what it means to be human and to exist; it reflects on everyday human experiences and attempts to make sense of them (van Deurzen, 2010). Indeed, the existential paradigm considers meaninglessness, isolation, freedom and death as 'facts of life' (Yalom, 1980). Every person will have their own unique conflicts in relation to these 'facts of life' and existential philosophy addresses the immense human capacity to find hope and meaning in both mundane and harsh life experiences (Frankl, 2004). Looking through an existential lens, we are free to make choices and to act; consequently, we are responsible for our actions, as well as the void or 'nothingness' in our lives (Yalom, 1980). From this human freedom to choose comes a human need for structure: it is this structure that can be shattered when we lose someone we love, leaving us feeling alone and in torment, making the loss arduous to bear (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006). Many prominent existential philosophers recognize intersubjectivity as essential to human existence (Buber, 1955; Heidegger, 1963; Sartre, 1956; Stolorow & Atwood, 2019; van



Deurzen, 2002). We do not exist in a vacuum: humans are beings *in relation to* other humans. We are meaning making creatures who have feelings, both emotional and physical; we wonder what we mean to other people and what they mean to us. It is difficult to imagine life without *being in relation to* other humans. When we lose someone we love, we lose the possibility of physically *being with* them. We grieve the loss, which can represent a profound challenge for a human being. According to Stolorow (2019), the “unbearable emotional pain” (p.76) from an emotional trauma, like loss, can only be integrated into a person’s worldview when the pain can be held in a “relational home” (p76) characterized by deep emotional attunement and understanding. Viewed through the existential framework, death is a fact of life and bereavement is a critical life experience; when these are confronted, we have the opportunity to live authentically and meaningfully (Frankl, 2004; Paidoussis-Mitchell, 2018; van Deurzen, 2010).

## **2.3 What is meaning?**

### **2.3.1 The meaning of meaning**

Meaning is a difficult concept to define: to give it meaning is to impose *my* meaning onto it. Accordingly, meaning is to do with language and mental representations and it joins ideas and phenomena together (Baumeister, 1991). McKenzie and Baumeister (2014) have defined meaning as “a shared mental representation of possible relationships among things, relationships and events. Thus, meaning is the basis of a collective, organized network of concepts” (p. 26). The purpose of meaning is for us to adapt to the environment in which we each live and to manage ourselves in our external environments (Baumeister, 1991). This means that in each of our physical and social environments, there are codes, customs, rules, traits and behaviours that govern us. Understanding these allows us to get on with each other (Baumeister, 1991). We are required to regulate ourselves and our actions in order to respond to our environment, rather than acting impulsively and instinctively (Baumeister, 1991). Thus, imposing meaning on life enables us to make decisions and act based on our values, goals, obligations and ambitions: these guide our actions, taking us beyond our present environment (Baumeister, 1991).

Meaning in life is not only about self-regulation in our surroundings; it also helps us to regulate our affect, which is linked to the plethora of different emotions that human beings feel (Baumeister, 1991). When humans feel emotions, we feel them in our bodies and there is often a physical reaction (Schachter & Singer, 1962). Without the meaning that we each attribute to the bodily sensations we feel when emotional, our emotional world would be reduced to ‘pleasant sensation’ or ‘unpleasant sensation’ (Baumeister, 1991). Indeed, our

feelings and emotions, felt in our bodies, can be subtly different due to the meanings we give them (Baumeister, 1991; Schachter & Singer, 1962). Conversely, meanings can also *cause* feelings and emotions in us, for example, when we watch something poignant on the television, or receive a communication from someone who means something to us, sparking an emotional reaction (Baumeister, 1991).

Summarily, meaning guides our lives, both in terms of our external actions *and* our internal feelings. When these structures are shattered, for example, through the death of a loved one, we can feel hollow and insignificant, losing meaning and direction in our lives (Baumeister, 1991).

### **2.3.2 Baumeister's 'four needs for meaning'**

Baumeister (1991, p. 32) has written about the "four needs of meaning" in life, offering a structure for how people understand and make sense of their lives. He concedes that these 'four needs of meaning' suggest a rather arbitrary, delineated view of meanings in life. Indeed, there could be more or fewer 'needs of meaning': what is material is the theoretical space covered by them (Baumeister, 1991). According to Baumeister (1991), the 'four needs of meaning' are: purpose, value, efficacy, and, self-worth. A person whose life satisfies these four needs is likely to feel fulfilled and that their life has meaning (Baumeister, 1991). A person who is not able to satisfy one or more of the needs, may feel that their life is unbalanced and incomplete, requiring change and restructuring (Baumeister, 1991). I will now briefly discuss each of the four 'needs of meaning' (Baumeister, 1991).

#### **(i) Purpose**

We all want to feel that we have purpose in our lives, and purpose or "purposiveness" is considered a major need (Baumeister, 1991, p. 32). This is where our actions are directed towards a goal, which is important to us, requiring us to focus our immediate actions for a future objective (Baumeister, 1991). Whether the target is reached is not important, and it may be that we act with purpose and intention, without reaching our ambition (Baumeister, 1991). Baumeister (1991) divides 'purpose' into two sections: goals and fulfilments. Our behaviour and actions in the present depend on our goals, which are external to us, and may mean that we have to push ourselves in an undesirable way in order to achieve them (Baumeister, 1991). Purposes that are internal to us, or 'intrinsic purposes', are called fulfilments and we pursue these in order that we feel a certain way; for example, listening to a piece of music (Baumeister, 1991). Fulfilments are considered ideas about how a person might feel in the future if a certain intrinsic goal is attained; this helps individuals make decisions and act in the present (Baumeister, 1991).

## **(ii) Value**

Frankl (1959) places great emphasis on value and the justifications for people's actions. Value encourages actions that a person believes in, as a person's actions are justified as good and right. It is thus a form of motivation (Baumeister, 1991). Our values justify both our past and our present actions (Baumeister, 1991); for example, my value of authenticity motivates me to research meaning making after bereavement, as this has been helpful to me in my life. My value of equality between people drives me to conduct a research study about male meaning making after loss, to ensure the male voice is included in the psychological research on this topic. I will explore this in greater depth below.

## **(iii) Efficacy**

Baumeister's (1991) third 'need for meaning' is efficacy, which is when a person assumes control of their life. This often involves feeling capable, tenacious and that we are making a difference (Baumeister, 1991). Alongside purpose and value, which motivate and legitimize actions and behaviours, efficacy involves feeling capable and robust in realizing goals and values (Baumeister, 1991). When we achieve our goals and meet the challenges in our lives, we feel satisfied. If the challenges are too easy, there is less satisfaction, and if they are too difficult, there is more frustration and failure than satisfaction (Baumeister, 1991). It is the subjective sense of efficacy, and the feeling of having an impact on the world, that is essential for a meaningful life, and not the objective control that the individual has over a situation (Baumeister, 1991). Indeed, when a person is deprived of efficacy, they may feel distressed, uncomfortable and helpless in their life (Baumeister, 1991).

## **(iv) Self-worth**

Self-worth is the fourth of Baumeister's (1991) 'needs for meaning' and it involves self-respect, pride in the self and some form of respect and regard from others. A feeling of self-worth or self-esteem can mean a feeling of superiority over others (Baumeister, 1991). When applied to the paradigm of dominant masculinity, it might be argued that the self-worth of dominant men can come from feeling superior to others in society; more powerful, more influential and more confident, therefore getting respect and esteem from others (Jablonka, 2019). Dominant men, therefore, may fulfil this 'need of meaning' (Baumeister, 1991) by virtue of their position in society.

## **2.4 Meaning and loss: what the literature says**

The loss of a significant relationship can undermine the bereaved person's fundamental beliefs about themselves, their relationships and their world and it can destroy the purposeful, essential, assumptive structures in their lives (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). One

possible consequence of loss and the consequent shifting of the bedrock of sustenance and support in life, is that life seems pointless and bleak (Holland et al., 2006). The guiding framework that did provide substance and value is fragmented and this can feel devastating for the bereaved (Neimeyer, 2001). In researching loss, meaning making, or “the formulation of a subjective understanding of the loss” (Currier et al., 2006, p. 403) has been considered as having a central role in the restoration process in order to integrate this experience into the lives of the bereaved, to assist them in developing new structures and beliefs to navigate the world (Janoff-Bulman & Frantz, 1997; Neimeyer & Anderson, 2002).

Three meaning making processes have been identified in the literature on meaning reconstruction: sense-making; benefit-finding; and, identity change (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006). These have been shown to help the bereaved rebuild the framework of their lives, their ‘assumptive world’, and adapt to their new reality (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). Meaning is therefore distinguished as a process of making sense of the loss and integrating it into the life of the bereaved, and as an outcome, where a benefit, or meaning, is made, constructed or encountered, resulting in an identity shift (Gillies et al., 2014; Thimm & Holland, 2017). Finding meaning after loss therefore involves developing an understanding of the experience of loss *and* finding some positive psychological changes as a result of the loss “such as developing a new perception of the self as well as a novel way of understanding the world and relationships” (Boyras et al., 2012, p. 520; Janoff-Bulman & Yopyk, 2004).

## 2.5 Who benefits from meaning making?

What has been shown to be *unhelpful* to the bereaved is the idea that there are emotional stages of grief that need to be ‘gone through’ in order to come to terms with loss in a ‘healthy’ and ‘timely’ manner (Stroebe et al., 2017). Nevertheless, research has shown that how we support grieving people, as a society and as clinicians who work with the bereaved, seems ‘stuck’ in promoting this ‘stage-theory’ of grief (Stroebe et al., 2017). It has been argued that such a ‘stage-theory’ of grief is popular and embedded in our response to grief as it helps clinicians, and the bereaved themselves, understand complex systems of human behaviour, which can then be used to inform clinical interventions and diagnostic criteria, therefore supporting the bereaved and those who work with them (McGorry, 2007). Kübler-Ross (1969) is usually credited with the emergence of this ‘stage-theory’, as she documented her observations of the five stages of grieving that people go through in her work *On Death and Dying*: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. In this work, the suggestion was that the stages of grief were distinct and linear, with minimal

acknowledgement of any fluctuation between the stages, the possibility of co-existing stages or time sequences unique to each individual bereaved person (Stroebe et al., 2017). A sixth stage of grief has subsequently been added, 'finding meaning' (Kessler, 2019) and although this focuses more on the individual experience of the bereaved, the separate, sequential stages remain (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). These 'stages' of grief as underpinning a conceptual model for therapy with bereaved people has been criticised by various researchers as "suspiciously simplistic" (Neimeyer, 2000, p. 547) as grief is not a "linear process with concrete boundaries but, rather, a composite of overlapping, fluid phases that vary from person to person" (Shuchter & Zisook, 1993, p. 23). The stages are not based on solid, robust scientific evidence and adhering to them, therefore, could potentially lead to its prescriptive use by practitioners who want to their bereaved clients to grieve in a certain way, with possible disastrous consequences for those who do not conform to the grieving process imposed on them (Corr, 2015; Osterweis et al., 1984; Silver & Wortman, 1980).

Despite the acclaim for this 'stage-theory' of grief, much research exists demonstrating that after a bereavement, not all individuals will follow the same path or 'stages' of grief; we are all individuals with unique histories, biologies, families and cultures and therefore, there is no generic grief guide that can be applied to all (Friedman & James, 2008; Silver & Wortman, 2007; Stroebe et al., 2017). What can be helpful to people after a bereavement is meaning making, not as a distinct sixth 'stage' of grief (Kessler, 2019) but rather as an approach to support those whose worldviews are destroyed after the death of someone they love, making life feel meaningless and difficult, and leaving us feeling hollow (Bonnano et al., 2004). Not all individuals will look for new meanings in their lives after a loss, and this does not mean that their grief is problematic (Bonnano et al., 2004). For some people, their worldviews may not be shattered as a result of the death of a loved one, and so they do not have to renegotiate their way of seeing the world; indeed, their existing world views may be *affirmed* by the loss (Bonnano et al., 2004)

The meaninglessness that may accompany loss can cause profound distress to some bereaved people and those who *struggle* to find new meanings have been shown to have difficulty in adjusting to their loss (Currier et al., 2006). Those who are successful in making sense of their loss, and incorporating this new meaning into their lives, adjust well to it (Bonnano et al., 2004; Neimeyer et al., 2006). It is the *successful* search for meaning, for those bereaved who look for it, that is helpful. Furthermore, those individuals who are able to make sense of their loved one's death, were shown to derive something positive, a 'silver lining', from their experience of loss and they reported a shift in their identity, as a benefit and as a result of their bereavement (Neimeyer et al., 2006). Indeed, meaning-based group

counselling has been shown to benefit individuals who have been bereaved, who want to make sense of their loss and who have not developed complicated grief (MacKinnon et al., 2015)

Some individuals will develop 'complicated grief' after the death of someone they love. This is grief that is prolonged and includes elevated depression, cognitive disorganization and health problems. It has been linked to those individuals who lose someone by homicide, suicide or accident (a 'violent loss') (Currier et al., 2006). In his article *Mourning and Melancholia*, Freud (1917) recognised grief can sometimes become pathological, like 'complicated' or complex grief, and along with Anderson (1949), he reasoned that this was due to hostile wishes towards the person who had died that had turned inward. The angry feelings towards the deceased person caused guilt in the bereaved person, as it tarnished the memory of the person who had died, and this led to a self-hatred, which was expressed as 'melancholia' (Freud, 1917; Miller, 1970). Melanie Klein (1935, 1937) writes about 'reparation' after a significant loss and this is a process that can take some time after bereavement. It involves the bereaved person no longer idealising the person who has died and integrating a more balanced memory of them. 'Mourning' is central to this process, and is expressed by Klein as 'remorse' (Klein, 1937). Without this process of de-idealisation and integration, Klein (1935, 1937) argues that the work of 'mourning' cannot be done and a bereaved person is more likely to feel desolate, disintegrated and shattered after their loss. Indeed, other literature has shown that approximately half of those people who are bereaved develop depression in the year following the death (Koblenz, 2015) and sixteen per cent of the bereaved remain depressed after the first year of living with loss (Jacobs et al., 1990).

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-5's (DSM-5) Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD) puts a time limit of 12 months after the death of a loved one, for a bereaved person to show that they have moved on, do not yearn for or show intense preoccupation with the person who has died, and do not feel lonely, numb and that life is meaningless, among other similar criteria (American Psychological Association, 2022). Previous research on gender differences and pathological grief has shown that there is a positive association between being female and being diagnosed with PGD, as women were more likely to display severe symptoms of PGD after bereavement (Heeke et al., 2017; Killikelly et al., 2019; Zhou et al., 2020). Indeed, in a longitudinal study conducted with bereaved men and women, a similar proportion of men and women stated that they experienced symptoms that would classify as PGD two months after their loss. Nine months later, and eleven months after the loss, the same participants were asked about their reactions to their loss and it was found that women were more likely than men to display PGD symptoms (Lundorff et al., 2020). As

discussed in chapter one, introduction, men and women are socialised differently, with women expected, encouraged and permitted in our society to be more emotionally expressive than men, who are encouraged and expected to suppress their emotional responses, or express their anger (Granek, 2021; Stelzer et al., 2019). This potentially means that women are more likely to talk and express their inner emotions when they are distressed, as this is in line with gendered expectations in society. It follows that the more distressed a man is, and the more time that passes after a distressing experience, the *less* likely he is to talk and express his emotions, as this is not in line with the masculine mandate of stoicism and autonomy (Granek, 2021; Kimmel, 1997). It could therefore be argued that the inclusion of PGD in the DSM-5 (APA, 2022) is a way of controlling grief and the predominantly female reaction to the loss of a loved one. This is an example of the (masculine) power structures within which we live, and diagnose, exerting their authority and influence on the bereaved by pathologizing a grief reaction that is more likely to be female and makes (the female) gender a risk factor for developing Prolonged Grief Disorder (APA, 2022; Romero, 2021).

Those who develop complicated grief can benefit from successful meaning making (Currier et al., 2006; Holland et al., 2006; Milman et al., 2019). If the search for meaning is *not* successful, the individual who has been bereaved by violent loss is *more* likely to develop complicated grief (Milman et al., 2019). Indeed, even when the death was not unexpected and violent, the unsuccessful search for meaning has been linked to complicated grief: in a study of bereaved parents, they often struggled to make sense of their loss or find a benefit in their lives after the death of their child, and they continued their search for meaning, experiencing continued suffering (Lichtenthal et al., 2010). A similar result has been shown for those who lose close relationships: the closer the relationship, for example the loss of a child or spouse, the higher the chances of developing complicated grief after violent loss (Rozalski et al., 2017). Successful meaning making was shown to benefit those who lose a close relationship to a violent death (Currier et al., 2006; Keesee et al., 2008). Finally, meaning making was also found to be beneficial for those who had lost a close relationship and who wanted to adjust to their loss through their continuing bond with their lost loved one (Keser & Isikli, 2022).

As counselling psychologists and psychotherapists, this research informs us of the importance to support individuals who search for meaning in order to help them to reconstruct the meaningful structures in their lives, and find a benefit that makes sense to them and their identity, particularly after violent loss and where the relationship was close (Currier et al., 2006; Keser & Isikli, 2022; Milman et al., 2019; Rozalski et al., 2017).

## **2.6 What variables affect the process of meaning making?**

For those bereaved individuals who want to re-evaluate and construct a new and meaningful framework for their lives, individual differences have been shown to affect this process. The early maladaptive schemas of rejection and disconnection (expecting secure attachments not to be met), and self-sacrifice (a focus on meeting others' needs) were linked to the development of complicated grief and a struggle to find meaning (Thimm & Holland, 2017). Furthermore, positive affectivity and extraversion were positively linked to social support and meaning making after bereavement, with the capacity for reflection having a mediating role between looking for new meaning, affect and finding positive meaning (Boyratz et al., 2010, 2012).

This reflective capacity is important in the process of making meaning as grief is *active* (Alves et al., 2013). Innovative Moments (IMs) have been identified as moments when meaning is made in a bereaved person's narrative as there is a shift: action, reflection, protest, reconceptualization and performing change have been identified as these 'moments of change' (Alves et al., 2013). The more IMs that emerge in a person's narrative, the better the outcomes for that bereaved individual. Identifying IMs as the mechanisms for making meaning allows clinicians to analyze the *process* of meaning making objectively, without relying on self-report measures. In particular, reflection, reconceptualization and performing change have been linked to positive client functioning in the course of therapy after bereavement (Piazza-Bonin et al., 2016; Piazza-Bonin et al., 2016a).

Therapists can support their bereaved clients with certain therapist procedures that have been linked to IMs; for example, narrative writing exercises, empty chair dialogues, visualization and imaginal conversations alongside empathic attunement and active listening (Piazza-Bonin et al., 2016, 2016a). Therefore, therapists and bereaved clients can work together to co-construct new meanings for the client in the course of therapy following a loss.

## **2.7 Themes of meanings-made**

This co-construction of new meanings is illustrated by the development of the Meaning of Loss Codebook (MLC), which helps clinicians recognize the prevalent themes of meanings-made by the bereaved (Gillies et al., 2014). This has been developed for clinicians who hold different theoretical perspectives and was based on the information supplied by a diverse and large population of bereaved individuals. Codes were developed for the thirty most common meanings-made; including, personal growth (the most prevalent), acceptance, identity change, family bonds, lost identity, spirituality and release from suffering, amongst others. This MLC also includes the perspectives of those individuals who have *struggled* to



make meaning, as it includes the themes of 'lack of understanding' and 'no meaning'. Despite this being a useful tool for clinicians, it cannot be applied to any meanings-made that are artistic, musical or non-literal. However, one study looking at the perspectives of the *therapists* who support those who have been bereaved through suicide, supports this approach of co-constructing a framework of meaning in a bereaved person's life with language and narrative, and this was identified as central to a bereaved individual's adjustment to their loss (Gall et al., 2014).

In one study of bereaved parents, themes of spirituality and religious beliefs were helpful for meaning making after their child's death (Lichtenthal et al., 2010). Furthermore, this study noted that it was important to the bereaved parents to incorporate their increased desire to help others and their compassion for the suffering of other people into their lives in a meaningful way, after their loss (Lichtenthal et al., 2010). Spiritual meanings were also explored in relation to different types of death (homicide, suicide, accident, natural), with meaning-making having an important role when an individual's spirituality and faith is challenged after the loss of a loved one (Neimeyer & Burke, 2017). Consistent with this research was a recent study where finding a benefit in the loss and that benefit then leading to the re-evaluation and eventual change in the bereaved person's sense of their identity after their loss, contributed to a reduction in distress and the sense of grief and also to a positive state of mind (Romero, 2021). This concurred with Gillies and Neimeyer (2006) who posit that "by reconstructing meaning in our lives in response to loss, we necessarily reconstruct ourselves" (p. 37).

## **2.8 Limitations of the existing research**

Taken together, this literature provides a wide body of research to support those who work with bereaved people to reconstruct the meaning in their lives after losing someone they love. The quantitative studies on who benefitted from meaning making and what variables affected meaning making relied on cross-sectional, self-report measures; therefore, the lasting effects of meaning making are not known, and more longitudinal research is required. Furthermore, two of these studies assessed meaning making by asking participants, *How much sense have you made of the loss?* (Boyraz et al., 2012; Currier et al., 2006). This suggests that the meaning making process has an end point, which may have prevented some participants from expanding on the extent of their sense-making *thus far*. Further research looking at meaning making as an ongoing process is required.

### 2.8.1 The gap in the literature

As discussed, the existing research covers diverse groups of people, including bereaved young adults (Stein et al., 2018; Thimm & Holland, 2017); parents who have lost children (Lichtenthal et al., 2010); those who have lost a first-degree family member (Keser & Isikli, 2022); older widows and widowers (Bonanno et al., 2004); those who have been married to or cared for, and then lost, someone with Alzheimer's disease (Romero, 2021); those who have developed complicated grief (Currier et al., 2006); those who have not (MacKinnon et al., 2015); and, those who struggle to make sense of their loss after two years (Milman et al., 2019). These, and the other studies included in this review, all support a meaning reconstruction approach to grief therapy (Neimeyer, 2019). Nevertheless, in *all* of these studies, the majority of the participants were female. The highest level of male participants in any of the studies was 28% (Milman et al., 2019). Therefore, if men accommodate loss differently, it is not robustly included in the research, which is not based on an equal proportion of male voices. There may be no difference between men and women and how they make sense of their loss and make meaning after it; however, this cannot be assumed until men's perspectives and experiences are more resolutely included. Supposing that men and women make meaning in the same way after a loss presumes that men and women *are* the same, thus dismissing their gendered experiences in the world and the impact of social constructions of gender, treating them in a detached and clinical way.

It is important to note, at this point, that both Currier et al. (2006) and Romero (2021) posit that female spouses are more likely to experience high levels of depression and complicated grief symptoms. In particular, Romero's (2021) quantitative study specifically looked at gender as being a risk factor for complicated grief. However, in this study, 88% of the 66 participants were female (and only 29 participants were spouses): the small sample size and the high proportion of female participants may have limited the strength of the study and the capacity to reach statistical significance (Romero, 2021). This limits the wider applicability of the findings of this study and opens questions as to gender being a risk factor for complicated grief. **This will be further explored in chapter five, discussion.**

### 2.9 Grief and age

**Research conducted with elderly people who have been bereaved has shown that they are more accepting of loss than younger or middle-aged adults because older adults, aged 65 and above, are more likely to expect death to happen to them and those they know; they have lived for a long time; and, they can conceive of life ending (Ball, 1976-1977; Gramlich, 1968; Stern & Williams, 1951). However, it has also been noted that older people will grieve differently and often they will have unique effects from their loss, due to their place in the**

lifespan (Kowalchuk, 2021): the stress of grief and loss can make older people more susceptible to health problems due to increased stress combined with the natural effects of aging and any existing health concerns; confusion after the death of a loved one is common, and for older people, this may lead to disorganisation, disorientation and forgetting important information; their sense of being alone may increase when those they love die, increasing their vulnerability and risk of death from social isolation (Kowalchuk, 2021). Other research has shown that older and middle-aged adults report more feelings of grief than younger adults (Patrick & Henrie, 2016). Taken together, while older people may be more accepting and expectant of death in their lives, the somatic feelings after being bereaved and their feelings of grief, isolation and despair may be more intense (Jacobs et al., 1986; Patrick & Henrie, 2016; Stern & Williams, 1951; Gramlich, 1968).

Other research has shown that widowers die at a higher rate than widows (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1993) and that the widowers' risk of death or ill-health does not lessen with increasing age (Osterweis et al., 1984). We will now look at existing research on grieving, meaning making and gender differences.

## **2.10 Research on gender differences**

Gender socialisation processes of men and women are thought to impact their behavioural, emotional and cognitive processes after being bereaved (Stelzer et al., 2019). Social role theorists have explained that gender stereotypes can impact how men and women act, think and express themselves in society, with women occupying more 'communal' roles, where emotional expression is allowed, and men occupying more 'agentic' roles, where they are more independent and self-reliant (Eagly et al., 2000; Stelzer et al., 2019). Research shows that men are more likely to convey information with the language they use, and women are more likely to express their emotional processes (Newman et al., 2008). Furthermore, it has been noted that, in the bereavement context, women tend to use more sadness, anxiety and positive emotion words, and refer to their social networks and support, while men tend to use more words associated with anger when they do express their internal states (Mehl & Pennebaker, 2003; Newman et al., 2008). This is consistent with the research on spousal loss in older adults, which has shown that widows have more social support and integration than widowers, who tend to be more self-reliant, in line with the expected gender norms for men in society (Stroebe et al., 2001). This may explain the previous research which found that widowers die at a higher rate than widows, and also have poorer health than them after being bereaved (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1993). This is also consistent with the literature discussed in section 2.5, which found that gender is a risk factor in the development of

Prolonged Grief Disorder (APA, 2022) or complicated grief, with women more likely than men to receive this diagnosis due to the social acceptability and encouragement of women's emotional expression (Granek, 2021; Romero, 2021)

In their study on how men and women expressed themselves after the death of a loved one, Stelzer et al. (2019) found that there were no gender differences and this was described as "puzzling as it fails to replicate previous research reporting gender differences in various linguistic categories" (Stelzer et al., 2019, p. 7; Mehl & Pennebaker, 2008; Newman et al., 2008). It is posited that a potential reason for this finding is a result of the men and women who participated all doing so voluntarily, demonstrating their motivation and desire to talk about their losses (Stelzer et al., 2019). As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, chapter one, there is an implicit expectation on men from other men to 'prove' their manhood, and this can be done by displays of strength, power and a disregard for danger (Capraro, 2000; Kimmel, 1997). Situational context is therefore important when considering gender differences in behaviour (Stelzer et al., 2019) and gender differences are more likely to occur in situations where there is more expectation for a gender to behave in a certain way and when any observers to the particular situation have more traditional gender role expectations, and this is more likely to happen when men watch or perceive other men (Bosson et al., 2006; Deaux & Major, 1987). Stelzer et al.'s (2019) study was conducted by interviewing individual bereaved men and women in private, talking to one female researcher; this potentially means that the male participants did not feel compelled to conform to traditional masculine gender stereotypical behaviours, as they might have done if the interviewer had been male or done publicly (Stelzer et al., 2019).

This research has consequences for clinicians who work with bereaved people, as it may be that men and women will respond differently to different types of grief therapy; for example, in Stroebe and Schut's (1999, 2001, 2008) dual process model of coping with bereavement, where a central component is the oscillation between "loss-oriented and restoration-oriented coping" (Stroebe et al., 2001, p. 76). This means that to process their grief, bereaved people will move between the two positions: at times they will confront their loss, and at other times they will seek to re-engage in their current lives and attend to what is happening now (Stroebe et al., 2001). It has been suggested that 'loss-oriented' coping may come more naturally to women, who are more able to express their emotions and internal processes; however, without the 'oscillation' to 'restoration-oriented' coping, no progress will be made (Stroebe et al., 2001). Furthermore, it is also suggested that men are more able to attend to 'restoration-oriented' coping as they may be more able to "completely block their emotions" (Stroebe et al., 2001, p. 77). It is argued that it is for clinicians to help bereaved men to

become more emotion-oriented, and support bereaved women with re-engaging in their lives now, and this will lower their distress after losing their loved one while conferring health benefits (Schut, 1992; Schut et al., 1997; Stroebe et al., 2001).

Another approach to grief therapy is through the reconstruction of meaning after the loss of a loved one, as discussed earlier in this chapter (Neimeyer, 2001). This approach has several stages, including: finding new meaning in life as well as meaning in the death of the loved one; construction and integration of meaning into life; talking about the loss to help with integrating the loss in to the bereaved's sense of themselves and their lives after loss (Neimeyer, 2001). As previously discussed, the research on reconstructing meaning after loss has been predominantly contributed to by bereaved women, and there has been no study on whether men and women make meaning differently, potentially dismissing any gendered experience.

There has been research conducted about male survivors of sexual abuse, which found that men's 'making sense' of the abuse and integrating it into their understanding of their current lives has been critical to their recovery (Grossman et al., 2006). However, this research speculated that *how* men made meaning from their abuse was strongly influenced by gender socialization (Grossman et al., 2006; Kia-Keating et al, 2005). Western culture is described as impacting men's development of meaning and help-seeking behaviours after trauma: "men...are socialized to be emotionally stoic and invulnerable, forceful and aggressive, preoccupied with sex and sexuality, economic providers, and protectors of home and family" (Grossman et al., 2006, p. 435; Mahalik et al., 2003). These cultural influences do not directly impact women, and there is the possibility of variance between the genders in *how* meaning is made and *what* meanings are made after a traumatic event. This possibility is echoed in other research showing significant differences in how the genders seek help, approach psychological therapy and cope with life difficulties (Liddon et al., 2018). In this quantitative study, a significant proportion of men preferred support groups, believed there was a lack of male-friendly support options available to them and felt less inclined than women to seek help for their psychological issues (Liddon et al., 2018).

Wester and colleagues (2012) have developed the construct of Gender Role Conflict (GRC), which is when the prescriptive and inflexible gender roles assigned to and expected from men in society clash with the demands and requirements of any particular situation. This conflict has negative consequences for the men who feel it and for those people in their lives who are impacted by the man's behaviour (O'Neil et al., 1995; Wester et al., 2012). Four situations of GRC have been established (Neil et al., 1995): firstly, men are socialized to

achieve personal success and power through competitive efforts; secondly, men are taught to refrain from expressing their feelings verbally so that they do not appear weak and vulnerable; thirdly, men learn as boys to refrain from showing affection and care for other boys; and, fourthly, men experience conflict between work, family and school relationships, as they struggle to find a balance between these competing demands (Neil et al., 1995). GRC manifests in the lives of men when they are professionally rewarded for stoicism and being self-assured and disciplined, not appearing weak at work, being instrumental and therefore advancing their career (Wester et al., 2012). This can then conflict with the man's interpersonal and romantic relationships, where the man may be expected or desired to be more emotionally available and expressive with their partner (Wester et al., 2012). There is a clash between these two positions and men may feel the battle and bewilderment as a result (Wester et al., 2012): how do they balance their 'masculinity' with the demands of the situation in which they find themselves? (Violanti, 2007).

Several reviews of GRC studies have been conducted and all show a positive relationship between the four GRCs and negative interpersonal ramifications for men, including, depression, anxiety, stress, low self-esteem, alexithymia, shame, substance use and abuse, marital problems, decreased intimacy and lower levels of social connection (Wester et al., 2012). However, there have been questions around this research in terms of whether it is applicable cross-culturally, to different age groups, and also whether it actually measures the conflict felt by men between their environmental demands and their socialized gender role, or whether it measures the man's subscription to the mandate of what it means to be a (dominant) male (O'Neil, 2008; Wester et al., 2012).

As discussed in the Introduction, there are multiple 'masculinities' dependent on the context of a particular man in his particular life (Jablonka, 2019). Consequently, there is not one idea of GRC, as this will depend on each particular man's experience of GRC, taking into account his age, ethnicity, culture, social class, sexuality, religious orientation, relationships and how these factors intersect and interplay with his construction of masculinity (Wester, 2008). What is clear from the research on GRC, however, is how gender socialization *can* influence men in society with potential negative repercussions for the verbal expression of their feelings, their help-seeking behaviours and their interpersonal relationships (Wester et al., 2012). It is therefore vital for clinicians working with men to provide gender-role sensitive therapy, allowing and being curious about what masculinity means to a particular man while working with him (Wester, 2008). In order for this to happen, research that robustly includes the male voice and experience is crucial.

## **2.10 Contribution to counselling psychology**

As previously highlighted, the objectives of CoP are to promote 'wellbeing in our diverse society', promote 'fairness, equality and social justice' and meet 'the psychological needs of people' (BPS, 2022). To act within the essence of this mission and these values, counselling psychologists need to promote gender equality and understand gender specificity in their work. Gender is construed by postmodernist thinkers as a relational construct ordering social practice, as opposed to the positivist view of the masculine contrasting the feminine (Connell, 1995). This means that there are diverse patterns among men and there is no rigid male character determined by biology. As discussed in the Introduction, low numbers of men seek help with their problems (Galdas et al., 2005), and this is linked to the feminization of psychology, the individual man's social construction of masculinity and the unequal power relationship between therapist and client (Morison et al. 2014). Spindel (2019) argues that the low numbers of men seeking support is partly due to the social and cultural "influence of restrictive (and toxic) forms of masculinity" (p. 26). Taking a pluralistic approach to masculinity and recognizing that it has different forms is therefore within CoP's vision and is vital for counselling psychologists in order to promote talking therapy as a choice for all.

### **2.10.1 Rationale**

To date, the research on making meaning after bereavement has been predominantly influenced by the voice of women, not taking into account the potential for men being different. Indeed, Golden (2013) has suggested that bereaved men "sometimes display a grieving action...rather than crying and talking about feelings" (Liddon et al., 2018, p. 43; Golden, 2013). This is echoed in the research on male survivors of sexual abuse, where one of the predominant meaning making styles of these men was meaning making through action (Grossman et al., 2006). Within the coding categories in the MLC, in which 79% of the participants were female, there is a category of 'Lifestyle Changes' like 'drinking less' or 'pursuing an education', and also a category of 'Compassion', including being more altruistic and empathic (Gillies et al., 2014). However, in the research on male meaning making after sexual abuse, an 'action' can be the act of writing a poem, a song or a book about their experiences (Golden, 2013; Grossman et al., 2006; Liddon et al., 2018). This kind of act is *not* included in the MLC raising the possibility that further research is required to allow the male perspective on meaning making and meanings made after bereavement to be more fully included in the research.

Viewed through an existential lens, women and men are human beings who are meaning making creatures (Yalom, 1980). However, if the genders are different in *how* they make meaning and in the themes of meanings-made, this is not currently reflected in the research.

This is not in the spirit of CoP's values, which aim to promote 'fairness' and 'equality' and meet 'the psychological needs of people'; both men and women (BPS, 2022). As CoP is underpinned by existential-phenomenology, therefore aiming to understand the unique experience of each individual, CoP is well-placed to receive research on male meaning making after loss. The outcomes will have a direct effect on those who work with bereaved clients and the bereaved individuals themselves.

### **2.11 Objectives of the research and the research question**

The research I am proposing to undertake will add to the body of knowledge about the reconstruction of meaning after the loss of a loved one, in order to support the bereaved, the counselling psychologists, and the other professionals, who work with them. My intention is for men (and women) to be well supported, by informed clinicians, at a demanding time in their lives. I am interested in what helps and hinders male meaning making and what the themes of meanings-made are. As men's voices have not been adequately represented in the research thus far, it is in the interests of equality, fairness and social justice, which are core CoP values, that I propose to research the question: how do men make sense of the death of a loved one and what are the themes of the meanings they make?

### **2.12 Reflexivity III**

Initially, I felt intimidated by my area of research: both grief and loss, and gender and masculinity, have hundreds of articles to be reviewed, each with their own unique contribution to the field. I read, reviewed and filtered the articles to locate those ones directly relevant to my area of interest. My own subjectivity emerged in my choice of research question: equality between people is an important value of mine, coupled with my own experiences of oppression and inequality due to my feminine gender. I am aware that different people will have different ways of interpreting and reviewing the same literature that I have studied, and that gender struggle is particularly meaningful to me and my experience. Acknowledging my position in relation to the research and literature is consistent with my methodology as I have explored it from my phenomenological perspective.



## **Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Chapter overview**

I will start this chapter by outlining the ontological and epistemological positions of my research, before proceeding to describe the study's design, the chosen methodology and the alternative methodologies that I considered. I will then go on to discuss how I conducted my research, including descriptions of the recruitment and data collection methods. Finally, this chapter includes a section on ethical considerations, a discussion of the analytic stages and quality in qualitative research.

### **3.2 Ontological position**

Ontology is the philosophical basis for research and asks the question, 'What is there to know?' (Willig, 2013). It is therefore concerned with the nature of reality and what can be known about that reality. Ontological positions can be 'realist', where the world is made up of structures and objects that are independent of any individual's interpretation, or 'relativist', which emphasizes the subjectivity of each person's interpretation of the world (Willig, 2013).

I hold a critical realist ontology, which is founded on the work of Bhaskar (1997, 2016) and developed by social science researchers Archer (2000), Sayer (2000) and Collier (1991). A critical realist position holds that the universe is an open system with three layers of reality: the empirical, the actual and the real (Pilgrim, 2020). The empirical is what we as humans perceive with our senses; the actual is what happens in space and time, and can be different to what is perceived by human senses; and the real is generated by underlying mechanisms in the world, independent from human subjectivity and perception (Pilgrim, 2020). Critical realism also distinguishes between the transitive and the intransitive dimensions of reality (Pilgrim, 2020): there is a dimension of reality that we cannot change, the 'intransitive', and there is a way of talking about the world and understanding it through language that will make it different for each of us, the 'transitive' (Pilgrim, 2020). Consequently, the meaning that humans attribute to a particular event has a transitive character, as meaning can be talked about, reconceptualised and changed (Pilgrim, 2020). However, the event about which the human being is making meaning has an intransitive character, as the event itself is in the past and cannot be changed (Pilgrim, 2020).

In holding a critical realist ontological position, I believe that there is a mind-independent reality, which we as humans can know about in a subjective way; our understanding of the objective, intransitive 'reality' is discourse-bound and constructed by each of us (Pilgrim,

2020). This means that our perception and understanding of reality is transitive and constantly changing, as it can be fallible and open to modification (Pilgrim, 2020).

### 3.3 Epistemological position

Epistemology is a philosophy that is concerned with the theory and nature of knowledge itself (Willig, 2013). Its target is understanding the scope of knowledge, and its reliability and validity; it asks the question, 'How can we know?' (Willig, 2013). I believe that my critical realist ontological position (Bhaskar, 1997, 2016) is compatible with my phenomenological epistemological position (Willig, 2013). As individual human beings, we are each situated in a particular context, culture and environment, which is our 'reality', and we make sense of this and understand it through our own individual perceptions and consciousness. This results in a unique experience for each of us, in relation to how we experience ourselves and our external world (Willig, 2013). This epistemological position is consistent with existential thinker Jean-Paul Sartre's understanding of reality as something that exists independently of human construction or knowledge, yet is constantly changing, as humans understand it (Sartre, 1956).

I believe that a positivist position is not compatible with this research, as it asserts that there is a 'right' way of looking at and understanding the world, with one 'reality' that must be construed objectively in order to know it (Kirk & Miller, 1986). This position has value when looking for objective truths and scientific 'answers'; however, it does not account for the position of the researcher, their personal involvement with the research or their contingent interests (Willig, 2013). I also believe that extreme forms of relativism are not compatible with this current research, as there is no 'mind-independent reality' to study, know and understand; there is only what is constructed in society, which is constantly changing (Willig, 2013). I agree with Budd et al. (2010) who posit that critical realism and phenomenological epistemology are aligned in inquiring about the nature of the world: there is a mind-independent reality which we each understand from the point of view of our own subjectivity (Willig, 2013).

My research seeks to understand how the participants made meaning and what the themes of meaning were, after the death of a loved one. They each have an experience of bereavement, which is the 'intransitive', mind-independent context of my participants (Pilgrim, 2020). The meanings they make, if any, are transitive, always changing and being re-evaluated by the participants and are unique for each of them (Pilgrim, 2020). As a result, I am enquiring about the nature of their meaning making experience and I recognise that this

may be different for each of them: I am not looking to discover an objective truth (Pilgrim, 2020). I accept that the data I collect is interpreted through my own subjectivity, therefore involving me in the research.

### **3.4 Positioning counselling psychology in the research**

In the UK, counselling psychology (CoP) is grounded in humanistic values, where each individual's subjective and intersubjective experience is considered paramount, alongside each person's autonomy, individual choice and responsibility (Fromm, 1947; May, 2009; Rogers, 1961; Stolorow, 2007; Yalom, 1980). As individuals, we are beings-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1963), where we exist in relation to others and our co-created relationships. As counselling psychologists, it is our job to support individual people and interact with them in respectful, considerate and valuing ways, considering the context of their lives and their wider experiences (Cooper, 2009).

CoP adopts a pluralistic approach to therapy and research, as many therapeutic modalities and research methods can be adopted under the umbrella of CoP, promoting dialogue, collaboration and the co-existence of multiple ways of seeing the world (Smith & de la Prida, 2021). This pluralistic stance of CoP aligns with my critical realist ontology and phenomenological epistemology, as I value subjective experience as a way of understanding 'reality', which can only be imperfectly understood by each of us. My research is therefore aligned with the humanistic roots of counselling psychology (Fromm, 1947; May, 2009; Rogers, 1961); each participant is located within a 'real' context of having been bereaved at least two years prior to the interview, affecting their unique relational worlds, and each has their own subjective experience of meaning making since their loss, which I am interested in understanding.

### **3.5 Qualitative research**

As discussed, CoP adopts a pluralistic approach to research and considers the object of enquiry, the topic under investigation, to be of paramount importance when deciding on the method of enquiry (Kasket, 2017). Unlike quantitative research, which seeks to test theories and establish relationships between entities, qualitative research seeks to provide thorough accounts of the phenomenon in question. Additionally, Willig (2013) posits that qualitative research is concerned with meaning and providing detailed descriptions of the processes of individual meaning-making. A qualitative researcher therefore aims to explore people's thoughts, feelings, experiences or language in detail and in depth in order to provide a rich account of the quality of experience (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). My research question is

about how men make meaning in their lives after the death of a loved one, and what meanings are made? As I am looking to understand psychological meaning-making processes and themes at a deeper level, and to provide a rich, descriptive account of these, the qualitative research methodologies seemed appropriate (Willig, 2013).

Given my ontological and epistemological foundations, and my research question, I chose Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2013, 2022) reflexive thematic analysis as the methodology for my research, which I will now explain, before discussing other possible qualitative methodologies.

### **3.6 Thematic analysis**

Thematic Analysis (TA) is not tied to a particular ontological or epistemological position, allowing for theoretical flexibility and diversity, and this makes TA a pragmatic choice for many researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013, 2022). Much has been written about TA due to its theoretical flexibility, particularly regarding whether it is "a fully-fledged method in its own right, or whether it is simply a tool that underpins many different qualitative approaches" (Terry et al., 2017, p. 3). Gibson and Brown (2009) argue that TA is not a qualitative methodology in its own right, rather a meta-analytic technique. Other authors recognise TA as a rigorous qualitative research method, however, they have often failed to recognise the diversity within TA, instead focusing on a singular approach (Joffe, 2012; Langdridge, 2004). It is crucial for TA researchers to acknowledge TA's capacity for a range of theoretical underpinnings *and* to be explicit and clear about the theoretical underpinnings of their particular TA research (Terry et al., 2017).

There are different types of TA: codebook and reflexive (Braun & Clark, 2020). Kidder and Fine (1987) describe codebook TA as 'small q' qualitative research as it is underpinned by the positivist research values that usually underpin quantitative research and emphasise reliability, objectivity, generalisability and replication of the study in question (Braun & Clark, 2020). In contrast, reflexive TA is seen as 'Big Q' qualitative research (Kidder & Fine, 1987) as it is underpinned by qualitative research values, including the subjectivity of the researcher, and the creation of knowledge that is partial, situated and contextual (Braun & Clark, 2013). In the current research, I am conducting a reflexive TA: the knowledge is produced by my subjectivity in the context of my own life experience; I am therefore embedded in it.

Braun and Clarke (2013) have distinguished between 'critical' and 'experiential' orientations to qualitative research: 'critical' approaches explore patterns of meaning and understand that

language creates, rather than reflects, reality; 'experiential' approaches focus on the participants' experiences and what they think, feel and do, which assumes that language reflects reality, whether that is the 'unique reality' of a particular participant, or a universal reality (Terry et al., 2017). Despite these different approaches to and possibilities within qualitative research, some researchers situate TA solely within the 'experiential' orientation (Guest et al., 2012). Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013, 2022) have developed TA as a rigorous approach to qualitative research that offers theoretical flexibility *and* the possibility of either a 'critical' or 'experiential' orientation.

Researchers using **reflexive** TA need to make the theoretical underpinnings of their work explicit, particularly the research's epistemological and ontological orientations, so that it is clear 'how' the analysis is being conducted (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013, 2022). The aim of a TA is to identify and analyse patterns across qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013, 2022). Terry et al. (2017) describe two different approaches to conducting a TA: deductive approaches that emphasize coding reliability, where theory is used to identify themes before gathering the 'evidence' for the themes from the data that was collected; and, inductive approaches, that allow more flexibility in developing themes from the data collected, and are more 'data-driven' (Boyatzis, 1998). Braun and Clarke's approach (2006, 2013, 2022) to **reflexive** TA understands that the subjectivity of the researcher is an intrinsic component in the process of analysing qualitative data and therefore an inductive approach is more common. This means that the outcomes, or the themes that develop from the data, are created by the researcher, and their engagement with the data within their theoretical and conceptual frameworks; the themes cannot be right or wrong in any objective sense (Terry et al., 2017).

As previously explained, in my research, I hold a critical realist ontological position and a phenomenological epistemological position, where I understand that my participants each have their own experiences of meaning making after the death of a loved one. Consequently, my research is 'experiential', as I am interested in what my participants say about their experience of making meaning after being bereaved and the themes of meanings made (Terry et al., 2017). This is consistent with CoP, which also positions itself within a phenomenological framework, valuing the subjective experience of individuals.

**The overarching themes were developed by me through immersion in the dataset: the resulting codes and themes come from my subjectivity and are created by me (Terry et al., 2017). In analysing the data, there was a tension between this inductive approach, being guided by the data in interpreting it subjectively, and a more deductive approach (Braun &**

Clark, 2006, 2013, 2022); I am in the position of the researcher with certain knowledge and understanding of existential theories (Buber, 1955; Heidegger, 1955; Sartre, 1956; Stolorow & Atwood, 2019; van Deurzen, 2002, 2010; Yalom, 1980). Consequently, the themes developed with this knowledge in mind, as I am not separate from what I know. Another researcher, with knowledge of different theory and research, may have interpreted the data differently and developed contrasting themes.

### **3.7 Alternative methodologies**

Before I decided to conduct my research using reflexive thematic analysis as my methodology, I considered other qualitative methodologies. These possible alternatives included interpretative phenomenological analysis, narrative analysis and grounded theory. I will now discuss why I did not choose these methodologies for my research.

#### **3.7.1 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

Ontologically and epistemologically, my research is close to an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith et al., 2009), and in the early stages of this research, I considered using IPA. IPA's primary goal is to explore how individuals make sense of a particular phenomenon, drawing on the principles of idiography, hermeneutics and phenomenology (Smith et al., 2009). According to idiography, the participants in a study are examined in detail and in depth to obtain a full understanding of their experience and context. Researchers focus on the particular, unique experience of the participant, and then compare and contrast between different individual narratives. IPA also relies upon the theoretical orientation of hermeneutics, which concerns interpretation: the researcher needs to aim to understand what it is like to stand in the shoes of the participant and then interpret what the participant has said, in order to make sense of it (Freeman & Cameron, 2008). The researcher thus has an active role in the research (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). They will influence the extent to which they have understood the participant's experience and how they have made sense of it and convey it (Smith et al., 2009). Finally, IPA relies upon phenomenology, which is concerned with how things appear to individuals in their experience (Husserl, 1927-1931). Phenomenologists look to understand what the essential components of an experience are that make them different from other experiences (Smith et al., 2009). This means studies conducted using an IPA methodology will look at how an event or an object is talked about and perceived, rather than describing the object or event using predetermined categories or systems (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). This involves some suspension of judgement or preconceptions on the part of the researcher to allow the phenomenon in question to speak for itself.

There is much that was appealing about the IPA methodology in the beginning, as my aim was to gather data from participants about their subjective meaning making experiences, processes and themes after the loss of a loved one. Each interview was different, unique to each participant and descriptive in nature. My aim was to understand the participants' experiences from their point of view: indeed, my chosen epistemological and ontological frameworks in my proposed TA study are the same as for an IPA study (Smith et al., 2009). However, my research aims to look at the processes of meaning making experienced by men after a bereavement and the themes of meanings-made by these bereaved men. I am presupposing in this research that men may, in fact, make meaning after the loss of a loved-one. If I were to research the question, 'How do men experience the loss of a loved one?' or 'How do men experience grief?' I believe that IPA would be the most suitable methodology, as I could explore their general experience of grief and loss, while suspending any preconceptions I have about meaning making after loss. This is not what I am proposing to do; I have an interest in contributing to the body of research around meaning making after loss in particular. Therefore, I am placing my research within the meaning making system instead of bracketing my knowledge of that system and exploring grief and loss in a more general sense. Consequently, I felt that a reflexive thematic analysis methodology was more appropriate than adopting an IPA approach.

### **3.7.2 Narrative Analysis**

I also decided against adopting a narrative analysis methodology. Narratives are stories that we tell ourselves and others in order to make an identity for ourselves and to make meaning in our lives (McAdams, 2008). People often use narratives during difficult life events, for example, bereavement or illness, in order to make sense of these events and to promote change (Rimmon-Kenan, 2002). As a result, this methodology initially appeared attractive. On closer reflection, narrative analysis focuses more on the language used by a participant in describing an experience and thus produces socially constructed knowledge (Willig, 2013). Narrative analysis is mainly rooted in a social constructionist ontology and concerns itself with how people construct reality, including their own self-identity, through language and stories, rather than exploring their experience. 'Loss' is the general theme of my study, and each participant will have their experience of loss, it is not the stories of their experiences of loss or the language used that I am interested in. Rather, I am interested in their subjective experiences of meaning making after bereavement, and what the common themes of meanings-made are. I felt that using a narrative analysis approach would move the data away from the original question and therefore it was not suitable for my study.

### **3.7.3 Grounded Theory**

I also considered grounded theory as a possible methodology for my study (Charmaz, 2000; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Constructivist grounded theory considers that the researcher is

actively investigating a particular phenomenon in order to create a theory about it (Charmaz, 2006). This active investigation then contributes to the development of a wider understanding of the phenomenon in question (Charmaz, 2006). Consequently, my phenomenological epistemological position is aligned with constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). However, constructivist grounded theory seeks to construct a theory about the object of enquiry, therefore taking a more explanatory position towards the concept, and is based on larger participant samples that have contributed to the dataset being 'saturated' (Charmaz, 2006). My proposal is not to develop a theory of meaning making; rather, my intention is to explore at depth how men make meaning after they have been bereaved and what the main themes of meanings made are. My engagement with the data, creating codes and themes inductively, allowed for a deep exploration and consideration of my participants' experiences of making meaning, and meanings made, after the death of their loved one, in a way that I felt could not be matched by grounded theory. It felt important to stay close to the original rationale for the research, namely, understanding men's meaning making processes and the themes of meaning they make, and therefore reflexive thematic analysis, with a critical realist ontology and a phenomenological epistemology, is my chosen methodology.

### **3.8 Conducting the research**

#### **3.8.1 Reflexivity IV**

In the days, weeks and months after my sister's death, I spent the majority of my time with my family, at our family home. There was no question about this; I knew I wanted to be there with them while the grief felt painful and raw. My experience of having friends take time out of their day to visit me in-person meant a huge amount to me, especially as my family home was not near to where any of them lived. I did not feel forgotten, or dismissed by them, in this awful experience. I felt like I mattered to them and even though it was not easy to come and bear witness to a grieving family, they still made the journey to be with me. I valued their presence, felt cared for and less alone in my sorrow.

This experience has materially impacted how I decided to conduct this research: in-person interviews despite the Covid-19 restrictions only being relaxed shortly before the summer of 2021, when they happened. I felt that it was important to be with the participants, in the same room, having made a journey to be with them, to talk about their losses. Research has shown that therapy conducted online can be more 'disinhibited', with more self-disclosure being recorded than in-person work (Suler, 2004). It is thought that those who have online therapy feel freer to express their negative thoughts and feelings away from the embodied experience in the room with the therapist (Scharff, 2020). Given these



findings, had I conducted my interviews online, my participants may have found it easier to express their difficult and more negative thoughts and feelings to me due to this “disinhibition effect” and the data may have been qualitatively different (Suler, 2004). However, it is exactly the “embodied communication in a shared environment” (Isaacs Russell, 2020, p. 365) that I wanted to experience with my participants rather than “mediated communication” online (Isaacs Russell, 2020, p. 365). I was informed by my own experience after the death of my sister and I wanted to demonstrate to my participants that I valued their time and stories of grief, by journeying to them and being with them, rather than depending on technology to mediate our relationship. I did not want to lose the sense of presence in the work or the subtle non-verbal cues of the participants while talking about the deaths of those they loved. I felt it demonstrated my care and value of their participation, and of their wellbeing, while talking about such a sensitive topic.

### **3.8.2 Data collection method**

#### **(i) Interview schedule**

In order to collect data for my TA research, I chose semi-structured interviews and questionnaires to gather demographic data about the participants and their losses. I wanted to offer a consistent approach to each participant yet also offer flexibility. My phenomenological epistemological position assumes that each participant will have had an experience that is unique to him: my aim was to know how each participant made their own sense (if any) of a similar experience (loss), and what the themes of meaning were. The demographic data collected was considered useful to provide a context for my sample, therefore adding depth of meaning.

My interview schedule (Appendix A) consisted of an initial question, asking each participant to begin to tell me about their loss(es), in order to orientate each of us in the interview process. My intention was for the participants to begin to talk about their experience and for me to get a sense of them and their bereavement experience. As we continued, my intention was to go deeper into the participant’s meaning making experience and in order to do this, I asked follow-up questions, sometimes prompting a participant and reflecting what they had said to me, in order to assist their reflective process and to encourage depth. I did not ask closed or directive questions, preferring open, exploratory questions or encouragements to explain or clarify their dialogue. At all times, I actively listened to each participant, nodding and acknowledging them and what they said, in order that they felt safe, heard and valued.

## (ii) Advertising the study

Several studies on bereavement have recruited participants through advertising on grief blogs, and following those, I contacted two grief blogs 'Let's Talk About Loss' and 'The Good Grief Trust' who agreed to advertise my study on their social media (Boyras et al., 2010, 2012; Gillies et al., 2014; Milman et al., 2019). The research department at Cruse Bereavement Care, a UK charity interested in becoming involved in research that promotes understanding of bereavement and its impact on both individuals and on society also agreed to advertise my study (Milman et al., 2019). The advert used to advertise the study is shown in Appendix B. I sought to recruit participants after the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, in May 2021, and I decided that recruiting participants online would be most efficient.

## (iii) Inclusion criteria

The inclusion criteria for the participants included: identify as a man; over the age of 18; experienced the loss of a parent, child, sibling, partner, spouse, other family member, friend; and, bereaved at least two years ago. This meant that all of the male participants were adults who had lost someone close to them and had lived for at least a two-year period with their loss. This two-year period provided some distance from the bereavement, in order to reflect on their process and possibly construct some meaning. Exclusion criteria included: loss from suicide. Many studies have shown that "there are minimal or no significant differences in the psychological or emotional wellbeing of the suicidally bereaved person as compared to those bereaved by natural causes, accidents, and homicide" (Gall et al., 2014, p. 430; Hung & Rabin, 2009; Kuramoto et al., 2009). However, an individual who has been bereaved through suicide, as compared to other types of death, like accident, natural causes or homicide, may struggle more with meaning making while also feeling guilt, shame, stigmatization and anger (Arnold & Gemma, 2008). Consequently, bereavement from suicide is considered to be "qualitatively unique" (Gall et al., 2014, p. 430). Research has shown that those bereaved by suicide "struggle for meaning" as there was often a struggle to grasp the depth of the despair felt by their loved one (Gall et al., 2014, p. 432). While death by homicide is violent, sudden and intentional, the cause of the death is not the person who has been lost. Indeed, other research has shown that those bereaved by homicide are able to make meaning despite the tragic circumstances of their loss (Armour, 2003) and this is helpful for their healing process. While some large quantitative studies about meaning making do include loss by suicide (Currier et al., 2006), the difficulty in making meaning after suicide is supported in other qualitative studies of the lived experiences of those bereaved by suicide (Begley & Quayle, 2007; Jordan & McIntosh, 2011; Kneiper, 1999). One result of this research is the development of specialist intervention and postvention for the suicidally bereaved, particularly focusing on the process of meaning making (Parrish & Tunkle, 2005). The meaning making process for the suicidally bereaved may therefore be qualitatively

different from those who are bereaved suddenly by natural causes, accidents, homicides with the additional stigma of suicide (Scooco et al., 2012); therefore, in the interests of homogeneity, an important factor in qualitative research, I decided to exclude those bereaved by suicide from my sample.

#### **(iv) Recruiting participants**

When a potential participant contacted me via email, I sent him the Information Sheet with details about my study (Appendix C), making the inclusion and exclusion criteria explicit in the accompanying reply email. I also offered the possibility of a short telephone conversation with me, as an opportunity to ask any questions about what participation would involve, prior to making a decision about participating in the study. I made it clear that the interviews would be face-to-face, and not online. I made this decision as I recognised that working with bereaved individuals requires a sensitive approach where “one is potentially an intruder into the world of the bereaved” (Stroebe et al., 2003, p. 239). My intention was to establish a connection with each of my participants that was not dependent on WiFi, where I could listen to them, ask my questions and monitor in-person their response to my questions and their ability to continue talking about such a sensitive topic. I started to advertise the study in May 2021, when there were no longer Covid-19 restrictions prohibiting us meeting in-person. The recruitment process lasted five months, until September 2021.

#### **(v) Sample size**

There is no prescribed sample size for TA studies, and the number of participants generally depends on the following: the practical limitations of the researcher; the availability of and access to participants; the richness of the interviews conducted; and, the ontological orientation of the TA research, with realist ontologies more likely to have larger sample sizes (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In order to ensure that the qualitative data I collected could be analysed in detail and depth, my aim was to find between 6 and 10 male participants (Fugard & Potts, 2015).

After advertising the study, fourteen men approached me as potential participants for the research. Of these fourteen, three lived abroad and were not able to meet in person, one did not reply after receiving the Information Sheet, and one potential participant had been bereaved less than two years prior to our contact. This excluded them from joining the research. I met one potential participant for an interview, and it became clear during the interview that he had lost both his parents by suicide: this participant understood that his mother’s mental health, particularly her severe depression, had been her cause of death, rather than her taking her own life. I continued with the interview despite the participant not meeting criteria, due to the sensitive nature of the topic. At his request, the interview was transcribed, anonymized and sent to him, and after a discussion with my supervisor, it was

agreed that it would not be used in the analysis. Of the fourteen potential participants who initially contacted me, eight participants were included in the study. After discussion with my supervisor, this was considered to be a sufficient sample size for doctoral research. Table 1 illustrates the demographics of the participants in my research study.

*Table 1: Participant demographics*

<b>No.</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Relationship to person who has died</b>	<b>When and how bereaved</b>
1	John	64	White British	Brother, son, husband	1973, 2009, 2013; Motorcycle accident (brother), COPD (mother), bowel cancer (wife)
2	Michael	30	Black British (Caribbean)	Son	2013; prostate cancer (father)
3	George	41	White British	Son, father	2011, 2016; Stillborn sons, heart attack (father)
4	Kevin	56	White British	Son, friend	2008, early 2019; Illness
5	Rob	30	White British	Boyfriend	July 2019; encephalitis/ sepsis
6	Brandon	30	Black British	Son	2014, 2015; cardiac arrest (mother), Multiple Sclerosis (father)
7	Graeme	66	White British	Husband	18 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2019; Stage 4 colon cancer
8	Ishan	28	British Asian – Indian	Brother/ cousin	2017; long-standing illness (sister), acute brain haemorrhage (cousin)

#### **(vi) Interview process**

I interviewed the participants in-person, either in their homes, at their place of work, in a hired private room at a location agreed in advance or at the Metanoia Institute in Ealing. I visited four participants in London, and one in each of Nottingham, Northallerton, Southend-

on-Sea and Leeds. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with each participant. Prior to interview, we discussed its possible length. The timeframe agreed was approximately one to one and a half hours, depending on what the participant was able to do. I arrived early to each interview, to familiarise myself with the space, to ground myself before the interview and to reflect on the interview process before it unfolded. I recorded some of these pre-interview reflections in a journal (Appendix D).

At the interview, each participant was welcomed and asked to read the Information Sheet with details of the study, how to contact me, how long I will keep their interview for, and the timeframe for deciding to withdraw from the study (Appendix C). This was then discussed with them, alongside the limits of confidentiality (for example, if a participant disclosed an imminent, severe risk to themselves or another person) and their right not to continue with the interview or not to answer any question without any reason being needed and without negative consequences.

Once this was verbally agreed, each participant was asked to sign the Informed Consent form (Appendix E). Each participant was initially asked to fill in a form about the demographics of their loss (Appendix F), before being invited to freely discuss their loss, answering open, exploratory questions with a focus on their personal experience. The intention was for participants to discuss their reactions to the death of their loved one, the impact of the death, how they had coped, whether there had been any benefit or hindrance to the process and whether they had incorporated any new meanings into their lives. At the end of the interview, the participant was thanked and invited to discuss how they found the interview process, before being given a Debrief Information Form to keep (Appendix G). This form included: details about the study; how to contact me and my supervisor if there were any further questions; how and when to withdraw from the study, if this is what they decided; and, details of bereavement counselling services, if the participant felt that he wanted to talk about his loss and his feelings about his loss in greater depth.

I acknowledge the sensitive nature of the topic of this research. During the interviews, I aimed to respect the space and pace of each participant (DeYoung, 2015). In order to promote their self-care, I used my therapeutic skills to stay connected to them and to how they responded during the interview, to ensure that they felt able to continue with it. My intention was that the participants felt safe during the interview process.

After each interview, I recorded my reflections and experiences of the interview in my research journal (Appendix D). This felt therapeutic for me as it allowed me to note my many

feelings as I felt them and therefore contain the interview experience. Given the heavy topic of the research, this felt important as a form of self-care.

#### **(vii) Data storage**

In order to ensure confidential data storage, each interview was audio-recorded using a digital voice-recorder and the recording was immediately saved onto an encrypted dual password-protected memory stick after the interview. Written data was stored confidentially and anonymously, using the participant's unique ID, with the exception of the Informed Consent form, which included the participant's signature (Appendix E). This was separated from the other data and kept confidentially and in a locked location in my home. In the transcripts that were written up, all references to the participants' names and the names of their loved ones were removed and then changed to a pseudonym.

### **3.9 Ethical considerations**

Ethical approval for this research was granted by Dr. Julianna Challenor on behalf of the Metanoia Research Ethics Committee on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2021 (Appendix H). The research conformed to The British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics (2021). As part of the approval process, a health and safety risk assessment was carried out (Appendix I) and legal requirements surrounding data storage and use were complied with, in particular the Data Protection Act 1998 and the General Data Protection Regulation 2018.

Informed consent, participant anonymity, and personal and participant safety were paramount over the course of collecting and analysing the data. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic of the research, participant welfare took precedence. I felt that it was important to be mindful and aware of how the participants were responding in the interviews, to respect their space and pace (DeYoung, 2015). I anticipated that some participants may find the experience challenging, with others finding it a positive experience, as they would be able to share their story in a safe, contained space. In the event of participant distress, the interview would stop and I would use my therapist skills to talk to the participant about their feelings and to signpost therapeutic support, where necessary. It was made clear to all participants that there was no obligation to continue with their participation in the study and that they could withdraw at any time up until one month after the date of the interview, without giving any reason and without negative consequences (see Appendices C and G).

Finally, it was important to consider my own self-care during this process. My own feelings of grief and loss were stirred while talking to the participants about their losses. I spoke to nine different men and it was important for me to have sufficient space between each interview in order to reflect on and talk about the feelings that came up within me as a result

of each meeting. This involved reflections and discussions with my research supervisor and my personal therapist and writing in my research journal to explore my processes both before and after each interview. Spending time with family and friends, and walks with my dog, were also important to help me to regulate my emotions and feel connected to my life, the natural world and those who matter to me, in among many stories of death and loss.

### **3.10 Transcribing interviews**

Within one week of each interview taking place, they were transcribed verbatim, including pauses, laughter, incomplete sentences, false starts and repeated words (Willig, 2013). The intention was that the *content* of the interview was reflected in the transcript, not a full transcription of the interview in all its detail. All participants requested that transcribed copies of their interviews be sent to them afterwards via email. Each participant expressed that they found the process meaningful, and wanted a reminder of their words. My understanding of this request is that the interview process had allowed them to process thoughts and feelings, actively making meaning, and the transcript of the interview would allow them to remember their words.

## **3.11 Reflexivity V**

### **3.11.1 My position as a researcher**

I am a woman who has had a personal experience of loss and grief. Consequently, I share an experiential base with the participants of my study. My 'insider' position may mean that I was in a position to demonstrate greater empathy and understanding to the participants, through speaking a common language and therefore obtaining data that has greater depth (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). However, this position may also have impacted my understanding and interpretation of my participants' subjective experiences, as I may have drawn inferences based on my own experiences. In order to reduce the risk of influencing the data I gathered and analysed, I felt that it was important to recognise my subjective thoughts and feelings in relation to my research, maintain open reflection on how I felt I was impacting the research and monitor the relationship between me and my research by recording my reflections, before and after each interview, in my research journal (Appendix D) (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Prior to conducting any interview, I decided not to share my 'insider' position with any participant. I felt that it was important for each participant to share their experience and reflect on their own meaning making without diluting their contributions with my own experiences.

Alongside this 'insider' position, as a result of my experience, I have developed my own language of loss, I have my own identity as a result of my loss and I am female (Asselin, 2003). I am also in the role of 'researcher' and not 'participant', having read much literature on loss and meaning making. I have become "immersed" in my researcher role (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 60). Therefore, I am also different to the participants in my study, which I explore in greater depth below.

I do not believe that the ideas of insider/outsider researcher are dualistic, nor do I posit that being a member of a group means complete sameness or complete difference to that group; instead, it is my belief that my position in my research is layered and there is a 'middle ground' (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). This allows the position of *both* 'insider' and 'outsider' researcher. Furthermore, as a qualitative researcher I am not separate from my study; I am located firmly within it and am "essential to it" (Dwyer & Buckle, p. 61). I interviewed each participant, transcribed the interviews and analysed them in depth: their words impacted me as I aimed to understand their experience. I did not and could not "retreat to a distant 'researcher' role" (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 61), as in quantitative research. I have impacted my research as it has impacted me: I locate myself in the space created between these two positions and not within either side of the constructed dichotomies of 'insider' or 'outsider' researcher (Gould, 2003).

### **3.11.2 My gender**

As a woman researching male meaning making, I acknowledge that my gender may have influenced the openness of the male participants. Research done on which gender of *therapist* men preferred concluded that most males had no preference about the gender of their therapist, and those males who did have a preference, preferred a female therapist (Liddon et al., 2018; Pikus & Heavey, 1996). This may suggest that my gender will have no influence on the male participants, or it may positively affect their openness.

No participant explicitly asked me why I, as a woman, was interested in researching a male style of grief and meaning making. Nevertheless, there were times when I was aware of my difference as a woman and my experience was that the men felt more able to open up to me because I am a woman and therefore different; I am not socialised as a man, with the tacit rules of strength, discipline and stoicism despite painful, life-changing loss. In each interview, I was prepared to be asked about my interest in this area and to be honest about my belief in CoP's values of equality, fairness and social justice, alongside my motivation to contribute to the bereavement literature to create more equality and depth of understanding in the research. I believe this contribution to the



research will not only help men, but also women, whose own, potentially more 'masculine' style may not currently be widely understood.

### **3.11.3 My approach to masculinity**

As stated previously, I acknowledge that there are multiple 'types' of masculinity and there are stereotypical notions of what men's coping looks like; for example, 'boys don't cry' or 'the strong silent type' (Spendelow, 2019). In line with postmodernist thinking, I have adopted a pluralistic approach to masculinity, consistent with the spirit of CoP's pluralistic approach to people and ideas (Cooper & McLeod, 2007). Taking this postmodernist and pluralistic perspective on gender, my research was open to transgender men, however, none came forward as participants (Nagoski & Brzuzy, 2010).

## **3.12 Data analysis**

### **3.12.1 Familiarisation with dataset**

I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2013, 2022) guidance and protocols for conducting a reflexive TA. These offered a clear process for a reflexive TA research study, without being steadfast rules (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Their first guideline, after conducting the semi-structured interviews, is to transcribe the interview (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Secondly, they suggest familiarisation with the dataset by reading and re-reading it several times (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I listened to and read each interview after transcribing it, and then re-read each interview several times, noting down initial thoughts and impressions and highlighting phrases that I thought were interesting (Appendix J). I did not use an electronic system to support my analysis of the data (like NVivo) as I decided that I would be closer to the data and 'know' it better by reading and re-reading it several times myself, noting my initial thoughts by hand. I found this process chaotic and overwhelming, as well as fascinating, as I thoroughly immersed myself in the data, which felt enormous and almost unmanageable. Slowly, I felt myself getting to know it, as I became more familiar with it, and I began to note different codes (Appendix K).

### **3.12.2 Initial codes generated**

I took an inductive approach to coding the data, where I looked for manifest meanings in the data, rather than using my interview questions as themes, which Braun and Clarke advise against (2022). I did not code every line or piece of text in the data, instead coding the pieces of data that were relevant to or captured something interesting about my research question. I went through each transcript, noting initial codes by hand and then making a list of codes with associated quotes from the text for each participant. When this was done, I grouped the similar codes from the different participants together, to try and begin to make sense of the data and develop themes.

This process still felt overwhelming and unmanageable, and I supported myself by having meetings with my research supervisor, where I would send her a list of emerging codes, alongside a transcript, and we would discuss what we felt was going on in the interview. This would help me to think about the code at a deeper level, and think about grouping similar themes from across the participants together.

### 3.12.3 Emerging themes

Once the codes were identified and reflected upon, I grouped them into underlying, semantic themes that emerged from reading the data (Willig, 2013). Initially, there were four broad themes: as I read and re-read the data, I became aware that each participant’s loss had affected every part of their lives. As discussed in chapter two, I have decided to look at meaning making after loss through an existential lens, therefore, I initially grouped the codes into four broad existential positions covering the physical, social, spiritual and psychological worlds of each participant (van Duerzen, 2010). These initial themes included: making an impact on the (physical) world; social (dis)connection; (spiritual) purpose in life after loss; and, psychological change/who am I now? (Appendix L). Initially, I grouped my emerging codes into at least one of these broad themes and discussed this with my research supervisor and in a peer research group. The initial themes and associated subthemes are illustrated in Table 2.

*Table 2: Initial themes and sub-themes*

Initial theme	Initial sub-themes
<p><b>Making an impact on the world</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Freedom to choose actions/reactions</li> <li>2. Responsibility to act</li> <li>3. The process of meaning making and rejoining life after loss is active rather than passive</li> </ol>
<p><b>Social (dis)connection</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Re-evaluation of relationships after loss</li> <li>2. Isolation from other people</li> <li>3. Language used when communicating with others about the loss matters</li> </ol>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Purpose in life after loss</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Re-evaluation of worldviews to make new meanings</li> <li>2. Existential isolation/loss of innocence</li> <li>3. The circle of life</li> </ol>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Who Am I Now?</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Living authentically is important</li> <li>2. I feel different and I carry this burden of loss</li> <li>3. Remembering my lost loved one affects who I am</li> </ol>

According to Braun and Clarke (2022), “a topic summary is not a theme” (p. 77) and my research supervisor and I decided that my initial four themes and associated sub-themes summarized the data rather than offering themes of meaning or ideas. I therefore went back to my dataset in order to develop more sophisticated themes, “united by a central organising concept” (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 77).

#### **3.12.4 Review themes**

At this point in the research process, I felt overwhelmed and thoroughly immersed in the data. It felt difficult to gain distance from the research on my own, and so I took my initial themes to a research supervision group with my peers, who helped me to gain distance and perspective. From discussions with them, I made copious notes on post-it notes, creating a ‘moveable map’ of themes and ideas. At this point, three overarching themes emerged from a synthesis of the initial emerging themes. Each theme was created from the data, alongside the relevant sub-themes, and each was supported with relevant quotes from the data and also relevant literature on meaning making and loss (Appendix M). These three overarching themes and their associated sub-themes will be introduced and discussed in detail in the next chapter (4), analysis.

### **3.13 Quality in qualitative research**

In researching making meaning after the loss of a loved one, I have chosen to study an area of both personal and professional interest. Consequently, I have aimed to describe in detail the process of data collection and the process of analysis, considering how my values, experiences and gender may have impacted the process, in order that this study may be judged as trustworthy. Cypress (2017) describes trustworthiness in qualitative research as

having confidence in the results, with the researcher providing an authentic and transparent account of the data collection and analysis processes.

Yardley (2000) has developed four guidelines to evaluate the quality, trustworthiness and reliability of qualitative research: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance. These recommendations are regularly used within phenomenological research, and due to the epistemological and methodological consistency with my research, I have chosen to apply these criteria to my study. The application and presence of each recommendation in the current study is discussed below.

### **3.13.1 Sensitivity to context**

This guideline urges that the researcher understands the philosophical and cultural background to the area of research and the relevant literature. Considering this principle, I believe I have situated my study in the review of literature in chapter two, where I discuss previous research on meaning making after loss and also men's meaning making in different contexts. This chapter also discussed limitations in the existing research on making meaning after bereavement, particularly with regard to the inclusion of men in the studies. I believe I have also located this study firmly within the philosophical approach of phenomenology adopted, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

I believe sensitivity to context was also demonstrated in relation to the data itself, and how it was collected and analysed. During the interviews with participants, I was aware of the power imbalance between us, and my aim was for balance. In order to facilitate this, I asked my participants at the end of each interview if there was anything else that they would like to talk about in the context of making meaning after loss, as my questions may not have covered all of their experience. My intention here was to demonstrate my curiosity and interest in their experience, and not to assume my questions had covered everything that they would like to say. Finally, the location and timing of each interview was convenient for and agreed with each participant prior to their interview, with me travelling across the country to meet four of the participants. I have considered ethical issues (see section 3.9), provided demographic data and used many extracts from each participant when analysing the data and deciding the codes, emerging and final themes. I believe that this demonstrates that I have considered each participant's perspective and have grounded the research firmly within them.

### **3.13.2 Commitment and rigour**

Commitment is demonstrated by prolonged engagement with the topic and immersion in the data. I have read extensively about the topic of grief and making meaning after bereavement

and I have presented my research at a Metanoia research seminar in 2021. Furthermore, I believe I was attentive, caring and committed with each participant during data collection, and also during data analysis, where I have striven to ensure that each participant's voice is included equally in the research.

According to Yardley (2000), rigour refers to how complete the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation is. All participants were included in the research on the basis of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, with one interview not included due to the suicide exclusion criteria, as outlined in section 3.8.1(e). During data analysis, I shared some data with my research supervisor and peers in order to triangulate my understanding of the data. This was especially useful with a male colleague, who discussed my findings and my reflections on 'masculinity' or 'masculinities'. I believe this contributed to a rigorous approach to data analysis. My aim was not to engage with the data in a superficial or overly descriptive way, and I believe my analysis demonstrates commitment and rigour: I engaged with the data at length, in depth and over a prolonged period of time (analysis lasted from July 2022 to December 2022). The themes I have developed are supported by several quotes from each participant and I have aimed for a balance between their accounts.

### **3.13.3 Transparency and coherence**

In order to demonstrate transparency, I have detailed and discussed different stages of my research process, from ethical approval, participant recruitment, the semi-structured interview schedule and the interviews themselves (Appendices A-H). After transcribing the interviews, I followed the guidelines provided by Braun and Clarke (2022) in conducting a reflexive TA. I have provided accounts of the emerging codes, initial themes and final themes, in order to be transparent about the process (Appendices J-M). By including the different materials, a reader can follow the progression of my study. I believe that this transparency enhances the trustworthiness and credibility of my study.

Throughout the study, I have also chosen to include different reflexive processes in order that the reader can understand my position in the world and in relation to this research. I believe that this strengthens the transparency of the research, so that my impact on it may be understood.

In order to demonstrate coherence in the research, I have asked myself the following questions throughout the analysis and writing-up processes: are my themes logical and rational?; are my themes overly descriptive, or is there a central, unifying concept?; do I present a consistent, logical argument for my research in the development of my themes?;

have I attended to contradictions in the data? I believe that asking these questions is vital for my research to be considered accessible, consistent, reliable, logical and of good quality.

#### **3.13.4 Impact and importance**

The impact and importance of research is determined by whether it is novel and useful in practice. For this particular research, the consideration is whether it offers something new and helpful for people, particularly men, who have been bereaved. I will consider this in my discussion section in chapter five.

## Chapter 4: ANALYSIS

### 4.1 Chapter overview

Analysis of the data resulted in three overarching themes representing the areas where meanings were made by the participants after their losses: 1. Inexorable death, 2. Identity shift, 3. Meaning in human connection. The corresponding sub-themes explore these meanings and what helped and hindered making them. This chapter will discuss each theme and its sub-themes, using direct quotes from the participants by way of example.

Table 3 (below) will feature throughout this chapter as a reference point for the reader and as an illustration of the overarching themes and sub-themes and their prevalence amongst the eight participants.

*Table 3: Overarching themes with their sub-themes and the prevalence among participants*

<p><b>Theme 1:</b> <b>INEXORABLE DEATH</b> (all participants)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Making sense of death (all participants)</li> <li>- The Sisyphean burden (all participants)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Theme 2:</b> <b>IDENTITY SHIFT</b> (all participants)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Changing relationships (all participants)</li> <li>- Action Man? (all participants)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Theme 3:</b> <b>MEANING IN HUMAN CONNECTION</b> (all participants)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sharing experiences of loss (all participants)</li> <li>- Language matters (Brandon, George, Graeme, Ishan, Kevin, Michael, Rob)</li> <li>- Man, find your own words (all participants)</li> </ul>
---	---	--

### 4.2 Overarching theme one: Inexorable death

*One is a piece of fate.* (Nietzsche, 1990, p. 86).

The loss of a close relationship has radically changed each participant's life and become a fundamental part of their lives going forward. This overarching theme addresses how the participants' experiences of bereavement have made them aware that death is mandatory,

often putting their fragile, finite lives into focus. All participants talked about trying to make sense of death as an unavoidable fact of life, and that the burden of loss is to be carried even if it is not wanted.

In sub-theme one, making sense of death, how the participants have attempted to understand the death of their loved one and integrate that understanding into their lives is explored. There is meaning for some in spiritual beliefs, the idea of a “grand plan” and belief in the ‘circle of life’. For others, the meaning is more negative and they now understand life as cruel, bleak and finite. All of the participants are now aware that life is limited by death for us all, giving them a sense of purpose and meaning to live as best they can while alive.

Sub-theme two, the Sisyphean burden, addresses how loss can feel like a heavy burden to be carried in life, without choosing to. This burden can feel difficult and is often painful; however, the participants have found that this burden can represent a continued connection with their lost loved one, which is meaningful. I shall now describe each sub-theme in detail.

#### **4.2.1 Sub-theme one: Making sense of death**

*Sometimes, for a moment, I have a flash of resentment that she has the privilege of dying first. It seems so much easier that way.* (Yalom & Yalom, 2021, p. 69).

Each of the participants’ experiences of death lead them all to wonder about death and its relationship to life. John gets to the point when he says, “It’s just the eh, (*pause*) inevitability of it, you know? I think: it happens, you’re taken early, and we don’t know why, em, but it just happens.” In this extract, John understands death as an “inevitability”: it is certain for us all, yet its reasons and timing are uncertain, “we don’t know why, em, but it just happens.” John has been confronted with the deaths of his brother, mother and wife and his understanding of these deaths is illustrated when he says,

I don’t think I’ve ever tried to make sense of them other than, it was their time. I believe there is a grand plan, I guess, sometimes that belief is tested, you know, why did [she] get taken at 54 when she shouldn’t have been? But, em, (*pause*). I like to think there is a grand plan and I’m surprised I’m still here (*laughs*). I’m enjoying being here.

John believes in a person having a “time” to die and this is how he has made sense of the deaths in his life. He questions “why” did his wife “get taken” at 54, implying that a greater



power exists, to 'take' life from the living, which can feel senseless, especially when that person is young. He continues his reflection in saying that he "like[s] to think there is a grand plan", and I understand that John's theory of a "grand plan" provides a meaningful structure within which he can make sense of his loved ones' deaths. John believes in a 'greater power' that determines the timing of our inevitable fate and he understands that his brother, mother and first wife all died as part of a "grand plan" over which he has no influence. I believe his laugh demonstrates his uneasiness and anxiety at still being alive, yet aware of death's approach, not fully understanding life's "grand plan" and where he stands in it. He is still alive when others have died, there is no reason for that difference, and his turn will come. His awareness of his death as an "inevitability" and part of a "grand plan" contributes to his awareness of his life in the here and now, which he is "enjoying". Like all of the other participants, throughout his interview, John makes it clear that he does not want to waste his life; "I tend to live for today and not worry too much about tomorrow." The participants' experiences of loss have confronted them all with the certainty of death and consequently, all of the participants want to make the most of their time alive, understanding that none of us have control over when we die, rather it is life's "grand plan" which decides.

Like John, Brandon has found the idea of it being "their time" to die as helpful when making sense of his parents' deaths, "So, if it was his time, then, that's, I'm at peace with that, you know?" Brandon's use of the word "if" when talking about "his time" to die suggests that he hesitates in his idea of there being a "time" to die. While he is ambivalent about this belief, it has been crucial to him in understanding his parents' deaths, helping him to make sense of them and feel "at peace". He goes on to describe his theory and that, like John, he does not fully understand death and its reasons,

So, even though I don't understand their deaths entirely, even when people ask me, 'How, how did your parents die?' What I tell them, it changes, like, my mum was in a coma and she had a cardiac arrest, but is, is that the reason she died? Probably not....Even though I may not understand every single thing there is to understand about their passing, but I'm still, I'm still at peace.

Brandon admits, "I don't understand their deaths entirely", alluding to a bigger picture, beyond the physical world, which he cannot fathom, yet which provides a meaningful structure within which he understands his parents' deaths. While he is aware of the physical reason that his mother died, he further implies that this is not the full picture, when he says, "is that the reason she died? Probably not." Brandon also says, "God knows best", and my understanding is that Brandon believes in a brilliant and benevolent deity who controls our

time on Earth, and who is the “reason” behind his parents’ deaths. Brandon’s beliefs in “God” and their “time” are meaningful to him, soothing his own anxiety about death, allowing him to feel “at peace.”

As Brandon and John have articulated, and like the other participants in the study,

throughout Kevin’s interview, he understands that death is a fundamental part of life and he portrays a sense of awe about it, questioning what happens when people die. He has lost family members and close friendships, and he wonders whether there is something more to life and our physical world, like Brandon and John:

As humans, how, how, how do we keep going when you know it’s going to end? We pass it on, and we think we’ll pass it on forever and ever, but you know, and that’s where you start getting into stuff like, what, that is, insofar as, ‘Are we part of something bigger?’ Because if we are not, it’s, sort of like, maybe it’s fine, maybe it is the fact that we’ve been given this small window and we just have to do something with it. It’s making sense of the whole thing, you know?

For Kevin, the idea of being part of “something bigger” has meaning as he makes sense of death and as he questions whether humans can continue existing after they have died. He demonstrates awareness of death’s shadow in his life when he says, “how do we keep going when you know it’s going to end?” He changes pronouns in this thought process: at the beginning, he includes himself in “we” when he wonders, “how do we keep going”; however, by the end of the sentence, he removes himself from what he is saying by using “you” as the pronoun, “when you know it’s going to end.” Using “you” may be Kevin covertly expressing his anxiety about death, removing himself from this thought process and wondering about life ending for “you”, other people. This may soothe him as it does not directly include *him* in thoughts about life ending. While Kevin is aware that life ends, he sounds anxious about this, as he questions what happens after death and whether we are part of “something bigger”. There is a pleading quality when he says, “Because if we are not... maybe it’s fine” as he demonstrates a struggle to make sense of his thoughts and feelings about death. He understands that the world will continue after a person’s death, and while there may be “something bigger”, there also may not be. There is a contradiction here, which also gives a focus and a meaningful framework to Kevin’s understanding of life, and he intends to “do something with” the “small window” of opportunity that he has “been given”. He continues,

Death isn’t an ending, cos it’s not an ending. It’s literally, scientifically, not an ending and they’ve proved that, you know, and you only have to look at, sort of like, sort of,

you know, the seasons, you know, you look at the garden and you sort of see everything go to sleep and die and it all goes back to the Earth and that feeds everything and brings it to life the follow, the following, em, Spring.

Kevin is searching for a convincing metaphor to illustrate death; he finds meaning in the idea of the 'circle of life', that we go "back to the Earth and that feeds everything and brings it to life". He believes that our physical life ends when we "go to sleep and die", while simultaneously asserting that death is "not an ending". Using the analogy of "sleep" suggests that we will wake up, further cementing the idea that death is "not an ending". After death, Kevin believes that our bodies will physically nourish new life endlessly, by going back to the Earth to promote new growth, but our opportunities to grow and act have gone. Like the other participants, Kevin understands that we cannot make meaning after our deaths; our opportunity to do so is available only while we are alive, thus affirming his belief in doing "something" with "this small window" of opportunity that he has while alive.

Awareness of death as a shadow in life motivates Kevin to act meaningfully in his life. This is echoed by all of the other participants, including Rob, who is also more aware of his own fate since the untimely death of his girlfriend, "I suppose on that 'life's too short' thing, it's kind of, it has definitely, I think, ... made me more notice my mortality." Rob is aware that he will die and that "life's too short". He expands on what this existential awareness of his "mortality" means,

I don't just want to almost waste life, that kind of thing. But, I suppose the biggest question is, what does that count as, 'wasting life'? I mean, what is, what, what is 'time well spent', that sort of thing?.....I can get a bit bogged down in, like, thinking and getting, like, panicked, like, thinking, 'It's passing so fast.'

Rob feels "bogged down" and "panicked", which suggests that he is struggling to live the life he would like. He is aware of his "mortality" and of his responsibility not to "waste life". There is a sense that his life is happening without him, while he watches it "passing so fast". Like all of the other participants in the study, Rob expresses an anxiety about living in a meaningful way, yet he feels like he is "wasting life". Developing an understanding of death in life is difficult for Rob, it requires action, but there is a sense of paralysis in this process, as he is "bogged down". Since his girlfriend's death, Rob is struggling to rebuild the meaningful structures in his life to guide his decisions and actions.

Two other participants are also struggling to make sense of their losses, articulated by Graeme, who is loath to accept the death of his wife as part of his life,

I don't think you can make any sort of sense of the fact that, I've probably said it wrong, it's just nature's blind indifference. It, like, bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people.

Graeme sounds resentful; his wife has died and he does not "think you can make any sort of sense of the fact". Death is a "bad thing" that has happened to him, he is at death's mercy, epitomised when he says that it is "nature's blind indifference" that has cruelly taken his wife. The suggestion here is that Graeme and his wife lived life within the framework of 'good things happen to good people', which provided meaningful structure to their lives until it was shattered by her untimely death; she was a 'good' person, and a 'bad' thing happened to her. This meaninglessness also appears in Ishan and Rob's narratives, and they are struggling to make sense of the deaths of their loved ones in a positive way. They are not "at peace", like Brandon, nor are they soothed by the idea of a "grand plan" or "something bigger" like John or Kevin. There is a sense of how cruel life can be, articulated by Graeme saying it is "nature's blind indifference", and this is now what guides his life as he lives on. As illustrated throughout this subtheme, making sense of death, none of the participants want to waste their lives now that they are aware of its finitude, illustrated when Graeme says, "I don't think I'm living life to the full, but I'm living life as best I can, I think. And... I won't give in to despair, although I do feel despair sometimes." Graeme is "living life as best" he can, which he recognises is not "living life to the full". He sounds unsure about "living life as best I can" as after this statement, he says, "I think", highlighting his insecurity about the quality of his life since his wife's death. Graeme does not want to "give in to despair", implying that he wants to have hope and meaning in his life. He does "feel despair sometimes" yet there is a determined quality to his words; the meaningful structures in his life were cruelly destroyed when his wife died, which also made him aware of life's finitude. This realisation of how life is both cruel and finite, now provides a structure to his life as he continues to do the "best" he can each day. Like Rob and Ishan, he gives the impression that his meaning-making is a work in progress, as he struggles to come to terms with his loss. He feels the weight of what he has lost, when he says,

I feel like I carry the burden myself, and don't share it with anybody, and sometimes when you don't share things with people, it can get on top of you. And sometimes I feel like things get on top of me.

Graeme carries the burden of his loss, which he did not choose in his life. His isolation in not sharing “things with people” will be discussed in theme two, identity shift, and the gendered aspect of finding it difficult to talk about loss will be discussed in theme three, meaning in human connection. The next sub-theme, the Sisyphean burden, delves into the participants’ integration of the weighty burden of loss into their lives, which we shall explore now.

#### 4.2.2 Sub-theme two: The Sisyphean burden

*Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy. (Camus, 2005, p. 119).*

In Camus’ ‘The Myth of Sisyphus’ (2005), Sisyphus is a man condemned to rolling the same large, heavy rock up a mountain every day for eternity; once he reaches the top, it rolls back down, and he must push it back up the same mountain again the next day. Camus is writing about what makes a meaningful life. His conclusion is that it is our *perception* of the meaning in our circumstances that establishes the meaning in our lives, regardless of the environment in which we find ourselves, however tough and futile. This sub-theme, the Sisyphean burden, explores the participants’ feelings of loss being a heavy burden which they now carry in their lives. It is a burden that they did not choose and which, like Sisyphus, they are condemned to carry. All the participants expressed that, over time, there is meaning in this burden as it represents a connection with their lost loved one.

Ishan lost his sister and a cousin, who he refers to as his brother throughout the interview, within months of each other, when they were both young and in their twenties. His sister had needs which meant that she received around-the-clock care, and Ishan felt a duty of care and responsibility over her. Losing her created a vacuum in his life and his feelings about the loss feel heavy. Not long after his sister’s death, Ishan’s brother died suddenly and unexpectedly in his sleep from a brain haemorrhage. Ishan feels that he did not take all available opportunities to spend time with his brother when he was alive and consequently, Ishan now lives with regret. This regret also feels like a burden. He describes his feelings about living with the heavy load of loss when he says,

I don’t think the pain of loss has ever really gone away, and I think what I’m learning is, at the time you just, when it’s acute, you know, one month, one year, two years, that, you sort of, I always thought I was waiting for a moment where, like that (*clicks fingers*), and suddenly everything will be ok again, sort of thing. And I think I realised

over time that that moment was never coming and I think that when I realised that I'd need to accept a new, sort of, baseline of, of being and feeling, then that's when I started to move on, really, rather than waiting for a moment where I would snap back to where things were like before.

It has taken time for Ishan to adjust to living with the burden of loss and "to accept a new .. baseline of .. being and feeling". He has accepted this burden only after a period of yearning for "where things were like before." When he 'clicks' his fingers, it is a quick and sudden motion, giving the impression that he was waiting for an effortless change, passively relieving him of this burden, rather than demanding action from him. The moment where "everything will be ok again" never came and slowly, Ishan understood that "that moment was never coming". He realised his need to carry his losses in a new burden, as they would not go away, thus changing his "baseline of.. being and feeling", which is something Ishan feels angry about;

When something, sort of, goes wrong, I sort of default to, like, quite a high level of anger. Not necessarily anger that I express, but certainly an anger that I feel. And I think that's one thing that's definitely, definitely changed, I can't deny it, really ... That's the truth. But I think it's because of, I feel like an element of injustice that I've been dealt by life.

Ishan's new "baseline" is angrier than before the deaths of his sister and brother, due to the "element of injustice" that he feels he has "been dealt by life". The suggestion is that he is angry about the losses happening to him, resulting in him being more reactive "when something.. goes wrong" as he defaults to "quite a high level of anger". Carrying this burden feels unfair to Ishan, who seems to understand that "life" has a 'justice system', serving him "injustice" and causing him "anger". My understanding is that, before his experiences of death, Ishan believed in the idea of a fair justice system, providing a framework for understanding his life: if he provided 'good enough' care for his sister, she would be well looked after and *live*. However, with her death, this belief has been shattered; his family protected her over her lifetime, and she died anyway. It feels unfair and unjust, leaving Ishan angry, bereft and without a meaningful structure within which he can live his life. Ishan does "not necessarily" express how he feels, further contributing to the sense that he carries the heavy load of his losses on his own, feeling their full weight and struggling to make sense of them; like Sisyphus, he is condemned to do so. Throughout his interview, my sense was that expressing himself to me was a rare experience for him, allowing him to process

feelings, actively make sense of his losses, and integrate the past and the present. As this assimilation developed, he expanded on the “high level of anger” he feels by saying,

I wasn't a bad person when she was alive and certainly she wouldn't have wanted me to become a bad person after she died, so yeah, it's a battle, I think, is probably the best way of describing it, that I'm always trying to manage. Em, I'm just trying my best, I'd say.

In this extract, Ishan communicates that his anger makes him feel that he could become a “bad person”, again alluding to the idea of a ‘justice system’ in life that consists of ‘good’ and ‘bad’. Ishan feels hurt by his losses, which is hidden under and concealed by his overwhelming anger. I understand his feeling of potentially acting ‘badly’ as his retaliation to feeling punished by his losses. Was the care he provided ‘good enough’ if his sister died? His enemy is death and it ‘won’; my sense is that Ishan wants revenge for this “injustice”, yet there is nothing and no-one to attack. Consequently, he seems to be engaged in “a battle” with his inner feelings of “anger” and “injustice”, which he is “always trying to manage”, conjuring a violent image of Ishan fighting with himself, and even punishing himself for not managing to keep his sister alive. He describes his powerful struggle not to be “a bad person” and the use of the word “bad” suggests a childlike response to his losses, evoking an image of a child needing protection, as Ishan’s anger protects his devastating hurt. The memory of his sister and what she would have wanted from him, when he says, “certainly, she wouldn't have wanted me to become a bad person after she died”, does help to direct his life in a meaningful way as he tries his “best” to live up to her expectations of him. Living with loss is painful and difficult for Ishan, as he feels punished and broken; nevertheless, remembering his sister is meaningful for him and helps him to “try his best” and keep going, without becoming “a bad person” who acts out his “anger” in destructive ways.

All of the participants felt loss as a burden in their lives now, and each articulated it slightly differently. When Michael lost his father, he struggled to make sense of it and after several months, he developed alopecia. He attributes his hair loss to the stress that he felt after his father’s death, “I was keeping all of the stress in...it really started to eat me up, which I didn't know at first.” The burden of loss “started to eat” him up. When he describes “keeping all of the stress in”, there is a sense of him carrying a load inside of him, with unwelcome and corrosive effects on his body. What has been helpful for Michael since the loss of his father is the memory of his father. This has been particularly beneficial in Michael’s family life, with his younger brothers and sisters and his wife and children. Michael did not grow up living with his father, who struggled with alcohol, and this contributed to ambivalent feelings

towards his father after his death. However, Michael has been able to make sense of these feelings by learning and making meaning from his burden of loss:

Just because I've got my little brothers and sisters who are there. But I just don't want them to feel how I felt (*pause*) and I want them to have, to know that I'm there. Just to be that father figure for them.

Michael acknowledges that he felt negative feelings about his relationship with his father, as he does not want his "little brothers and sisters... to feel how I felt". The implication is that Michael has learned how *not* to be from his father, as he strives "to be that father figure for them", contributing more positively to their lives and giving his life meaning. As Michael's interview progressed, he continued to make sense of his feelings:

I've got to focus on my own relationship with my son, just to make sure that he knows that I'm always there for him. And always being present. And just, not judging, I suppose, you know, my dad didn't judge me. Actually, I just wanna give what my dad gave, because dad was always giving, so if you ever needed anything, if he had it, he would give it to any of us. And that's the same as how I want to be. Em, well, I just wanna be more present."

Michael recognises that, despite his absence, his father had some positive qualities when he says, "my dad didn't judge me" and "dad was always giving". Michael wants to emulate his father in these ways, particularly in his relationship with his son, and "give what my dad gave. ... that's the same as how I want to be." Despite his difficult relationship with his father, there is meaning for Michael in thinking about his own actions as a father, and his impact on his son. While he recognises the positive and incorporates it into his own parenting strategies, he also recognises that his father was not particularly "present" in his life and he wants to act differently, saying "I just wanna be more present." There is a balance in how Michael remembers his father and incorporates that memory into his life: Michael wants to mirror his father's positive influence in "not judging" and "always giving", while realising that he would like to "be more present" for his son, thus learning from his father's mistakes and meaningfully incorporating that learning into his life. Michael makes meaning in his life by reflecting on his relationship with his father and the impact his father had on his life; he has decided to emulate his father in some ways, and to act differently in other ways. In this process, Michael carries the burden of loss of his father and integrates it into his life in a way that is both meaningful and positive for his own family relationships.



Like Ishan and Michael and the other participants in the study, George also feels that his losses represent a burden to be carried in his life:

I'm sitting here four years later, in front of you, that kind of shows to you that this isn't a one-off event (*pause*). This is something that you, is there for life. It will change in intensity over time, but it's still there. It doesn't go away (*pause*).

This excerpt echoes Ishan's statement about a new "baseline of... being and feeling", as rather than loss being "a one-off event", it "is there for life" and "it doesn't go away". This new feeling for George "will change in intensity over time, but it's still there." This language suggests that loss is onerous. These arduous feelings may develop over time, potentially becoming less uncomfortable and challenging, but they will not go away entirely; this is the burden that George now carries since the death of his twin sons. George feels that there is crucial meaning in this burden as it represents a bond with his sons that continues into his family's present-day life:

The meaning-making is not just from us, it's from the children as well. It's really good to see that we are not the sole carriers of that torch, that the children create stories and ideas of what their brothers might have done.

For George, it is important that he and his wife are not the "sole carriers" of the "torch" representing the twins' deaths. Their other children know about their brothers and "create stories and ideas of what their brothers might have done." This is meaningful for George as it feels as though the burden is shared; he and his wife are not solely responsible for remembering the twins and the implication is that George takes comfort from his other children remembering and talking about the twins, therefore incorporating and sharing the burden of loss in a meaningful way. This sense of the burden of loss representing a continuing attachment to the person who has died was meaningful to each of the participants.

#### 4.2.3 Reflexivity VI

In writing about this overarching theme, inexorable death, I am aware of my influence on the interpretation of the data. In my own experience of death and loss, I am drawn to the existential theories of Yalom (1980, 2008), Frankl (2004) Stolorow, (2007) and van Deurzen (2010), who write about the inevitability of death, existential isolation and their understandings of meaning in life. These are also pertinent topics in the subthemes,

making sense of death and the Sisyphean burden. As I have analysed the data, it has been important for me to keep my participants in the forefront of my mind, rather than the theories that I am drawn to. To do this, it has felt important to regain a sense of my experience with them in the interview. For this, I re-read the journal that I kept before and after each interview as well as remembering the interview itself, with each participant. I have reflected on where I met each participant, what he sounded like, what I felt like when I was with him, and what he looked like. Visualising and reliving the interview in this way helped to ground me and set aside my own theoretical inclinations, as I analysed and interpreted the data.

#### **4.2.4 Summary: Inexorable death**

The first overarching theme is about how the participants develop an understanding of death as a fact of life and how they live with their loss. In losing an important person, all of the participants were faced with death's inevitability, which they sought to make sense of (sub-theme one, making sense of death). Those participants who believed in "something bigger", for example, the idea of "destiny", the 'circle of life' or an all-powerful and benevolent God who determines the timing of our fate, seemed to understand and feel more accepting of their loss and their fate, and find meaning in these beliefs. The participants who saw death as crueler and more unjust, seemed to struggle more with integrating their loss: death was a merciless event that happened to them, shattering what was important in their lives. Nevertheless, loss brought all the participants face-to-face with death and their own mortality, leading to a sense of wanting to do their "best" and not "waste" their finite lives.

Carrying the burden of loss is the topic of sub-theme two, the Sisyphean burden. All of the participants felt that, like Sisyphus, they are condemned to bear their loss, and this was not an active choice. This has meant that each participant has had to evolve in their lives in order to carry this load, resulting in new feelings and behaviours, affecting both themselves and their wider families. Those participants who managed to incorporate the burden of loss into their lives through a continued memory of, and bond with, the person they lost, felt this was meaningful in their lives.

The experience of death and then carrying the burden of loss changed something fundamental in each participant's sense of themselves and their lives. This is the second overarching theme: identity shift.

Table 3: Overarching themes with their sub-themes and the prevalence among participants

<p><b>Theme 1:</b> <b>INEXORABLE DEATH</b> (all participants)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Making sense of death (all participants)</li> <li>- The Sisyphean burden (all participants)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Theme 2:</b> <b>IDENTITY SHIFT</b> (all participants)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Changing relationships (all participants)</li> <li>- Action Man? (all participants)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Theme 3:</b> <b>MEANING IN HUMAN CONNECTION</b> (all participants)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sharing experiences of loss (all participants)</li> <li>- Language matters (Brandon, George, Graeme, Ishan, Kevin, Michael, Rob)</li> <li>- Man, find your own words (all participants)</li> </ul>
---	---	--

### 4.3 Overarching theme two: Identity shift

*I'm beginning to re-join life once again.* (Yalom & Yalom, 2021, p. 219)

This overarching theme, identity shift, explores how the participants' sense of themselves changed after their experiences of loss. It builds on overarching theme one, inexorable death, as the participants' awareness of death's inevitability led them to re-evaluate themselves, their relationships and what they do with their lives.

All of the participants talked about relationships as an important part of their lives, explored in sub-theme one, changing relationships. There is meaning in already-existing relationships and newly-formed relationships, which influence the participants' behaviours and actions, providing a purpose to their lives. Some relationships did not survive the loss and this was also meaningful for the participants; often relationships ended suddenly when there was a clash of values. Finally, relationships, or lack of relationships, seemed to contribute to the participants' sense of who they are since their bereavement, with some participants feeling more isolated and alienated from others.

Sub-theme two, Action Man?, explores how the participants have chosen to act in their lives after their bereavement. Actively and authentically participating in life is helpful to live with

meaning and purpose after loss, and those participants who occupy more passive positions in their lives, seem to struggle more in adjusting to their loss and making meaning after it. I will now discuss each sub-theme in depth.

#### 4.3.1 Sub-theme one: Changing relationships

*I am concerned about the people I encounter. It is part of my nature to be, in this way, linked to everything and everyone around me.* (van Deurzen, 2010, p. 237).

Rob lost his girlfriend unexpectedly when they were both in their twenties, and this devastating experience shattered his hopes for the future and the meaningful structures of his life. There is a sense throughout his interview that his search for meaning after loss is enduring, and the interview is another way for him to continue on his quest. Despite this ongoing journey, he describes how his appreciation for his extended family and old friends has grown since his girlfriend's death, and this is meaningful for him:

It's brought me closer to, like, certain members of my family as well, cos, I was very close to my im..or, wmediate family before, em, but, just like more, more kind of, eh, peripheral members of the family, like ones I don't see too often, it's just kind of inspired me more to just like, eh, be in contact with them and even contact with old friends as well... it's just kind of, yeah, let me think (*pause*), let me realise how, like, how important these, it is to nurture these relationships.

Rob professes the importance of family relationships, both "immediate family" who he was "very close" to before his girlfriend's death, and also "peripheral members of the family", who he now feels compelled to be in contact with. This feeling extends to "old friends" who he is in touch with again. His experience of loss has awakened him to "how important these" relationships are to him and he has a renewed desire to "nurture these relationships." Since his bereavement, he takes a more active role in his relationships, asking friends and family "about things that they didn't, you didn't before, and just taking an interest". My understanding is that this is meaningful for Rob, as he strives to integrate his loss and rebuild his life, including people who are important to him. This affirmation of important family relationships was also expressed by six of the other participants.

While Rob finds meaning in his existing family and friend relationships, there is also a sense of him feeling alienated from and different to other people. This feeling was shared by five other participants. Rob has tried to find support for himself and found that it was often aimed

at older, middle-aged people who had lost a partner and he can “feel a bit alienated”. Throughout his interview, he repeats the word “weird” to describe his experience,

I suppose being bereaved of a partner at 30 is weird, I mean, being bereaved of, I suppose, a parent at that age is, can be weird as well, but it's just, it's just I feel, I feel like future relationships and stuff are just not (*sighs*), are just not going to be the same, and I don't mean to be able to recapture what I had, but I'll just be going in with that, with this extra kind of overhead of kind of what's happened before.

Rob feels that he is “weird” as a result of his experience as it is not common for 30-year-olds to lose a partner. He feels different from his peers as he has “this extra kind of overhead of ... what's happened before.” This sense of alienation weighs on him, captured in his sigh as he speaks, suggesting that he feels tarnished by his experience; while he values relationships, and finds meaning in his relationships with family and old friends, he also feels alienated from other people who have not gone through what he has. His sense of himself in his relationships with other people has shifted since his girlfriend's death, and “future relationships and stuff are just not (*sighs*), are just not going to be the same.” There is a sense of Rob feeling scarred and alienated from others his age, and this hinders him from meeting new people and moving on with his life in a meaningful way.

**Like Rob, and five other participants, John** recognises the value of relationships since he lost his wife, as he does not like to feel alone:

I don't like to be on my own. And I think quite a few men are like that and women, generalisation, tend to be happy with their own company a lot more than men are happy with their own company (*laughs*), maybe, em, but I know some men who wouldn't even think of getting remarried. ... I know if something happened to me, [wife] would have moved on and if something happened to [wife], I would have moved on because we wouldn't want each other to be unhappy and lonely. Em, so, you know, life's for enjoying, enjoy it, so, yeah, unfortunate.

John attributes his dislike of his own company to his masculinity and he believes that “quite a few men are like that”. John is a 64-year-old director with decades of experience in a male-dominated workplace, where traditional hegemonic masculinity is valued, and where his colleagues defer to his authority and status. John was keen to demonstrate to me that he is open-minded and accepting of difference (for example, when he says, “generalisation, ... I know some men who wouldn't even think of getting remarried”), yet the implication in this

extract is that, because he is a man, he prefers the company of another, particularly a woman, to “enjoy” life. His romantic relationships since his wife’s death have provided structure and meaning to his life, which he wants to make the most of while he can.

Elsewhere in his interview, while he acknowledges the importance of relationships, he questions what they say about him:

I don’t really have close male friends and I don’t know whether it’s because my two best male friends died, em, early, or just a matter of circumstance. ... I know a lot of people but have very few close friends (*pause*). And I don’t know whether if that’s because of that or it’s just the way I am. I don’t know.

John wonders about his identity as a consequence of the quality of his relationships. Since the death of his “two best male friends” he does not “really have close male friends” and he wonders why. Is it because of the early deaths of his friends or is it more fundamental to who he is? Is it part of John’s identity not to have male friends? There is a wistful quality to John’s words, highlighted by the ‘pause’ as he thinks about his life and the people in it, and also by his acknowledgement that he is unsure why he has “very few close friends”. My understanding is that John’s losses have become part of his identity, integrated into “the way” he is. He has incorporated the deaths of his friends into his life and his sense of himself; he does not, and cannot, know who he would be without them. Furthermore, John lost his wife when he was 56-years-old, a young age that was potentially isolating for him at the time, thus possibly contributing to his feeling of isolation from other men. **Feeling isolated and alienated after loss was echoed by all of the other participants, and for** John, it seems easier to form new relationships with women, who are either divorced or have lost their husbands, in order to “enjoy” his life, feel “happy” and have a sense of purpose.

Like Rob, John, **and the other participants in the study**, since Ishan’s experiences of loss, he is more aware of and grateful for supportive people in his life,

I’ve tried to appreciate people around me who are, who have been there for me, sort of thing. I think it’s, yeah, I think I’ve found a new sense of appreciation for not only life, but for the people around me who I can count on.

Ishan acknowledges the importance of the people in his life who have offered their help and support to him after the deaths of his sister and brother. He values these relationships and “can count” on them, providing a meaningful support in his life. Ishan goes on to explain that

he finds it difficult to pursue relationships with friends who have let him down, with the potential extreme consequence of cutting that person out of his life:

Maybe a bit more ruthless in the sense of, if someone (*pause*) I feel has, yeah, let me down once, it's very difficult for me to trust them again,... I feel like I've become a bit more ruthless, em, with my conviction, I think. Like, I'm happy to stick to a decision, em, now, rather than umming and erring about something, particularly if it means cutting someone out, cutting someone out of my life (*laughs*). Which I'm not sure if it's a good or a bad thing, it's just one way I've changed, really.

Ishan repeats the words “ruthless” and “cutting” twice, demonstrating the harsh way he is prepared to end relationships as “it's very difficult for me to trust them again.” Ishan will no longer trust a person who has let him down, and he is “happy to stick to a decision... rather than umming and erring... particularly if it means cutting someone out, cutting someone out of my life”. Ishan laughs when he says this, which could demonstrate his uncomfortable feelings about his “conviction”, which seems unforgiving. Relationships that provide meaningful, reliable support to Ishan are important to him; however, his language describes an unyielding position, should a friend let him “down once”. There is a destructive quality to Ishan's words, which parallels the destruction he feels in his life since the deaths of his sister and brother, and demonstrates his struggle to make new meanings in his life. Elsewhere in the interview, **as already articulated by John and shared by all of the other participants**, Ishan comes across as more isolated in his life,

And so, this was one of those situations where, like, life had hit me really, really hard again. And this was a feeling that I couldn't really share with anyone else because no-one understood how much it really meant to me.

Despite his renewed appreciation for people who have “been there” for him, he does not share his feelings with them, giving the impression that he keeps his thoughts and feelings to himself, thus pulling away from relationships and isolating himself from others. The anger felt by Ishan, and discussed in 4.2.2, the Sisyphean burden, is again reflected in his language in the above extract; his description of being bereaved is violent, as it is like life hitting him “really, really hard again”. Ishan is in a passive, powerless position here, with “life” being the violent, active agent hitting him, hurting him and possibly contributing to his anger. Ishan endures this painful and cruel attack alone, powerless and detached from his friends; he feels that he cannot share his feelings with others, as they do not understand “how much it really meant to” him, thus changing his relationships.

Ishan is not alone in his experience of “cutting someone out of” his life, as four other participants also described this relationship shift. For Michael, the death of his father meant ending several relationships between him and those on his father’s side of the family,

I just kind of learned that, you know, I guess, when it comes to deaths in families, it can be quite toxic if things aren’t organised. There’s always, everyone’s got an opinion. So, at that point, I just decided to cut everybody off, other than my immediate family. *(Pause)*. On my dad’s side, I just didn’t want anything to do with them. Not after the funeral.

Michael prioritises his “immediate family”, meaning his wife and children, after his father’s death. His experience after bereavement was “toxic”, which he attributes to his father not having a will and not being “organised”, meaning that people wanted to know about money and property, rather than each other’s thoughts and feelings. There is an undercurrent of anger in this extract, as Michael describes the situation as “toxic”, deciding to “cut everybody off” in line with his own family values. The use of the word “cut” is sharp, suggesting finality and aggression towards those he has decided to stop seeing and, like Ishan, it illustrates the devastation Michael feels in life since his father died. Despite the severity of ending these relationships, his relationships with his “immediate family” seem to be strengthened,

I guess it kind of made me stronger and it’s made me a bit more *(pause)* honest with myself, which is good. And it’s taught *[sic]* me what I need to do in regards to parenting and in my own relationship.

Michael is committed to his roles of father and husband; in “parenting and in my own relationship.” Michael feels that he has grown since his difficult experiences of loss and with his father’s family, as he describes himself as “stronger” and more “honest” with himself, examples of his own ‘identity shift’. While Michael has actively decided to end some “toxic” relationships in line with his own values, other committed, family relationships have been strengthened as a result of Michael’s father’s death. **This was felt by six other participants who felt that important relationships were affirmed, giving meaning and direction to their lives.**



### 4.3.2 Sub-theme two: Action Man?

*Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.*

(Frankl, 2004, p. 75).

All participants talked about and re-evaluated their actions since their experiences of loss, and what they did in and with their lives. Building on overarching theme one, inexorable death, the participants expressed that it was important for them to act authentically as life is impermanent and not to be wasted. George succinctly explains this,

How could you have such an experience of horror, tragedy, sadness; it completely reshapes you. I remember going, I think it was one of those sorts of moments, going into work and just thinking, 'Why am I spending all my time here with people I don't particularly care about, doing a job I am slightly competent at but have no joy in? Why am I spending all my time doing this?'

George's losses have led him to question his actions and what he does with his life. In particular, he describes the deaths of his twin sons as "horror, tragedy, sadness" that have "completely" reshaped him. This language suggests that he feels different, that the contours of who he sees himself to be have shifted. This goes to the heart of who he is and how he impacts the world. His losses have confronted him with death and he questions what his purpose is and what he wants to spend his precious time doing. In order to incorporate his loss and act in a meaningful way, George raises awareness of baby loss at work,

I've been very lucky to have a workplace that's supported me in allowing that to become part of my job. So, it's badged as a corporate objective, I'm giving time to spend doing that; building the networks, writing the resources, doing the talks, doing awareness raising and the cake sales and all the rest of it.

His actions feel meaningful and he is "giving time to spend doing that." The use of the verb 'to give' here suggests that this is a generous action that George actively 'gives' to, rather than something that 'takes' his time in a resentful or tiring way. George speaks with enthusiasm and energy about incorporating this into his job, which he feels "very lucky" to be able to do. At the time of the interview, George was 41-years-old, with a young family. When I met him at his home, I also met his heavily pregnant wife, due to give birth any day. This felt poignant given that much of George's narrative was about making meaning after the

deaths of his twin sons. As I have reflected on George's interview, I understand that George's position as father and husband may be important in his making sense of his bereavements. He integrates the losses of his twin sons into his work, which also provides for his wife and living children, and this is meaningful for him.

While it may be that social expectations on men as providers, particularly fathers, subtly influenced their meaning making, social stereotypes about supporting bereaved men were perceived as a hindrance,

You get the sense from charities that they are desperately trying to reach out to 'Men' as a homogenous block. And it's with the best of intentions, 'Oh, we want to reach 'Men'. What do they like? They like 'Sport'.' ... Now, that's great if you like sport; if sport mystifies you, you're screwed. Because there isn't really anything else out there because it's all badged at that.

As discussed in the introductory chapter, mental health charities increasingly want to appeal to men, in order that more of them feel able to access support at critical times in their lives. George confronts the dilemma of treating men as "a homogenous block" who stereotypically "like 'Sport'." He sounds understanding about this stereotyping of men as it is done "with the best of intentions", to create different, 'more masculine' spaces for men to meet each other in supportive environments. However, George also sounds frustrated about the blanket assumption that all men "like 'Sport'." This has been a hindrance to him, as he feels "screwed" in being unable to access supportive male spaces, as "there isn't really anything else out there" for men and not to do with sport. It is meaningful for George to attempt to create these spaces at work.

Like George, Kevin has found actions in his life, particularly writing, meaningful in helping him make sense of his feelings around his losses, "So, this whole thing of how I cope with death, I find myself putting onto paper, and then other people read it and it gives them a comfort." When we met, Kevin gave me four pieces of paper on which were printed seventeen poems that he had written about death, dying, after-death, living with death and loss. During his interview, he refers to writing as the "perfect companion" since his losses, as it has allowed him to express himself, despite his isolation and loneliness,

I think the worst thing out of it is how empty my life has become since they've gone. But at the same time, there's this, in this sort of wilderness I'm in, I'm sort of finding all these answers, that are eventually coming out on paper.

Kevin describes writing as giving a “comfort” to others, however, there is also the sense that writing provides a “comfort” to him, in his “empty” life, which he describes as the “worst thing” about loss. There is a sense that his writing produces something material, and materially important, in “this sort of wilderness” that he lives in. My sense is that his writing helps his sense of himself and his understanding of his feelings now that his family and closest friends have died. What he expresses is both meaningful and authentic and his poems and other writings have allowed him to find “all these answers”, thus integrating his losses into his identity and his life. Writing was also described as beneficial by three other participants.

Akin to George and Kevin, and all of the other participants, Brandon’s losses have caused him to re-evaluate his actions. Each participant felt that it is important for him to act in ways that are authentic and meaningful. For Brandon, this has meant contributing to a book on loss and established a grief podcast since his parents’ deaths,

When I started the podcast or I write about it, I didn’t kind of think, ‘Well, maybe this is one way of me moving.’ It just happened.. it was like a moment of realisation, actually this is, this is how I am doing it, without realising it.

At the time, he did not consciously decide to act in these ways in order to integrate his loss; however, over time, he has realised that these actions are meaningful for him, allowing him to blend his sense of himself and his experiences of loss. The impression Brandon gives is that grief has dynamics, it fluctuates and moves. Brandon’s ability to move with his grief, rather than resist it, has helped him to manage his feelings about losing his parents. After some time, his movements became more conscious, when there was “a moment of realisation... this is how I am doing it.” This is illustrated when he says,

I think the main thing for me is like, one thing I realised through my journey and experience is that, with grief, you can move with it. How you decide to move with it is, is, you know, it’s dependent on you.

Over time, Brandon has become aware and “realised through [his] journey and experience” that grief is a motion, that requires a response, “you can move with it.” Brandon has slowly assumed an active, rather than a passive, position in grief’s dynamics – in writing and creating a podcast. He has “realised through [his] journey and experience” that it has been his responsibility to act in ways that feel important and authentic to him. Brandon understands the importance of engaging with grief, responding to the fluctuation of his

emotions, thoughts and feelings, and he recognises that this will be different, yet important, for everyone, “How you decide to move with it is, is, ... dependent on you.” Brandon uses the verb ‘to decide’, which implies that there is a decision for a person to make after loss, an active choice in what they do and how they respond. This is rather than adopting a more passive position, where a person feels unable to decide, paralysed by grief and passively directed by its movements and changes.

Unlike Brandon and four other active participants, three participants struggled to know how to act, occupying more passive positions in their lives and struggling to make sense of their losses. Since Graeme’s wife died, he has struggled to come to terms with losing her as it shattered the meaningful structures of his life. Nevertheless, like Brandon, he is aware of grief’s dynamics, and describes occupying both a passive and an active position in relation to these,

I try to move about quite a lot cos, like I say, if, if you sit for too long, it settles on you and you can start to feel a bit agitated. I do get agitated, I do feel unsettled and no matter where I go, I do feel uncomfortable. You know, and I feel like, em, it’s the grief fairy giving me a visit, you know? And I go out on my bike and I get out in the fresh air and I do 30, 40 miles and exercising about in the fresh air.

In this excerpt, there is a sense that Graeme’s feelings creep up on him from the outside, external to him. Graeme occupies a passive position, uninvolved with his feelings, and the agent in charge is described as “the grief fairy”, who brings “uncomfortable” feelings. Graeme is learning, through this process of feeling “agitated” and “unsettled” in his grief, that it is helpful to “move about quite a lot” and therefore occupy a more active and involved position in his life, where *he* decides his movements. Unlike Brandon, Kevin, George, and two other participants, he does not do this through his work or writing and instead he gets out of the house, on his bike, “exercising about in the fresh air”.

When Graeme goes out on his bike, or to the shops, there are memories of his wife that are important to him. He feels this close to home,

Even going shopping in Sainsbury’s, walking the corridors [wife] use to walk and that, and going to the bread counter and standing where she used to stand and get the bread and get it cut and just all these little things.

He is also aware of wanting to retrace her steps further away from home, from the time before they were together and his wife was at university,

[Wife] went to university in South Wales in a place called C-, and she lived there for three years. I know nothing much about her life down there. ... When she died, I had this absolutely massive, like, compulsion to go down there. I don't know why. ... I don't know where it's come from and sometimes, I think, 'Am I a bit mad?' But I've felt this really strong urge to go down and visit C-, where she went to university.

These extracts describe Graeme feeling identified with his wife, aware of either repeating her actions at the local supermarket "and just all these little things" and also of wanting to go to places she went to without him, like her university town, which he knows "nothing much about". This identification with his wife is helpful for Graeme, giving meaning to his actions, as he struggles with his own identity since her death. In reliving her experiences, he can begin to process his feelings about his loss, and try to understand what it means to him. **Two other participants also described feeling identified with their lost loved one and using this feeling to guide their actions in their present lives was felt to be helpful in making sense of their experiences.**

#### **4.3.3 Summary: Identity Shift**

Overarching theme two, identity shift, explores the participants' changing identities since the deaths of their loved ones. It builds on the first overarching theme, inexorable death, as awareness of mortality and the finitude of life has caused each participant to re-evaluate their relationships with others and also how their actions impact the world.

Sub-theme one, changing relationships, delves into the participants' experiences of relationships with others after being bereaved, with all of them discussing this in their interviews. There was a sense of relationships being valued as positive and meaningful, to be "nurtured", after loss. There was also appreciation and gratitude for important connections with people, bringing joy and happiness to what may otherwise be a life alone. Indeed, being a father and a husband was meaningful for those participants who were married with young children. Despite these positive feelings about relationships, there could be a sense of alienation and isolation from others. Some participants even had experiences of relationships ending in an angry and final way after loss. In all cases, the participants' sense of identity was affected by their experiences in their relationships since their losses.

Sub-theme two, Action Man?, analysed the participants' actions and the meanings they made from these in their lives since their losses. Taking an active role in the process of meaning making was important, with the more passive participants struggling to make sense of and integrate their losses into their lives. How the participants decided to act seemed to be influenced by gender socialisation, for example, as an economic provider and protector of family. Gender stereotypes about how to support bereaved men were perceived as unhelpful. What was important for each participant was the sense that their actions were authentic and meaningful, and for three participants, identification with their lost love one helped them to act in the present, as they made sense of their loss and what it meant for them. This resulted in personal growth and an 'identity shift' that included their loss.

Overarching themes one and two, inexorable death and identity shift, explore individual concerns of the participants. The third overarching theme, meaning in human connection, examines the meaning in the participants' social and interpersonal experiences.

*Table 3: Overarching themes with their sub-themes and the prevalence among participants*

<b>Theme 1:</b> <b>INEXORABLE DEATH</b> (all participants)	<b>Theme 2:</b> <b>IDENTITY SHIFT</b> (all participants)	<b>Theme 3:</b> <b>MEANING IN HUMAN CONNECTION</b> (all participants)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Making sense of death (all participants)</li> <li>- The Sisyphean burden (all participants)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Changing relationships (all participants)</li> <li>- Action Man? (all participants)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sharing experiences of loss (all participants)</li> <li>- Language matters (Brandon, George, Graeme, Ishan, Kevin, Michael, Rob)</li> <li>- Man, find your own words (all participants)</li> </ul>

#### 4.4. Overarching theme three: Meaning in human connection

*All actual life is encounter.* (Buber, 1923, p. 62).

This third overarching theme looks at the social, interpersonal aspects of meaning making after loss and found that: sharing experiences of loss is meaningful for the bereaved (sub-theme one, sharing experiences of loss); the language we use in talking about loss is crucial (sub-theme two, language matters); and, sociocultural forces influence the process of meaning making after loss (sub-theme three, man, find your own words). I will now discuss each sub-theme.

#### **4.4.1 Sub-theme one: Sharing experiences of loss**

*If sorrow can admit society / Tell o'er your woes again by viewing mine.*

(Shakespeare, 1846, p. 114)

All eight participants benefitted from sharing their experiences of loss with others. Five participants accessed some form of therapeutic support, which was helpful as it allowed them to express their feelings to a compassionate other, supporting them to feel less alone in their grief. Graeme describes an advantageous experience of counselling when he says, "I couldn't stop talking, and a lot of the time, I couldn't stop crying, em, but I found that helpful." Graeme describes his counselling as an open space where he "couldn't stop" either "talking" or "crying". Expressing himself was not restricted, and this was "helpful" for him. Graeme does not describe a reciprocal relationship with the counsellor; rather it was a space for him to talk and cry freely in the presence of another.

This seems to have also been the case for Ishan. He accessed counselling, which was helpful:

I remember I had... quite brutal sessions with the counsellor here, where I just, I just went for it. Those sessions were really intense and I just told him everything that I felt at the time... And I think that really helped; not talking to someone about it, but just the fact that I was able to communicate what it was I was thinking at the time. And I think if I hadn't done that, I probably would have felt a lot worse...they just helped me organise my thoughts and then I sort of, tried to move on after that, really.

His counselling sessions were "brutal" where he "just went for it" and "told him everything that I felt at the time." This suggests that Ishan, like Graeme, felt unrestrained in how he could communicate his thoughts and feelings during these sessions and this freedom to express himself candidly with a counsellor "really helped". For Ishan, it was helpful as a way to express himself and be witnessed by another person, rather than the "talking to someone

about it". The person of the counsellor seems to have been less important than the open space to articulate his sentiments without feeling censored or judged. Without the opportunity to do this, he "probably would have felt a lot worse." This process helped him to make sense of and "organise my thoughts" which allowed him "to move on after that".

For Graeme, after his counselling was over, what seems to have been especially helpful was a new friendship with a man who had also lost his wife;

We had been emailing each other for a year and he actually came up to visit me... and we did get out for a pint and a chinwag and that, but we've been exchanging, eh, emails, and I've found it very helpful.

In contrast to the counselling experience, where Graeme expressed himself freely as the counsellor listened, there is a dialogical reciprocity between Graeme and his friend, as they have "been exchanging" their experiences of loss over email, which has been "very helpful". Graeme has felt supported by this man, developing a friendship, where they have met face-to-face for "a pint and a chinwag". When they met in person, Graeme recounts,

He sat there and cried as well, you know. And a lot of sort of, what he did was cry. He, he, his wife had been dead six months when he met me, and he took a lot from me, really. And I think sometimes it gives you a good feeling, how helpful you can be to others in a loss situation. And of course, he's been helpful to me, told me his story, you know.

Graeme found the open space for "crying" with the counsellor helpful, which he then provided for his new friend, giving Graeme "a good feeling" as to "how helpful" he was to this man "in a loss situation." There is the sense that Graeme was able to access *his* feelings of grief and loss through his encounter with this man, who is in a similar situation to Graeme, having both lost their wives. They share their experiences, empathising and meeting each other in their grief, thus tacitly communicating to each other that neither is alone. Graeme expresses that, "he took a lot from me, really", however, there is not the sense that this was draining or tiresome. Rather, Graeme had a "good feeling" as he was helpful *while* being helped. Graeme shared his own story of loss with this man, and listened to his friend's different story of loss: this dialogical, reciprocal sharing helped Graeme feel less alone, as this other man 'met' Graeme in his experience, also allowing Graeme to feel useful and supportive to another in their suffering. **This was articulated by three other participants.**



Meeting people and being helpful to them is an important theme in Graeme's narrative,

I want to do face-to-face, to meet people, for god's sake, you know, just for my own wellbeing. Cos you derive a lot by being giving and being nice to people and doing something worthwhile, I think. It gives you a, gives you a boost to your self-esteem, you know (*sniffs*). Cos sometimes you can be a bit down on yourself and think, 'Well, what do I do to help people? I sit here all day!' You know, (*laughs*). And life's a bit more than that, for god's sake!

For Graeme, meeting those who have lost loved ones "face-to-face" is important both for his "self-esteem" and his "own wellbeing". There is an exasperated, almost indignant, quality to what he says, highlighted in his repetition of "for god's sake" when he expresses a desire to meet people and to get out of the house, two apparently simple concepts, which he is finding difficult since the death of his wife. I interpreted Graeme's laughter as wry laughter, hinting at his frustration at sitting "here all day" when he would rather be out meeting people, helping them and helping himself. Without meeting others, Graeme can "be a bit down on" himself and the implication is that his "wellbeing" and "self-esteem" suffer. He wants more from life and to share his time with others. This has not happened in a satisfying way for Graeme, which in part, may also be due to the Covid-19 restrictions that were in place until shortly before our meeting.

Like Graeme, **connections to others are important for all of the other participants. For Ishan,** alongside vocalizing his thoughts and feelings to his counsellor, it was important for him to *be with* his family at his sister's cremation,

They ask you if you want to witness the cremation, right, the family is allowed to witness the cremation. And, you sort of think, I remember at the time thinking, I definitely need to be there with my family, and I kind of need that closure, sort of thing.

It was vital for Ishan to share the event of his sister's cremation with his family. This togetherness was important as he deals with his feelings of loss. There is no question in his mind, he "definitely need[s] to be there with my family". There is meaning in sharing this occasion; it represents a moment of human connection between the members of a family who have just lost an important member, described by Ishan as, "what tied us all together." In being there, Ishan simultaneously offers his support to his other family members and feels supported by them at this crucial time.

It follows that making sense of difficult feelings after loss is helped by moments of togetherness and connection to others, where thoughts and feelings can be freely vocalised and experiences shared. These moments of connection, where the participant felt understood and less alone, were experienced by four of the participants through third-party written accounts and on-screen, both television and film. Through other people's stories, these participants were able to relate to their own feelings of grief, as articulated by Graeme,

It's called *After Life*... I watched it. And I absolutely derived something from it, cos he's really, really struggling... I can't say I didn't shed tears when I watched it, cos I did (*coughs*), but then you start laughing at something cos he's quite funny as well.

Graeme "derived something" from watching the television show 'After Life'. My understanding is that Graeme felt identified with the lead character, who had also lost his wife, and this identification is depicted in the "tears" he "shed" while watching it. This process helped Graeme to further connect to *his* feelings by relating to how the character expressed *his* grief on-screen. Although the on-screen loss is not Graeme's, its representation and characterization help Graeme to feel supported and that he is not alone, providing a means to make sense of his own feelings.

This idea of using other people's experiences as a tool for accessing and representing a person's own experience of grief and loss, is developed by Ishan, who says,

I was reading this article... she'd written some very, very em, eh, (*pause*) sort of (*pause*) emotive piece, em, that was really articulate, basically describing exactly what I was going through to the absolute detail, sort of thing. And I was like, yeah, this is exactly what I'm going through, sort of thing. And I remember, like, even if I hadn't gone through what I was going through, reading this, or someone else objectively reading this, you get a feeling from how she'd written it, how awful it was what she was going through. Like, it was so very difficult to read. And I was like, wow, this is my reality, sort of thing. And, I guess, in some way it makes me feel not so bad about things, like, what I'm going through is really tough.

In his description of reading an article written by a woman who had lost her child, Ishan felt that it described "exactly what I was going through to the absolute detail". He found the piece "emotive" which suggests that he was able to access his feelings around his losses by reading about the woman's experience. He "got a feeling from how she'd written it, how

awful it was, what she was going through” and in this process of understanding her experience, Ishan found that he could represent his own experience, as he felt, “wow, this is my reality”. In feeling met in his grief, despite it being “so very difficult to read” and “awful”, Ishan felt “not so bad about things”. There was a realisation from him that “what I’m going through is really tough”. Reading this article gave Ishan an opportunity to make some sense of his feelings; his experience is shared and articulated by another person who has had a similar experience, giving him a way to articulate and represent his own feelings of loss.

Akin to Ishan and Graeme **and one other participant**, John finds it helpful to understand others’ representations of their experiences of death and loss, as this helps him to relate to his own feelings of grief,

I’m a very emotional person, I can cry while watching, eh, television programs, especially if it’s a nice one, you know, em, but you know, when they say, em, ‘Men Don’t Cry’, well, that’s just absolute rubbish, because I do. I can at the drop of a hat. Em, but, I wear my heart on my sleeve, I enjoy life, I have fun.

John does not agree with the old adage “Men Don’t Cry” and feels that it is “just absolute rubbish”. Like George has articulated about “Sport”, John feels that stereotypes about men and grief are unhelpful. He feels that he can cry “at the drop of a hat” particularly “while watching, eh, television programs, especially if it’s a nice one”. This indicates that John’s feelings of loss are touched when he watches “television programs” involving death; he *does* cry, as a man. Like Graeme and Ishan, John associates what he watches with how he feels inside, thus relating to his own feelings through external means. He uses the analogy of wearing his “heart on [his] sleeve”; what is inside him, his heart, is described metaphorically as being outside of his body, able to be touched by external processes, depicted by other people in a fictional way.

In sharing experiences of loss, whether with a counsellor, friend or through third parties and fiction, language is necessary. This leads us to the next sub-theme, language matters, about the importance of the words we choose when communicating with the bereaved.

#### **4.4.2 Sub-theme two: Language matters**

*Don’t tell me that you understand,  
Don’t tell me that you know.  
Don’t tell me that I will survive,*

*How I will surely grow.*

(Hendel, 2013)

This sub-theme (two), language matters, explores how the language used in talking about bereavement can impact the meaning making process for the bereaved, as discussed by seven of the eight participants. This sub-theme delves into issues about the language used with and by the bereaved, and so is about language matters, with the finding that language is important; what is said by the bereaved and what is communicated to them through language, by individuals and organisations, *matters*.

For Michael, the words spoken to him after his loss were important, yet often disappointing and meaningless,

I think actions speak louder than words. And I think that when people say that, em, 'if there's anything you need, just let me know,' it kind of feels like they are putting pressure on you to then come out and say, 'Look, could you do this, would you mind doing that?' Whereas, when you are grieving, I don't think that you really want to go out of your way to inconvenience people.

For Michael, people's "actions speak louder than words"; people offered to help him after his father died, by asking him to let them know "if there's anything you need". This felt like "pressure" as Michael then had to do the thinking about what he might need and reach out to the person to let them know and ask for their support. The impression Michael gives is that this offer of "just let me know" if "there's anything you need" often feels too onerous to act on, and therefore it becomes empty and meaningless. Michael felt like an "inconvenience", imposing on other people if he did reach out. Having someone be more active in offering help, without needing Michael's instructions, would have been more supportive. This feeling is echoed by George,

You'll have friends who might say, 'What, what, anything you need?' Well, I don't know what I need. 'Well, you can always call me.' And things like that. And it's the well-meaning platitudes that aren't always backed up, because you can't promise to always be there for someone, you can't always be the four o'clock phone call... But when you set people up with that expectation, that can be quite heart-breaking when it fails. And I think that's the thing around support, it's so fragile.

Like Michael, George feels that the “well-meaning platitudes that aren’t always backed up” can be “quite heart-breaking” when the “expectation” fails. Since the deaths of his father and his twin sons, George has noticed other people’s language and what they say to him. Like Michael, who feels “pressure”, George does not always “know what [he] need[s]” and consequently, he realises that there is a fragility to the support offered after bereavement; there is a requirement for the bereaved to know what they need and to reach out for it. This is “so fragile” because the onus is on the person who is grieving rather than the person apparently offering the help. George feels that these offers of help are “well-meaning” yet are not “always backed up” as people have their own lives and they “can’t promise to always be there for someone”. The words spoken therefore become empty of meaning, glib “platitudes” that are at best unhelpful and at worst “heart-breaking”.

For Kevin, alongside four other participants, unhelpful language has come from people who have told him what to do since being bereaved. Kevin says,

And perhaps maybe I have been stuck, I mean, I mean, if there were hindrances, I mean the thing is, I have been, sometimes people say to me, ‘Oh, you should move on.’ I mean, perhaps, I mean, maybe, I don’t know if they see a part of me I can’t see. I mean, maybe (*pause*). You know, it’s like I’ve, because I’ve lost all the people that meant something and I’m finding it difficult to (*pause*) go out my way and meet people, it’s like an energy thing.”

Kevin sounds unclear about his thoughts and feelings when people command, “Oh, you should move on.” His train of thought connects this to “hindrances” in his making sense of his feelings after loss, suggesting that being told to “move on” by other people has been unhelpful. The uncertainty in what he says comes from the repetition of “I mean, I mean,” “maybe... maybe” and the ‘pauses’ in his narrative, as if he is struggling to ascertain what he does mean, needing space and time to decide, and also unsure whether the people who tell him what to do “see a part of me I can’t see.” The impression Kevin gives is that he is anxious about what he makes of his life since his losses, “stuck” between what he feels himself and what he perceives from others. Instead of finding other people’s words helpful, they seem to ignite tension in Kevin, who has “lost all the people that meant something” and now feels more alone and isolated in his life. He does not have the “energy” to “go out my way and meet people”, involving the possibility of investing in new relationships, potentially exposing him to more loss. Instead of other people helping Kevin to feel supported at this “difficult” time, by offering friendship or the opportunity to spend time together, the unhelpful words spoken to Kevin sound demanding, not showing understanding or empathy for the

particular situation in which Kevin finds himself. This frustration at the lack of empathy in 'glib platitudes' was articulated by seven of the eight participants.

Two participants talked of being more sensitive in how they expressed themselves in language after their bereavements, more aware of the impact of their words. George explains,

It's that sort of hesitation when signing someone's maternity card, you know, they're going off on maternity leave, and I find it really hard to write glib statements. It's not a difficult thing to write, 'Congratulations, hope everything goes well.' But, I feel like I can't. Which is a really silly thing. But, it's that sort of level of, em, remove from us. It definitely changes things.

George finds it "really hard to write glib statements" on maternity cards after the deaths of his twin sons. He holds an empathy and understanding of the horror that is possible when people leave work to have babies; there is no "remove" for him. George has lost his naivety about what can happen in life and he feels different: his experiences of loss have "definitely" changed how he expresses himself in language. He can no longer "write glib statements", which seems "a really silly thing", yet George's lost innocence impacts the meaning of what he says.

As explained, it is a finding of this study that 'language matters' when communicating with individuals who have been bereaved. This applies to both personal communication and in the advertising of bereavement support services, as explained by George,

When I joined the Sands Board, it wasn't for me, and I got contacted by a lot of dads.. saying, 'Eh,... I don't tend to hang around here much because I don't really do the language of angel babies,' and so stuff like that. So, I've found a different online forum, .... more of a, sort of, literary, brutal form of expressing grief in words, compared to the more, sort of, rainbows, unicorns, kittens, sparkles and heaven. It just didn't, it didn't work for me.

According to George, he was contacted "by a lot of dads" when he joined the Sands Board (a baby loss charity), who communicated that they "don't really do the language of angel babies". It was the language used that stopped these bereaved fathers from accessing this resource; they "don't tend to hang around here much". George expands on this further, as he also realised that it "wasn't for me", and he "found a different online forum" that did not use

the language of “rainbows, unicorns, kittens, sparkles and heaven”. The language used can be off-putting for some, thus potentially increasing their sense of isolation and alienation from others after loss. For George, and for other men who had lost children, the language used to communicate about loss and grief was important, with George preferring a more “literary, brutal form of expressing grief in words”. This is consistent with him starting a blog, a significant action after his bereavements, where he wrote about his experiences in a way that felt more meaningful to him as the language felt more authentic to his experience. In this way, George has also helped other bereaved fathers who have struggled with the language used by some charities to talk about loss.

Platitudes and “glib statements” were often received by the participants with irritation. They often felt that these easy remarks were made superficially, to help the person saying them to feel better, rather than to offer any sort of meaningful support. This hindered meaning making for those participants as it contributed to a sense of isolation for the bereaved. There was also a sense of a loss of innocence, resulting in a new sensitivity to the language used.

While language matters, each participant interviewed felt that there is no generic approach or universal language for loss. How we talk about loss will depend on who we are and the society in which we live. This takes us to sub-theme three, man, find your own words.

#### **4.4.3 Sub-theme three: Man, find your own words**

*Masculinity might be a straightjacket that is keeping men from ‘being themselves’, whatever that might mean. In their drive for domination, men have neglected to prioritize vital aspects of being wholly human, particularly issues around mental health. (Perry, 2016, p. 3).*

All of the participants felt their meaning-making was impacted by society’s notions of what the grieving process ‘should’ look like and that it was unhelpful for our society to judge grief as pathological if it does not conform to a manual. In five interviews, meaning-making after loss was also impacted by sociocultural ideas of stereotypical masculinity. What was useful for these participants in making sense of their loss was feeling they were seen and understood as whole, gendered beings, without other people’s perspectives being imposed on them. I will now illustrate this sub-theme with examples.

Brandon articulates the differences between people in how they make sense of their bereavements and also the potentially oppressive social forces, preventing men from talking about their grief, when he says,

Talking is not always something everyone might do. For some men, it might be just through some form of activity, or whatever that might be, like, so that might be their way of releasing things, or, and, or, worst-case scenario, there might be some men who, like, yeah, they don't talk, so they might just, like, suffer in silence, they might just feel, 'Actually, you know what? I don't want to say something because like, what's that, what's that going to look like?'

Brandon is aware that "talking is not always something everyone might do." In saying this, he recognises that people will grieve and make meaning after loss in different ways. He recognizes that processing grief might be difficult for men, referring to the invisible social forces that act on men, teaching them to keep their feelings inside, unexpressed and silent. He acknowledges that while there is no 'right' way to express grief or make sense of loss, "releasing things" is important, which may mean "some form of activity". Brandon believes that we are all different in how we express ourselves and integrate our experiences of loss into our lives; however, he is not entirely accepting of these differences, as he judges those men who "suffer in silence" as the "worst-case scenario". His judgement of "silence" being the "worst", is underpinned by his understanding of potential reasons for this, describing men as potentially feeling concerned by "What's that going to look like?" if they express, or release, their internal feelings. They may be perceived as weak, out of control and inadequate as men if they cannot deal with their grief on their own and in silence. The men who fear being perceived in this way may therefore choose to remain quiet and "suffer in silence."

As his interview finished, Brandon made what felt like an impassioned plea to men about how they access support after a significant loss from their lives:

We can't feel isolated with this, because with anything, like, if you suppress things or deal with it by saying you don't need help, it's going to, it's going to come out, and it may not be in a way you can handle or you can control. So, it's actually important to realise, 'What is it that I'm going through?' and 'How can I deal with it?' So, whether that is through talking, an activity or channelling it into something that helps you process things, then, you know, that, that's the main thing. So, talking is just one way, it's not the only way; it's just one way.

His words are powerful as he implores men not to "feel isolated with this". He is aware that telling other people how to grieve or what would be best for them is unhelpful, and so he is



not dogmatic in *how* we express ourselves; however, he is also clear that thinking about “What is it that I’m going through?” are “definitely” important for those who have lost someone they love from their lives. Brandon indicates that he understands why some men may “suppress things or deal with it by saying you don’t need help” when he says that, “it’s going to come out and it may not be in a way you can handle or you can control.” Brandon recognises that “control” and discipline, being able to “handle” a situation, can be important for men, and this may prevent them from confronting their feelings around loss. What is clear to Brandon is that engaging in “an activity or channelling it into something that helps you process things” is important. For Brandon, this has meant talking and writing about his losses, and starting his grief podcast, however, he realises that “talking is just one way; it’s not the only way”. The important step is to confront the loss and “realise... ‘How can I deal with it?’”

Rob echoes Brandon’s words about feeling socialised to be ‘strong and silent’, when he says,

I suppose the extra thing of, eh, of course, of being a man, it’s kind of, eh, men, of course, there’s, they have the thing of, eh, they just don’t deal with, or, they have their own way of dealing with mental health, ... the whole ‘strong, silent’ sort of thing. And it’s, it, it’s almost subconscious, cos I’d admit I’m quite, I’m not too much of an emotional person anyway, eh, I don’t really know why that is. But, I don’t know if it, kind of, subconsciously moulded me. ... But it’s, it, sometimes it feels better for me that way, almost, though, and it’s kind of, (*sighs*), it would be weird, kind of, being pressured into talking about it. And yeah, it’s, I think, I feel like there’s an extra barrier talking to people, ... (*sighs*) I dunno, it’s like, maybe I’m thinking of it too much long-term, like, ‘What are people going to think of me, if I say that kind of thing, or say that?’ or, like, ‘Is it dumb that I’m still thinking that?’”

Rob begins by talking generally about “men” and “being a man” and how “they don’t deal with” things or “they have their own way of dealing with mental health”, and he sounds as though he separates himself from the “men” who “don’t deal with” their feelings properly. Rob also understands the social doctrine of “strong, silent” influencing boys’ and men’s lives and he feels that this influences how he deals with the sudden death of his girlfriend. His narrative is slightly confusing, as he starts sentences and then changes his mind and starts a new sentence. This suggests that he is actively using the interview to make sense of how he feels male socialization has impacted him in his grief. He is actively processing his thoughts and feelings by talking about them in the interview and my sense is that he has not

done that before, hence the confused, jumpy narrative. It is clear that Rob does not feel that he is “too much of an emotional person anyway”; however, he is unclear as to the reasons for this, saying, “I don’t really know why that is.” He does wonder if he has been “subconsciously moulded” that way, referring to invisible social forces that have impacted him as a man, thus affecting his ability to express his grief. As he continues to talk about the difficulty he feels in talking about his feelings, he sighs twice, possibly indicating the release of some tension while talking to me. As highlighted previously, Rob uses the word “weird” several times throughout his interview, and he uses it in this extract to describe how it would feel to be “pressurised into talking about” how he feels about his girlfriend’s death. Rob feels more comfortable *not* talking about his thoughts and feelings and he is aware of “an extra barrier talking to people” (being a man) which makes opening up to his family and friends difficult and “weird”. Like Brandon has already said, men may worry about how others perceive them if they express their grief emotionally, and this is how Rob feels, hindering his ability to express himself to loved ones, wondering, “What are people going to think of me, if I say that?”

Over the course of the interview, Rob alludes to wishing there was a process to follow to feel better and to move on with his life; he says, “there’s no set book on it, or a manual” and “there’s no, like, magic bullets in this, sadly.” The implication here is that he wishes there was a “manual” or “magic bullets” to feel better without having to talk, or feel. This contrasts with the other participants who all felt aware that manualised grief was not helpful for them; we are all different with our own ways of processing emotional pain. Over time, like the other participants, Rob has learned that his feelings and reactions are unique to him, and have to be confronted by him, as he says,

It’s kind of, almost, learning to find myself, almost (*laughs*) or like, live with myself, ... so maybe, I guess that’s where I’ll find the meaning, cos, once again, it’s a thing you can’t really, it differs for every person, so you can’t read, eh, read the meaning, or whatever, so yeah, it’s as I say, it’s a long road.

Slowly, Rob is realising that making meaning in his life after his loss is not an easy, passive endeavour, accomplished by following a set of rules. He actively participates in the interview, making sense of thoughts and feelings that are sometimes confused. He is “learning to find” himself and “live with” himself as he discovers and deals with his internal processes. Losing his girlfriend was devastating, destroying his visions of the future and shattering his hopes for his life. This experience has deeply touched his emotions, which is a new experience for him, as “not too much of an emotional person”. Now, Rob is “learning” about “himself” and to

“live with” himself, which is where he hopes to “find the meaning”. He understands that what helps a person after loss “differs for every person” and “you can’t... read the meaning”. We are all unique, and what will help us process grief and loss and make meaning in our lives after losing someone we love, will be different for each of us. “It’s a long road”, without a “manual” or “magic bullets”, yet one that we can each actively influence for ourselves and for each other. This was felt by each of the participants in this study, who expressed that there is no ‘right’ way to grieve, nor is there a timescale at the end of which grief should be ‘complete’.

#### **4.4.4 Summary: Meaning in human connection**

This third overarching theme, meaning in human connection, is about how the participants are influenced, helped and hindered by others, whether directly in social relationships, by written or filmed accounts of loss, or more indirectly through society and its invisible forces. In contrast to the other themes, which were more about the participants as individuals, this theme is more about the participants’ experiences *with* other people and in society.

The first sub-theme, sharing experiences of loss, explored how the participants expressed themselves in therapy and with friends, and how these open spaces to talk and cry were helpful and meaningful. Helping others was also beneficial for the participants, who felt less alone. There was also a sense of the participants sharing experiences through other people’s accounts of loss. In having other people’s feelings about loss represented to them in writing or on screen, some participants were more able to relate to their own feelings of grief, making sense of them in an experience that felt shared.

Sub-theme two, language matters, delved into the participants’ reactions to the language people use in talking to them after being bereaved, with many participants feeling irritated by “empty” platitudes. Often, the participants felt hindered as a result of other people’s comments, as they felt they could not reach out to others or they felt that they were not where they ‘should’ be. There was also a change in how two of them expressed themselves, losing the ability to use easy statements.

Sub-theme three, man, find your own words, dealt with the participants’ experiences in our society. All of the participants felt that expectations about grief were unhelpful as we are all different and will all make sense of our feelings around loss differently. Five participants discussed how their experiences as men affected their grieving process, with society’s demands for the “strong, silent” type conflicting with its demands for “talking” and “expressing” grief.

#### 4.5 Chapter summary

The aim of the research was to understand the male participants' meaning making after loss; particularly, what the themes of meanings made were and what helped and hindered these. In three overarching themes, inexorable death, identity shift and meaning in human connection, different meanings and meaning-making processes have been explored.

In their experiences of loss, the participants were firstly awakened to the fact that life ends for us all; there is no escape from death. Making sense of their experiences of death, or trying to, was meaningful for the participants and is one outcome of the research. Those participants who were able to integrate their experiences of loss into their lives in a positive way, believing in "something bigger", "destiny" or the 'circle of life', seemed to be more accepting of, and adjusted to, their losses. Those participants who saw loss as crueler and more unjust were struggling to make sense of their losses and integrate them into their lives. Nevertheless, loss forced each participant to confront his own mortality, and this new understanding of life's precariousness and fragility brought new focus to their lives, which they did not want to waste, doing their "best" to live with their loss. The Sisyphean burden of loss was discussed by each participant and was meaningfully integrated into their lives through a continued bond with the person who died and who continues to influence actions after death.

The new sense of existential awareness after losing a loved one contributed to a shift in the participants' sense of themselves and this was the second overarching theme; identity shift. What contributed to a person's sense of identity included their relationships and their actions. All participants discussed the importance of relationships in their lives, and for many, there was a sense of their relationships being affirmed by loss. This was not the case for all participants, whose sense of themselves and their sense of meaning after loss, were also affected by feelings of isolation and alienation from others. For five participants, some relationships ended abruptly and in anger, paralleling the destruction and devastation these participants felt in their lives after their losses. Actions were also an important process in making meaning after loss, as explored in sub-theme two, Action Man? Some participants were active in making podcasts, writing poetry, increasing awareness of loss at work, exercising and retracing the steps of the person they had lost. Other participants felt more paralysed in their actions, unsure what to do, yet knowing that it was important to act as life is finite. Acting authentically was important to the participants as they incorporated their losses into their lives.

Finally, overarching theme three delved into the social aspect of meaning making after loss, as the participants found meaning in human connection. There was meaning in sharing experiences with others, both to be helpful to others and to help themselves feel less alone in their grief. In this process of sharing experiences with others, language matters. For seven out of eight participants, the language used in talking about death and loss was meaningful, and could hinder meaning making by creating a sense of distance between the bereaved and the other people in their lives; for example, in the use of glib platitudes. Finally, there was a wider sociocultural context in making meaning after loss. There was a recognition that we are all different and there is no generic approach to loss. Expressing feelings verbally and talking about loss is one way to be helpful in processing difficult feelings; it is not the only way. Men in particular may find talking and expressing more difficult due to the way they are socialised to be “strong, silent”, in “control” and concerned about how others will perceive them if they are emotional.

The next chapter (5) will discuss and locate these findings in the wider context of the existing literature and discuss how these findings contribute to it.

## Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Chapter overview

In this chapter, I will discuss the key findings from the analysis section's three overarching themes: inexorable death; identity shift; and, meaning in human connection. This discussion will synthesise the main points from the overarching themes and discuss them within the context of existing literature, theory and sociocultural issues. The strengths and limitations of the current research will then be considered before a description of clinical recommendations for those who support the bereaved and possible future research avenues. This chapter will conclude with some final reflections.

### 5.2 Meaning in life now

The first overarching theme, inexorable death, found the participants faced with death and loss as facts of life, striving to understand them and integrate that understanding into their lives, sometimes with difficulty. Loss has felt unbearable and bleak for all the participants, who became aware of the precious, precarious nature of life. For three participants, there was belief in "something bigger" and "destiny" as well as there being a "time" to die and the 'circle of life'. These beliefs played an important role in developing a subjective "understanding of the loss" (Currier et al., 2006, p. 403) and provided meaningful structures within which the participants could make sense of their losses. Those participants who were able to find an explanation for their losses adapted better to their loss than those who struggled to find such an explanation. They integrated their loss into their lives within the structure of their beliefs around death, thus making meaning in their life since their loss. This is consistent with previous research where 'sense-making' has been found as crucial for the reconstruction of meaning after bereavement; it is "the survivor's capacity to find some sort of benign explanation for the seemingly inexplicable experience" (Holland et al., 2006, p. 176; Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006).

For three participants, developing a subjective understanding of loss was difficult, as it felt cruel and unjust, shattering what was meaningful in life. Despite their struggle to understand what their *bereavements* meant to them, these participants now understood *life* as cruel and restricted by death for us all. This new awareness provided a new framework for their lives, motivating them to act and do their "best" while alive, despite their harsh losses and the distress they have felt. The new awareness of life as cruel and finite is meaningful and there was no participant in this study who made 'no meaning', as outlined in the MLC, where the majority of participants were female, as discussed in the literature review (Gillies et al., 2014).

All of the participants in this study were aware of their one precious life since their losses, which they do not want to waste and they accept responsibility for this. Rob's experience of loss awakened him to life, wanting to make his time alive "count", more aware of his "mortality". Graeme was trying his "best" every day, despite his struggle to accept his wife's death. This new awareness of life as limited has given each participant the motivation to act in their lives, providing a sense of control and 'purpose', which is considered a major 'need of meaning' (Baumeister, 1991), as outlined in the literature review. 'Purpose' involves both goals and fulfilments, including how a person feels they want to act, in line with their beliefs about the world (Baumeister, 1991). In this sense, the participants want to act in 'purposeful' ways, with a sense of control in their life, perhaps due to traditional male social mandates, as considered in chapter one. Applying the traditionally masculine social mandates of 'control' and 'discipline' to the participants' actions and meaning making processes may help to explain why no participant in this study made 'no meaning' (Gillies et al., 2014). Those participants who understood their losses within a framework that was meaningful to them, for example belief in a "grand plan", found it easier to integrate their losses into their lives, giving them a sense of purpose (Baumeister, 1991). Those participants who developed a new awareness of how cruel and unjust life could be also wanted to live their limited lives to the best of their ability, also giving them a sense of purpose and meaning (Baumeister, 1991).

### **5.2.1 Meaning in action**

In the meaning-making after bereavement literature reviewed in chapter two, three meaning making processes were identified as important for the reconstruction of meaning after loss: sense-making, benefit finding, and, identity change (Gillies et al., 2014; Thimm & Holland, 2017). This is where a bereaved person has developed an understanding of what has happened, integrated that into their life in a positive way, and found some psychological change in themselves or in their way of comprehending their relationships and the world (Janoff-Bulman & Yopyk, 2004).

**As found in overarching theme two,** one area of 'identity shift' came in the form of how the participants decided to act in their lives after their bereavements. The process of making sense of their losses caused them to re-evaluate their actions; the resulting change was often personal identity growth and a bittersweet 'benefit' (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006). Indeed, from the data collected for the MLC, 'personal growth' was the most prevalent meaning made by those included (Gillies et al., 2014). This re-evaluation of actions and the desire to impact the world in an authentic and meaningful way is also consistent with Baumeister's (1991) four 'needs of meaning'; 'purpose', 'value', 'efficacy' and 'self-worth'. The participants who expressed their desire to achieve goals that mattered to them and had value for them,

developed a sense of agency and control in their lives, impacting their behaviour and increasing their self-respect (Baumeister, 1991).

Taking an active role in the process of making meaning after loss was important for the participants to adjust to their losses and incorporate them into their lives. This is consistent with Attig's (2011) assertion that "grieving is active" (p. 25) and Brandon's experience of grief: "you can move with it. How you decide to move with it is... dependent on you." Those participants who assumed more passive roles in their lives, where they felt punished by life, seemed to struggle more with integrating their loss, as it was something senseless that had happened to them. Indeed, when viewed through the lens of Baumeister's (1991) 'needs of meaning', it seems these participants lacked a sense of 'efficacy': they felt attacked by the world, leading to feelings of distress, anger and helplessness (Baumeister, 1991).

It is a finding of this study that a "grieving action" was helpful to the participants in making sense of their losses (Liddon et al., 2018, p. 43). This included raising awareness of the impact of grief and loss at work, providing support to others, exercising, talking and writing about grief and loss. Acting in a way that felt authentic to each participant felt important, with each participant finding meaning in actions that could also help others. In previous research involving male survivors of sexual abuse, it was found that 'making sense' of the abuse and integrating that understanding into their lives was vital to their recovery and how they did that included an action, like writing a poem, a song or a book (Grossman et al., 2006). Consistent with this previous research, in the present study, four of the participants spoke of finding writing, in particular, to be helpful in making sense of thoughts and feelings after loss. As discussed in chapter two, the meaning making of the male survivors of sexual abuse was critically influenced by gender socialisation, including Western society's demands that men are powerful, aggressive, income producers and defenders of home and family (Grossman et al., 2006; Kia-Keating et al., 2005; Mahalik et al., 2003). The two participants who were fathers to young families expressed a desire to incorporate their meaning making into their work. Indeed, for all of the men, it was important to incorporate their meaning making into a meaningful action, often through daily work. When viewed through the lens of masculinity in our society, it is often taken "for granted that being a breadwinner [is] a core part of being masculine." (Connell, 1995, p. 28) as masculinity is traditionally associated with the 'public' sphere, while femininity is considered more 'private' (Lee & Owens, 2002). Viewed in this way, it could be argued that incorporating loss into meaningful work as "a breadwinner" can be important for men, particularly those who provide for families. Indeed, this may also be true for women who provide economically for their families; however, in our Western society, it is not traditionally feminine to be a "breadwinner".



In his text, *Existential Psychotherapy* (1980), Yalom talks of life having depth, vigour and energy when death is accepted as part of life's process. Like Yalom (1980), all of the participants in this research consider that death and loss have focused their attention on life, the fact that it will end, and their desire to do their best while they can. Indeed, Kevin reminds us that "we've been given this small window and we just have to do something with it. It's making sense of the whole thing, you know?" This echoes Yalom's closing remarks, after the death of his wife, where he talks of life as a "crack of light", to be made the most of, before the "darkness" of death prevails,

"I shall end our book with the unforgettable opening words of Nabokov's autobiography, *Speak, Memory*. 'The cradle rocks above the abyss, and common sense tells us that our existence is but a crack of light between two eternities of darkness.' That image both staggers and calms." (Yalom & Yalom, 2021, p. 222).

Making sense of death can feel arduous, and for many, including the participants in this study and Yalom, (Yalom & Yalom, 2021), the idea of life being a short space of time within which we can act, has meaning. This belief supports those individuals to recreate their lives after the death of their loved one, with purpose (Holland et al., 2006; Neimeyer, 2001).

### **5.3 Meaning in a continuing attachment**

Living life after being bereaved also involves the acceptance of the burden of loss into life, whether or not it is wanted, and attempting to incorporate this burden in a meaningful way. This was explored **in overarching theme one, inexorable death**, sub-theme two, the Sisyphean burden. All of the participants felt that their loss was not something they chose to carry, rather they were condemned to do so, like Camus' *Sisyphus* (2005). Van Deurzen describes Sisyphus', and the participants', challenge when she says,

"His wretched condition does not get the better of him. He accepts that there can be no sunshine without shadow and that we have to know the night as well as the day and accept that difficulty is unavoidable if we are to accomplish anything." (van Deurzen, 2010, p. 106).

For each participant, the loved one who died is represented by the idea of van Deurzen's (2010) "sunshine" which has become a "shadow" because of "unavoidable" death. The "shadow" is then a burden to be carried in life. This burden becomes bearable and meaningful when it is represented by remembering and sustaining an attachment to the person who has died, who continues to impact decisions and actions in the present. The

idea of a 'continued bond' with a deceased person is not new, as previous research has shown that individuals who continue a bond with a person who has died find the enduring attachment to be helpful in integrating the loss into their life in a meaningful way (Keser & Isikli, 2022). In terms of object relations, this involves the continuation of a bond *into the future* with an internalised 'object' who is no longer alive (Klein, 1940). This is contrary to what Freud wrote in *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917) where he described 'successful' mourning as a process of *detaching* from the deceased person, and saying goodbye to the bond, thus relinquishing the attachment to them. For all of the participants in this research, in contrast to Freud's (1917) work yet consistent with Keser and Isikli (2022), there *was* meaning in their continued connection with and attachment to the person who died. The burden of loss carried by the participants often affected their values, justifying and motivating actions, and also affecting their sense of self-worth and self-respect, as their actions were influenced by the memory of the lost loved one. 'Self-worth' and 'value' are two of Baumeister's (1991) 'needs of meaning'.

In his compelling work, *Momma and the Meaning of Life* (1999), Yalom describes his work with a woman who had been bereaved many times. At the time of writing, Yalom (1999) agreed with Freud's (1917) theory of detaching from the dead person. In Yalom's clinical work with this bereaved woman, he describes "taking a well-established, sound position, namely, that the work of mourning consists of gradually detaching oneself from the one who died and redirecting one's energy toward others. ... Every single widow and widower I studied gradually detached from the dead spouse and then reinvested in something or someone else." (Yalom, 1999, p. 96). Indeed, in his description of this work, he explains that the woman "hated my comments about detachment and dismissed my research out of hand: "We bereaved have learned to give the answers investigators want. We have learned that the world wants us to recover quickly and that it becomes impatient with those who cling too long to losses.'" (Yalom, 1999, p. 96). At this point in Yalom's life, he had lost his parents, but not his spouse. Later in his life, in the text co-written with his wife prior to and after her death, he explores his reaction to her death (Yalom & Yalom, 2021), and changes his point of view. He declares to this client of years before, "If I were to see you now, now that I've lived through Marilyn's death, I am certain that our work together would be different – and better." (Yalom & Yalom, 2021, p. 214). Indeed, in his latest work (Yalom & Yalom, 2021), Yalom describes the *comfort* he feels from the continued bond with his wife, which he articulates in a moving letter written to her after her death, in which he says, "I think I can say to you, "Don't worry about me: I'm beginning to rejoin life once again." You're there with me, all the time." (Yalom & Yalom, 2021, p. 219). In this, Yalom articulates his continued attachment to his wife, and how he continues his relationship with her after her death; she is

with him “all the time”. This is soothing for him; while he continues his life without her physical presence, he has a meaningful connection to her memory and their relationship, influencing his present-day thoughts and feelings, like the participants in this study.

This moving account from Yalom, as well as the experiences of the participants in this study, has clinical implications for clinicians working with bereaved people. Imposing agendas or demanding that grief and meaning making ‘be’ a certain way, as Yalom did with his client in suggesting she ‘detach’ from her dead loved one (Yalom, 1999), is unhelpful, as it discounts an individual’s experience and denies them empathy and understanding at a critical time. This will be discussed further in section 5.6, clinical recommendations and implications.

### **5.3.1 Identification with the lost loved one**

It was found that an identification with the person who has died can also be helpful and meaningful for the bereaved. Three of the participants described feeling identified with their lost loved one, and wanted to retrace their steps, care about what they cared about and/or adopt their concerns and values. **This continued their connection with the person who had died,** and affected their actions in the present day. Freud (1917) posits that we identify with our lost loved one as we make sense of their death: “example after example shows that it is a basic human response to loss. Either we take traits from the one we have lost, singular features remain part of us, or, as in the melancholic case, we take everything.” (Leader, 2008, p. 55). This goes to the heart of our personal identities and how they can change after losing someone we love; each loss we bear leaves its mark on us and contributes to our personal evolution (Attig, 2011). For the participants in this study, there was a sense of it being those participants who were struggling more with their loss, potentially lacking strong identities of their own, who became most identified with their dead loved one. For them, identification was a helpful process, in order to support them in making sense of their losses and integrating them into their lives. This identification and incorporation of an aspect of the lost loved one helped the process of building their personal identity after loss, leading to an ‘identity shift’, consistent with the theme of ‘identity change’ in the MLC (Gillies et al., 2014).

While identification with the deceased person may be a common and helpful phenomenon, it is important to acknowledge that it can also be detrimental when it represents a “static, fixed, lifeless, preoccupying or obsessive” association with the deceased (Attig, 2011, p. 176). This type of identification ignores a person’s individuality and compromises their development, meaning that they struggle to move forward in their life and make sense of their loss: they remain ‘fixed’ to their identification with the person who has died (Attig, 2011). While none of the participants in this study demonstrated an “obsessive” identification, it is important to recognise the phenomenon, as in Leader’s view, “ignoring these identifications can be

catastrophic” (2008, p. 54). If a person is so strongly identified with a person who has died, they too may give up their will to live (Leader, 2008). Ignoring the fixation on the dead person may blind those around the bereaved person to their risk of suicide and the meaning of their symptoms (Leader, 2008). In the context of male meaning making, this is important, as, in our society, men are more likely than women to die by suicide (Mind, 2020; Samaritans, 2022) and men between the ages of 40 and 49 have the highest rate of suicide in the UK (Mind, 2020). While these statistics do not just include men who have taken their own lives through fixed identifications with lost loved ones, the connection to the potential for suicide should not be ignored.

#### **5.4 Meaning in relationships and human encounters**

In this study, the participants found benefits and felt their identities shift, **as discussed in overarching theme two, identity shift**, in two areas after loss: their relationships and their actions. For seven of the eight participants, it was found that some important relationships, particularly family relationships, were affirmed since the loss. These relationships were described as meaningful, with a strong desire to nurture them. This is consistent with the previous research on important meanings-made in the MLC, where ‘family bonds’ were listed as significant in the lives of the bereaved (Gillies et al., 2014). In terms of Baumeister’s (1991) ‘needs of meaning’, family relationships seem to provide a sense of ‘purpose’ and ‘value’ in these seven participants’ lives. They care about and value their bonds with family members, and these influence and justify their behaviour and decision-making in the present (Baumeister, 1991).

While family bonds were often affirmed after loss, a sense of isolation and alienation from others, even in the presence of important relationships, was also found. Death meant losing a vital relationship, with the participant feeling more alone in life as a result. It also could mean feeling different to other people, those who had no experience of loss. After the death of his first wife, Stolorow (2007) writes of feeling “like a strange and alien being – not of this world. ...An unbridgeable gulf seemed to open up, separating me forever from my friends and colleagues. They could never begin to fathom my experience, I thought to myself, because we now lived in altogether different worlds.” (p. 14). Stolorow (2007) writes about the intrinsic sense of isolation and estrangement from others that often results from an experience of emotional trauma, like bereavement. As discussed in the first overarching theme, inexorable death, death awakened the participants to life’s fragility and finitude; they have been exposed to “the unbearable embeddedness of being” (Stolorow & Atwood, 1992, p. 22). With this new awareness and their experiences of loss, they feel different to other people, more isolated and separate from them; there is a “deep chasm in which an

anguished sense of estrangement and solitude takes form.” (Stolorow, 2007, p. 16). According to Stolorow (2007), those who experience this sense of alienation and isolation after bereavement are helped by sharing the experience “and thereby come to feel less of a strange and alien being.” (p. 16).

Overarching theme three, meaning in human connection, found that there was meaning in the participants’ social lives and interpersonal interactions, their sharing of experiences with others and their communication. Five participants talked of accessing therapeutic support after their bereavement, and finding this helpful as it provided a space to express feelings without censorship and in the presence of a considerate other. This helped the participants at least begin to make sense of their losses by developing their understanding of the experience (Janoff-Bulman & Yopyk, 2004). In terms of Baumeister’s (1991) ‘needs of meaning’, it seems that those participants who accessed counselling benefitted as it satisfied their need for ‘efficacy’, where an individual assumes some control in their life, helping them to feel capable and less helpless (Baumeister, 1991).

The participants also found meaning in shared experiences with family members, other bereaved people and other people’s depictions of loss, whether written or filmed accounts. Contrary to the social stereotype that ‘Men Don’t Cry’, which was found to be unhelpful and inaccurate, all of these shared experiences with others helped the participants to access, express and share *their* feelings of grief and loss, thus allowing them to make sense of them and integrate them into their lives. This speaks to Kohut’s (1984) theory of twinship, where he proposes that we each have a developmental need to feel understood by another person, through forming a connection with someone who shares our experience. This links to theme two, identity shift, where some participants felt alienated and isolated from people in their lives who had not been bereaved. Stolorow (2007) argues that “longings for twinship or emotional kinship” (p. 49) are a common reaction after an emotional trauma, like bereavement, and without meaningful encounters with others, we can feel alone in our experience. He writes that it is important to find a ‘relational home’ for the traumatic experience, where another person deeply understands and shares our experience, and we feel that connection and understanding. However, Stolorow (2007) also posits that “loss can be an emotional trauma for which it is especially difficult to find a relational home.” (p. 50). Indeed, for those participants who lost their spouse, girlfriend, or close sibling relationship, there was the sense that the person with whom they felt they could share their devastating and overwhelming grief was the same person who was gone, and for those individuals, written and televised accounts *from other people* were especially helpful, as they sought twinship and connection in their experience.

Leader (2008) writes about “borrowed mourning” (p. 78) and describes a woman who uses other people’s accounts of loss to help her understand her own: “although...these losses were not her own, can’t we see them as tools that allowed her to mourn? She was able to make something from how other people had represented their own grief. And we could call this a *dialogue of mournings*.” (Leader, 2008, p. 78). For those who struggled to make sense of their experiences of loss, it was meaningful to find a representation of *another* person’s experience of loss that echoed theirs, helping them access their own feelings and begin to make sense of them. There was a sense that without the catalyst of the other person’s representation, the participant would feel more isolated in his experience, unable to make sense of his overwhelming feelings. Indeed, as Leader (2008) writes, “symbolizing a separation or death is a necessary part of being able to start thinking about it.” (p. 83). As the literature shows clearly, the reconstruction of meaning after a significant loss is a process that involves sense-making, benefit-finding and, identity change (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006). Being able to represent and think about the loss is therefore an important part of the meaning making process, as it involves making sense of the loss, and for some, a “dialogue of mournings” (Leader, 2008, p. 78) may support this process.

#### **5.4.1 Meaning in language**

In communicating and sharing experiences of loss, language is necessary. In this study, language was also found to be important and meaningful. For seven participants, being spoken to in “well-meaning platitudes”, told how to grieve, how to feel and how to behave after their loss was both unhelpful and aggravating. This extended to the language used by bereavement charities, as described by George: it was important that the language resonated with the experience of the individual or it was off-putting. Many of the platitudes and empty offers of help were felt to be spoken naïvely, more to help the person speaking soothe their own anxious feelings about death, rather than offer actual help to the bereaved person. Attig (2011) posits that talking to bereaved people in “empty clichés” (p. 20) lacks “empathy and understanding” (p. 20) of their challenges and choices, thus compounding their feelings that they are alone in their grief (Attig, 2011, p. 20). This can hinder meaning-making, as the bereaved person does not feel seen or understood. This also suggests that the help often offered to bereaved people is passive and distant: it is up to those who have lost loved ones to actively reach out for help. According to Attig (2011), “constructive support and active helping” (p. 94) helps a bereaved person “to flourish and to find purpose and meaning in life” (p. 94). This requires respect for the individuality of those who have lost loved ones, and involves *actively* listening to them and understanding how the loss has impacted their particular life (Attig, 2011). For the participants in this study, the lack of active help was a hindrance, as were the empty, easy statements made to them.

Two participants spoke of how their experiences of easy statements affected *their* use of language, aware of how simple statements can sound ignorant. Stolorow (2007) talks of the Absolutisms of Everyday Life (p. 13), such as “I’ll see you later” (p. 16) or “I’ll see you in the morning....Such absolutisms are the basis for a kind of naïve realism and optimism that allow one to function in the world, experienced as stable and predictable.” (p. 16). For the participants whose use of language changed, words can sound too simple after an experience of loss, and their innocence at using ‘easy’ language has been shattered. Meaning has been lost and changed at the level of how they express themselves in language.

#### **5.4.2 Resentment and anger after bereavement**

The effort to accept death, especially the death of a close relationship, like a spouse, is a major theme in Yalom and Yalom’s joint text, *A Matter of Death and Life* (2021). In this, Irvin Yalom, the internationally renowned psychiatrist, author and husband, has to endure the death of his beloved wife of 65 years, and he talks of the “resentment” he feels that “she has the privilege of dying first. It seems so much easier that way.” (Yalom & Yalom, 2021, p. 69). In losing his wife, like the participants in this study, Yalom is forced to face his own mortality, with the certainty that his wife will not be by his side when it happens. Despite having four children, eight grandchildren and many friends, he candidly observes that “they will not have the power to penetrate the depths of my isolation.” (Yalom & Yalom, 2021, p. 69). Yalom’s words demonstrate how cruel death feels to him in life, like the participants in this study. There is an anger to Yalom’s words; he feels “resentment” and envy that his wife has the “privilege of dying first”, separating him from, and depriving him of, her, and it “seems so much easier” to be the spouse to die first (Yalom & Yalom, 2021). In his language he demonstrates a feeling of persecution from death, which is ‘bad’ (Klein, 1946, 1957), echoing Graeme’s words, “bad things happen to good people”. This splitting of experience, where death is ‘bad’, does not take into account the fact that his ‘good’ wife has been lost, and focuses more on his feeling of being attacked by death (Gomez, 1997; Klein, 1935). Integrating the two positions, the loss of the ‘good’ wife and the persecutory ‘bad’ attack, would demonstrate a more ‘depressive’ position, potentially leading to feelings of grief of what has been lost, rather than anger about what has felt like a personal attack (Klein, 1935; Yalom & Yalom, 2021). Freud (1917) wrote that the anger, or “resentment” (Yalom & Yalom, 2021, p. 69) felt after loss can sometimes be turned inward, resulting in guilt and self-hatred, as the living person idealises the person who has died and does not want to direct their angry feelings towards them. In this study, five participants expressed angry feelings after their bereavements, and these feelings were not directed at the lost loved one.

For the participants who felt angry after their losses, some of their relationships ended abruptly after their bereavement, and those participants explained in their interview that it felt important to cut ties with individuals who were considered unhelpful. This conforms to Baumeister's (1991) 'value' and 'efficacy' 'needs of meaning', as certain relationships were actively ended in line with the individual's values, thus assuming control of their life and bringing a sense of meaning. These relationships were often ended in anger after the death of the loved one and Leader (2008), who builds on Freud's (1917) earlier work, understands that "rage is ubiquitous in the mental life of bereaved people. They may find it difficult to mourn a loss when tender feelings jostle with fury at that person for having died." (p. 39). Thinking psychoanalytically, it may be that these relationships ended as a result of displaced anger: the participant felt angry with the person who died, but directed their anger at others, rather than tarnishing the memory of the deceased person. Returning to object relations, Klein (1940) makes the case that our internal objects are injured after the loss of an external object. She argues that the 'straits of the depressive position' will have to be gone through with each loss experienced (Klein, 1940). In this process, she believes that bereaved people are tasked with re-creating the internal world of their objects, understanding the good *and the bad* in the lost object (Klein, 1940). However, the bereaved person can feel guilty about expressing ambivalence towards the person who has died, preferring to idealise their memory (Leader, 2008). It seems that the displacement of anger from the dead person and onto the living is a common reaction, yet it can hinder the process of meaning making after loss, as it can result in relationship ruptures that are potentially irreparable. For a bereaved person, it seems important to understand and make sense of their different feelings towards the person they have lost and to integrate the memories, both good and bad, into their life, without displacing feelings of anger onto ongoing relationships. This may maintain the potential benefit of these relationships as a source of comfort and meaning in the future, and has implications for counselling psychologists and psychotherapists who work with the bereaved, to be explored further in section 5.6, clinical recommendations and implications.

### **5.5 What does it mean to be a (bereaved) man?**

It was found that the participants' ability to make meaning after their losses was influenced by sociocultural factors, including the idea of a 'right' process for grieving. Imposing an agenda on bereaved men, for example demanding they talk about their loss, was considered a hindrance by the participants in this study, who valued their individuality, wanting it to be respected by others. This is supported by Attig (2011) who posits that social context, the relationship lost and how it was lost, and individual differences, are imperative pieces of information when supporting the bereaved. This valuing of individuality is contradicted with the inclusion of Prolonged Grief Disorder in the latest edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical



Manual of Mental Disorders-5 (DSM-5) (American Psychiatric Association (APA), 2022), which puts a time limit of 12 months after the death of a loved one, for a bereaved person to show that they have moved on, do not yearn for or show intense preoccupation with the person who has died, and do not feel lonely, numb and that life is meaningless, among other similar criteria. This follows the sense, in some bereavement literature, that there is a 'right' process for grieving and making sense of loss; for example, Kübler-Ross's (1969) five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance, with Kessler's (2019) sixth stage, finding meaning, recently added. The description of this 'typical' process, coupled with the possibility of being pathologized with Prolonged Grief Disorder if grief 'takes too long', denies the individuality of those who are bereaved, by "de-humanis[ing] suffering and despair" (Paidoussis-Mitchell, 2018, p. 297), and suggesting both a 'right' and a 'wrong' way. As Rob reminds us, "it differs for every person", a sentiment echoed by each participant.

Given that the genders are socialised differently in our society, it follows that "masculinity is not just an idea in the head, or a personal identity. It is also extended in the world, merged with organised social relations." (Connell, 1995, p. 29). George highlights the tendency of charities to stereotype men "as a homogenous block" by offering activities that are centred on 'sport' to attract men into supportive spaces after bereavement. This application of stereotypical masculinity in charitable bereavement services is perceived as unhelpful; as George reminds us, "if sport mystifies you, you're screwed." This stereotypical formula that 'men like sport' was not expressed in any interview conducted. Furthermore, it chains men to their inherited gender patterns; it implicitly suggests that activities other than 'sport' are not 'masculine' and are therefore prohibited from men, further enmeshing the idea of what *is* masculine. A bereaved man may experience these prescriptive gender expectations as inflexible and inaccurate, leaving him further isolated in his experience. While it may be that a "grieving action" (Liddon et al., 2018, p. 43) may be a response to loss that can be considered 'masculine', where actions rather than words are preferred to process and integrate difficult feelings of grief, the action that is helpful for each particular bereaved person who prefers this active style of making meaning will be different. It will be vital for the counselling psychologists and psychotherapists who support bereaved people to be actively aware of, and reflect on, their own assumptions of male meaning making in order that they do not impose their agendas or expectations onto men who have been bereaved, and rather be curious about their individual experiences in order to support them effectively at this critical time.

As discussed in chapter two, literature review, the clash between social expectations of behaviour and the exigencies of a particular situation can lead to a Gender Role Conflict, where the gender roles assigned to men by society differ from the demands of a situation (Wester et al., 2012). After his bereavement, Rob explains that “there’s that extra thing of...being a man” as he feels comfortable being “strong, silent”, yet, he wants to express his grief and make sense of his loss by talking about his experience, which is difficult for him. In Western society, “a familiar theme in patriarchal ideology is that men are rational while women are emotional” (Connell, 1995, p. 164). This implicit social rule is apparent in the current literature on making meaning after loss, as reviewed in chapter two, where women’s voices dominated the studies, potentially because they felt more comfortable expressing their emotions as “emotional” women (Connell, 1995, p, 164). This is also consistent with Stelzer et al’s (2019) hypothesis that women would use more emotional words when talking about loss than men, who were expected to use more anger words when expressing themselves, due to the expectation that men are reasonable, rational, stoical and disciplined (O’Neil et al., 1995; Wester, et al., 2012). This affects men’s ability to talk about and make sense of their losses. In chapter two, literature review, it was argued that gender may therefore be a risk factor in the development of complicated grief, or Prolonged Grief Disorder (APA, 2022; Romero, 2021), with women more likely than men to receive this diagnosis, due to the greater likelihood and acceptability of their emotional expression over a period of time (Stroebe et al., 2001; Romero, 2021). Nevertheless, in Stelzer et al’s (2019) study, no gender difference was found in the communication styles of men and women after being bereaved; however, it is thought that this may be due to the context of the interview with one female interviewer conducting them in private, and the male participants voluntarily participating. There was therefore no ‘male audience’ to influence and potentially change the public behaviours and words of the participants, as they strove to conform to the expected male mandate of stoical self-reliance (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; De Visser, 2009). This may also be pertinent to the current study, as the male participants each had an interview with me, an individual female interviewer, and were therefore not in public or under pressure from any male witness. This may have allowed the participants to express themselves more authentically.

Indeed, in this study, seven of the participants either explicitly expressed concern about how they were perceived by others as men or they implicitly demonstrated that they struggled to articulate themselves, as this had never been expected of them before. This may explain why some men seemed more able to display anger and resentment after their losses, as expression of these emotions is permitted by the traditional masculine gender mandate, shielding more vulnerable feelings of grief and sadness, the expression of which is not

traditionally allowed for men in our society. The demands of hegemonic masculinity are implicit in allowing these expressions of anger, as opposed to vulnerability and sadness, as anger can demonstrate power and dominance in a situation, thus 'proving' manhood (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). A person who communicates in an angry way, potentially pushing people away and acting aggressively, is also likely to be considered autonomous and not in need of help or care, which is consistent with the traditional expectations of men in our culture (De Visser, 2009; Kimmel, 1997, 2023). A 'male' expression of grief, which is more likely to be an expression of anger or not talking about loss at all, given how men are socialised in our society (Stroebe et al., 2001), may mean that men are less likely to get the help and support they need at a time of distress, as their grief does not conform to the requirements of Prolonged Grief Disorder (APA, 2022) and they feel less able to express themselves emotionally. This is consistent with Stroebe et al's (2001) finding that men may be better supported by professionals to express their feelings to cope better with their loss and become more 'emotion-oriented', while women may be better supported to act and participate in their lives, therefore becoming more 'restoration-oriented'. The hypothesis that men will change how they behave and communicate depending on whom they are talking to (Stelzer et al., 2019), also has clinical implications for counselling psychologists and psychotherapists who work with bereaved people, as it is important to consider the audience to whom a bereaved man is talking and how we can support a more authentic expression of feeling, rather than the more socially acceptable expression of anger, aggression and independence.

## **5.6 Strengths and limitations**

The research revealed that a reflexive thematic analysis conducted from a phenomenological epistemological position was suitable for exploring men's meaning making after the death of someone close to them. Themes of meaning were identified and processes that the participants found to be both helpful and a hindrance were explored. The participants ranged from 28 years old to 66 years old, reflecting different developmental positions in the lifespan, they lived in different areas in the UK, and they came from a range of ethnic backgrounds: I believe these are strengths of the study. A range of different male perspectives was represented in this research and themes were drawn across the ages, localities and ethnicities of the participants. Nevertheless, there were only eight participants in this study. While this small number allowed for a detailed analysis and discussion of their narratives, the findings cannot be generalised to the wider population. Rather, the findings from this small-scale study give men a voice in a field that has often been dominated by the voices of women, starting a discussion about the complexity and impact of gender on meaning making after bereavement, and therefore informing future research.

All interviews with participants were conducted in-person over the summer of 2021. As this was at the beginning of the 're-opening' of society and in-person meetings after the lifting of the restrictions due to Covid-19, some men may have felt reluctant to come forward for an interview due to feelings of anxiety and uncertainty about catching or spreading Covid-19. The men I met were comfortable to meet me in-person, at a place convenient to them. The timing of my research, and my decision to conduct in-person interviews, may have impacted the research, attracting men who are potentially more active and extrovert and less anxious about health. This is a potential limitation of the research as it may have indirectly excluded some interested men from participating in the study. It may also have influenced the finding that men may be supported to make meaning through action after loss, as the men in this study all actively chose to participate in it.

Due to the nature of this study being a qualitative reflexive thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews (Braun & Clark, 2006, 2013, 2022), processes and themes of meaning making that were verbal could be written about and discussed. Any processes and meanings made that were not verbal, for example, musical or artistic, were not recorded in this study.

My female gender may also have impacted the openness of the participants, preventing them from talking about their whole experience. Although the research has shown that men can often feel comfortable with a female therapist (Liddon et al., 2018), the difference in our genders may have impacted their ability to talk to me about certain thoughts and feelings, for example, sexual feelings, which I explore below in 5.7, future research.

The final limitation comes from the design of the study as it is not a longitudinal study. One interview with each participant was recorded and analysed, capturing the participant at a particular time and place, and also at a particular stage in their meaning making process. As we have seen, "grieving is active" (Attig, 2011, p. 25) and each person's meaning making involves an active, and potentially lengthy, process. For some of the participants, they were still making sense of their losses and coping with integrating the loss into their lives when they were interviewed. A longitudinal perspective would give a better sense of their meaning making processes and the themes of meanings made along the way.

### **5.7 Clinical recommendations and implications**

This study demonstrates how important it is for clinicians who work with the bereaved to support them as individuals, rather than imposing an external framework about what grieving and meaning making 'should' be like; for example, pathologizing grief in the DSM-5 with the

inclusion of Prolonged Grief Disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2022), demanding that the bereaved 'detach' from the deceased person (Freud, 1917; Yalom, 1999), or imposing the six stages of grief on their individual processes after bereavement (Kessler, 2019; Kübler-Ross, 1969). These assumptions and imposed agendas can deny bereaved people's feelings, potentially isolating them further at a time when they may already feel isolated and alienated from others (Stolorow, 2007). Clinicians therefore need to be open and curious about each unique bereaved individual, the relationship they lost and the context of their loss, in order that the bereaved person feels heard and valued in their unique experience, free of imposed agendas and assumptions (Paidoussis-Mitchell, 2018). This will involve active listening and empathic attunement to the client, as the loss is explored and new meanings are navigated.

Demonstrating understanding, interest and empathy to each bereaved individual will also involve clinicians being curious about their gendered experience and how they have been socialised in our culture and society, without imposing gender stereotypes. In striving to include more men in services, there is the potential to impose these cultural stereotypes, which could feel alienating and dismissive of their experience, as articulated in this study. Furthermore, in striving for equality between the genders, there is the risk that it becomes the practice in our society to treat all people in the same way. This does not recognise the powerful, yet often subtle, ways the beliefs and expectations imposed on men (and women) in our society influence our behaviours, thoughts and feelings, and have the potential to feel dismissive of our experience. As we have seen, the bereaved can often feel alienated and isolated, struggling to make meaning and find a "relational home" (Stolorow, 2007, p. 50), where they feel understanding and empathy. To impose gendered stereotypes, or to dismiss a bereaved person's gendered experience, risks isolating them further, denying them the possibility of sharing their full experience. Counselling psychologists and psychotherapists therefore have a responsibility to understand and be aware of their own assumptions and expectations about gender and grieving, and reflect on this, in order to work effectively with bereaved people.

Death was understood as a cruel, inexorable fact of life by each participant, bringing a sense of purpose and meaning to their lives, and motivating their actions and behaviours. A "grieving action" (Liddon et al., 2018, p. 48) may therefore be a style of meaning making that is unique to men, as it did not emerge from the research where the majority of participants were women (Gillies et al., 2014). In applying this finding to clinical work with bereaved men, it will be important not to impose any "grieving action" (Liddon et al., 2018, p. 48), and rather explore and demonstrate curiosity about what action may be helpful. It may also be

beneficial for the partners, family members, friends and colleagues of grieving men to understand that men can often make sense of their feelings through actions rather than words, thus helping to develop empathy and understanding between people and supporting interpersonal relationships at a time when individuals may feel isolated and misunderstood.

It is worth noting that half of the participants in this study found that writing about their experiences was a helpful “grieving action” (Liddon et al., 2018, p.48), as it supported making sense of thoughts and feelings. This is consistent with the research on male survivors of sexual abuse, who also found that writing about their experiences was beneficial and supported meaning making (Grossman et al., 2016). Given this finding is supported by previous research, it might therefore be helpful for therapists to support clients with narrative writing exercises, such as writing letters to the lost loved ones, in order to support the meaning making process after loss, as suggested by Piazza-Bonin and colleagues in previous studies (2016, 2016a). It will be important *not* to impose this as an agenda on the bereaved person. Indeed, stereotypes about what is helpful for men after bereavement are considered unhelpful, as they dismiss the individuality of the person, again emphasising the importance of demonstrating curiosity, empathy and understanding, alongside active listening, to each particular bereaved person.

Working empathically and openly with bereaved clients may require clinicians to work with their anger. As discussed in section 5.2, inexorable death, Yalom, as well as four participants in this study, felt anger and “resentment” (Yalom & Yalom, 2021, p. 69) when faced with death’s cruelty and their existential isolation. They have felt the death of their loved one as a personal attack, something ‘bad’, which is split from the ‘good’, loved person who has been lost, suggesting a paranoid-schizoid position after the stress and trauma of bereavement (Klein, 1935, 1946). The clinical implications of this for counselling psychologists and psychotherapists include supporting bereaved individuals to integrate the two ‘split’ positions, where the ‘bad’ and the ‘good’ can co-exist; leading to a more balanced ‘depressive’ position (Klein, 1940, 1957). The aim of the work will be to demonstrate curiosity, empathy and acceptance of a range of feelings, including anger, which may shield more vulnerable feelings of grief and sadness. It may be important to reflect on how men are socialised in our culture; there is the potential for them to feel uncomfortable and reluctant to display their vulnerability, underneath their rage, as this may conflict with the learned traditional ‘masculine’ gender mandates of being ‘tough’, ‘in control’ and ‘independent’, and they may feel concerned about what other people think of them for expressing their grief and sadness and showing ‘weakness’ (Good & Robertson, 2010; Wester et al., 2012). Reflecting on how men feel they ‘should’ be in society, and creating a non-judgemental space where all

feelings are welcomed and accepted, may help to integrate the two 'split' positions and support the bereaved person to bear their difficult and contrasting feelings about death and loss (Klein, 1935, 1946, 1957).

Finally, anger can also potentially be misdirected onto the living rather than tarnishing the memory of the deceased person, as experienced by four participants in this study (Leader, 2008). This is interesting for clinicians working with the bereaved as misdirected anger has the potential to rupture important relationships, losing them as a potential source of comfort in the future. Supporting the bereaved person to integrate a balanced memory of their dead loved one, including the positive and negative, rather than an idealised version, may help to understand feelings of anger in a caring and containing environment, allowing other relationships to remain intact as anger is not directed onto them.

### **5.8 Future research**

This research has shown that while themes of meaning are made by the bereaved, these are not fixed and rigid in their lives. Meaning making is an ongoing process, not a destination, and the participants in this research continued to make sense of their thoughts and feelings about their losses in their interviews. It would be interesting for future research to include a longitudinal study where participants are met and interviewed about their meaning making experiences over a period of time after their loss, in order to understand the processes in more depth and how they change as time passes.

In this study, there was no discussion of sexual thoughts and feelings after bereavement. As previously mentioned in 5.5, strengths and limitations, the participants may have felt uncomfortable talking about their inner sexual life to me as someone of the opposite sex. Yalom writes that after the death of his wife, his "sexual thoughts feel more real, resulting in a life affirming feeling that awakens me and rousts me from my preoccupation with death." (Yalom & Yalom, 2021, p. 172). He goes on to describe conversations he has had with "experienced colleagues who work with grieving individuals, and they agree that sexual arousal and preoccupation among the bereaved is far more common than generally thought, often more an issue for men than women though, without question, it is an issue for women as well." (Yalom & Yalom, 2021, p. 172). There was no mention of sexual thoughts and feelings in this study, perhaps due to embarrassment or shame felt by the participants in talking about them. Indeed, very little has been written about this phenomenon and there are no empirical studies about it. I believe that the bereaved might benefit from future research exploring this area, to understand more about how sexual feelings impact grief and meaning making after loss.

Finally, I believe that future research on bereavement and meaning-making should include more studies with male participants, so that men are robustly included in the research, and the impact of gender socialisation on critical life processes, like bereavement, can be understood in depth. This may also help to understand if a “grieving action” (Liddon et al., 2018, p. 48) is a unique way for men, and those whose grieving style is more ‘masculine’, to make meaning at a critical time in their lives, after the death of someone they love.

## **5.9 Final reflections**

I have included reflexive statements throughout this thesis in order to provide a transparent account of my thinking and how I feel I have impacted the research process. As we come to the end and as I reflect on my role as a researcher, I am aware of two processes which I feel require further consideration; the power dynamics between me and the participants and the privacy of my family.

### **5.9.1 Power dynamics**

Throughout the process of this research, I have been in the position of the researcher, which puts me, arguably, in a position of power in relation to the participants, particularly within the interview and analysis processes. I designed the research, created the research question and the interview schedule, therefore setting the agenda for the participants, asking them to talk to me about their bereavements, while not revealing much about myself. Simultaneously, I was dependent on my participants taking part and being willing to share their thoughts and feelings about this sensitive topic.

One way in which I attempted to balance the power between us was to meet each participant in a location and at a time convenient to him. As I felt it was important to discuss such a potentially emotional and delicate topic face-to-face and not online, this meant travelling to the participants, not only across London, but also across the country. I met only one participant at Metanoia, and all other locations were either neutral or in the participant’s home or place of work, helping the participant to feel more at ease and in control of his surroundings. The participant I met at Metanoia chose to come to Ealing for the interview, and so this was not imposed by me. He described feeling more comfortable away from his home and was grateful that I could accommodate that for him. I also started each interview in the same way, aiming to put the participant at ease by asking him to tell me a bit about his loss. I wanted to demonstrate an open, caring and genuinely interested attitude towards each experience, without imposing any perspective. I believe my



willingness to travel to each participant and make the necessary arrangements for each interview, as well as demonstrate curiosity to them, valuing their stories, served to balance power dynamics between us.

In conducting this reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006, 2013, 2022), I have taken an inductive approach to analysing the data: this means that the themes have developed from the data gathered and are 'data-driven'. Nevertheless, these themes have developed in my mind and through my subjective process, which is therefore an intrinsic component of the analysis, and means that I have influenced the data, as it has simultaneously influenced me. The process of power is apparent here as I have created the themes from the data, taking me beyond the transcripts of the participants.

As the analysis progressed, and I began to write it down, I became aware, again, of my power in deciding which participant and what part of their narrative was included in each theme. It felt important at this stage to reflect back to each interview, treating the resulting transcript with respect and sensitivity. I aimed to include each participant as evenly as I could, and include as much of their narrative as possible, to ensure they did not feel dismissed or misunderstood. My personal process was that I found it difficult to move away from the data: I respected each participant for his honest and brave participation, and I wanted to treat that with the kindness and respect I felt it deserved. My hope is that the result is a balance of each participant's voice alongside my analysis and discussion of processes and themes of meaning making after bereavement.

### **5.9.2 My family's privacy**

As I have previously stated, I have aimed to provide transparency throughout this thesis in offering reflexive statements about my process and reasoning as the study has progressed. This has been limited by the fact that my sister's death, where the roots of this thesis lie, is not only my story to tell. Hilary was a sister, a daughter, a niece, a cousin, a granddaughter and a friend: many different people felt bereft after her death. I have no doubt that this research could have been enriched by sharing some experiences surrounding her death, and how these interact with the experiences of the participants in the research. I have been unable to fully do this out of respect for my family's privacy, which I have felt it important to protect.

Nevertheless, I hope that you feel that you have come to know Brandon, George, Graeme, Ishan, John, Kevin, Michael, Rob and me through this piece of work, which

includes our experiences, reflections, thoughts and feelings after losing people we love. I am grateful to each of the participants for their rich, detailed, brave accounts of meaning making when faced with the significant personal challenge of bereavement and the suffering it can bring.

*If there is a meaning in life at all, then there must be a meaning in suffering. Suffering is an eradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death human life cannot be complete.*

(Frankl, 2004, p. 76)

## REFERENCES

Adichie, C. N. (2021). *Notes on grief*. London: Harper Collins Publishers.

Addis, M. & Mahalik, J. (2003). Men, masculinity, and the contexts of help-seeking. *American Psychologist*, 58(1), 5-14. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0003-066X.58.1.5>

Alves, D., Fernandez-Navarro, P., Baptista, J., Ribeiro, E., Sousa, I., & Gonçalves, M. M. (2013). Innovative moments in grief therapy: The meaning reconstruction approach and the processes of self-narrative transformation. *Psychotherapy Research*, retrieved on 2 May 2019 from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10503307.2013.814927>

Anderson, C. (1949). Aspects of pathological grief and mourning. *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 30, 48-55.

Archer, M. (2000). *Being Human: The Problem of Agency*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3089723>

Armour, M. (2003). Meaning making in the aftermath of homicide. *Death studies*, 27(6), 519-540. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0002-9432.72.3.372>

Arnold, J., & Gemma, P. B. (2008). The continuing process of parental grief. *Death Studies*, 32, 658-673. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481180802215718>

Attig, T. (2011). *How we grieve: Relearning the world*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

American Psychiatric Association. (2022). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5<sup>th</sup> edition). Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596>

Baumeister, R. F. (1991). *Meanings of life*. London and New York: The Guilford Press.

Begley, M., & Quayle, E. (2007). The lived experience of adults bereaved by suicide: A phenomenological study. *Crisis*, 28, 26-34. <https://doi.org/10.1027/0227-5910.28.1.26>

Bergman, S. J. (1995). Men's psychological development; A relational perspective. In R. Levant & W. Pollack (Eds.). *A new psychology of men*. New York: Basic.

Bhaskar, R. (1997) On the ontological status of ideas. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 27(3), 135–137. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1468-5914.00031>

Bhaskar, R. (2016). *Enlightened Common Sense: The Philosophy of Critical Realism*. London: Routledge.

Bloch, R. H. (1978). Untangling the roots of modern sex roles: A survey of four centuries of change. *Signs*, 4(2), 237-52.

Bonnano, G. A., Wortman, C. B., & Nesse, R. M. (2004). Prospective patterns of resilience and maladjustment during widowhood. *Psychology and Aging*, 19(2), 260-271. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0882-7974.19.2.260>

Bosson, J. K., Taylor, J. N., & Prewitt-Freilino, J. L. (2006). Gender role violations and identity misclassification: The roles of audience and actor variables. *Sex Roles*, 55, 13-24.

Boyras, G., Horne, S. G., & Sayger, T. V. (2010). Finding positive meaning after loss: The mediating role of reflection for bereaved individuals. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 15, 242-258. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15325020903381683>

Boyras, G., Horne, S. G., & Sayger, T. V. (2012). Finding meaning in loss: The mediating role of social support between personality and two construals of meaning. *Death Studies*, 36, 519-540. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1080/07481187.2011.553331>

Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Brannon, R. (1976). The male sex role: Our culture's blueprint of manhood and what it's done for us lately. In D. S. David & R. Brannon (Eds.), *The forty-nine percent majority: The male sex role* (pp.1-45). Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful qualitative research: A practical guide for beginners*. London: SAGE.

Braun, V. & Clark, V. (2020). Can I use TA? Should I use TA? Should I not use TA? comparing reflexive thematic analysis and other pattern-based qualitative analytic approaches. *Couns Psychother Res.* 1-11. DOI: 10.1002/capr.12360

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. London: Sage Publications.

Buber, M. (1923). *I and thou*. Edinburgh: T and T Clark.

Buber, M. (1955). *Between man and man*. Boston: Beacon Paperbacks.

Budd, J. M., Hill, H., & Shannon, B. (2010). Inquiring into the real: A realist phenomenological approach. *The Library Quarterly*, 80(3). <https://doi.org/10.1086/652876>

Cambule, L. (2017, November 15). "Man up"? Getting more "men" in mental health. <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/your-stories/man-up-getting-more-men-in-mental-health/>

Camus, A. (2005). *The myth of Sisyphus*. London: Penguin Books.

Capraro, R. (2000). Why college men drink: Alcohol, adventure, and the paradox of masculinity. *Journal of College Health*, 48(6), 307-315. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448480009596272>

Carrigan, T., Connell, R., & Lee, J. (1985). Toward a new sociology of masculinity. *Theory and Society*, 14(5), 551-604.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London: SAGE.

Collier, A. (1991). Explanation and emancipation. In M. Archer, R. Bhaskar, A. Collier, T. Lawson and A. Norrie (Eds.), *Critical Realism: Essential Readings*. London: Routledge.

Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Cambridge: Polity Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003116479>

Connell, R. W. & Messerschmidt, J. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender and Society*, 19(6), 829-859. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639>

Cooper, M. (2009). Welcoming the Other: Actualising the humanistic ethic at the core of counselling psychology practice. *Counselling Psychology Review-British Psychological Society*, 24(3/4). <http://dx.doi.org/10.53841/bpscpr.2009.24.3-4.119>

Cooper, M., & McLeod, J. (2007). A pluralistic framework for counselling and psychotherapy: Implications for research. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 7, 135-143. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14733140701566282>

Corr, C. (2015). Let's stop "staging" persons who are coping with loss. *Illness, Crisis & Loss*, 23(3), 226-241. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1054137315585423>

Creighton, G., & Oliffe, J. L. (2010). Theorising masculinities and men's health: A brief history with a view to practice. *Health Sociology Review*, 19(4), 409-418. <https://doi.org/10.5172/hesr.2010.19.4.409>

Currier, J. M., Holland, J. M., & Neimeyer, R. A. (2006). Sense-making, grief, and the experience of violent loss: Toward a mediational model. *Death Studies*, 30, 403-428. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07481180600614351>

Cypress, B. S. (2017). Rigor or reliability and validity in qualitative research: Perspectives, strategies, reconceptualization and recommendations. *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing*, 36 (4), 253-263. <https://doi.org/10.1097/dcc.0000000000000253>

Dasgupta, R. (2009). The "lost decade" of the 1990s and shifting masculinities in Japan. *Culture, Society and Masculinity*, 1 (1), 79-95.

Deaux, K., & Major, B. (1987). Putting gender into context: An interactive model of gender-related behaviour. *Psychological Review*, 94, 369-389.

De Visser, R. (2009). Young men, masculinity and alcohol, in A. Broom, & P. Tovey (Eds.), *Men's health: Body, identity and social context*. (pp. 126 – 144). Wiley-Blackwell: West Sussex.

DeYoung, P. (2015). *Relational psychotherapy: A primer* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London: Routledge.

Dwyer, S. C., & Buckle, J. L. (2009). The space between: On being an insider-outsider in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8, 54-63.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690900800105>

Eagly, A. H., Wood, W., & Diekmann, A. B. (2000). *Social role theory of sex differences and similarities: A current appraisal*. In T. Eckes & H. M. Trautner (Eds.). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Frankl, V. E. (2004). *Man's search for meaning: The classic tribute to hope from the Holocaust*. Great Britain: Ebury.

Freeman, D. L., & Cameron, L. (2008). Research methodology on language development from a complex systems perspective. *The Modern Language Journal*, 92, 200-213.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2008.00714.x>

Freud, S. (1917). Mourning and melancholia. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, 14, 237-258.

Friedmann, R., & James, J. W. (2008). The myth of the stages of dying, death and grief. *Skeptic*, 14, 37-42.

Fromm, E. (1947). *Man for himself: An inquiry into the psychology of ethics*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203721339>

Fromm, E. (1973). *The anatomy of human destructiveness*. London: Pimlico Random House.

Fugard, A. J. B., & Potts, H. W. W. (2015). Supporting thinking on sample sizes for thematic analysis: a quantitative tool. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 18, 669-684. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2015.1005453>

Gall, T. L., Henneberry, J., & Eyre, M. (2014). Two perspectives on the needs of individuals bereaved by suicide. *Death Studies*, 38, 430-437.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2013.772928>

Galdas, P. M., Cheater, F., & Marshall, P. (2005). Men and help-seeking behaviour: Literature review. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 49, 616-623. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2004.03331.x>

Gerson, J. M. & Preiss, K. (1985). Boundaries, renegotiations, consciousness: Reconceptualising gender relations. *Social Problems*, 32(4), 317-331. <https://doi.org/10.2307/800755>

Gibson W., & Brown, A. (2009). *Working with qualitative data*. London: SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857029041>

Gillies, J., & Neimeyer, R.A. (2006). Loss, grief, and the search for significance: Toward a model of meaning reconstruction in bereavement. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 19, 31-65. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1080/10720530500311182>

Gillies, J., Neimeyer, R. A., & Milman, E. (2014). The meaning of loss codebook: Construction of a system for analyzing meanings made in bereavement. *Death Studies*, 38, 207-216. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2013.829367>

Glaser, B. G. & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Aldine. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203793206>

Golden, T. (2013). *The way men heal*. Gaithersburg, MA: G.H. Publishing.

Gomez, L. (1997). *An introduction to object relations*. London: Free Association Books.

Good, G. E. & Mintz, L. B. (2005). Integrative therapy for men. In G. Good & G. Brooks (Eds.), *The new handbook of psychotherapy and counselling with men: A comprehensive guide to settings, problems, and treatment approaches*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Good, G. E. & Robertson, J. M. (2010). To accept a pilot? Addressing men's ambivalence and altering their expectancies about therapy. *Psychotherapy Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 47(3), 306-315. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/a0021162>



Goodyear, R., Lichtenberg, J., Hutman, H., & Overland, E. (2016). A global portrait of counselling psychologists' characteristics, perspectives, and professional behaviours. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 29(2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09515070.2015.1128396>

Gould, S. J. (2003). *The hedgehog, the fox, and the magister's pox: Mending the gap between science and the humanities*. New York: Three Rivers.

Granek, L. (2021). Grief dynamics and gendered expectations on expressions of grief. In A. Koster & E. H. Kofod (Eds.), *Cultural, Existential and Phenomenological Dimensions of Grief Experience*. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003099420>

Grossman, F. K., Sorsoli, L., & Kia-Keating, M. (2006). A gale force wind: Meaning making by male survivors of childhood sexual abuse. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 76, 434-443. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0002-9432.76.4.434>

Guest, G., MacQueen, K. M., & Namey, E. E. (2012). *Applied thematic analysis*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.

Heeke, C., Kampisiou, C., Neimeyer, H., & Knaevelsniid, C. (2017). A systematic review and meta-analysis of correlates of prolonged grief disorder in adults exposed to violent loss. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 8(6). <https://doi.org/10.1080/20008198.2019.1583524>

Heidegger, M. (1963). *Being and time*. New York: Harper & Row.

Hendel, J. (2013). *Don't*. <http://johnnie-jones.last-memories.com/page/4421>

Holland J. M., Currier J. M., Neimeyer R. A. (2006). Meaning reconstruction in the first two years of bereavement: The role of sense-making and benefit-finding. *OMEGA—Journal of Death and Dying*, 53(3), 175–191. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.2190/FKM2-YJTY-F9VV-9XWY>

Hung, N. C., & Rabin, L. A. (2009). Comprehending childhood bereavement by parental suicide: A critical review of research on outcomes, grief processes, and interventions. *Death Studies*, 33, 781-814. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481180903142357>

Husserl, E. (1927-1931). Psychological and transcendental phenomenology and the confrontation with Heidegger. *Collected Works of Edmund Husserl, Volume VI*.

Isaacs Russell, G. (2020). Remote working during the pandemic: A Q&A with Gillian Isaacs Russell. *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 36(3), 364-74  
<https://doi.org/10.1111%2Fbjp.12581>

Jablonka, I. (2019). *A history of masculinity: From patriarchy to gender justice*. Milton Keynes: Allen Lane.

Jacimovic, D. (2022, May 23). *Psychology statistics and facts for 2022*.  
<https://thecircularboard.com/psychology-statistics/>

Janoff-Bulman, R. (1992). *Shattered assumptions: Towards a new psychology of trauma*. New York: Free Press. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00029157.1994.10403078>

Janoff-Bulman, R., & Frantz, C. M. (1997). The impact of trauma on meaning: From meaningless world to meaningful life. In M. Power & C. Brewin (Eds.), *The transformation of meaning in psychological therapies: Integrating theory and practice*. Sussex, England: Wiley.

Janoff-Bulman, R., & Yopyk, D. (2004). Random outcomes and valued commitments: Existential dilemmas and the paradox of meaning. In J. Greenberg, S. L. Koole & T. Pyszczynski (Eds.), *Handbook of experimental existential psychology* (pp. 122-138). New York, NY: Guilford. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/9780470561119.socpsy001020>

Joffe, H. (2012). Thematic analysis. In D. Harper & A. R. Thompson (Eds.), *Qualitative research methods in mental health and psychotherapy: A guide for students and practitioners* (pp. 109-223). Chichester: Wiley.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/9781119973249.ch15>

Jordan, J. R. & McIntosh, J. L. (2011). *Grief after suicide: Understanding the consequences and caring for the survivors*. New York: Routledge.

Kasket, E. (2017). *How to become a counselling psychologist*. London: Taylor & Francis.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315669670>

Keser, E. & Isikli, S. (2022). Investigation of the relationship between continuing bonds and adjustment after the death of a first-degree family member by using the multidimensional continuing bonds scale. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 78*(2), 218-232.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.23210>

Kessler, D. (2019). *Finding meaning: The sixth stage of grief*. London: Penguin Random House.

Kia-Keating, M., Grossman, F.K., Sorsoli, L., & Epstein, M. (2005). Containing and resisting masculinity: Narratives of renegotiation among resilient male survivors of childhood sexual abuse. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 6*, 169-185.

<https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/1524-9220.6.3.169>

Kidder, L. H. & Fine, M. (1987). Qualitative and quantitative methods: When stories converge. In M. M. Mark, & L. Shortland (Eds.). *New directions in program evaluation*. (pp. 57-75). Jossey-Bass.

Killikelly, C., Lorenz, L., Bauer, B., Mahat-Shamir, M., Ben-Ezra, M., & Maercker, A. (2019). Prolonged grief disorder: Its co-occurrence with adjustment disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder in a bereaved Israeli general population sample. *Journal of Affective Disorders, 249*, 307-314. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2019.02.014>

Kimmel, M. (1997). Masculinity as homophobia: Fear, shame and silence in the construction of gender identity, in M. Gergen, and S. David (Eds.), *Toward a new psychology of gender*. (pp. 223 – 242). Routledge: New York.

Kimmel, M. (2008). *The gendered society reader*. Oxford University Press: New York.

Kimmel, M. (2023, April, 26<sup>th</sup>). 'Toxic masculinity' is not a useful description: Navigating manhood in the modern age. The Institute of Art and Ideas.

<https://iai.tv/articles/toxic-masculinity-is-not-a-useful-description-michael-kimmel-auid-2466#:~:text=As%20a%20result%2C%20%20toxic%20,dialogue%20with%20the%20external%20world.>

Kirk, J., & Miller, M. L. (1986). *Reliability and validity in qualitative research: Qualitative research methods volume 1*. London: Sage.

Klein, M. (1935). A contribution to the psychogenesis of manic-depressive states. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 16, 145-174.

Klein, M. (1937). Love, guilt and reparation. In *Love, Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921-1945*. London: The Hogarth Press.

Klein, M. (1940). Mourning and its relations to manic-depressive states. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 21, 125.

Klein, M. (1946). Notes on some schizoid mechanisms. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 27, 99-110.

Klein, M. (1957). Envy and gratitude. In M. Klein (Ed.). *Envy and gratitude and other works 1946-1963*. London: Hogarth.

Knieper, A. (1999). The survivor's grief and recovery. *Suicide and life threatening behaviour*, 29, 353-364.

Kohut, H. (1984). *How does analysis cure?* A. Goldberg & P. Stepansky (Eds.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kowalchuk, K. (2021, March 4<sup>th</sup>). Older people grieve differently. *Centre for Grief and Trauma Therapy*.

<https://www.centerforgrieftherapy.com/older-people-grieve-differently/>

Kübler-Ross, E., (1969). *On death and dying*. New York: Macmillan.

Kübler-Ross, E., & Kessler, D. (2005). *On grief and grieving: Finding the meaning of grief through the five stages of loss*. New York: Scribner.

Kuramoto, S. J., Brent, D. A., & Wilcox, H. C. (2009). The impact of parental suicide on child and adolescent offspring. *Suicide & Life-Threatening Behavior*, 39, 137-151.

<https://doi.org/10.1521/suli.2009.39.2.137>

Langdrige, D. (2004). *Introduction to research methods and data analysis in psychology*. London: Pearson

Leader, D. (2008). *The new black: Mourning, melancholia and depression*. London: Penguin.

Lee, C. & Owens, R. G. (2002). Issues for a psychology of men's health. *Journal of Health Psychology, 7*(3), 209-217 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105302007003215>

Lichtenthal, W. G., Currier, J. M., Neimeyer, R. A., & Keesee, N. J. (2010). Sense and significance: A mixed methods examination of meaning making after the loss of one's child. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 66*(7), 791-712. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.20700>

Liddon, L., Kinglerlee, R., & Barry, J. A. (2018). Gender differences in preferences for psychological treatment, coping strategies, and triggers to help-seeking. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology, 57*, 42-58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjc.12147>

Lundorff, M., Bonanno, G. A., Johanssen, M., O'Connor, M. (2020). Are there gender differences in prolonged grief trajectories? A registry sample and cohort study. *Journal of Psychiatric Research, 129*, 168-175. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2020.06.030>

Mahalik, J. R., Good, G. E., & Engar-Carlson, M. (2003). Masculinity scripts, presenting concerns, and help seeking: Implications for practice and training. *American Psychologist, 34*, 123-131. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0735-7028.34.2.123>

Mahalik, J. R., Locke, B. D., Ludlow, L. H., Diemer, M. A., Scott, R. P. J., Gottfried, M., & Freitas, G. (2003). Development of the conformity to masculine norms inventory. *Psychology of Men and Masculinity, 4*, 3-25. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/1524-9220.4.1.3>

May, R. (2009). *Man's search for himself*. London: W. W. Norton & Company.

McAdams, D. P. (2008). Personal narratives in the life story. In John, Robins & Pervin (Eds.). *Handbook of personality: Theory and research* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). NY: Guilford Press.

McKenzie, M. J., & Baumeister, R. F. (2014). Meaning in life: Nature, needs, and myths. In A. Batthyana & P. Russo-Netzer (Eds.), *Meaning in positive and existential psychology* (pp. 25-37). New York, NY: Springer. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4939-0308-5\\_2](http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4939-0308-5_2)

Mehl, M. R., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2003). The sounds of social life: A psychometric analysis of students' daily social environments and natural conversations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84*(4), 857-870.

Mental Health Foundation, (2021). *Men and mental health*.

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/a-z-topics/men-and-mental-health>

Messner, M. (1997). *Politics of masculinities: Men in movement*. Sage: London.

Milman, E., Neimeyer, R. A., Fitzpatrick, M., MacKinnon, C. J., Muis, K. R., & Cohen, S. R. (2019). Prolonged grief and the disruption of meaning: Establishing a mediation model. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 66, 714-725. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000370>

Mind, (2020, December). *Get it off your chest: Men's mental health 10 years on*.

[https://www.mind.org.uk/media/6771/get-it-off-your-chest\\_a4\\_final.pdf](https://www.mind.org.uk/media/6771/get-it-off-your-chest_a4_final.pdf)

Morison, L., Trigeorgis, C., & John, M. (2014). Are mental health services inherently feminised? *The Psychologist*, 27(6), 414-416.

Nagoski, J.L., & Brzuzy, S. (2010). Transgender theory: embodying research and practice. *Affilia*, 25, 431-443. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0886109910384068>

Neimeyer, R. (2000). Searching for the meaning of meaning: Grief therapy and the process of reconstruction. *Death Studies*, 24(6). 541-558.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/07481180050121480>

Neimeyer R. A. (Ed.). (2001). *Meaning reconstruction and the experience of loss*.

Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

<https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/10397-000>

Neimeyer, R. A. (2019). Meaning reconstruction in bereavement: Development of a research program. *Death Studies*, 43(2), 79–91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2018.1456620>

Neimeyer, R. A., & Anderson, A. (2002). Meaning reconstruction theory. In N. Thompson (Ed.), *Loss and grief* (pp.45-64). New York, NY: Palgrave. <https://doi.org/10.2190/FKM2-YJTY-F9VV-9XWY>

Neimeyer, R. A. & Burke, L. A. (2017). Spiritual distress and depression in bereavement: A meaning oriented contribution. *Journal of Rational-Emotive and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy*, 35(1), 38-59. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1007/s10942-017-0262-6>

Newman, R. S., Murray, B., & Lussier, C. (2001). Confrontation with aggressive peers at school: Students' reluctance to seek help from the teacher. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 93, 398-410. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0022-0663.93.2.398>

Newman, M. L., Groom, C. J., Handelmann, L. D., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2008). Gender differences in language use: An analysis of 14,000 text samples. *Discourse Processes*, 45(3), 211-236. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01638530802073712>

Nietzsche, F. W. (1990). *Twilight of the idols/The antichrist*. London: Penguin Classics.

O'Brien, R., Hunt, K., & Hart, G. (2005). "It's caveman stuff, but that is to a certain extent how guys still operate": Men's accounts of masculinity and help-seeking. *Social Science and Medicine*, 61, 503-516. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2004.12.008>

O'Neil, J. M., Good, G. E., & Holmes, S. (1995). Fifteen years of theory and research on men's gender role conflict. In R. F. Levant & W. S. Pollack (Eds.), *The new psychotherapy of men* (pp. 164-206). New York, NY: Basic Books. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/0735-7028.27.3.259>

Osterweis, M., Solomon, F., & Green, M. (1984). *Bereavement: Reactions, consequences, and care*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Paidoussis-Mitchell, C. (2018). An existential view on traumatic grief: A four-worlds model. In S. du Plock (Ed.). *Case studies in existential therapy: Translating theory into practice*. (pp. 282-298). Monmoth: PCCS Books Limited.

Parrish, M., & Tunkle, J. (2005). Clinical challenges following an adolescent's death by suicide: Bereavement issues faced by family, friends, schools, and clinicians. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 33, 81-102. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1007/s10615-005-2621-5>

Penglase, B. (2010). The owner of the hill: Masculinity and drug trafficking in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropologie*, 15(2), 317-337. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1935-4940.2010.01088.x>

Perry, G. (2016). *The descent of man*. Milton Keynes: Penguin Books.

Piazza-Bonin, E., Neimeyer, R. A., Alves, D., Smigelsky, M., & Crunk, E. (2016). Innovative moments in humanistic therapy I: Process and outcome of eminent psychotherapists working with bereaved clients. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology, 29*, 269-297. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1080/10720537.2015.1118712>

Piazza-Bonin, E., Neimeyer, R. A., Alves, D., & Smigelsky, M. (2016a). Innovative Moments in humanistic therapy II: Analysis of change processes across the course of three cases of grief therapy. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology, 29*, 298-317. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1080/10720537.2015.1118713>

Pietkiewicz, I., & Smith, J. A. (2012). A practical guide to using interpretative phenomenological analysis in qualitative research psychology. *Psychological Journal, 18*, 361-369. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14691/CPJ.20.1.7>

Pikus, C. F., & Heavey, C. L. (1996). Client preferences for therapist gender. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy, 10*, 35-43. [https://doi.org/10.1300/J035v10n04\\_05](https://doi.org/10.1300/J035v10n04_05)

Pilgrim, D. (2020). *Critical realism for psychologists*. London: Routledge.

Ratele, K. (2008). Masculinity and male mortality in South Africa. *African Safety Promotion, 6*(2), 19-41. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/asp.v6i2.31587>

Rimmon-Kenan, S. (2002). The story of 'I': Illness and narrative identity, *Narrative, 10*, 9-27. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/nar.2002.0006>

Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On becoming a person: A therapist's view of psychotherapy*. London: Robinson.

Romero, M. (2021). Meaning reconstruction in bereaved caregivers of persons with Alzheimer's disease: A mixed methods study. *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying, 82*(4), 548-569. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0030222818821024>



Rozalski, V., Holland, J. M., & Neimeyer, R. A. (2017). Circumstances of death and complicated grief: Indirect associations through meaning made of loss. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 22, 11-23. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1080/15325024.2016.1161426>

Rungreangkulkij, S., Kotnara, I., Kittiwatanapaisan, W., & Arunpongpaisal, S., (2019). Loss of control: Experiences of depression in Thai men. *Walailak Journal*, 16(4), 265-274. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.48048/wjst.2019.3584>

Samaritans, (2022). *Latest suicide data*.

<https://www.samaritans.org/aboutsamaritans/research-policy/suicide-facts-and-figures/latest-suicide-data/>

Sartre, J.P. (1956). *Being and nothingness: An essay on phenomenological ontology*. New York: Philosophical Library.

Sayer, A. (2000). *Realism and Social Science*. London: Sage.

Schachter, S. & Singer, J. E. (1962). Cognitive, social, and physiological determinants of emotional state. *Psychological review*, 69, 379-399.

<https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/h0046234>

Scharff, J. (2020). In response to Kristin White "Practising as an analyst in Berlin in times of the coronavirus." *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 101(3), 585-588.

Schofield, T., Connell, R., Walker, L., Wood, J., & Butland, D. (2000). Understanding men's health and illness: A gender relations approach to policy, research and practice. *Journal of American College Health*, 48(6), 241-256. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448480009596266>

Schuchter, S. R., & Zisook, S. (1993). The course of normal grief. In M. Stroebe, W. Stroebe, & R. Hansson (Eds.), *Handbook of bereavement: Theory research and intervention*, (pp. 23 – 43). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Scocco, P., Castriotta, C., Toffol, E., & Preti, A. (2012). Stigma of suicide attempt (STOSA) scale and stigma of suicide and suicide survivor (STOSASS) scale: Two new assessment tools. *Psychiatry Research*, 200, 872-878. <https://doi.org/10.1027/0227-5910.27.1.39>

Seidler, V. J. (1989). *Rediscovering masculinity: Reason, language and sexuality*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203392669>

Shakespeare, W. (1846). *The tragedy of King Richard III*. Oxford, England: Oxford Paperbacks.

Smith, J., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Smith, K., & de la Prida, A. (2021). *The pluralistic therapy primer*. Monmouth: PPCS.

Spendelow, J. (2019). Who says men can't cope with emotions? *Therapy Today*, 30(5), 26-29.

Stein, C. H., Petrowski, C. E., Gonzales, S. M., Mattei, G. M., Hartl Majcher, J., Froemming, M. W., Greenberg, S. C., Dulek, E. B., & Benoit, M. F. (2018). A matter of life and death: Understanding continuing bonds and post-traumatic growth when young adults experience the loss of a close friend. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 27(3), 725–738.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-017-0943-x>

Stelzer, E. M., Atkinson, C., O'Connor, M. F., & Croft, A. (2019). Gender differences in grief narrative construction: A myth or reality? *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 10(1).

<https://doi.org/10.1080/20008198.2019.1688130>

Stelzer, E. M., Zhou, N., Maercker, A., O'Connor, M. F., & Killikelly, C. (2020). Prolonged grief disorder and the cultural crisis. *Frontiers in Psychology*.

<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02982>

Stolorow, R. D. (2007). *Trauma and human existence: Autobiographical, psychoanalytic and philosophical reflections*. Oxon: Routledge.

Stolorow, R. D. (2019). Emotional disturbance, trauma and authenticity: a phenomenological-contextualist perspective. In R. D. Stolorow & G. E. Atwood (Eds.) *The power of phenomenology* (pp. 71 – 83). Oxon: Routledge.

Stolorow, R. D., & Atwood, G. E. (2019). *The power of phenomenology*. Oxon: Routledge.

Stroebe, M. S., & Schut, H. (1999). The dual process model of coping with bereavement: Rationale and description. *Death Studies*, 23, 197-224.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/074811899201046>

Stroebe, M. S., & Schut, H. (2001). Meaning making in the dual process model. In R. Neimeyer (Ed.), *Meaning reconstruction and the experience of loss* (pp. 55 – 73). Washington DC: American Psychological Association.

Stroebe, M. S., & Schut, H. (2008). The dual process model of coping with bereavement: Overview and update. *Grief Matters: The Australian Journal of Grief and Bereavement*, 11, 1-4.

Stroebe, M., Stroebe, W., & Schut, H. (2001). Gender differences in adjustment to bereavement: An empirical and theoretical review. *Review of General Psychology*, 5(1), 62-83. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.5.1.62>

Stroebe, M., Stroebe, W., & Schut, H. (2003). Bereavement research: methodological issues and ethical concerns. *Palliative Medicine*, 17, 235-240.

<https://doi.org/10.1191/0269216303pm768rr>

Stroebe, M., Schut, H., & Boerner, K. (2017). Cautioning health-care professionals: Bereaved persons are misguided through the stages of grief. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying*, 74(4), 455-473. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0030222817691870>

Suler, J. (2004). The online disinhibition effect. *CyberPsychology and Behaviour*, 7(3), 321-326. <https://doi.org/10.1089/1094931041291295>

Terry, G., Hayfield, N., Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2017). Thematic analysis. In C. Willig & W. Stainton-Rogers (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research in psychology* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 17-36). London: SAGE. <https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/the-sage-handbook-of-qualitative-research-in-psychology/book245472>

The British Psychological Society, (2021). *Code of Human Research Ethics*, retrieved on 22 Nov 2022 from <https://www.bps.org.uk/guideline/bps-code-human-research-ethics>

The British Psychological Society (2022). *Division of Counselling Psychology*. <https://www.bps.org.uk/member-networks/division-counselling-psychology>

The World Bank, (2022). *Population, male (% of total population)*.

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.MA.ZS>

Thimm J. C., & Holland, J. M. (2017). Early maladaptive schemas, meaning making, and complicated grief symptoms after bereavement. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 24, 347-367. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/str0000042>

Tiger, L. (1969). *Men in groups*. New York: Random House.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/000271627139300171>

University College London, (2014, December 12). *Bringing evidence-based practice to psychological therapy*. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/impact/case-studies/2014/dec/bringing-evidence-based-practice-psychological-therapy>

Van Deurzen, E. (2002). *Existential counselling and psychotherapy in practice* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). London: Sage.

Van Deurzen, E. (2010). *Everyday mysteries: A handbook of existential psychotherapy*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London and New York: Routledge.

Violanti, J. M. (2007). *Police suicide: Epidemic in blue*. New York, NY: Charles C. Thomas.

Wester, S. R. (2008). Thinking complexly about men, gender role conflict, and counselling psychology. *The Counselling Psychologist*, 36(3), 462-468.

<https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1177/0011000007310971>

Wester, S. R., Vogel, D. L., O'Neil, J. M., & Danforth, L. (2012). Development and evaluation of the Gender Role Conflict Scale Short Form (GRCS-SF). *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*, 13(2), 199-210. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/a0025550>

Wheeler, J. (1984). *Touched with fire: The future of the Vietnam generation*. New York: Watts. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003463738508200134>

Willig, C. (2013). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Berkshire: Open University Press.

World Health Organisation, (2018). *Men's health and well-being in the WHO European region*. [https://www.euro.who.int/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0019/381403/who-mhr-fs-eng.pdf](https://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/381403/who-mhr-fs-eng.pdf)

Yalom, I. D. (1980). *Existential psychotherapy*. New York: Basic Books.

Yalom, I. D. (1999). *Momma and the meaning of life: Tales of psychotherapy*. London: Piatkus.

Yalom, I. D. (2008). *Staring at the sun: Overcoming the dread of death*. London: Piatkus.

Yalom, I. D., & Yalom, M. (2021). *A matter of death and life: Love, loss and what matters in the end*. London: Piatkus. <https://www.sup.org/books/title/?id=33115>

Yardley, L. (2000) Dilemmas in Qualitative Health Research. *Psychology and Health*, 15(2), 215-228. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08870440008400302>

Zhou, N., Wen, J., Stelzer, E. M., Killikelly, C., Yu, W., Xu, X., Shi, G., Luo, H., Wang, J., & Maercker, A. (2020). Prevalence and associated factors of prolonged grief disorder in Chinese parents bereaved by losing their only child. *Psychiatry Research*, 284. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.112766>



## **APPENDIX A**

### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

It is my intention to ask few, open-ended questions to the participants, so that they are able to freely discuss their loss. These questions may be subject to change over the course of the project, and this change will be reflected upon and discussed with my supervisor and other colleagues to ensure validity. These reflections will be recorded.

#### Possible questions:

How do you feel that you have made sense, or are making sense, of your loss?

What has helped you make sense of your loss?

What has hindered, or interfered with, you making sense of your loss?

Despite your loss, have you been able to find any benefit from your experience of loss?

How has your life changed as a result of your loss?

Do you feel that you are different as a result of your loss?



## APPENDIX B

### Advertising the study

#### **Making new meanings after losing a loved one.**

I am currently studying for my Doctorate in Counselling Psychology with the Metanoia Institute/Middlesex University. As part of my training, I have to submit a Research Project.

My area of interest is bereavement and making meaning in life after losing a loved one. Particularly, I am interested in men's meaning making after loss. I have noticed their voices have not been robustly included in the research, until now. I am looking for participants to join my study.

If you identify as male, are over the age of 18 and have lost a loved one at least two years ago, I would love to hear from you. A loved one would include: a parent, spouse, partner, sibling, child, grandparent, close family member, close friend.

As making meaning after loss from suicide may be distinct, I am not recruiting men who have lost a loved one to suicide.

I am interested in interviewing men who have lost a loved one at least two years ago in order to understand how they made sense of the loss and what helped them cope.

If you would like more information, without any commitment to participate in the study, please contact me on:

Lillian Atkinson

[Lillian.atkinson@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:Lillian.atkinson@metanoia.ac.uk)

07852 291386



## APPENDIX C

### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (PIS)

Participant ID Code:.....

#### SECTION 1

##### 1. Study title

Male meaning making after loss: what affects the process and what are the themes of meanings-made?

##### 2. Invitation paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

##### 3. What is the purpose of the study?

I am interested in how men make meaning of losing someone close to them and what, if any, new meanings they incorporate into their lives as a result of their bereavement.

##### 4. Why have I been chosen?

You have indicated that you are interested in taking part in this study.

In order to be included in the study, the following criteria must be met:

1. You must identify as a man;
2. You must be over the age of 18;
3. You must have been bereaved at least two years ago;
4. You must have lost someone close to you, eg. spouse, partner, parent, child, sibling, grandparent, close family member, close friend; and
5. You must not have been bereaved by suicide.

I am looking for between 6-10 participants for my study.

##### 5. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw until two weeks from the date of the interview and without giving a reason. If you do decide to withdraw from the study then please inform the researcher as soon as possible, and they will facilitate your withdrawal. If, for any reason, you wish to



withdraw your data please contact the researcher. You are able to withdraw, without giving any reason, up until two weeks after the date of the interview. However, as all data are anonymised, your individual data will not be identifiable in any way.

**6. What will I have to do?**

If you decide to participate in this Research Project, you will be invited to attend an interview with me, either in your home or at the Metanoia Institute, 13 Gunnersbury Avenue, Ealing, London W5 3XD. During our first conversation, we would decide when and where the interview would be held together, at a time and place convenient and comfortable for you.

The interview will last about an hour, depending on your availability and your wishes. Your interview will be recorded and kept anonymously and confidentially on an encrypted, Dual-lock double password protected memory stick. You will also be asked to answer a short questionnaire about your bereavement. This will also be kept anonymously and confidentially. Your data will be identifiable through your unique participant ID code.

Please note that in order to ensure quality assurance and equity, this project may be selected for audit by a designated member of the committee. This means that the designated member can request to see signed consent forms. However, if this is the case your signed consent form will only be accessed by the designated auditor or member of the audit team.

**7. What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

We hope that participating in the study will help you. However, this cannot be guaranteed. The information we get from this study may help us to understand if and how men make sense of the death of someone close to them. This will hopefully help those who work with bereaved men and bereaved men themselves, by including their voice more robustly in the research.

**8. Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

Yes. The research team has put a number of procedures in place to protect the confidentiality of participants. You will be allocated a participant code that will always be used to identify any data you provide. Your name or other personal details will not be associated with your data, for example, the consent form that you sign will be kept separate from your data. All paper records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, accessible only to the research team, and all electronic data will be stored on a password protected computer. All information you provide will be treated in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act.

**9. What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results of this study will be presented at conferences or in journal articles, for example, the Bereavement Care Journal promoted by Cruse Bereavement Care. I will also approach the British Psychological Society, the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy and the UK Council for Psychotherapy in order to disseminate the research findings. The data will only be used by members of the research team and at no point will your personal information or data be revealed.

## **10. Who has reviewed the study?**

The study has received full ethical clearance from the Metanoia Institute Research Ethics committee (MREC) who reviewed the study.

## **11. Contact for further information**

If you require further information, have any questions or would like to withdraw your data then please contact:

Lillian Atkinson on 07852 291386 or email [Lillian.atkinson@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:Lillian.atkinson@metanoia.ac.uk)

Dr. Michelle Ruger, my research supervisor, on email at [michelle.ruger@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:michelle.ruger@metanoia.ac.uk)

Thank you for taking part in this study. You should keep this participant information sheet as it contains your participant code, important information and the research team's contact details.

## **SECTION 2**

### **Metanoia Institute Guide to Research Privacy Notices**

Privacy notices need to be presented whenever data is collected and should be understandable and accessible. Privacy notices must explain the type and source of data that will be processed. They will also set out the processing purpose, data retention schedules and data sharing. Privacy notices must include details of the subject's rights and who the subject can complain to.

The following example may be used and completed for your research purposes.

### **Metanoia Institute Privacy Notice for Research Participants**

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) protects the rights of individuals by setting out certain rules as to what organisation can and cannot do with information about people. A key element to this is the principle to process individuals' data lawfully and fairly. This means we need to provide information on how we process personal data.

The Institute takes its obligation under the GDPR very seriously and will always ensure personal data is collected, handled, stored and shared in a secure manner. [The Institute's Data Protection Policy can be accessed here:](#)

<http://metanoia.ac.uk/media/2363/privacy-policy-metanoia-institute.pdf>

The following statements will outline what personal data we collect, how we use it and who we share it with. It will also provide guidance on your individual rights and how to make a complaint to the Information Commissioner's Officer (ICO), the regulator for data protection in the UK.

### **Why are we collecting your personal data?**

We undertake research as part of our function and in our capacity as a teaching and research institution to advance education and learning. The specific purpose for data collection on this occasion is to understand how men make meaning after losing someone close to them. This will hopefully help bereaved men and also those who support them.

The legal basis for processing your personal data under GDPR on this occasion is Article 6(1a) consent of the data subject.

### **Transferring data outside Europe**

In the majority of instances your data will be processed by Metanoia Institute researchers only or in collaboration with researchers at other UK or European institutions so will stay inside the EU and be protected by the requirements of the GDPR.

In any instances in which your data might be used as part of a collaboration with researchers based outside the EU all the necessary safeguards that are required under the GDPR for transferring data outside of the EU will be put in place. You will be informed if this is relevant for the specific study you are a participant of.

### **Your rights under data protection**

Under the GDPR and the DPA you have the following rights:

- to obtain access to, and copies of, the personal data that we hold about you;
- to require that we cease processing your personal data if the processing is causing you damage or distress;
- to require us to correct the personal data we hold about you if it is incorrect;
- to require us to erase your personal data;
- to require us to restrict our data processing activities;
- to receive from us the personal data we hold about you which you have provided to us, in a reasonable format specified by you, including for the purpose of you transmitting that personal data to another data controller;
- to object, on grounds relating to your particular situation, to any of our particular processing activities where you feel this has a disproportionate impact on your rights.

Where Personal Information is processed as part of a research project, the extent to which these rights apply varies under the GDPR and the DPA. In particular, your rights to access,

change, or move your information may be limited, as we need to manage your information in specific ways in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. If you withdraw from the study, we may not be able to remove the information that we have already obtained. To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personally-identifiable information possible. The Participant Information Sheet will detail up to what point in the study data can be withdrawn.

If you submit a data protection rights request to the Institute, you will be informed of the decision within one month. If it is considered necessary to refuse to comply with any of your data protection rights, you also have the right to complain about our decision to the UK supervisory authority for data protection, the Information Commissioner's Office.

None of the above precludes your right to withdraw consent from participating in the research study at any time.

### **Collecting and using personal data**

If you agree to participate in the study, we will meet in person at your house or at the Metanoia Institute, 13 Gunnersbury Avenue, Ealing, London W5 3XD. The interview will be recorded on a digital voice-recorder and will last approximately one hour, depending on your availability and your wishes. The recording will then be immediately transferred onto an encrypted, Dual-lock double password protected memory stick where it will be kept confidentially and anonymously. It will be identifiable only through your unique participant ID code.

Once complete, I will transcribe the interview. Any names will not be recorded in the transcript. The transcript will also be saved on the double password protected memory stick to ensure confidentiality using your unique participant ID. I will use the recording and the transcript to develop themes of men's meaning making after the loss of a loved one. The information will be kept for two years from the date of the interview before being permanently deleted.

### **Data sharing**

Your information will usually be shared within the research team conducting the project you are participating in, mainly so that they can identify you as a participant and contact you about the research project.

Responsible members of the Institute may also be given access to personal data used in a research project for monitoring purposes and/or to carry out an audit of the study to ensure that the research is complying with applicable regulations. Individuals from regulatory authorities (people who check that we are carrying out the study correctly) may require access to your records. All of these people have a duty to keep your information, as a research participant, strictly confidential.

If we are working with other organisations and information is shared about you, we will inform you in the Participant Information Sheet. Information shared will be on a 'need to know' basis relative to achieving the research project's objectives, and with all appropriate safeguards in place to ensure the security of your information.

### **Storage and security**

The Institute takes a robust approach to protecting the information it holds with its encrypted server and controlled access.

### **Retention**

Under the GDPR and DPA personal data collected for research purposes can be kept indefinitely, providing there is no impact to you outside the parameters of the study you have consented to take part in.

Having stated the above, the length of time for which we keep your data will depend on a number of factors including the importance of the data, the funding requirements, the nature of the study, and the requirements of the publisher. Details will be given in the information sheet for each project.

### **Contact us**

The Principal Investigator leading this research is Lillian Atkinson,  
The Metanoia Institute, 13 Gunnersbury Avenue, Ealing, London W5 3XD.  
07852 291386

[Lillian.atkinson@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:Lillian.atkinson@metanoia.ac.uk)

In case you have concerns about this project you can contact:

Dr. Michelle Ruger

[Michelle.ruger@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:Michelle.ruger@metanoia.ac.uk)

The Institute's official contact details are:

Data Protection Officer

Metanoia Institute

W5 2QB

Tel: +44 (0)20 8579 2505

Email: [dataprotection@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:dataprotection@metanoia.ac.uk)

## APPENDIX D

### EXTRACTS FROM RESEARCH JOURNAL

1<sup>st</sup> May 2021

There is lots of interest in the study, which is a huge relief – even from people seeing it advertised online abroad!

Not everyone follows up after the Participant Information Sheet is sent over. Potentially because we are meeting in person after all the Covid restrictions?

6 people are deciding whether to participate.

2<sup>nd</sup> July 2021

Trip to [.] to visit a participant at home.

I feel very apprehensive, going to his home. I check I have all the correct documentation several times, proving my anxiety. I arrive early and ground myself.

His wife, 9 months pregnant, welcomed me into their home. He was still on a work call, so I chatted to her for a few minutes. This was very moving - he is a participant after the deaths of their twin sons. I felt greatly appreciative and hugely privileged to be welcomed by her. I saw pictures of the twin sons who died on a shelf in their front room.

I feel that it is important to meet the participants in person. I feel it is respectful of their time and also demonstrates sensitivity to their feelings around their loss.

19<sup>th</sup> July 2021

A trip to [.] to meet a participant.

During this interview, I felt more confident asking questions and keeping him on point, with tact and sensitivity. I am aware that the participants so far have used the interview as an opportunity to tell their stories and explore their feelings about their losses, which are the focus. This is different for them, as their losses are usually not at the forefront of what they talk about with other people. I felt that this participant was grateful for the space and opportunity to do so. I get a sense that the participants are making sense of their experiences in the interviews.

I feel very moved after each story of loss as each participant is struggling in different ways. This participant has lost such an important dimension to his life, and rebuilding his life after his girlfriend's death is very difficult.

4<sup>th</sup> August 2021

Trip to [.]

I get lost on the way, which increases my anxiety. I meet the participant in his home, where he lived with his wife before her death. He is very kind and I feel a sense of overwhelming sadness; the profound pain of the loss of a life partner is almost unbearable. He shows me photographs of his wife, their son and his grandchildren. I feel moved to bear witness to his life and his feelings about the death of his wife. I feel affirmed in my decision to meet participants in person. It demonstrates depth, understanding and sensitivity and I feel these are important qualities to demonstrate to those who have been bereaved.



**APPENDIX E**  
**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

Participant Identification Number:.....

**Title of Project:** Male meaning making after loss: what affects the process and what are the themes of meanings-made?

**Name of Researcher:** Lillian Atkinson

**Please initial on the lines:**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated  
.....for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask  
questions. \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to  
withdraw until two weeks after the date of the interview, without giving  
any reason and without penalty. \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. I agree that this form that bears my name and signature may be seen  
by a designated auditor. \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. I understand that my interview will be recorded and subsequently transcribed. \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. I agree to take part in the above study. \_\_\_\_\_

Name of participant	Date	Signature

Researcher	Date	Signature

(1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher)





## APPENDIX F

### About you and your bereavement

Unique Participation Code:.....

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. Before the interview starts, I would like to know some more details about you and your loss. I would also like to remind you that the interview will be audio-recorded and stored anonymously on an encrypted, dual password protected memory stick for up to two years from today's date.

Age: .....

Occupation:.....

Highest level of education:.....

Relationship to the person who has died:.....

When were you bereaved? .....

How did your loved one die?.....

.....  
.....  
.....



## APPENDIX G

### DEBRIEF TO PARTICIPANTS

Thank you for taking the time to be interviewed for my Doctoral Research Project. I would like to give you some more information about the aims of my study. If you would like to withdraw from the study after reading this further information, please let me know. You can withdraw until two weeks after the date of the interview, without giving any justification or reason.

Research has shown that meaning making can benefit certain groups of bereaved individuals. The process of meaning making and the important meanings-made after loss have already been researched, however, the majority of participants in all of these studies were women. If men make meaning differently, or if there is a difference in the meanings-made, this is not included in the current research, as the male voice has not, until now, been adequately represented. The purpose of my research is to understand more about how men make meaning after losing someone they love, and what new meanings they incorporate into their lives, if any, following their loss.

If you are still happy to participate in the study, thank you very much for your time and for sharing some details of this difficult time in your life.

If you no longer wish to participate in the study, you are able to withdraw until two weeks from the date of the interview. If you let me know that you no longer wish to be included, your interviews will be removed from the project and destroyed. Should you wish to withdraw from the study, please email me, or my supervisor, at the following email addresses:

[Lillian.atkinson@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:Lillian.atkinson@metanoia.ac.uk) Phone number : 07852 291386

Dr. Michelle Ruger, [michelle.ruger@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:michelle.ruger@metanoia.ac.uk)

Should you wish to view my Doctoral Research Project, this will hopefully be available in November 2022. Please contact me at the above email address if you would be interested in seeing this.

Your responses and interview, will be kept anonymously and confidentially for up to two-years after the date of your interview. Once I have looked at the interviews, transcribed

them and written my Research Report, I will delete all participants' answers and interviews and no copy will be kept.

If you would like to contact a counsellor to discuss your bereavement and your feelings in greater depth, Cruse Bereavement Care have bereavement counselling services all around the UK. They can be contacted on 0808 808 1677. You can also access more information about them and the services they offer at <https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/local-services>

The Metanoia Institute also offers low-cost counselling services to individuals at their offices in Ealing, West London. If you would like to access this service, please contact [clinic@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:clinic@metanoia.ac.uk), Shea Holland on [Shea.Holland@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:Shea.Holland@metanoia.ac.uk), Milena Norgate on [Milena.Norgate@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:Milena.Norgate@metanoia.ac.uk) or call 0208 832 3080. More information can be found at <https://www.metanoia.ac.uk/therapy/metanoia-counselling-and-psychotherapy-service/>

Finally, I would like to thank you again for your participation in my study.

**APPENDIX H**  
**ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER**



13 Gunnersbury Avenue  
Telephone: 020 8579 2505

Ealing, London W5 3XD  
Facsimile: 020 8832 3070

[www.metanoia.ac.uk](http://www.metanoia.ac.uk)

Lillian Atkinson  
Doctorate in Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy by Professional Studies (DCPsych)  
Metanoia Institute

26<sup>th</sup> January 2021  
*Ref: 12/20-21*

Dear Lillian,

*Re: Male meaning-making after loss: what affects the process and what are the themes of meanings made?*

I am pleased to let you know that the above project has been granted ethical approval by Metanoia Research Ethics Committee. If in the course of carrying out the project there are any new developments that may have ethical implications, please inform me as research ethics representative for the DCPsych programme.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Julianna Challenor  
Director of Studies DCPsych  
Faculty of Post-Qualification and Professional Doctorates

On behalf of Metanoia Research Ethics Committee

Registered in England at the  
above address No. 2918520

Registered Charity No. 1050175

**APPENDIX I**  
**RESEARCH ETHICS APPLICATION FROM**

**Research Ethics Application Form**



**Middlesex  
University  
London**

Metanoia Institute and Middlesex University  
Metanoia's Research Ethics Committee



*These guidelines exist for candidates and staff, and for any external body wishing to access Metanoia Institute for the purposes of research. Metanoia's Research Ethics Committee oversees the process of approving all research undertaken by staff and candidates prior to the commencement of the study. If ethical approval has been obtained from a recognised Research Ethics Committee, the letter of approval must be submitted to the Metanoia's Research Ethics Committee prior to the commencement of the study with the application to Metanoia's research committee. You will need to complete the ethics form itself and also complete a risk assessment for the project work. Risk assessment materials are included at the end of this document. Please read these guidelines carefully, to ensure that you submit the correct documentation.*

Approved proposals may be audited at random in order to verify that they comply with the ethical requirements/guidelines of Metanoia's Research Ethics Committee.

Please note that at Metanoia Institute we do not distinguish between categories of proposal since we require full documentation to be submitted for all proposed projects.

All applicants should read the British Psychological Society's *Code of Human Research Ethics* (2010) (available to download at [www.bps.org.uk](http://www.bps.org.uk)), the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy's *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions* (2016) (available to download at [www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk)), and the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy *Ethical Principles and Code of Professional Conduct* (2009). Applicants should also familiarise themselves with the Data Protection Act (1998) - information and guidance on this is provided by the Information Commissioner's Office (available at: [www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk)) - and also the Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care (2005) (available to download at: [www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyandGuidance/ResearchandDevelopment](http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyandGuidance/ResearchandDevelopment)).

Consistent with BPS, BACP and UKCP guidance, ethical conduct needs to be viewed as a process. Hence, ethical matters should be continually reviewed and addressed throughout the course of the project and in consultation with your research supervisor. If there are significant changes to your research design, you should consider the ethical implications of these changes and consider also, in consultation with your research supervisor, whether formal ethical approval needs to be obtained again.

Before completing this form you should discuss the ethical implications of your research with your research supervisor.

**Statutory data collected as part of a candidate's employment**

Candidates do not need to seek approval for the collection of data obtained as part of their normal professional work roles and under statutory powers. However, should a candidate intend to use the data to address a research question outside their 'normal work role' ethical

approval will be required. Permission for the access to and use of the data for research purposes should be provided by the employer with reference to the data protection act. In such cases, this committee does not approve the collection of data but only its use as part of the candidate's research project. In order to assist the committee in its deliberations candidates are advised to provide a paragraph outlining the capacity in which they are obtaining the data.

### **Studying abroad**

When research is being carried out abroad, in addition to the requirements of the ethical procedure of the host country, candidates should seek written permission (concerning access), from the relevant bodies/departments to access the research participants/records/documentation. Metanoia's Research Ethics Committee will be responsible for the ethics scrutiny of the project and the candidate will be required to follow the normal procedures and guidelines for obtaining Metanoia's ethical permission.

### **Purpose of this form**

This form is reviewed by the Research Ethics Committee in order to assess the ethical implications of your research project and your response to these implications. The research cannot proceed until ethical approval has been obtained. Applicants may be asked to review and re-submit this form in the light of the Research Ethics Committee's decision regarding whether ethical issues have been adequately identified and addressed prior to starting the research work.

Once completed, this form should be submitted to the Research Ethics Committee, accompanied by:

- Your finalised research proposal.
- Any research materials such as participant recruitment advertisements, letters/email communications to participants, information sheets and consent forms.
- Research materials such as interview schedules, topic guides, published questionnaires, or other research protocol materials.
- Letter of consent from any organisation where researcher is conducting either interviews, focus groups, surveys, observations etc.
- Evidence of permission to access data, or provide justification where permission is not required.
- A letter of approval from a recognised Research Ethics Committee if ethical approval for the study to take place has been required from another organisation (e.g. NHS, MoD, etc.).

### **DETAILS OF APPLICANT AND RESEARCH SUPERVISOR**

**1.1. Applicant's name: LILLIAN ATKINSOM**

**1.2. Email address: [Lillian.atkinson@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:Lillian.atkinson@metanoia.ac.uk)**

**1.3. Telephone number: 07852 291386**

**1.4. Research supervisor(s) name, qualifications and contact details: Dr Michelle Ruger, Counselling Psychologist, [michelle.ruger@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:michelle.ruger@metanoia.ac.uk)**

**1.5. Institution/contact details (if applicable):**

1.6 Do you have any external funding for this project? Yes/No (please circle)  
If yes, please provide brief details including the name of the funding body:

1.7. Project title: Male meaning making after loss: A thematic analysis of male meaning making after the death of a loved one.

### ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Note: The items below cover all of those in the A/B categories of Middlesex University

	YES	NO	N/A
1. Will you describe the research procedures in advance to participants so that they are informed about what to expect? Please attach a copy of any recruitment letters and information sheet to be used.	x		
2. Is the project based on voluntary participation?	x		
3. Will you obtain written consent for participation?	x		
4. If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?			x
5. Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason and inform them of how they may withdraw?	x		
6. Will you ensure that participants are not subtly induced, either to participate initially, or to remain in the project?	x		
7. Will you give participants the option of omitting questions from interviews or questionnaires that they do not want to answer?	x		
8. Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	x		
9. Have you made provision for the safe-keeping of written data or video/audio recordings?	x		
10. Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation?	x		
11. Have you ensured that your research is culture/belief/ social system sensitive and that every precaution has been taken to ensure the dignity, respect and safety of the participants?	x		

If you have answered 'NO' to any of the questions listed in 1 to 12 above, then please provide further details on a separate page and attach it to this application.

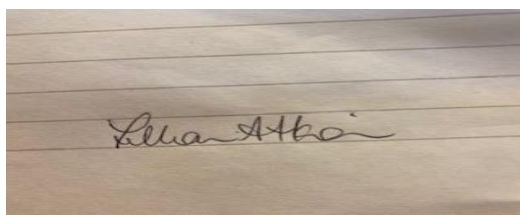
	YES	NO	N/A
12. Is there a realistic risk of any participant experiencing either physical or psychological distress or discomfort? If YES, what will you tell them to do if they should experience any problems (e.g. who they can contact for help.)	x		
<i>I have provided details of Cruse Bereavement Care and also Metanoia's low-cost counselling on the debrief document, if a participant would like to discuss their bereavement and feelings in greater depth.</i>			

13. Is there an existing relationship between the researcher and any of the research participants? If YES, please describe the ethical implications and the safeguards in place to minimise risks.		x	
14. Your research does not involve offering inducement to participate (e.g. payment or other reward)? If YES, please describe the ethical implications and the safeguards in place to minimise risks.		x	
15. Will the project involve working with children under 16 years of age? If YES, please describe parental consent and safeguarding procedures.		x	
16. Will your project involve deliberately misleading participants in any way? If YES, please explain why this is necessary.		x	
17. Will you need to obtain ethical approval from any other organisation or source? If YES, please attach letter confirming their ethical approval.		x	
18. Are there any other ethical considerations in relation to your project that you wish to bring to the attention of the Research Ethics Committee that are not covered by the above? If YES, please describe on a separate sheet.		x	

**If you have answered 'YES' to any of the questions listed under 13 to 18 above, then please provide further details on a separate page and attach it to this application.**

### CANDIDATE DECLARATION

I have read the BACP and the BPS guidelines for ethical practices in research and have discussed this project with my research supervisor in the context of these guidelines. I confirm that I have also undertaken a risk assessment with my research supervisor:



Signed:.....

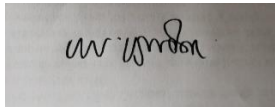
Print name...LILLIAN ATKINSON.....Date 25 JANUARY 2021  
(Applicant)

### RESEARCH SUPERVISOR DECLARATION

- As supervisor or principal investigator for this research study I understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that researchers/candidates under my supervision undertake a risk assessment to ensure that health and safety of themselves, participants and others is not jeopardised during the course of this study.



- I confirm that I have seen and signed a risk assessment for this research study and to the best of my knowledge appropriate action has been taken to minimise any identified risks or hazards.
- I understand that, where applicable, it is my responsibility to ensure that the study is conducted in a manner that is consistent with the World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki: Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (see <http://www.wma.net/e/policy/b3.htm> ).
- I confirm that I have reviewed all of the information submitted as part of this research ethics application.
- I agree to participate in committee's auditing procedures for research Studies if requested.



Signed:

Print name: Michelle Ruger Date:12.01.2021

**STATEMENT OF ETHICAL APPROVAL**

This project has been considered by the Metanoia Research Ethics Committee and is now approved.

Signed:.....Print name.....

Date.....

(On behalf of the Metanoia Research Ethics Committee)

**Metanoia Institute**

**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (PIS)**

Participant ID Code:.....

**SECTION 1**

**1. Study title**

Male meaning making after loss: what affects the process and what are the themes of meanings-made?

**2. Invitation paragraph**

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

**3. What is the purpose of the study?**

I am interested in how men make meaning of losing someone close to them and what, if any, new meanings they incorporate into their lives as a result of their bereavement.

**4. Why have I been chosen?**

It is important that we assess as many participants as possible, and you have indicated that you are interested in taking part in this study.

In order to be included in the study, the following criteria must be met:

1. You must identify as a man;
2. You must be over the age of 18;
3. You must have been bereaved at least two years ago;
4. You must have lost someone close to you, eg. spouse, partner, parent, child, sibling, grandparent, close family member, close friend; and
5. You must not have been bereaved by suicide.

I am looking for between 6-10 participants for my study.

**5. Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw until a month from the date of the interview and without giving a reason. If you do decide to withdraw from the study then please inform the researcher as soon as possible, and they will facilitate your withdrawal. If, for any reason, you wish to withdraw your data please contact the researcher within a month of your participation. After this date it may not be possible to withdraw your individual data as the results may have already been published. However, as all data are anonymised, your individual data will not be identifiable in any way.

**6. What will I have to do?**

If you decide to participate in this Research Project, you will be invited to attend an interview with me, either in your home or at the Metanoia Institute, 13 Gunnersbury Avenue, Ealing, London W5 3XD. We would decide when and where the interview would be held together, at a time and place convenient and comfortable for you.

The interview will last about an hour, depending on your availability and your wishes. Your interview will be recorded and kept anonymously and confidentially on an encrypted, Dual-

lock double password protected memory stick. You will also be asked to answer a short questionnaire about your bereavement. This will also be kept anonymously and confidentially. Your data will be identifiable through your unique participant ID code.

Please note that in order to ensure quality assurance and equity this project may be selected for audit by a designated member of the committee. This means that the designated member can request to see signed consent forms. However, if this is the case your signed consent form will only be accessed by the designated auditor or member of the audit team.

**7. What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

We hope that participating in the study will help you. However, this cannot be guaranteed. The information we get from this study may help us to understand if and how men make sense of the death of someone close to them. This will hopefully help those who work with bereaved men and bereaved men themselves, by including their voice more robustly in the research.

**8. Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

The research team has put a number of procedures in place to protect the confidentiality of participants. You will be allocated a participant code that will always be used to identify any data you provide. Your name or other personal details will not be associated with your data, for example, the consent form that you sign will be kept separate from your data. All paper records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, accessible only to the research team, and all electronic data will be stored on a password protected computer. All information you provide will be treated in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act.

**9. What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results of this study will be presented at conferences or in journal articles; for example, the Bereavement Care Journal promoted by Cruse Bereavement Care. I will also approach the British Psychological Society, the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy and the UK Council for Psychotherapy in order to disseminate the research findings. The data will only be used by members of the research team and at no point will your personal information or data be revealed.

**10. Who has reviewed the study?**

The study has received full ethical clearance from the Metanoia Institute Research Ethics committee (MREC) who reviewed the study.

**11. Contact for further information**

If you require further information, have any questions or would like to withdraw your data then please contact:

Lillian Atkinson on 07852 291386 or email [Lillian.atkinson@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:Lillian.atkinson@metanoia.ac.uk)

Dr. Michelle Ruger, my research supervisor, on email at [michelle.ruger@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:michelle.ruger@metanoia.ac.uk)

Thank you for taking part in this study. You should keep this participant information sheet as it contains your participant code, important information and the research teams contact details

## SECTION 2

### **Metanoia Institute Guide to Research Privacy Notices**

Privacy notices need to be presented whenever data is collected and should be understandable and accessible. Privacy notices must explain the type and source of data that will be processed. They will also set out the processing purpose, data retention schedules and data sharing. Privacy notices must include details of the subject's rights and who the subject can complain to.

The following example may be used and completed for your research purposes.

### **Metanoia Institute Privacy Notice for Research Participants**

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) protects the rights of individuals by setting out certain rules as to what organisation can and cannot do with information about people. A key element to this is the principle to process individuals' data lawfully and fairly. This means we need to provide information on how we process personal data.

The Institute takes its obligation under the GDPR very seriously and will always ensure personal data is collected, handled, stored and shared in a secure manner. The Institute's Data Protection Policy can be accessed here:

<http://metanoia.ac.uk/media/2363/privacy-policy-metanoia-institute.pdf>

The following statements will outline what personal data we collect, how we use it and who we share it with. It will also provide guidance on your individual rights and how to make a complaint to the Information Commissioner's Officer (ICO), the regulator for data protection in the UK.

#### **Why are we collecting your personal data?**

We undertake research as part of our function and in our capacity as a teaching and research institution to advance education and learning. The specific purpose for data collection on this occasion is to understand how men make meaning after losing someone close to them. This will hopefully help bereaved men and also those who support them.

The legal basis for processing your personal data under GDPR on this occasion is Article 6(1a) consent of the data subject.

#### **Transferring data outside Europe**

In the majority of instances your data will be processed by Metanoia Institute researchers only or in collaboration with researchers at other UK or European institutions so will stay inside the EU and be protected by the requirements of the GDPR.

In any instances in which your data might be used as part of a collaboration with researchers based outside the EU all the necessary safeguards that are required under the GDPR for transferring data outside of the EU will be put in place. You will be informed if this is relevant for the specific study you are a participant of.

#### **Your rights under data protection**

Under the GDPR and the DPA you have the following rights:

- to obtain access to, and copies of, the personal data that we hold about you;
- to require that we cease processing your personal data if the processing is causing you damage or distress;
- to require us to correct the personal data we hold about you if it is incorrect;
- to require us to erase your personal data;
- to require us to restrict our data processing activities;
- to receive from us the personal data we hold about you which you have provided to us, in a reasonable format specified by you, including for the purpose of you transmitting that personal data to another data controller;
- to object, on grounds relating to your particular situation, to any of our particular processing activities where you feel this has a disproportionate impact on your rights.

Where Personal Information is processed as part of a research project, the extent to which these rights apply varies under the GDPR and the DPA. In particular, your rights to access,

change, or move your information may be limited, as we need to manage your information in specific ways in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. If you withdraw from the study, we may not be able to remove the information that we have already obtained. To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personally-identifiable information possible. The Participant Information Sheet will detail up to what point in the study data can be withdrawn.

If you submit a data protection rights request to the Institute, you will be informed of the decision within one month. If it is considered necessary to refuse to comply with any of your data protection rights, you also have the right to complain about our decision to the UK supervisory authority for data protection, the Information Commissioner's Office. None of the above precludes your right to withdraw consent from participating in the research study at any time.

### **Collecting and using personal data**

If you agree to participate in the study, we will meet either in person at your house or at the Metanoia Institute, 13 Gunnersbury Avenue, Ealing, London W5 3XD. The interview will be recorded on a digital voice-recorder and will last approximately one hour, depending on your availability and your wishes. The recording will then be immediately transferred onto an encrypted, Dual-lock double password protected memory stick where it will be kept confidentially and anonymously. It will be identifiable only through your unique participant ID code.

Once complete, I will transcribe the interview. Any names will not be recorded in the transcript. The transcript will also be saved on the double password protected memory stick to ensure confidentiality. I will use the recording and the transcript to develop themes of men's meaning making after the loss of a loved one.

The information will be kept for two years from the date of the interview before being permanently deleted.

### **Data sharing**

Your information will usually be shared within the research team conducting the project you are participating in, mainly so that they can identify you as a participant and contact you about the research project.

Responsible members of the Institute may also be given access to personal data used in a research project for monitoring purposes and/or to carry out an audit of the study to ensure that the research is complying with applicable regulations. Individuals from regulatory authorities (people who check that we are carrying out the study correctly) may require access to your records. All of these people have a duty to keep your information, as a research participant, strictly confidential.

If we are working with other organisations and information is shared about you, we will inform you in the Participant Information Sheet. Information shared will be on a 'need to know' basis relative to achieving the research project's objectives, and with all appropriate safeguards in place to ensure the security of your information.

### **Storage and security**

The Institute takes a robust approach to protecting the information it holds with its encrypted server and controlled access.

### **Retention**

Under the GDPR and DPA personal data collected for research purposes can be kept indefinitely, providing there is no impact to you outside the parameters of the study you have consented to take part in.

Having stated the above, the length of time for which we keep your data will depend on a number of factors including the importance of the data, the funding requirements, the nature of the study, and the requirements of the publisher. Details will be given in the information sheet for each project.

### **Contact us**

The Principal Investigator leading this research is Lillian Atkinson,  
The Metanoia Institute, 13 Gunnersbury Avenue, Ealing, London W5 3XD.  
07852 291386

[Lillian.atkinson@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:Lillian.atkinson@metanoia.ac.uk)

In case you have concerns about this project you can contact:

Dr. Michelle Ruger

[Michelle.ruger@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:Michelle.ruger@metanoia.ac.uk)

The Institute's official contact details are:

Data Protection Officer

Metanoia Institute

W5 2QB

Tel: +44 (0)20 8579 2505

Email: [dataprotection@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:dataprotection@metanoia.ac.uk)

Participant Identification Number:

**CONSENT FORM**

**Title of Project:** Male meaning-making after loss: what affects the process and what are the themes of meanings made?

**Name of Researcher:** Lillian Atkinson

**Please initial box:**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated .....for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.                  | 1 |
| 2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw within a month of the interview, without giving any reason and without penalty. | 2 |
| 3. I agree that this form that bears my name and signature may be seen by a designated auditor.   | 3 |
| 4. I understand that my interview may be recorded and subsequently transcribed.   | 6 |
| 5. I agree to take part in the above study.   | 7 |

Name of participant	Date	Signature
---------------------	------	-----------

Name of person taking consent (if different from researcher)	Date	Signature
---	------	-----------

Researcher	Date	Signature
------------	------	-----------

1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher

## Metanoia Institute Data Protection Checklist for Researchers

Project title:	
PI/Supervisor:	Date:

There are **8 Data Protection Principles**, which states that information must be:

1. Fairly and lawfully processed;
2. Processed for specified and lawful purposes;
3. Adequate, relevant and not excessive;
4. Accurate and kept up date where necessary;
5. Not kept for longer than is necessary;
6. Processed in accordance with individuals' rights under the DPA;
7. Kept secure;
8. Not transferred to countries without adequate protection.

Section 33 of the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) provides exemption to some of the eight data protection principles for processing personal data for 'research purposes' including statistical or historical purposes. These are noted in the checklist below.

For guidance on the Data Protection Act for Social Research please see the MRS/SRA Data Protection Act 1998: Guidelines for Social Research, April 2013 which can be accessed using the following link:  
<http://www.mrs.org.uk/pdf/2013-04-23%20MRS%20SRA%20-%20DP%20Guidelines%20updated.pdf>

Guidance on large data sets can be found at the Information Commissioner's Office website – Big Data and Data Protection July 2014.  
[http://ico.org.uk/news/latest\\_news/2014/~-/media/documents/library/Data\\_Protection/Practical\\_application/big-data-and-data-protection.pdf](http://ico.org.uk/news/latest_news/2014/~-/media/documents/library/Data_Protection/Practical_application/big-data-and-data-protection.pdf)

You may also find JISC Legal Information on Data Protection and Research Data Questions and Answers, Aug 2014 helpful. <http://www.jisclegal.ac.uk/ManageContent/ViewDetail/ID/3648/Data-Protection-and-Research-Data-Questions-and-Answers-21-August-2014.aspx>

Note: Personal data which is anonymised<sup>i</sup>, permanently, is exempt from compliance with the DPA and registration process. See endnotes for further details.

Conditions which must be met for a research exemption to apply under section 33 of the DPA 1998	Please indicate	
1. The information is being used <b>exclusively for research</b> purposes?	Agree	Disagree
2. The information is not being used to <b>support measures or decisions relating to any identifiable living individuals?</b>	Agree	Disagree
3. The data <sup>ii</sup> is not being used in a way that will <b>cause or is likely to cause, substantial damage or substantial distress</b> to any individuals or very small groups?	Agree	Disagree



<p><i>If you 'Disagree' please provide details why an adverse effect is justified:</i></p>			
<p>4. The results of the research, or any resulting statistics, will <b>not be made available in a form that identify individuals?</b></p> <p><i>If you 'Disagree' please provide details why identification is intended:</i></p>	Agree	Disagree	
<p>If you 'Agree' to all of the above conditions then the use of personal data is exempt from the Second Principle and the Fifth Principle, but you must comply with First, Third, Fourth, Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Principles of the DPA. If a research exemption does not apply then you must ALSO comply with the Second and Fifth Principles of the DPA</p>			
<p>First Principle: Fairly and lawfully processed</p>			
<p>5. Will you have appropriate <b>informed consent</b><sup>iii</sup> secured from participants for the <b>personal data</b><sup>iv</sup> that you will be analysing? i.e., <b>inform participants</b> of</p> <p>a) What you will <b>do</b> with the data?</p> <p>b) Who will <b>hold</b> the data? (Usually MU, unless a third party is involved)</p> <p>c) Who will have <b>access</b> to the data or receive copies of it? (e.g., for <b>secondary data sets</b>, are you sure that appropriate consent was secured from participants when the data was collected?) <i>If 'no' please provide details and any further actions to be taken:</i></p>	Yes	No	N/A
<p>6. If you plan to analyse <b>sensitive personal data</b><sup>v</sup>, have you obtained <b>data subjects</b><sup>vi</sup> <b>explicit informed consent</b><sup>vii</sup> (as opposed to <b>implied consent</b><sup>viii</sup>)? <i>If 'no' please provide details:</i></p>	Yes	No	N/A
<p>7. If you do not have the data subjects' explicit consent to process their data, are you <b>satisfied that it is in the best interests of the data subject</b> to collect and retain the sensitive data? <i>Please provide details:</i></p>	Yes	No	N/A
<p>8. If you are processing<sup>ix</sup> personal data about <b>younger individuals or those with reduced capacity</b>, have you put a process in place to obtain consent from parents, guardians or legal representatives, if appropriate? <i>Please provide details:</i></p>	Yes	No	N/A
<p>9. Will you have a process for managing <b>withdrawal of consent</b>? <i>If 'no' please provide details:</i></p>	Yes	No	N/A
<p>10. Will it be necessary or desirable to work with external organisations e.g., charities, research organisations etc. acting as a <b>third party</b> i.e., directly providing a service for us or on our behalf that involves them accessing, collecting or otherwise processing personal data the third party will become a data processor under the DPA?</p>	Yes	No	N/A

<p><i>If 'yes' then you will be using a third party as a data processor you must take advice from the Metanoia Institute Data Protection Officer about the planned contractual arrangements and security measures.</i></p>			
<p>11. If you hold or control personal data, will you <b>register and/or inform</b> the Metanoia Institute Data Protection Officer when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) A new dataset has been established,</li> <li>ii) The purpose for which personal data stored in a dataset has changed,</li> <li>iii) A networked dataset of personal data is being used,</li> <li>iv) Extracting personal data from a networked dataset to create a new dataset.</li> </ul>	Yes	No	N/A
<p><b>Second Principle: Processed for limited purposes</b></p>			
<p>Will personal data be obtained only for <b>one or more specified and lawful purposes</b>, and not further processed in any manner incompatible with the purpose(s)? (Research data subjects should be informed of any new data processing purposes, the identity of the <b>Data Controller</b><sup>x</sup> and any disclosures that may be made.)</p> <p><b>Research Exemption Note</b> (section 33(2)): Personal data can be processed for research purposes other than for which they were originally obtained if that processing does not lead to decisions being made about an individual and is not likely to cause substantial damage or distress to an individual. That data may also be held indefinitely (Section 33(3)).</p>	Yes	No	N/A
<p><b>Third Principle: Adequate, relevant and not excessive</b></p>			
<p>12. Will you only collect data that is <b>necessary</b> for the research? <i>If 'no' please provide details and any further actions to be taken:</i></p>	Yes	No	N/A
<p><b>Fourth Principle: Accurate and where necessary, kept up to date</b></p>			
<p>13. Will you take reasonable measures to ensure that the information is <b>accurate, kept up-to-date</b> and <b>corrected</b> if required? <i>If 'no' please provide details:</i></p>	Yes	No	N/A
<p><b>Fifth Principle: Not kept for longer than is necessary</b></p>			
<p>14. Will you check <b>how long data legally must be kept</b> and <b>routinely destroy</b> data that is past its retention date and <b>archive data</b> that needs to be kept?</p> <p><b>Research Exemption Note</b> (section 33(3)): Personal data processed for research purposes can be kept indefinitely.</p>	Yes	No	N/A
<p><b>Sixth Principle: Processed in accordance with individuals' rights under the DPA<sup>vi</sup></b></p>			
<p>15. If you are intending to publish information, which could <b>identify individuals</b>, have you <b>made them aware</b> of this when gaining their informed consent? <i>If 'no' please provide details:</i></p>	Yes	No	N/A

16. Will you allow <b>access to all personal data</b> held about a data subject if an individual makes this request?  <b>Research Exemption Note</b> (section 33(4)): Where the results of processing personal data for research purposes do not identify a data subject, that data subject does not have a right of access to that data.	Yes	No	N/A
17. Will you ensure that all researchers who have access to <b>personal data</b> understand that it <b>must not be provided to any unauthorised person or third party</b> (e.g. family members etc.) unless consent has been given?	Yes	No	N/A
<b>Seventh Principle: Kept secure</b>			
18. Will you ensure that personal data will be <b>stored in locked cabinets, cupboards, drawers</b> etc. (regardless of whether data is on paper, audio visual recordings, CDs, USBs, etc.)?	Yes	No	N/A
19. Will you ensure that if personal data is to be <b>stored electronically</b> it will only be kept on <b>encrypted devices</b> ?	Yes	No	N/A
20. Will you ensure that individuals who have access to the personal data are aware that <b>email is not a secure method</b> of communication and should <b>not be used for transferring the data</b> ?	Yes	No	N/A
21. Will you ensure that <b>disposal of personal data</b> will be via <b>confidential waste services</b> or in the case of <b>electronic media and hardware</b> should be <b>destroyed</b> in line with Metanoia Institute guidelines and procedures?	Yes	No	N/A
<b>Eighth Principle: Not transferred to other countries without adequate protection</b>			
22. Will you <b>ensure that personal data is not transferred outside the EEA</b> unless one of the following applies? i. The country you are transferring the data to has been approved as providing adequate protection ii. You have obtained explicit informed consent from the individual(s) iii. You have a contract in place with the recipient of the data, which states the appropriate data protection requirements. iv. You have completely anonymised the data.	Yes	No	N/A

**Any concerns in relation to compliance with the DPA should be discussed with the Middlesex University Data Protection Officer.**

<sup>1</sup> **Anonymous data** is prepared from personal information but from which, an individual cannot be identified by the person holding the data. **Anonymisation** is a **permanent** process. Personal data must be treated so that it cannot be processed in such a way as to link the data to a specific individual (e.g., using an identifier). Coded data is not anonymised and therefore not exempt from compliance or registration.

<sup>1</sup> **Data** covers information that is held on computer, or to be held on computer to be processed. Data is also information recorded on paper if you intend to put it on computer.

<sup>1</sup> **Informed consent** means providing participants with a clear explanation of the research project in order for them to give informed consent regarding the use of their data. Individuals should be informed that their involvement is voluntary and that they have the right to refuse or withdraw at any time without any negative consequences.

**Informed** refers to the following information being provided to the data subject/participant:

- i) Who you are, the organisation you work for and who else is involved in the research project or using the data.
- ii) What data will be collected and how.
- iii) Who will hold the data, control access to the data and how it will be stored and kept safe and whether it will be transferred to a third party.
- iv) How the data will be used.

- v) How long it will be kept and what will happen to it at the end of the project.
- vi) Risks related to any aspects of the research project and data, benefits of the research project and any alternatives.

<sup>1</sup> **Personal data** (sometimes referred to as personal information) means data which relate to a living individual who can be identified from those data whether in personal or family life, business or profession, or from those data and other information which is in the possession of, or is likely to come into the possession of, the data controller. The data is of biographical significance to the individual and impacts an individual in a personal, family, business or professional capacity. It includes any expression of opinion about the individual and/or statements of fact.

<sup>1</sup> **Sensitive personal data** means personal data consisting of information about the **data subjects**,

1. Racial or ethnic origin,
2. Political opinions,
3. Religious beliefs or other beliefs of a similar nature,
4. Trade union membership
5. Physical or mental health or condition,
6. Sexual life,
7. Criminal matters

Also personal financial details are vulnerable to identity fraud and should be handled confidentially and

securely although not defined as sensitive under the Act.

<sup>1</sup> **Data subject** is a living individual to whom the personal data relates. If an individual has died or their details have been anonymised then their data does not fall within the Act. Personal data relating to deceased individuals may still be owed a duty of confidentiality.

<sup>1</sup> **Explicit informed consent** is where an individual actively opts to participate.

<sup>1</sup> **Implied consent** is where an individual must inform the researcher that they wish to opt out.

<sup>1</sup> **Processing** of personal information includes collecting, using, storing, destroying and disclosing information.

<sup>1</sup> **Data controller** is the person who either alone or jointly on in common with other persons determines the purposes for which, and the manner in which, any personal data are or are to be, processed. The fact that an individual or institution holds or processes personal data does not make them a Data Controller if they do not determine the purpose and manner of that holding or processing. (This is probably one of the most widely misunderstood definitions of the Act.) In most cases the Data Controller will be Middlesex University, however further guidance and clarification can be sought from the Middlesex University Data Protection Officer.

<sup>1</sup> **Data subject rights** include rights to access, for accuracy, to prevent processing likely to cause damage or distress, to prevent direct marketing, to prevent automated decision making, to seek compensation and for no third party access. Access means an individual can make a subject access request for all copies of all personal data held about them and ask to whom it has been disclosed. An individual potentially has access to personal comments written about them. It is an offence to deliberately edit or destroy data once a subject access request has been received. Third parties do not generally have access to subject data unless an exemption applies or there is overriding public interest. There may be limited third party access to ordinary personal data relating to a business or professional capacity in the public interest through the Freedom of Information Act.

## INDEPENDENT FIELD/LOCATION WORK RISK ASSESSMENT

*This proforma must be completed as part of the research ethics submission for all fieldwork. It is to be completed by the person carrying out the fieldwork (which in most cases is the candidate) in conjunction with the research supervisor.*

### FIELDWORK DETAILS

Name of person carrying out fieldwork (usually the candidate)....Lillian Atkinson..

Name of research supervisor.....Dr Michelle Ruger....

Telephone numbers and name of next of kin who may be contacted in the event of an accident

#### FIELDWORK NEXT OF KIN

**Name** Neil Atkinson  
**Phone** 07948 435668

Physical or psychological limitations to carrying out the proposed fieldwork

NONE

.....  
.....  
.....

Any health problems (full details) which may be relevant to proposed fieldwork activity in case of emergencies.

NONE

.....  
.....  
.....

Locality (Country and Region)

LONDON, UK

Travel arrangements

LONDON PUBLIC TRANSPORT OR PRIVATE CAR  
(depending on location of interviews)

.....  
.....

NB: Comprehensive travel and health insurance must always be obtained for independent overseas fieldwork.

Dates of travel and fieldwork

From April 2021 (or when in-person interviews are permitted)

**Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment - PLEASE READ VERY CAREFULLY**

List the localities to be visited or specify routes to be followed (**Col. 1**). For each locality, enter the potential hazards that may be identified beyond those accepted in everyday life. Add details giving cause for concern (**Col. 2**).

**Examples of Potential Hazards :**

- Adverse weather: exposure (heat, sunburn, lightening, wind, hypothermia).
- Terrain: rugged, unstable, fall, slip, trip, debris, and remoteness. Traffic: pollution.
- Demolition/building sites, assault, getting lost, animals, disease.
- Working on/near water: drowning, swept away, disease (Weil's disease, hepatitis, malaria, etc.), parasites'.
- flooding, tides and range.
- Lone working: difficult to summon help, alone or in isolation, lone interviews.
- Dealing with the public: personal attack, causing offence/intrusion, misinterpreted, political, ethnic, cultural.
- socio-economic differences/problems. Known or suspected criminal offenders.
- Safety Standards (other work organisations, transport, hotels, etc.), working at night, areas of high crime.
- Ill health: personal considerations or vulnerabilities, pre-determined medical conditions (asthma, allergies.
- fitting) general fitness, disabilities, persons suited to task.
- Articles and equipment: inappropriate type and/or use, failure of equipment, insufficient training for use and repair, injury.
- Substances (chemicals, plants, bio- hazards, waste): ill health - poisoning, infection, irritation, burns, cuts, eye-damage.
- Manual handling: lifting, carrying, moving large or heavy items, physical unsuitability for task.

**If no hazard can be identified beyond those of everyday life, enter 'NONE'.**

1. LOCALITY/ROUTE	2. POTENTIAL HAZARDS
LONE INTERVIEWS IN LONDON, LONDON AREA OR ELSEWHERE IN THE UK	NONE

**Risk Minimisation/Control Measures**

**PLEASE READ VERY CAREFULLY**

For each hazard identified (**Col 2**), list the precautions/control measures in place or that will be taken (**Col 3**) to "reduce the risk to acceptable levels", and the safety equipment (**Col 5**) that will be employed.

Assuming the safety precautions/control methods that will be adopted (**Col. 3**), categorise the fieldwork risk for each location/route as negligible, low, moderate or high (**Col. 4**).

**Risk increases with both the increasing likelihood of an accident and the increasing severity of the consequences of an accident.**

**An acceptable level of risk is:** a risk which can be safely controlled by person taking part in the activity using the precautions and control measures noted including the necessary instructions, information and training relevant to that risk. The resultant risk should not be significantly higher than that encountered in everyday life.

**Examples of control measures/precautions:**

Providing adequate training, information & instructions on fieldwork tasks and the safe and correct use of any equipment, substances and personal protective equipment. Inspection and safety check of any equipment prior to use. Assessing individual's fitness and suitability to environment and tasks involved. Appropriate clothing, environmental information consulted and advice followed (weather conditions, tide times etc.). Seek advice on harmful plants, animals & substances that may be encountered, including information and instruction on safe procedures for handling hazardous substances. First aid provisions, inoculations, individual medical requirements, logging of location, route and expected return times of lone workers. Establish emergency procedures (means of raising an alarm, back up arrangements). Working with colleagues (pairs). **Lone working is not permitted where the risk of physical or verbal violence is a realistic possibility.** Training in interview techniques and avoiding /defusing conflict, following advice from local organisations, wearing of clothing unlikely to cause offence or unwanted attention. Interviews in neutral locations. Checks on Health and Safety standards & welfare facilities of travel, accommodation and outside organisations. Seek information on social/cultural/political status of fieldwork area.

**Examples of Safety Equipment:** Hardhats, goggles, gloves, harness, waders, whistles, boots, mobile phone, ear protectors, bright fluorescent clothing (for roadside work), dust mask, etc.

If a proposed locality has not been visited previously, give your authority for the risk assessment stated or indicate that your visit will be preceded by a thorough risk assessment.

3. PRECAUTIONS/CONTROL MEASURES	4. RISK ASSESSMENT (low, moderate, high)	5. SAFETY/EQUIPMENT
<p>Before attending an interview, I will inform my next of kin (Neil Atkinson) of the location of the interview and the time of the interview. I will also inform him when the interview is over. If he does not hear from me within a 2 hour period, he will contact my research supervisor and the police.</p>	<p>LOW</p>	<p>MOBILE PHONE</p>

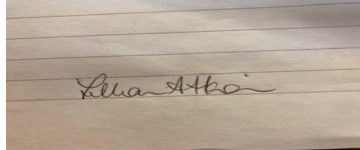
**DECLARATION:** The undersigned have assessed the activity and the associated risks and declare that there is no significant risk or that the risk will be controlled by the method(s)



listed above/over. Those participating in the work have read the assessment and will put in place precautions/control measures identified.

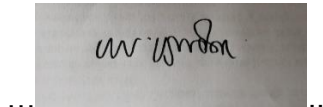
***NB: Risk should be constantly reassessed during the fieldwork period and additional precautions taken or fieldwork discontinued if the risk is seen to be unacceptable.***

**Signature of Fieldworker  
(Candidate/Staff)**



**Date** 25.1.21

**Signature of candidate's  
Research Supervisor**



**Date** ...16.12.20

**APPROVAL:**

**Signature of Research  
Co-ordinator or  
Faculty Head**

.....

**Date** .....

## FIELDWORK CHECK LIST

1. Ensure that **all members** of the field party possess the following attributes (where relevant) at a level appropriate to the proposed activity and likely field conditions:
  - Safety knowledge and training?
  - Awareness of cultural, social and political differences?
  - Physical and psychological fitness and disease immunity, protection and awareness?
  - Personal clothing and safety equipment?
  - Suitability of fieldworkers to proposed tasks?
  
2. Have all the necessary arrangements been made and information/instruction gained, and have the relevant authorities been consulted or informed with regard to:
  - Visa, permits?
  - Legal access to sites and/or persons?
  - Political or military sensitivity of the proposed topic, its method or location?
  - Weather conditions, tide times and ranges?
  - Vaccinations and other health precautions?
  - Civil unrest and terrorism?
  - Arrival times after journeys?
  - Safety equipment and protective clothing?
  - Financial and insurance implications?
  - Crime risk?
  - Health insurance arrangements?
  - Emergency procedures?
  - Transport use?
  - Travel and accommodation arrangements?

### **Important information for retaining evidence of completed risk assessments:**

Once the risk assessment is completed and approval gained the **research supervisor** should retain this form and issue a copy of it to the fieldworker participating on the fieldwork. In addition the **approver** must keep a copy of this risk assessment in an appropriate Health and Safety file.

---



### **Advertising the study**

#### **Making new meanings after losing a loved one.**

I am currently studying for my Doctorate in Counselling Psychology with the Metanoia Institute/Middlesex University. As part of my training, I have to submit a Research Project.

My area of interest is bereavement and making meaning in life after losing a loved one. Particularly, I am interested in men's meaning-making after loss. I have noticed their voices have not been robustly included in the research, until now. I am looking for participants to join my study.

If you are male, over the age of 18 and have lost a loved one at least two years ago, I would love to hear from you. A loved one would include: a parent, spouse, partner, sibling, child, grandparent, close family member, close friend.

As meaning making after loss from suicide may be distinct, I am not recruiting men who have lost a loved one to suicide.

I am interested in interviewing men who have lost a loved one at least two years ago in order to understand how they made sense of the loss and what helped them cope.

If you would like more information, without any commitment to participate in the study, please contact me on:

Lillian Atkinson

[Lillian.atkinson@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:Lillian.atkinson@metanoia.ac.uk)

07852 291386



**Questionnaire**  
**About you and your bereavement**

Unique Participation Code:.....

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. Before the interview starts, I would like to know some more details about you and your loss. I would also like to remind you that the interview will be audio-recorded and stored anonymously on an encrypted, dual password protected memory stick for up to two years from today's date.

Age: .....

Occupation:.....

Highest level of education:.....

Relationship to the person who has died:.....

When were you bereaved? .....

How did your loved one die?.....



**The Metanoia Institute**  
**DEBRIEF TO PARTICIPANTS**

Thank you for taking the time to be interviewed for my Doctoral Research Project. I would like to give you some more information about the aims of my study. If you would like to withdraw from the study after reading this further information, please let me know. You can withdraw within a month of the interview, without giving any justification or reason.

Research has shown that meaning making can benefit certain groups of bereaved individuals. The process of meaning-making and the important meanings-made after loss have already been researched, however, the majority of participants in all of these studies were women. If men make meaning differently, or if there is a difference in the meanings-made, this is not included in the current research, as the male voice has not, until now, been adequately represented. The purpose of my research is to understand more about how men make meaning after losing someone they love, and what new meanings they incorporate into their lives, if any, following their loss.

If you are still happy to participate in the study, thank you very much for your time and for sharing some details of this difficult time in your life.

If you no longer wish to participate in the study, you are able to withdraw until one month from today's date. If you let me know that you no longer wish to be included, your interviews will be removed from the project and destroyed. Should you wish to withdraw from the study, please email me at the following email address:

[Lillian.atkinson@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:Lillian.atkinson@metanoia.ac.uk) Phone number : 07852 291386  
Dr. Michelle Ruger, [michelle.ruger@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:michelle.ruger@metanoia.ac.uk)

Should you wish to view my Doctoral Research Project, this will hopefully be available in November 2022. Please contact me at the above email address if you would be interested in seeing this.

Your responses and interview, will be kept anonymously and confidentially for up to two-years after the date of your interview. Once I have looked at the interviews, transcribed them and written my Research Report, I will delete all participants' answers and interviews and no copy will be kept.

If you would like to contact a counsellor to discuss your bereavement and your feelings in greater depth, Cruse Bereavement Care have bereavement counselling services all around the UK. They can be contacted on 0808 808 1677. You can also access more information about them and the services they offer at <https://www.cruse.org.uk/get-help/local-services>

---

The Metanoia Institute also offers low-cost counselling services to individuals at their offices in Ealing, West London. If you would like to access this service, please contact [clinic@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:clinic@metanoia.ac.uk), Shea Holland on [Shea.Holland@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:Shea.Holland@metanoia.ac.uk), Milena Norgate on [Milena.Norgate@metanoia.ac.uk](mailto:Milena.Norgate@metanoia.ac.uk) or call 0208 832 3080. More information can be found at <https://www.metanoia.ac.uk/therapy/metanoia-counselling-and-psychotherapy-service/>

Finally, I would like to thank you again for your participation in my study.

APPENDIX J

EXTRACT FROM GEORGE'S ANNOTATED INTERVIEW

action - doing something at work to compensate for the loss.  
 - seeing work as something to be managed after loss.

grief is not generic.

48 suitable to you, in terms of language or feel or interest. It's very much about trying to  
 49 create those spaces, which I did a lot at work, I'm a co-chair of a staff network, looking to  
 50 full, public sector body type of thing, with the two aims of trying to improve support and  
 51 trying to influence policy change so that when people experience it, and particularly when  
 52 they are at work, they don't have to worry about as that, in addition. Em, so that's the big  
 53 thing, for me. I think it's different, it's very different from losing my father because most  
 54 people will lose their parent in various ways. It doesn't make it better, but it's a very  
 55 different experience because you have shared memories, you have other people, they've  
 56 touched lives and they've influenced things, for better or worse, and you can reflect on that.  
 57 Whereas, when you're losing a baby, or a child, their future is snuffed, and, all of the things,  
 58 all of the hopes and dreams and thoughts you had for them, go with it. Then you are trying  
 59 to sort of hold on to that, and create that shape, so, that's why it's common whenever you  
 60 have baby loss that charities are named after the lost baby, or an animal relating to them, or  
 61 something like that. It's that sort of legacy. Trying to incorporate their lives, which is why  
 62 we have their pictures in plain view, it's why we talk to the children about them, em. And  
 63 it's hard, cos we are trying to get the right balance, again, because it's giving them enough  
 64 information to not terrify them but also being open about it. So what we have noticed with  
 65 my daughter is that she's internalised it in a way that's slightly unsettling. So, when we talk  
 66 about when the baby's due, she says things, she tends to add little qualifiers, sometimes, 'I  
 67 hope we get to keep this one.' (Pause). Or, em, she's very big on the numbers, so one of the  
 68 questions bereaved parents always struggle with is, 'How many children do you have?' And  
 69 your answer may depend on who it is, the time of day, how you are feeling at the time. You  
 70 might want to give all of the information, you might want to withhold part of it. Em, and she  
 71 does that as well, in terms of how many brothers and it sometimes disarms people, eh,  
 72 because they aren't expecting a child to come out with something like that, have that  
 73 awareness. So it's trying to incorporate them into their life, into our lives, so that they are  
 74 not forgotten. The biggest fear that you have is that they will be forgotten because we are  
 75 the only people who experienced it. Em, and even after all these years it still feels unreal,  
 76 like it happened to someone else, or, memory becomes fuzzy. So, I started writing about it  
 77 in 2015. [Wife's name] originally started sense checking my posts, and she was going, 'That's  
 78 not how it happened. What you've written here, sticks together three separate days, over a  
 79 course of weeks. It didn't happen in a day.' And that's not, so it's that sort of fear of 1. Not  
 80 remembering and 2. I'm the unreliable narrator that your memories aren't quite as they  
 81 should be or they are not reflective of what actually happened. (Pause).

I: And was writing particularly helpful to you in making sense of the loss?

83 P: I think that it served its purpose. It came at a very intense time. So, it all kicked off after  
 84 our youngest was born in 2015, so, four-year mark. And I know from research that the four-  
 85 year is quite a significant point; most people think it is the round numbers but four is, was  
 86 particularly hard. Em, and for a period of about two weeks I felt like I was going mad, I felt  
 87 that I just had to pour out everything in my head onto a page. It originally started as a, a  
 88 private blog and I shared it with a few, em, on the bereavement support boards, and then  
 89 went public. And it's got a modest readership and people still refer to it. And it was helpful,  
 90 sometimes because it helped get out some of the things, it helped structure some of those  
 91 thoughts. Em, and it was unhelpful sometimes because of the way, because of the ease that  
 92 it came, it helped reinforce the narrative about them. So, it's the whole idea of, I became so

reflect on  
deceased's  
life  
see  
as  
helpful

something  
difficult  
incorporating  
loss  
into  
life  
disarm

relationships  
to the deceased  
seen as  
important  
factor

incorporate  
loss &  
experience of  
it into  
family life

expressing  
himself  
through  
writing  
making  
sense of  
an overwhelming  
feeling

writing as  
both helpful  
& unhelpful

writing as unhelpful  
- it became what  
was remembered  
- had to be written down to be remembered

writing to express &  
provide structure to thoughts  
Hot narrative  
survived &  
dominated



remembering their lives rather than their deaths seen as very important

95 practiced at, about talking about their deaths, I wasn't talking about their lives. And  
 96 particularly for something like baby loss, when everything is very medical, stillbirth, <sup>language used</sup>  
 97 miscarriage, termination for medical reasons, foetal abnormality, all of that <sup>who talks</sup> language is <sup>about loss</sup>  
 98 rooted in medics, and it has that level of distance and abstraction. (Pause). And that is hard. <sup>is important</sup>  
 99 So, when I do talk about their lives, it's to let people know that, whilst they didn't get to be  
 100 born, they had lives. We saw them on ultrasound, they were little mini-commuters,  
 101 travelling with my wife up and down Clapham Junction, em, all of those sorts of things. We <sup>relationship</sup>  
 102 could see that they had lives, they just didn't get to live them with us. So, it stopped being, <sup>with</sup>  
 103 cos sometimes language like 'a' stillbirth, rather than it being 'a thing', it becomes the <sup>deceased</sup>  
 104 identity; they are not 'stillbirths', they were my sons, they are my sons. (Pause). So, it's that, <sup>relationship</sup>  
 105 it's a really long answer to your question! (Laughter). But it's the, the different strands for <sup>life</sup>  
 106 me are the memory-making, the sharing, trying to make sure people feel less alone, using <sup>memories</sup>  
 107 that information, using that experience to help shape things to make it better. So, helping <sup>in life &</sup>  
 108 people have conversations that are awkward until they're not awkward anymore. Educating <sup>sharing</sup>  
 109 people about the realities of grief and timing, and, cos there are still people who are rooted <sup>experiences,</sup>  
 110 in the five, the five stages of grief, em, you know, you should be done by, by six months, and <sup>actions</sup>  
 111 any time after that is, you know, is pathological. And it's that sort of stuff, it's always there, <sup>to help</sup>  
 112 and moreso with my dad. When my dad died, it was unexpected, but I knew that sometime <sup>other</sup>  
 113 my parents would die. I knew that. He was not a healthy man. He'd had heart attacks  
 114 before (pause) but that was going to happen. Now I can look back on his very old, <sup>influence of</sup>  
 115 chequered lives together and the way that he's influenced me and how I parent and how I <sup>deceased father</sup>  
 116 am parenting (pause) in a way that I can't with my sons. I can only imagine what they'd be <sup>in life of</sup>  
 117 like, I can only imagine what they'd be like, em, with their siblings, or if we would have <sup>participate</sup>  
 118 siblings. We had twins, [can't make out 12.06], would we then go on to have more? The <sup>how he</sup>  
 119 chances are, 'Yes', but there's always that sort of question. <sup>parent is a</sup>  
 120 Genuinely bonds - either memories or imagined <sup>ambivalence about his life</sup>  
 121 I: Yeah. And in, in that, kind of, process and in all of that process, was there anything <sup>if the loss had not</sup>  
 122 particularly helpful for you at that time? <sup>happened.</sup>

123  
 124 P: I think the main thing was being in, was fast-tracked into <sup>together</sup> counselling by the <sup>counselling as</sup>  
 125 hospital. That was incredibly helpful because it allowed us to work through very quickly, not <sup>important</sup>  
 126 work through, but to talk about things, and, and, and to see how differently, cos, clearly my <sup>expressing</sup>  
 127 experience of the loss is going to be very different from my wife, who had a very physical  
 128 experience of losing them. She carried them and she felt them and she felt them not move, <sup>father's</sup>  
 129 and all of those things, where all I can only have was a visual representation of that or a <sup>loss of sons,</sup>  
 130 vicarious existence. The bond was there but it's not there. Her birth story is her birth story <sup>felt</sup>  
 131 and it's a very physical experience, em, but for me, I'm only sort of looking on. So, there is <sup>vicarious</sup>  
 132 sort of that very different way. And I think one of the things that counselling helped us to  
 133 identify was that a lot of how we deal with things like grief or trauma or anything like that is  
 134 heavily rooted in our experiences of the past and counselling brought that out very strongly, <sup>upbringing</sup>  
 135 to the point of boredom, about the chequered relationship I'd had with my parents and all <sup>& parents</sup>  
 136 of those sorts of things, because it was influencing how I was approaching that. And to a <sup>affecting</sup>  
 137 certain extent it was frustrating that even after all those years, it was still having an impact <sup>experience</sup>  
 138 on how I was experiencing something now. (Cough). Sorry. So, counselling was a big part of <sup>of loss</sup>  
 139 that, em, just having that sort of dedicated one-to-one support, having a sounding board,  
 140 you know, being able to take that ball of wool and separate the right coloured threads to  
 141 work out which one is, needs to be dealt with first. Em, (pause) but that didn't always come

talking  
relief  
-ve  
anxiety  
feeling  
'role'  
of  
dad

Making sense through  
talking about loss  
& talking about past.

Counselling as important  
to help make sense of  
difficulties



**APPENDIX K**

**INITIAL CODES FROM GRAEME'S INTERVIEW**

Emerging code	Key phrase	Line reference
<p>Gratitude for relationships and having his life</p> <p>Seeing/ understanding what she has lost by dying</p> <p>Difficulty of witnessing what she is missing out on</p>	<p>And it's just so, so, so sad, what she's lost. Cos sometimes, I can, I'm a human being, sometimes I can wallow in a little bit of self-pity and wallow in a little bit of self-pity and think about what I've lost, but then I think, what puts me right is thinking what [wife's name] has lost. I still have access to my grandchildren, I've still got access to love, my son, I've still got access to nice things, I mean she was only 64 for god's sake.</p> <p>I go down to Leeds, my son lives in Leeds, and they come up here and I take presents for the kids and em, but, it's just (pause) it's just so difficult, it, it's, it's massive. It's like, you know, and if I go down to Leeds before the pandemic and my daughter-in-law, [her name], her mother's there, and the kids are calling her 'nana', it cuts me like a knife because [wife's name] is not there to be talked to and, (pause) and em, the things she's not going to be able to share in, you know, like, we went to, went to [son's name]'s, little [grandson's name], that's my grandson, we went to his nativity in Leeds and [wife's name] wasn't there, and the nativity's always upsetting anyway when you see little kids singing and that (laughs), you're always going to be tearful, and [wife's name] wasn't there, you know, and eh, it, it, it's so, it's so sad.</p> <p>I haven't got a bad life really, so sometimes when I get down on myself and say that, that's what puts me right out of that, I tell myself off and give myself a kick up the backside and say, 'Look, whatever you've lost, well, [wife's name]'s lost a lot more.' So, that's what puts me right, really, that state of mind, thinking in a more positive light, really. But it is very, very difficult.</p> <p>I keep on trying, I keep on pulling myself up by my boot straps and saying, it's not all about</p>	<p>Lines 176-181</p> <p>Lines 246-255</p> <p>Lines 285-289</p> <p>Lines 634-641</p>

	<p>me, see, it's about, em, our [grandchildren's names] love me and they love coming to see grandad and love whenever I go down there, cos I'm good fun, I'm good with kids. Em, I can act daft, you know, okay, em, and I take [granddaughter's name] to the park, when [grandson's name] is at school, I take [granddaughter's name] to the park and we have a right carry on and get an ice cream (<i>can't make out 52:28 – 58:29</i>) em, so it's not all about me, it's about them, cos, cos it was a very difficult thing</p> <p>I know you said in your research about the meaning to it, and the only meaning I can derive from it really is the fact that, try and live as good a life as I can, and live the life and be a person [wife's name] would continue to want to be (breaks down crying). I can't let it colour me. I can't, I can't. (Pause). I have my bad days, but I won't let it turn me into a person I don't want to be. I won't ever be bitter. I won't end up, it is bitter, losing my wife like I have, but, it's a bitter pill to swallow, but I want to maintain the fact that I'm a nice person, I was loved, I'm lucky for that, really, I'm lucky for that, eh, I'm a good dad, I'm a good grandad, eh, I'm a good brother</p> <p>So, even though I haven't got her, I just try to live the life and be the person she'd want me to be. She wouldn't want me to, like I say, be bitter, and nasty and, em, and, like sort of, so resentful about what's happened to me, eh, that I can't, you know, that people don't want to be around me, eh, em. I think, you know, all in all, I think I've handled it pretty well considering the, the, the demand, the, the, the immensity of loss I've experienced. I know that's the same for a lot of people, not just me, but I think, you know, I've handled it pretty well, really (sniffs). I get on with my life, I do things, I'm not sitting, I don't need, I don't need, I'm quite independent, I don't ask for a lot, em, I don't get offered a lot either, but there you are, eh, (pause).</p>	<p>Lines 908-915</p> <p>928-936</p>
--	--	-------------------------------------

	<p>I resent, sort of his mother-in-law having this time with the kids and doing all them things with them, you know, being able to put plats in [granddaughter's name] hair, cos [wife's name] would've loved to have done that, but [other granny's name], she gets the chance for that. I sort of resent her a little bit really (laughs) although she's their nana, she's entitled to have time with them, she loves them, and that's fine, absolutely fair, but there's this sort of (pause) deep sort of, feeling inside, that you sort of like, it's an immediate reaction, and you do resent it and you get a pang cos you've seen her enjoy certain moments, and the kids and, and you obviously your mind is cast back to [wife's name] not being there to share in it.</p> <p>I think you've got to be a strong person to show a bit of weakness sometimes and sensitivity and as far as I'm concerned, the world needs more sensitive people. (Pause). And, I've always been sensitive because, (coughs) because of my upbringing, I think, and a pretty traumatic family life. And like I said, when I was at school you used to get these scruffy, smelly kids who'd come to my office and they'd be sat there because they'd told the teacher to 'fuck off', pardon my French, and I'd sit there and I'd say, 'That kid's me. That was me 40, 50 years ago.' (Crying). And, and, cos, (pause) cos (crying) I understood them, cos some kids come into school and some middle-class teacher stood in front of the classroom banging on about the Tudors and you've got a hungry belly, and no shoes, and you smell. And your mum and dad are arguing, (pause) (crying), so it's em, that's why I was good at my job sometimes. (Pause). Eh, and that's why [wife's name] was good at hers. Cos we worked in deprived areas. (Pause) em, (pause) and em, (sighs), I'll just go on and keep doing what I'm doing, really, and hopefully life will improve. Eh, like I say, I am grateful for what I've got and what I've had, I'll never forget that. Better I knew her for 38 years, 40 years, than not knowing her at all</p>	<p>Lines 1203-1211</p> <p>1390-1404</p>
--	--	---

	<p>I never expected to you know, be a widow at that, at this age, it's em, and like I say, (coughs) really, really importantly for me is the fact that, you know, what keeps me on the straight and narrow and gets me back on track is thinking about, you know, I get sad about what I've lost, but I think about what [wife's name] has lost. I think, and it stops me going, cos I think, 'Jesus, look what you've got!' And that to me is a good thought to have sometimes.</p> <p>she lost out on a hell of a lot, really, but like I say, she lost out on [grandchildren's names], seeing our [son's name], I mean [son's name], [son's name] just got promoted ten weeks ago, director at Deloitte,</p> <p>I: Congratulations.</p> <p>P: and she would have loved to have seen that.</p> <p>And I think, well I say, 'I think,' but I think having a nice house and having a nice, when you've been brought up in really deprived, em, circumstances, not clean clothes and clean sheets and stuff like, and clean underwear, and socks, as a kid, and your mum and dad are fighting and the police are called, and all this type of horrible stuff, like sat on the stairs as a six-year-old, eh, and the police, and your mum and dad fighting in the passage and (sound of P hitting his hand) and you dad punching your mum and stuff like that, you know, when you're six, and your stomach is knotted up, em, when you get married to someone you love, and you can build a life for yourself, it, it, it, it's so, this might sound silly, but stuff like clean sheets, clean towels, soap, em, toothpaste, just stuff, they're like luxuries, you know, and I never ever take stuff like that for granted because I had so little when I was little and [wife's name] was the same (sniffs)</p>	<p>1439-1444</p> <p>1455-1462</p> <p>1481-1491</p>
<p>Isolation, loneliness following loss</p>	<p>I found it really difficult, obviously this last year for us all, with the pandemic, I found that relationships have withered on the vine, even</p>	<p>Lines 231-233</p>

	<p>close ones I didn't expect, [wife's name] two sisters.</p> <p>He lost his partner, and he said, em, he said something about 'make the most of people being kind to you in these few weeks, because they will never be as kind to you again,' you know, and its true. I've found that to my cost, really. I don't have a lot of friends, not that I'd call true friends, I've got a few acquaintances, but I've found myself so isolated and so alone, especially with the pandemic for god's sake, you know, I didn't expect that. Em, I've found it very, very challenging</p> <p>we've stayed friends, and he used to say to me, 'Would you go on holiday again to Italy?' And, eh, it's so hard to do stuff on your own. I don't, I wouldn't, eh, we used to love Sorrento, we used to love the lakes, but I couldn't, maybe I might do in the future, I wouldn't rule it out, but I couldn't imagine myself walking around Sorrento on my own, or walking round Lake Garda or Baveno or Lake Maggiore on my own. It would evoke so many memories, and why she isn't here, you know?</p> <p>I am lonely and I do feel isolated; my son does his best, he FaceTimes me every night, the kids, they come on the phone, em, he's coming up this Saturday, eh, that's lovely, em, but, other people, they've sort of like withered on the vine a bit, em, and you know, people have got their own lives, I'm not daft, and you know, people have got their own families, their own problems, their own issues, their own ambitions, you know, but, things have sort of, lessened a lot, and sometimes I do get down about being on my own so much and it's hard, it's hard to deal with mentally because obviously when you live with someone for 40 years, you know, and then you're on your own all the time</p> <p>It's so hard when you're on your own, em, em, I feel like I'm self-pitying a bit, but I'm just being honest, really, em. It's just so hard being</p>	<p>Lines 238-243</p> <p>Lines 292-297</p> <p>Lines 304-312</p> <p>Lines 321-323</p>
--	--	---

	<p>on your own, and, eh, you know, and going forward, I just sort of like, I don't think too far ahead really.</p> <p>I haven't got no, I haven't, apart from [son's name], and I am conscious I don't want to burden him sometimes, you know, in talking to him in sort of really, I do talk to him in very meaningful ways, in very honest and open ways, and he says to me, 'I want you to, [son's name], I want you to, dad,' sorry, and I do do that, but, you need, when I was stressed at work or something was bothering me in my life, or some relationship or some problem, [wife's name] would sit down and she would sort it out; she would offer a solution to a problem and you could talk to her about things and same with her; she would come home from work sometimes, and say, 'Oh that bloody headteacher has asked to do this,' and I'd listen to her and we'd talk and it's so nice to talk things out. When you're on your own, you can get a bit (pause), I can find myself getting agitated sometimes and wandering round the house and not being able to settle, em, eh, it doesn't last long, and like I say, I accept it,</p> <p>I've got no-one; my son lives in Leeds, eh, I haven't got that support network.</p> <p>I'm lonely and I'm a bit sad at times, course I am, and upset, the life I would have had, going forward, the plans we had, you know, with the grandkids, and holidays, and em, it's just been taken away from me.</p> <p>It's like, em, he, he was going to go to Tenerife when the restrictions were lifted and have a nice fortnight there and all that, and I think, 'Well, I won't be going anywhere cos I've got no-one to go with.'</p> <p>I don't derive so much pleasure out of life. Em, someone else said that it's nice to have someone to do nothing with, not, you know, you've probably heard that, it's a bit of a cliché, but I've heard it and I've heard about it</p>	<p>Lines 328-338</p> <p>Line 474</p> <p>Lines 483-486</p> <p>Lines 549-551</p> <p>Lines 618-621</p>
--	---	---

	<p>a few times, and it's just nice to sit there and have, em, something, someone to do nothing with</p> <p>I think everyone in North Yorkshire's got a piece of her because the bunting was all over the kitchen. It was beautiful Christmas bunting, she would put it on the picture rail there, and my sister's got it, and my sister-in-law's got some, and my son's got some, and everyone's got some, and she would be in the kitchen, with the radio on, with the sewing machine and what have you (sniffs), and em, I'd make her a cup of coffee and give her a biscuit and what have you, and I was just pottering around, em and we would often go down to the library in Stoke, when we were on our summer holidays from school, the first thing we would do is get a load of books from the library, summer reading, you know, and plan a holiday, has my life changed? Yeah, it's changed immeasurably, really. I'm often sad, I'm often a bit tearful, I think sometimes I'm a little bit depressed.</p> <p>but my life, I mean, (sighs) (pause) eh, I don't know, really, eh (sighs), it's hard, it's hard to sort of (pause) (sighs) like I said, I had a really, really lovely life with [wife's name], a really lovely married life, really close, really affectionate, em, (pause), she was the love of my life and, you know, I was so lucky to meet her. And she said (breaks down crying) she was lucky really, but I used to doubt that sometimes but I can get a bit naggy sometimes, but em, there you are. But, (pause) I've just got to get on with it, and like I say, (pause) it's not the life I'd chose for myself, I, I'd love [wife's name] to be here, course I would, but I haven't got her here and I've got to face that reality and try and make some sort of life for me, myself, em (pause), going forward</p> <p>I've been one of these NHS responders, you know the phone goes off and you can help someone; I've helped three or four people. I've</p>	<p>Lines 625-634</p> <p>Lines 661-669</p> <p>Lines 673-678</p>
--	--	--

	<p>talked to an old lady, I've phoned an old lady who, who, wan- needed a dentist appointment. She said, 'Oh, thank you, love!' She said, 'You don't need to, my daughter's going to take me,' but I got talking to her for 25 minutes, but it was nice, and I, I do get something from it cos I'm quite lonely and talking to her was nice for me as well.</p> <p>But em, I've got no plans for holidays.</p> <p>other than that I've got no real plans. I just take each day as it comes, really. Em, I think if you start planning too much, and that, and you haven't got, you've got like a, I mean, I look at my phone sometimes and my diary has nothing on, it says 'You have nothing planned,' I think, 'You sad sap.' Where before, there was always something planned, but now, it's nothing planned, nothing planned, nothing planned. So, I've got to start putting some sort of plan together somehow, em, but, I'm just taking each day as it comes, really.</p> <p>when you're a team, you work it out together, don't you? But when you're on your own, you think, 'I don't want to make a mistake,' cos you've got no, you've got no voice there telling you, 'No we're not,' or 'We'll go for it,' you know.</p> <p>I think I've handled it pretty well considering the, the, the demand, the, the, the immensity of loss I've experienced. I know that's the same for a lot of people, not just me, but I think, you know, I've handled it pretty well, really (sniffs). I get on with my life, I do things, I'm not sitting, I don't need, I don't need, I'm quite independent, I don't ask for a lot, em, I don't get offered a lot either, but there you are, eh, (pause).</p> <p>I don't think anything's been too much of a hindrance on me cos (sighs) I haven't, I don't think I've got that big a life really, I haven't got a massive circle of friends, eh, eh, I've got a few acquaintances, I don't get many messages,</p>	<p>Lines 708</p> <p>Lines 711-717</p> <p>Lines 747-749</p> <p>Lines 931-936</p> <p>Lines 1248-1253</p>
--	--	--



	<p>texts, phone calls, em, so I've got no-one in my life really to hinder, our [son's name] could hinder me if he, if he had a mind to, or, but he wouldn't, he wouldn't, because he loves me</p> <p>I sometimes feel as though I don't want to burden him, cos he's got enough pressure in his life, with the whole family, he's been working from home for like 12 months, in a little kid's bedroom, he's six foot four, knees up to his chin and he's, he's got three laptops, big screens and that, so he's got quite a pressurised job and pressure in his life, so sometimes I feel like, I carry the burden myself and don't share it with anybody, and sometimes when you don't share things with people, it can get on top of you. And sometimes I feel like things get on top of me.</p> <p>It's funny, you know, it's amazing when one person dies, she was like the hub of the family, what the wheel went round and it just changes everything, and I find it incredible really, you know. Em, the world seems a bit alien sometimes to me, you know, and a bit threatening, and a bit, em, cos I'm on my own a lot of the time</p> <p>I had these blooming dressings and the doctor said, 'Don't change the dressings and keep them, keep them dry.' So, I thought, 'It's going to be great getting showered and washed, cos I've got one here and one on my back and one on my arm!' Anyway, I went, after a few days, I went in the garden, I started working, and I came in and my back was (pause), em, pouring with blood and I'd burst one of the stitches or whatever it was. And it was right on my back and I was on my own and I didn't have anyone to sort of help me, cos if I'd come in, [wife's name] would have said, 'I'll wash it, I'll put a plaster on it.' Cos it was right, I couldn't reach it, I couldn't even see it, it was right in the middle of my back. Anyway, I went in the bathroom and I got this nice white towel and I put it on my back and I had all blood all over my towel, so, you know what I had to do in the</p>	<p>1283-1290</p> <p>1290-1293</p> <p>1307-1324</p>
--	--	--

	<p>end? The sun comes through to my bathroom, so, I had to stand there, with my back to the sun to dry the blood. And I sort of felt really sorry for myself because I was on my own, I didn't have anybody to call on, and I started crying for a bit, I was crying for ages, there was no-one there to help me. And I am an independent person, it was just the, it was just the logistics of trying to get to the wound cos it was right in the middle of my back so I couldn't reach it. If it had been there, it wouldn't have been a problem. Whereas, I couldn't stop it bleeding. And I stained my bedsheets, so that sickened me a bit, but, so, it's just like a support network really.</p> <p>I started going to the pictures on my own, me and [wife's name] liked the pictures and I quite enjoyed it; it felt a bit weird and sad really, going to the pictures on my own, I felt a bit sad really, Billy no-mates (laughs). But I wouldn't let it stop me, cos it was a particular film I wanted to see. So, I went, and I got talking to a, actually, I got talking to a bloke at the pictures actually, em, and I think these are all like, little baby steps you take and like, little hurdles you step over to develop as a person on your own and to develop as a person to formulate some sort of life for yourself without someone who was there before. Cos you've got to, you've got to, sort of, take pride in that, really.</p> <p>Some of these guys, they do my head in. You know, grow up for god's sake, put your big boy's pants on; it is hard, you know, it, but, some of the things they come out with you think, 'Come on.' It is hard going shopping on your own, you know, cos me and [wife's name] always used to go shopping together. We used to see colleagues from school and we were always together, no matter what we were doing, we were always together, shopping, or whatever it was, down the town, shopping for clothes, we were always together, but some, some people, eh, and I'm talking about men in</p>	<p>1331-1338</p> <p>1372-1379</p>
--	--	-----------------------------------

	particular; women seem much more resourceful.	
Meaninglessness Despair	<p>And it's like a bomb going off in your life cos we had so, I know, when you're married or you're in a relationship you're going to lose each other one time, but not, not yet for god's sake.</p> <p>it's like a bomb going off in your life and you're wandering around looking for some pieces to put it back together, I didn't expect it; we had so many plans. And I didn't, I didn't make a plan b, if you like.</p> <p>I wanted a, cos, cos, my dad when my mum died, he turned into a right miserable bugger, pardon my French, em, he got to be a bit of a grump, em, when I, eh, I, I, I, even though I do sometimes, I've got to be honest with you, I won't give in to despair, even though I do despair sometimes.</p> <p>When you're on your own, you can get a bit (pause), I can find myself getting agitated sometimes and wandering round the house and not being able to settle, em, eh, it doesn't last long, and like I say, I accept it, I accept it as part of my grief, really. You know, and part of the reality of it, of my loss and things, em, but, it's hard to come to terms with.</p> <p>it's not enough. Here's me thinking it could be enough but how could it ever be enough? She's left such a massive hole in my life. Em, unfillable. In everyone's life, really. (Pause). (Crying). Em, sorry.</p> <p>my life going forward, I don't think I've got a plan, really. Em, (pause), I mean, things happen to you in life, don't they</p> <p>I don't want people to all be miserable, like I am sometimes, I want people to have nice lives and achieve stuff and the kids do well, you know, and have nice things, but, it's quite hard</p>	<p>Lines 208-210</p> <p>Lines 255-257</p> <p>Lines 264-267</p> <p>Lines 336-340</p> <p>Lines 493-495</p> <p>Lines 523-524</p> <p>Lines 555-557</p>

	<p>to sort of (pause), hear it and listen to it, when you haven't got that, you know.</p> <p>As far as meaning goes, and loss, I, I'm not sure there is a meaning, it just seems like (pause) good, bad things happen to good people, you know, and it's just cancer and the indifference of nature, really, you know. Good things happen to bad people. And she was very unfortunate. (Pause).</p> <p>I don't derive so much pleasure out of life. Em, someone else said that it's nice to have someone to do nothing with, not, you know, you've probably heard that, it's a bit of a cliché, but I've heard it and I've heard about it a few times, and it's just nice to sit there and have, em, something, someone to do nothing with</p> <p>has my life changed? Yeah, it's changed immeasurably, really. I'm often sad, I'm often a bit tearful, I think sometimes I'm a little bit depressed.</p> <p>Where before, there was always something planned, but now, it's nothing planned, nothing planned, nothing planned. So, I've got to start putting some sort of plan together somehow, em, but, I'm just taking each day as it comes, really. Em, and some days are good and some days are indifferent and some days are bad. I still suffer badly from being tearful and feeling unsettled and missing her and hurting and (pause) but you know, it's, someone said on twitter I think it was, 'I've cried thousands of tears for my wife and do you know what, she's worth every single one.' I thought that was quite lovely, really.</p> <p>Like I say, I don't think, I'm not sure you can 'make sense' of a cancer diagnosis or death</p> <p>I know some people get away with it, you know, fair enough, but some people don't, a lot of people don't. Now [wife's name], you know, she liked a drink, she liked a, a, a fish</p>	<p>Lines 611-614</p> <p>Lines 618-621</p> <p>Lines 633-634</p> <p>Lines 715-721</p> <p>Line 857</p> <p>Lines 861-868</p>
--	--	--

	<p>and chips and pizza and a blow out now and then, but generally speaking she, she, she was, she was slim, she looked after herself, her weight fluctuated a bit, you know, like most people, em, she liked a blow out and that, but she did take care of herself and that, em, so, I don't, I don't think you can make any sort of sense of the fact that, I've probably said it wrong, it's just nature's blind indifference, it like, bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people.</p> <p>I don't think you can make sense of it really. I certainly can't make sense of her, the only sort of, I know you said in your research about the meaning to it, and the only meaning I can derive from it really is the fact that, try and live as good a life as I can, and live the life and be a person [wife's name] would continue to want to be (breaks down crying). I can't let it colour me. I can't, I can't. (Pause). I have my bad days, but I won't let it turn me into a person I don't want to be. I won't ever be bitter. I won't end up, it is bitter, losing my wife like I have, but, it's a bitter pill to swallow, but I want to maintain the fact that I'm a nice person, I was loved, I'm lucky for that, really, I'm lucky for that</p> <p>I don't think I'm living life to the full, but I'm living life as best I can, I think. And, (pause), like I say, I won't give into despair, although I do feel despair sometimes, a bit, finding it difficult, you know, I think, I try to keep busy and move around a lot cos it's hard to sit with it sometimes, I think. It settles on you, sometimes. (Pause). (Crying).</p>	<p>Lines 906-914</p> <p>Lines 924-928</p>
<p>Making an effort to sustain important relationships</p> <p>Relationships with others are important</p>	<p>I suppose, I've got certain standards, haven't I, that I adhere to, (crying), but I didn't want to, em, I didn't want my grandkids coming, and seeing grandad's house is not festive, you know, that type of thing. Cos I love them. So, it's all making a big effort sometimes, and it is an effort</p>	<p>Lines 267-270</p> <p>Lines 328-331</p>

<p>Importance of supportive relationships</p> <p>Old/new relationships /connections helpful</p>	<p>I haven't, apart from [son's name], and I am conscious I don't want to burden him sometimes, you know, in talking to him in sort of really, I do talk to him in very meaningful ways, in very honest and open ways, and he says to me, 'I want you to, [son's name], I want you to, dad,' sorry, and I do do that</p>	<p>Lines 364-374</p>
<p>Improved relationships after loss</p>	<p>this Loss Foundation, they contacted me and put me in touch with some blokes who'd lost their wives like me, cancer, em, and I've got quite pally with one called [friend's name], [friend's name], what's his second name? I can't remember his second name, oh, I'm senile, sorry (I: laughs). He lives in Salisbury and em, he's a lovely bloke and he actually came, and he lost his wife in March, just as the pandemic started, so it was, and we had been emailing each other for a year, and he actually came up to visit me last September, em, he slept in a hotel in Northallerton, well, a Bed and Breakfast place. We met each other, and we couldn't do much because of the pandemic, for god's sake, but I took him round a few places, a few villages and what have you, and we did get for a pint and a good chinwag and that, but we've been exchanging, eh, emails, and I've found it very helpful.</p>	<p>Lines 383-385</p>
	<p>I've been emailing him for about a year and I'm planning to go down and see him, in maybe September, (<i>can't make out 31:30</i>) Salisbury and see him, cos, eh, he lost his wife in difficult circumstances, he's got three daughters</p>	<p>Lines 507-510</p>
	<p>I think a lot of people, you know, when [widowed friend's name] came up here, I pick him up at Northallerton, em, we went to a little country pub out at Welbury, and I said, 'I'll buy you a pint.' We sat, and the first thing that he did when I met him, he got in the car, and the first thing he did was cry, for god's sake.</p>	
	<p>I keep on trying, I keep on pulling myself up by my boot straps and saying, it's not all about me, see, it's about, em, our [grandchildren's</p>	<p>Lines 634-641</p>

	<p>names] love me and they love coming to see grandad and love whenever I go down there, cos I'm good fun, I'm good with kids. Em, I can act daft, you know, okay, em, and I take [granddaughter's name] to the park, when [grandson's name] is at school, I take [granddaughter's name] to the park and we have a right carry on and get an ice cream (<i>can't make out 52:28 – 58:29</i>) em, so it's not all about me, it's about them, cos, cos it was a very difficult thing</p> <p>I'm going to go down to Salisbury to meet [widower friend's name] in September probably, when the kids go back to school, when there's less demand, because it's very busy in this country at the moment, of bed and breakfast, and so, yeah, in September, when the kids get back to school, maybe, em, other than that I've got no real plans.</p> <p>He does talk to me, we are very open with each other, em, (pause) eh, I think it's, I wouldn't say it's improved our relationship, it's like, sort of, I love him, I love him, like, unconditionally, he's my son, but, em, (pause) I think (sighs) I'm trying to think now. I think he, I sometimes think he maybe wasn't really as much in touch with his feelings as I thought he might be, you know, but maybe this has sort of taught him in the harshest sort of way, the harshest sort of way to sort of be in touch with his feelings, and he does talk to me quite a lot and we talk about very deep things and what have you, we have shared that sort of last week of [wife's name]'s life, and I think it shook him to his roots. It shook me to my roots (laughs) to tell you the truth. . My dad dying, that wasn't as bad as what [wife's name] had to put up with. Em, em, so, (pause), I think it's improved our relationship; I think we are a bit more open and that with each other, more honest about how we are feeling</p> <p>I won't end up, it is bitter, losing my wife like I have, but, it's a bitter pill to swallow, but I want to maintain the fact that I'm a nice</p>	<p>Lines 708-712</p> <p>Lines 788-798</p> <p>Lines 912-915</p>
--	--	--

	<p>person, I was loved, I'm lucky for that, really, I'm lucky for that, eh, I'm a good dad, I'm a good grandad, eh, I'm a good brother</p> <p>one thing you do need when you lose someone is a bit of a support network and the only support, really, I've got is our [son's name]. And he loves me and he FaceTimes me every night religiously, and he'll phone me and sometimes when I can't stomach the FaceTime cos I'm feeling upset, and that doesn't happen very often, but it does happen, and I do tell him that, he'll phone me when he's got the kids to bed and we'll have a good chat and what have you</p> <p>I had these blooming dressings and the doctor said, 'Don't change the dressings and keep them, keep them dry.' So, I thought, 'It's going to be great getting showered and washed, cos I've got one here and one on my back and one on my arm!' Anyway, I went, after a few days, I went in the garden, I started working, and I came in and my back was (pause), em, pouring with blood and I'd burst one of the stitches or whatever it was. And it was right on my back and I was on my own and I didn't have anyone to sort of help me, cos if I'd come in, [wife's name] would have said, 'I'll wash it, I'll put a plaster on it.' Cos it was right, I couldn't reach it, I couldn't even see it, it was right in the middle of my back. Anyway, I went in the bathroom and I got this nice white towel and I put it on my back and I had all blood all over my towel, so, you know what I had to do in the end? The sun comes through to my bathroom, so, I had to stand there, with my back to the sun to dry the blood. And I sort of felt really sorry for myself because I was on my own, I didn't have anybody to call on, and I started crying for a bit, I was crying for ages, there was no-one there to help me. And I am an independent person, it was just the, it was just the logistics of trying to get to the wound cos it was right in the middle of my back so I couldn't reach it. If it had been there, it wouldn't have been a problem. Whereas, I couldn't stop it</p>	<p>1298-1303</p> <p>1307-1324</p>
--	--	-----------------------------------



	<p>bleeding. And I stained my bedsheets, so that sickened me a bit, but, so, it's just like a support network really.</p> <p>[son's name] offers, of course he does, em, but sometimes I say, 'Don't come up from Leeds. I can get dropped off and picked up, it's absolutely fine.' If it had been something serious, really, really serious, I would have asked him to come, of course I would, em, cos I had biopsies and everything was ok, but, they took biopsies and took them away for analysis. Em (pause), it's just a support network really</p>	1325-1329
<p>What he is able to do each day is important to him</p> <p>Fortunate environment is important</p>	<p>I do consider myself very fortunate cos I've got a nice house, I live in a nice area, I'm not a millionaire by any, any, any, em, metric, but, I, I, you know, I can afford to eat decent food and I can afford to put some petrol in the car and go and see my grandkids and them come here, em, I, I'm a very keen cyclist, I go out on my bike a lot, I go out on my bike two or three times a week, em, so, I haven't got a bad life really, so sometimes when I get down on myself and say that, that's what puts me right out of that</p> <p>I just try and make the most of, you know, what I have, but, like I say, I do, I do consider myself fortunate, cos, like I say, my family, em, come from a pretty deprived background</p> <p>It's very difficult, you know, I mean, like I say, I've still got quite a nice life, although I'm lonely and I'm a bit sad at times, course I am, and upset, the life I would have had, going forward, the plans we had, you know, with the grandkids, and holidays, and em, it's just been taken away from me. And I know there's a lot of people in the world who have terrible lives, eh, and I sympathise with that, you know, it's just, it's just horrendous, really. And do you know, she used to say to me, em, (sighs), she used to say, em, 'How, how will you cope without me?' I said, 'Well, [wife's name], I'll be alright, em, I've got my bike, and I like to read a lot, em, I've got my grandkids, I've got my</p>	<p>Lines 280-286</p> <p>Lines 324-325</p> <p>Lines 483-493</p>

	<p>garden to potter around in, although it's a pain in the neck sometimes. I'm like Monty Don, I seem to just create rubbish. Monty Don (<i>can't make out 40;40 – 40:41</i>). I've got my garden, eh, you know, I, I like watching certain things on television, and it's not enough.</p> <p>And I think, well I say, 'I think,' but I think having a nice house and having a nice, when you've been brought up in really deprived, em, circumstances, not clean clothes and clean sheets and stuff like, and clean underwear, and socks, as a kid, and your mum and dad are fighting and the police are called, and all this type of horrible stuff, like sat on the stairs as a six-year-old, eh, and the police, and your mum and dad fighting in the passage and (sound of P hitting his hand) and you dad punching your mum and stuff like that, you know, when you're six, and your stomach is knotted up, em, when you get married to someone you love, and you can build a life for yourself, it, it, it, it's so, this might sound silly, but stuff like clean sheets, clean towels, soap, em, toothpaste, just stuff, they're like luxuries, you know, and I never ever take stuff like that for granted because I had so little when I was little and [wife's name] was the same (sniffs)</p>	1481-1491
Acceptance	I can find myself getting agitated sometimes and wandering round the house and not being able to settle, em, eh, it doesn't last long, and like I say, I accept it, I accept it as part of my grief, really. You know, and part of the reality of it, of my loss and things, em, but, it's hard to come to terms with. And I will come to terms with it, I know I will	Lines 337-341
Talking about loss	<p>I got in touch with the Loss Foundation, em, and they put me in touch with a guy, em, cos, when, when I first lost [wife's name] about three, four, five, six, weeks, I was floundering a bit, and I thought, 'Oh, I need to talk to someone', I was feeling unsettled a bit, and I went to see a counsellor, at the local hospice.</p> <p>he actually came up to visit me last September, em, he slept in a hotel in Northallerton, well, a</p>	<p>Lines 341-344</p> <p>Lines 370-374</p>

	<p>Bed and Breakfast place. We met each other, and we couldn't do much because of the pandemic, for god's sake, but I took him round a few places, a few villages and what have you, and we did get for a pint and a good chinwag and that, but we've been exchanging, eh, emails, and I've found it very helpful.</p> <p>Someone said that one of the nicest gifts that you can give to someone who's bereaved is talking about the person they've lost</p> <p>I think you have to try and accentuate the positive, like, yes talk about your loss and your grief and how much it hurts and how much you miss them and how difficult it was being there, caring for someone who's dying of cancer, and all this type of thing, but there has to be a ying and yang, you have to talk about some other aspect of your life.</p> <p>I'm always conscious, you know, when we talk about grief, of losing [wife's name] in the early days, I used to say to him, 'How are you feeling, [son's name]?' 'How are you? Do, do, do you cry?' 'Do you let it out? Do you talk to [daughter-in-law's name] about it?' You know. Em, 'Cos you need that. You need that outlet.' And that's why I went to the counsellor cos I needed that outlet to talk to someone, just to, just to cry to someone, really.</p> <p>what I did like about the relationship with [wife's sister's names] was we did used to talk about [wife's name] a lot when they came. And this was in the early days, you know. I'm not sure it would ever be the same now if they came tomorrow. We would talk about her, but we would talk about [wife's name] a lot and that was a big comfort for me.</p> <p>I did some sort of, during lockdown I used to go for a walk, a two mile walk, I'd go out in the snow and that and I hadn't seen anyone for weeks. I was talking to [son's name] on the phone, but it's not the same as a physical sort of visit. I used to get talking to people, I used to</p>	<p>Lines 655-657</p> <p>Lines 761-765</p> <p>Lines 767-772</p> <p>Lines 961-964</p> <p>1508-1515</p>
--	---	--

	<p>stop and say, 'How're you doing?' and that, and start chatting and I'd start gabbling on, and, and I'd leave them, and 'See you!' 'See you again!' And I'd come back and I used to think that bloke or that woman will think that I'm a bit needy cos I don't see anyone and then I'm sort of like, I got this great need to talk. You know, cos I wasn't talking to anybody, so (sniffs), but I think most people are in the same boat actually.</p>	
<p>Talking about loss to someone who understands and who has experience is helpful</p> <p>Sharing experiences is helpful</p>	<p>I went to see one counsellor there, em, and she was a young lass, she was 20, 19, and she was a lovely young lass, very sympathetic, very open and that, but, I thought, 'You haven't got the life experience to listen to me, really.' Em, and maybe I'm a bit judgemental, I don't know, but I was very polite about it, very nice and that, so anyway, I phoned them up and I said, 'I don't, I don't want to come anymore.'</p> <p>talking to a 66 year old man, for god's sake, I thought a 19 year-old girl wouldn't understand that, maybe, I don't know</p> <p>I put my name down for counselling down there and I went there for a considerable time, and this was, like, at the point, I suppose, I feel like I'm making judgements here, but it was an older lady with a lot of life experience and things, you know, talking to a 66 year old man, for god's sake, I thought a 19 year-old girl wouldn't understand that, maybe, I don't know, em, and I went there for quite a few months and I found it very helpful actually, even though, (<i>can't make out 29:27 – 29:28</i>) but when I went in, I couldn't stop talking, and a lot of the time, I couldn't stop crying, em, but, I found that helpful</p> <p>And he sat there and cried as well, you know. And a lot of sort of, what he did was cry. He, he, his wife had been dead six months when he met me, and he took a lot from me, really, and I think sometimes it, it gives you a good feeling, how helpful you can be to others in a loss</p>	<p>Lines 345-350</p> <p>Lines 354-355</p> <p>Lines 351-358</p> <p>Lines 519-523</p>

	<p>situation. And, and of course, he's been helpful to me, told me his story, you know.</p> <p>I'm always conscious, you know, when we talk about grief, of losing [wife's name] in the early days, I used to say to him, 'How are you feeling, [son's name]?' 'How are you? Do, do, do you cry?' 'Do you let it out? Do you talk to [daughter-in-law's name] about it?' You know. Em, 'Cos you need that. You need that outlet.' And that's why I went to the counsellor cos I needed that outlet to talk to someone, just to, just to cry to someone, really.</p> <p>So, he's got a good wife; they love each other. She lost her dad about eight years ago, a brain tumour, so (sniffs). She, she's sort of been there, eh, so, she's been a bit sort of, obviously, she's got that experience about how she felt and is someone to talk to. And I do say to him, 'You do talk to [daughter-in-law's name], don't you?'</p> <p>He does talk to me, we are very open with each other, em, (pause) eh, I think it's, I wouldn't say it's improved our relationship, it's like, sort of, I love him, I love him, like, unconditionally, he's my son, but, em, (pause) I think (sighs) I'm trying to think now. I think he, I sometimes think he maybe wasn't really as much in touch with his feelings as I thought he might be, you know, but maybe this has sort of taught him in the harshest sort of way, the harshest sort of way to sort of be in touch with his feelings, and he does talk to me quite a lot and we talk about very deep things and what have you, we have shared that sort of last week of [wife's name]'s life, and I think it shook him to his roots. It shook me to my roots (laughs) to tell you the truth.</p>	<p>Lines 767-772</p> <p>Lines 784-788</p> <p>Lines 788-796</p>
<p>Not wanting to be a burden</p> <p>Up to me to shape my life now</p>	<p>I was always conscious of saying, 'Look, I think we should stop this now, I've been coming long enough!' I was thinking about other people down the line who have just lost their wives, husbands and that, they might want to get into</p>	<p>Lines 359-363</p>

Responsibility	<p>the system and I'm holding them up, you know. I used to think, 'I've had my turn.'</p> <p>but my life, I mean, (sighs) (pause) eh, I don't know, really, eh (sighs), it's hard, it's hard to sort of (pause) (sighs) like I said, I had a really, really lovely life with [wife's name], a really lovely married life, really close, really affectionate, em, (pause), she was the love of my life and, you know, I was so lucky to meet her. And she said (breaks down crying) she was lucky really, but I used to doubt that sometimes but I can get a bit naggy sometimes, but em, there you are. But, (pause) I've just got to get on with it, and like I say, (pause) it's not the life I'd chose for myself, I, I'd love [wife's name] to be here, course I would, but I haven't got her here and I've got to face that reality and try and make some sort of life for me, myself, em (pause), going forward</p> <p>I've got to start putting some sort of plan together somehow, em, but, I'm just taking each day as it comes, really. Em, and some days are good and some days are indifferent and some days are bad. I still suffer badly from being tearful and feeling unsettled and missing her and hurting and (pause) but you know, it's, someone said on twitter I think it was, 'I've cried thousands of tears for my wife and do you know what, she's worth every single one.' I thought that was quite lovely, really.</p> <p>I do say to myself, sometimes he FaceTimes me and I say, and I don't answer it, and I text him and I say, 'Just give me a ring,' like, because sometimes the mask slips and when the kids are on the other end of the phone and it's, 'Hi grandad!' I can't maintain that joyful exterior cos I'm not feeling it and I don't want to get upset in front of them</p> <p>I think, you know, I've handled it pretty well, really (sniffs). I get on with my life, I do things, I'm not sitting, I don't need, I don't need, I'm quite independent, I don't ask for a lot, em, I</p>	<p>Lines 661-669</p> <p>Lines 716-721</p> <p>Lines 799-802</p> <p>Lines 933-936</p>
----------------	--	---

	<p>don't get offered a lot either, but there you are, eh, (pause).</p> <p>I sometimes feel as though I don't want to burden him, cos he's got enough pressure in his life, with the whole family, he's been working from home for like 12 months, in a little kid's bedroom, he's six foot four, knees up to his chin and he's, he's got three laptops, big screens and that, so he's got quite a pressurised job and pressure in his life, so sometimes I feel like, I carry the burden myself and don't share it with anybody, and sometimes when you don't share things with people, it can get on top of you. And sometimes I feel like things get on top of me.</p> <p>I went in hospital about five months ago, I had some cancerous moles removed off my, my back, my back and my midriff and one on my arm, here, and em, eh, and he said, 'I'll come up and take you to the hospital, dad,' and what have you; well, I got my brother to take me, eh, anyway, I had this operation and they got infected and I was quite ill</p> <p>I had these blooming dressings and the doctor said, 'Don't change the dressings and keep them, keep them dry.' So, I thought, 'It's going to be great getting showered and washed, cos I've got one here and one on my back and one on my arm!' Anyway, I went, after a few days, I went in the garden, I started working, and I came in and my back was (pause), em, pouring with blood and I'd burst one of the stitches or whatever it was. And it was right on my back and I was on my own and I didn't have anyone to sort of help me, cos if I'd come in, [wife's name] would have said, 'I'll wash it, I'll put a plaster on it.' Cos it was right, I couldn't reach it, I couldn't even see it, it was right in the middle of my back. Anyway, I went in the bathroom and I got this nice white towel and I put it on my back and I had all blood all over my towel, so, you know what I had to do in the end? The sun comes through to my bathroom, so, I had to stand there, with my back to the</p>	<p>Lines 1283-1290</p> <p>1303-1307</p> <p>1307-1324</p>
--	---	--

	<p>sun to dry the blood. And I sort of felt really sorry for myself because I was on my own, I didn't have anybody to call on, and I started crying for a bit, I was crying for ages, there was no-one there to help me. And I am an independent person, it was just the, it was just the logistics of trying to get to the wound cos it was right in the middle of my back so I couldn't reach it. If it had been there, it wouldn't have been a problem. Whereas, I couldn't stop it bleeding. And I stained my bedsheets, so that sickened me a bit, but, so, it's just like a support network really.</p> <p>[son's name] offers, of course he does, em, but sometimes I say, 'Don't come up from Leeds. I can get dropped off and picked up, it's absolutely fine.' If it had been something serious, really, really serious, I would have asked him to come, of course I would, em, cos I had biopsies and everything was ok, but, they took biopsies and took them away for analysis. Em (pause), it's just a support network really</p> <p>I started going to the pictures on my own, me and [wife's name] liked the pictures and I quite enjoyed it; it felt a bit weird and sad really, going to the pictures on my own, I felt a bit sad really, Billy no-mates (laughs). But I wouldn't let it stop me, cos it was a particular film I wanted to see. So, I went, and I got talking to a, actually, I got talking to a bloke at the pictures actually, em, and I think these are all like, little baby steps you take and like, little hurdles you step over to develop as a person on your own and to develop as a person to formulate some sort of life for yourself without someone who was there before. Cos you've got to, you've got to, sort of, take pride in that, really.</p>	<p>1325-1329</p> <p>1331-1338</p>
<p>Importance of being sensitive in communications with other, especially those who have lost love ones.</p>	<p>I always give it a lot of thought. I don't just bang them out. I'm always conscious of the sensitivity of things, about what you can say, and what you can put on the paper because people can misconstrue things, can't they? So, I always give it a lot of thought.</p>	<p>Lines 375-378</p>



	<p>You know, some people are quite nice but some people are a bit thoughtless and a bit insensitive when they say, 'Oh you're doing marvellous!' And I think sometimes, when they say things like that, that abrogates their responsibility: I don't like you feeling uncomfortable, so if I tell you you're doing well, it won't go anywhere unpleasant. Do you know what I mean?</p> <p>You know, and I thought, 'How insensitive are you?' You know, my wife's not been dead two minutes and you want me to start looking at women, other women, and he'd say this type of thing, and I'd say, 'I don't want to! I've been married, thanks.'</p>	<p>Lines 403-407</p> <p>Lines 536-539</p>
<p>Written communication with another who has suffered a loss is helpful</p>	<p>we've been exchanging, eh, emails, and I've found it very helpful. And he said, '[P's name], you write some fantastic emails.' I always give it a lot of thought. I don't just bang them out. I'm always conscious of the sensitivity of things, about what you can say, and what you can put on the paper because people can misconstrue things, can't they? So, I always give it a lot of thought. And, I've found it very helpful, and I think, I think what it has made, it has made me more empathetic</p> <p>I've been emailing him for about a year and I'm planning to go down and see him, in maybe September, (<i>can't make out 31:30</i>) Salisbury and see him, cos, eh, he lost his wife in difficult circumstances, he's got three daughters</p>	<p>Lines 374-379</p> <p>Lines 383-385</p>
<p>More empathy for others as a result of loss</p> <p>Helping others</p>	<p>we've been exchanging, eh, emails, and I've found it very helpful. And he said, '[P's name], you write some fantastic emails.' I always give it a lot of thought. I don't just bang them out. I'm always conscious of the sensitivity of things, about what you can say, and what you can put on the paper because people can misconstrue things, can't they? So, I always give it a lot of thought. And, I've found it very helpful, and I think, I think what it has made, it has made me more empathetic</p>	<p>Lines 374-379</p>

	<p>I think a lot of people, you know, when [widowed friend's name] came up here, I pick him up at Northallerton, em, we went to a little country pub out at Welbury, and I said, 'I'll buy you a pint.' We sat, and the first thing that he did when I met him, he got in the car, and the first thing he did was cry, for god's sake.</p>	<p>Lines 507-510</p>
	<p>I think sometimes it, it gives you a good feeling, how helpful you can be to others in a loss situation. And, and of course, he's been helpful to me, told me his story, you know.</p>	<p>Lines 521-523</p>
	<p>I was looking at doing some sort of voluntary work, just to get me out the house and meet people and maybe help out at a foodbank or maybe working for Macmillan, something Macmillan in some capacity.</p>	<p>Lines 670-672</p>
	<p>son's name]'s just had quite a lot of work done in his living room, I want to go down and decorate for him in a few weeks' time</p>	<p>Lines 705-707</p>
	<p>I have looked at a lot of the posts and engaged with a few of them and got something out of it, eh, and talked to them and, you know, (<i>can't make out 1.28.27</i>) and I've given a bit of advice to people because there is an aspect of it, I didn't realise I was, eh, entitled to bereavement support payment, I mean, I've never known anything about that, but I got a phone call one day out of the blue; I'd been in the garden, and this lady from the gov.uk phoned me and said, 'Mr [surname], you haven't put a claim in for, em, bereavement support payment.' I said, 'What's that?' She said, 'Well, it's a payment you get if you lose your wife before she reaches pensionable age.' I said, 'Well, I didn't know anything about it, that's why I haven't put a claim in.' She said, 'Oh well, I'll do the,' she was lovely, she put a claim in for me and I got £4000 and £100 a month for twelve months and I didn't know I was entitled to it. In fact, I lost out cos I hadn't claimed for it for five months and I did not</p>	<p>Lines 1062-1078</p>

	<p>realise. So, so I've told people on the forum, I've said, 'Look, I'm very sorry you've lost your wife or your husband and that, but, it sounds to me that in your circumstances you'd be entitled to bereavement support allowance. Put in for it,' cos it's, you know, em, it's, it's much needed by a lot of people. Death, death has all sorts of consequences but, financially is a big one. Em, so, I've helped people that way</p>	
<p>Funerals and how we say goodbye to loved ones is important</p> <p>Disrespectful to attend a funeral if you didn't care in life/</p> <p>Unhelpful to see people at a funeral for someone you love when they were not present in the deceased's life</p>	<p>he lost his wife in difficult circumstances, he's got three daughters, and they couldn't have a proper funeral, you know, for god's sake, only six people. And they had a massive, em, amount of friends and acquaintances and only six people at the funeral for god's sake. Eh, so anyway, he said that they would organise, like, a memorial service about six weeks ago in Salisbury with a lot of friends and that going, and it all went very nice.</p> <p>And like you say, about friendships and people turned up, the people turned up at [wife's name]'s funeral, couldn't have cared two jots about her in life; you know, ex-colleagues from school, em, who never, even though they must have known she had terminal colon cancer, didn't contact or email or phone her, 'How are you doing, [wife's name]?' they turned up at her funeral and I can't begin to imagine how irritating that is, really. It's almost, like, disrespectful. Cos, if they didn't care for her in life, why do they want to be there in death? It's almost like, ghoulish, you know. And em, (sighs), it's like, I don't know, it's like picking an apple out of a fruit bowl and all the other apples fall into a different place. It's very difficult, you know?</p>	<p>Lines 384-389</p> <p>Lines 475-483</p>
<p>Glib platitudes from others are perceived as annoying and for the benefit of the person saying them rather than the bereaved</p>	<p>People have said, and you know, it's quite irritating when people are like, 'Oh, you're doing great, [P's name], you're doing marvellous!' You know, you, you put this face on, don't you? And I've said, 'You want to climb inside me sometimes. I'm not really. I can't go..,' you know, it, it's, it's so hard sometimes.</p>	<p>Lines 396-400</p> <p>Lines 402-410</p>

	<p>But, em, it is quite irritating what people say to you. You know, some people are quite nice but some people are a bit thoughtless and a bit insensitive when they say, 'Oh you're doing marvellous!' And I think sometimes, when they say things like that, that abrogates their responsibility: I don't like you feeling uncomfortable, so if I tell you you're doing well, it won't go anywhere unpleasant. Do you know what I mean? They can't deal with me being sort of open and honest about it, and I don't like people saying things like, you know, people say things like, 'Oh, she's gone to a better place,' or, 'God always takes the best.' You know, all this type of bloody thing, pardon my French, I'm sorry, but it just absolutely boils my urine.</p> <p>my brother-in-law, em, and, and, I was in the car one day with him, and hand on my hand, 'We're here for you, [P's name], we're family. You know, anything you want, we will be here to help you.' Eh, you know, 'Any, any jobs, you know, I'll come and give you a hand,' and that. Not one offer. Not one offer of a job (laughs).</p> <p>I think I'm quite sad and people say, 'No, you're doing well, [P's name]. You're doing great, you're marvellous,' you know, people saying this and it irritates me.</p>	<p>Lines 428-431</p> <p>Lines 754-756</p>
<p>Reality of death</p> <p>There is no afterlife</p> <p>Face up to death's reality in life</p>	<p>I don't like people saying things like, you know, people say things like, 'Oh, she's gone to a better place,' or, 'God always takes the best.' You know, all this type of bloody thing, pardon my French, I'm sorry, but it just absolutely boils my urine. I, I, I always deal in reality, you know, she's died, she's dead, you know, she isn't, you know</p> <p>she said something like, [wife's sister's daughter's name], her daughter, she's felt the presence in her bedroom of [wife's name] and [lady's name]. This, you know, and, and, I kept, I, I, I bit my tongue for a year, eh, but I just sort of snapped and I sent her a very, very abrupt WhatsApp. I said, 'Look,' I said, '[wife's</p>	<p>Lines 408-411</p> <p>Lines 437-443</p>

	<p>name]’s dead. If she’s anywhere, she wouldn’t be with [lady’s name].’ And she didn’t like it. I’m sorry, but that’s the way it is, you know. And I didn’t handle it very well</p> <p>but my life, I mean, (sighs) (pause) eh, I don’t know, really, eh (sighs), it’s hard, it’s hard to sort of (pause) (sighs) like I said, I had a really, really lovely life with [wife’s name], a really lovely married life, really close, really affectionate, em, (pause), she was the love of my life and, you know, I was so lucky to meet her. And she said (breaks down crying) she was lucky really, but I used to doubt that sometimes but I can get a bit naggy sometimes, but em, there you are. But, (pause) I’ve just got to get on with it, and like I say, (pause) it’s not the life I’d chose for myself, I, I’d love [wife’s name] to be here, course I would, but I haven’t got her here and I’ve got to face that reality and try and make some sort of life for me, myself, em (pause), going forward</p>	<p>Lines 661-669</p>
<p>Difficult relationships after loss</p> <p>Re-evaluation of relationships</p>	<p>And I didn’t handle it very well, I should have bit my tongue and not responded, but I did respond, and all of a sudden, five minutes later, look who’s on the phone to me, [name], [wife’s name]’s sister’s daughter, screaming down the phone, saying these awful things to me about how it’s all about me, I’m selfish, my dad’s a better dad than you, absolutely horrendous. And here’s me feeling at a low ebb after Christmas, putting up with all this, unfortunately, our [son’s name] was away at a conference in Warwickshire somewhere, so I couldn’t get in touch with him, I was on my own, and it was just horrendous and I haven’t spoken to her since.</p> <p>And what, what, what is so sad about it is, em, there wasn’t really anything, I don’t think, me and [wife’s sister’s name] couldn’t put right. You know, people speak out of turn sometimes and I’m big enough a person to say, ‘Maybe I didn’t handle the situation well.’ But, what’s really spoiled it, I think, and broke me</p>	<p>Lines 442-450</p> <p>Lines 450-464</p>

	<p>completely, is the fact that my, [wife's sister], what [wife's sister]'s daughter said. Because I didn't get my son involved, but she got her daughter involved, for some reason, and she said some pretty, pretty horrendous things about me, and I think, if, if I hadn't have felt, if I hadn't have been such a strong person, I think, I can imagine that it would tip someone over the edge. That's how bad it was. When I was feeling at a low ebb, she said those things about me. Em, and, em, and I've never spoken, this was over, this was last January, 20-, 2020. And we haven't spoken since then. And (pause) (sighs), and I feel really sad about it, em, but, I, I, I, sort of, I've revised my opinion of them to be honest because [wife's name] had two sisters, [sister 1 name] and [sister 2 name]. And [sister 1 name] has taken it upon herself not to get in touch with me either, obviously, sort of, sided with her sister and cut me out of her life, em, and being alone for 14 months in a pandemic and not wanting to pick up the phone.</p> <p>I was just explaining and articulating the situation, eh, and I think that they are pretty poor people, the fact that I was on my own for a year, in a pandemic, on my own, no support, nothing like that, and they couldn't pick up the phone and say, 'Look,' I mean, I could have, maybe I could have done it, you know, I just, that, that, that, that relationship is broken, really. Em, and it's so sad. And you know, [wife's name] she, these are very strong words here, but [wife's name] would hate them for it. (Pause).</p> <p>he used to sort of like take the mick out of you cos you didn't have an eye for the other women, and he was the sad one as far as we were concerned, I mean, he had a warped sense of morality. And I don't see him much now, that sort of, withered on the vine, but that's at my, my, em, my doing, I think, em. But, it, it, it, it, it is very difficult, em.</p>	<p>Lines 466-471</p> <p>Lines 563-567</p>
--	---	---

	<p>this guy was like sort of too in-your-face on the negative and I thought, 'I don't need this at this moment in time.' So, I'm not very proud of myself, I didn't like, send him a curt email saying, you know, keep your opinions to yourself, you know, I just let the relationship sort of wither on the vine, really. Cos, we, we had each other's' phone numbers and he was texting me, like, at quarter to one in the morning, and I'm not sure he wasn't drinking. I did sympathise with him, but I thought, 'I've got to fight my own battle,' in a way, 'I'll try and help you but sometimes try and help yourself as well.' Em, he was a bit sort of 'in your face' sort of thing</p> <p>I mean, even [wife's name]'s sisters used to visit once a fortnight and they used to come in and I used to make them tea and make them a bit of dinner maybe, get some nice cakes from the shop. So, I do the housework and all that, I do the polishing and all that, I keep the house in nice order, and eh, then they'd come and talk to me for a bit, then they'd go and sit in the bedroom where [wife's name]'s things (crying). (Pause). And (pause) when they were up there, I could hear them absolutely wailing, and I'd go up there, and she'd be sat with [wife's name]'s ashes on her knee (crying), cuddling her, (sniffs), (crying) feeling the weight of it, and, (pause) it sounds a little bit arrogant maybe, but I think I was a better support to them than they were to me really, you know? (Pause).</p> <p>I don't have that relationship now. I wish I did. And sometimes I wish, we're funny aren't we, I wish I was a bigger person sometimes so I could get on the phone and say, you know, 'We all sort of, dig our heels in and draw lines in the sand and if we start to apologise for stuff we don't feel we have to apologise for, we start thinking we're a lesser person or something, or we are weak or something, but we won't give in,' or, but, what I did like about the relationship with [wife's sister's names] was we did used to talk about [wife's name] a</p>	<p>Lines 765-772</p> <p>Lines 936-944</p> <p>955-964</p>
--	---	--

	<p>lot when they came. And this was in the early days, you know. I'm not sure it would ever be the same now if they came tomorrow. We would talk about her, but we would talk about [wife's name] a lot and that was a big comfort for me.</p> <p>I think the relationship with [wife's name]'s sisters, like falling out with one but the other one has taken it upon herself not to contact me as well, em, that's been a hindrance to me and that has really, really bothered me in the last, good few, I sometimes find myself waking up and it bothering me, eh, em, in the morning, and I get out of bed, and once you get out of bed and you start moving, you feel better. I think when you're laying and your muscles are relaxed and that, your brain can sometimes go into overdrive. But when you get out of bed and you have to start getting showered and making breakfast and you're moving about, your brain has other stuff to deal with so maybe it takes that strain off it a bit, em, that's been a hindrance, I think; I think it's knocked me backwards quite a few times</p> <p>I want to clarify, clarify with him about how I feel about it and what he feels about it and to see, sometimes you don't want to ask a question that you don't know what, you won't like the answer to. And I don't know if our [son's name] has a relationship with them or not, but I feel like, and I'm being honest with you here, I feel that if our [son's name] has a textual relationship with them, texting them, I'd feel a bit hurt really. I'd feel like he's being a bit disloyal. I don't think they've, and I'm not feeling sorry for myself, but I don't think they've treated me very well, really, considering the situation I was in. And I think if he was sort of like, for want of a better word, going behind my back, texting [wife's sister's name], and saying, 'Oh [granddaughter's name]'s doing well at school,' I'd feel a bit, now they're his aunties and, and, he's known them 34 years, since he was born, em, it's, it's a very difficult one really, that's part of what</p>	<p>Lines 1253-1262</p> <p>1264-1283</p>
--	---	---



	<p>troubles me because I can't think my way through it sometimes. Sometimes I can be out of my bike and I can see things so, you can see the clarity from space, on the other hand, I'm so clouded in my thinking processes and judgments and em, I get chewed about it, for want of a better word. And I'd want to, I want to, I want to sort of, I want to sort it out really, one way or the other, and I don't know how to. And we've had problems in our past, me and [wife's name], with family and stuff like that, you know, and we've always, like, been together as a team and sorted it out, you know, but when you are on your own, it, it's just hard. And sometimes, there's a part of it that [son's name] is my son, and sometimes I feel as though, as long as we have that really open relationship, loving relationship</p> <p>It's funny, you know, it's amazing when one person dies, she was like the hub of the family, what the wheel went round and it just changes everything, and I find it incredible really, you know. Em, the world seems a bit alien sometimes to me, you know, and a bit threatening, and a bit, em, cos I'm on my own a lot of the time; it's just em, I don't know people and eh, (pause) you know, all our relationships were sort of like, fine, when [wife's name] was alive, and then (pause) she dies, and not long after there's this schism in the family. Cos emotions run high, and you don't handle things particularly well, and we all make mistakes, I make mistakes, everyone does, you don't handle things very well, and then it changes even more, and one, one thing you do need when you lose someone is a bit of a support network and the only support, really, I've got is our [son's name]. And he loves me and he FaceTimes me every night religiously, and he'll phone me and sometimes when I can't stomach the FaceTime cos I'm feeling upset, and that doesn't happen very often, but it does happen, and I do tell him that, he'll phone me when he's got the kids to bed and we'll have a good chat and what have you</p>	<p>1290-1303</p>
--	---	------------------

<p>Bad things happen to good people</p> <p>Unfair/ injustice</p> <p>Being done to</p>	<p>And he also used to have an eye for the ladies, he, he was, he was always messing about with women, put it that way, pardon my French, and he sort of thought there was something wrong with me because, I, I like, I was in love with my wife and liked a nice stable relationship, a nice, and anyway, his marriage imploded in his face, his, his, em, his, em, his daughter ended up in psychiatric care because of it, you know, a very sensitive girl and the marriage broke up. Anyway, he ended up living on his own in some crummy street in, in Middlesbrough, em, and he's eh, he's got married again, he's, he used to come to see me on a bike, we'd go on a bike ride, and he'd say, 'Why don't you get yourself on Match.com?' You know, and I thought, 'How insensitive are you?' You know, my wife's not been dead two minutes and you want me to start looking at women, other women, and he'd say this type of thing, and I'd say, 'I don't want to! I've been married, thanks.' You know, em, anyway, he's got married again, and he, he's married quite a nice lass actually. She's nice, a primary teacher, nice sensitive type, soft, soft girl, not like the type you imagine would be attracted to him, but anyway, that's my view (laughs). But em, now he's got himself a camper van and he's retiring and he's going here and he's going there, and he's WhatsApping me about, oh we're here and we're there, and I find it really hard to handle. You know, how his life has changed and how my life has changed. Cos, I had a lovely life, eh, with a lovely wife and plans and nice, you know, and now he's sort of got that, if you know what I mean? And mine's like sort of gone backwards and it's so hard to em, it's so hard to come to terms with, like, sort of, the, other people enjoying themselves and having holidays that you're not going to have and, do you understand what I'm saying?</p> <p>it's quite hard, you know, to, to, em, so, when he does text me and sends me photos of where he is, I just sort of like, I sort of ignore him, for my own mental health, really. It can sort of knock you down, chip away at you,</p>	<p>Lines 528-549</p> <p>Lines 551-559</p>
---	---	---

	<p>when other peoples' lives, and I want people to have nice lives, I don't want people to all be miserable, like I am sometimes, I want people to have nice lives and achieve stuff and the kids do well, you know, and have nice things, but, it's quite hard to sort of (pause), hear it and listen to it, when you haven't got that, you know. Em, and, I don't know. I sometimes think he hardly deserves it, really, because of the way he was with his wife and thought he was clever, you know.</p> <p>As far as meaning goes, and loss, I, I'm not sure there is a meaning, it just seems like (pause) good, bad things happen to good people, you know, and it's just cancer and the indifference of nature, really, you know. Good things happen to bad people. And she was very unfortunate. (Pause).</p> <p>I know some people get away with it, you know, fair enough, but some people don't, a lot of people don't. Now [wife's name], you know, she liked a drink, she liked a, a, a fish and chips and pizza and a blow out now and then, but generally speaking she, she, she was, she was slim, she looked after herself, her weight fluctuated a bit, you know, like most people, em, she liked a blow out and that, but she did take care of herself and that, em, so, I don't, I don't think you can make any sort of sense of the fact that, I've probably said it wrong, it's just nature's blind indifference, it like, bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people.</p> <p>Bad things happen to good people. One of [wife's name]'s sisters, she has these helpers, cos he has a lot of needs, eh, toilet and stuff like that, em, and one of the helpers, she's been a family friend for years, I would think she's 60 now; she weighs about 16 stone, smokes like a trooper, drinks like a fish, probably her blood pressure is off the scale, and you know, and here's [wife's name], 64, slim, looking after herself, you know, I don't</p>	<p>Lines 611-614</p> <p>Lines 861-868</p> <p>Lines 902-907</p>
--	---	--

	think you can make sense of it really. I certainly can't make sense of her	
Continuing traditions as a way of honouring the dead and their memory in life going forward	My sister lives in Millingham, em, and she's very hard-up financially, she has these two rotten jobs and zero-hour contracts and all that, and em, me and [wife's name] would buy her a big Christmas hamper, well, we wouldn't buy one, [wife's name] would put it together over a month before Christmas, it was lovely, chocolates and wine and all that stuff, (crying) (sniffs) (pause). So, I've continued to do that.	Lines 577-581
Keeping the home they shared in good condition in her memory and also for their child and his family	I can paint and decorate really well, even though [wife's name] used to like, even though I could do it, [wife's name] would want to do the papering, but I would do the painting. So, I go and decorate for him, I do his garden for him, now and then. (Sniffs) I help him all I can because he works very, very hard and he has a good salary, but sometimes when I think of the hours he puts in, I think, 'Is he?' You know, 60-hour week sort of thing. (Sniffs). But he does work hard, em, so, I support him, love him, I support my sister, if I can, em, we used to support my mum and dad cos they were quite hard up	Lines 590-597
	But, my mum and dad, they stayed together after all that and gradually, over the years, things did seem to improve, maybe as the kids left home, I don't know, their lives may have been, em, so, they're sort of, there was a love there in some strange way. So [wife's name] and me, [wife's name] really got on with my dad, actually, and we took them on a few holidays to Scotland and Wales and stuff like that, and we used to take food for them, cos they weren't well off, few treats and what have you. So, I think, part of it, (pause) is keeping going on with [wife's name]'s legacy and being a nice person, really (crying).	Lines 604-611
	I want to go down and decorate for him in a few weeks' time, em, after I've cut my big hedge out the back there, eh, but eh, I've got some things doing.	Lines 706-708

	<p>I was amazed, when [wife's name] died in February, by August I was outside, it's quite a big house this, I was painting the outside of the house. Rubbing it down, undercoat and primer and all that, and I was amazed, I was up the ladder, 'Oh be careful, up the ladder,' and all that, but you know, but, why not? [Wife's name] would want me to keep the house nice, she wouldn't want me to sit, you know, sat like that, you know, and feeling sorry for myself. And I do feel sorry for myself sometimes, but she wouldn't want me to, and sometimes I, I, I don't hear her speak to me but I think, 'What would she say?' And I'd hear her voice, you know, sort of thing, telling me, you know, so, so, (sighs) that's about it really, I think.</p> <p>I can cope without [wife's name], I find it hard, but I can cope without her and she'd want me to. Cos, I loved her and she loved me and she would want me to cope. She'd want me to be strong and loving for my grandkids and my son, and be there and be there for our [son's name], (crying). Em, I, I, I am a strong person and I think, I think you've got to be a strong person to show a bit of weakness sometimes and sensitivity and as far as I'm concerned, the world needs more sensitive people.</p>	<p>1338-1346</p> <p>1387-1392</p>
<p>Giving to others important, kindness to others</p>	<p>we've always been generous people, me and [wife's name]. (Crying) (pause) cos I was the first one in my family to go to university (crying). (Pause) (sniffs) and em, and I've done pretty, reasonably well for myself, you know, and [wife's name] did coming, given her background. And we've always been generous and kind and loving people and we have always been kind to people who are less fortunate than ourselves. Em, (crying) (pause).</p> <p>I give to our [son's name], even though he's, I think I'm daft sometimes because [son's name] is on a six-figure salary, and here's me giving him, you know. But, he, he, he's six foot four, and he's my little five-year-old boy still, you know, to me, and he always will be. And he's a</p>	<p>Lines 572-577</p> <p>Lines 581-586</p>

	<p>lovely, sensitive lad and he's a good dad and that, so I'm generous with him, not just financially, giving him things and that, but with my time.</p> <p>I can paint and decorate really well, even though [wife's name] used to like, even though I could do it, [wife's name] would want to do the papering, but I would do the painting. So, I go and decorate for him, I do his garden for him, now and then. (Sniffs) I help him all I can because he works very, very hard and he has a good salary, but sometimes when I think of the hours he puts in, I think, 'Is he?' You know, 60-hour week sort of thing. (Sniffs). But he does work hard, em, so, I support him, love him, I support my sister, if I can, em, we used to support my mum and dad cos they were quite hard up</p> <p>Cos you derive a lot by being giving and being nice to people and doing something worthwhile, I think. It gives you a, gives you a boost to your self-esteem, you know (sniffs).</p> <p>hopefully going forward I can find some sort of niche I can sort of, fall into and help people a bit more.</p> <p>son's name]'s just had quite a lot of work done in his living room, I want to go down and decorate for him in a few weeks' time</p>	<p>Lines 590-597</p> <p>Lines 698-700</p> <p>Lines 704-705</p> <p>Lines 705-707</p>
<p>Talking about the dead loved one and their life is difficult yet helpful</p> <p>There is a feeling people don't want to hear about them and feel impatient</p> <p>Want/need to talk about their life as well as their death</p>	<p>it's very difficult questions, what to say to kids, you know, when the answer is, 'Your gran's dead,' and that, you think, 'Is that too much for a kid to handle?' You know (sniffs).</p> <p>I do try to make it part of the conversation sometimes, I do find it hard to, a lot of people don't talk about her anymore, it's only been two years and I think, and then I think, sometimes I don't bring her into the conversation because I think people will roll their eyes, 'Oh, he's not talking about his wife again,' you know. And I think that's really hurtful that, really. Cos, I don't want to talk</p>	<p>Lines 646-648</p> <p>Lines 649-661</p>

	<p>about the fact that she's dead, I want to talk about the fact that she's alive, she was alive and all she did in her life (crying) (sniffs) (pause). So, I found that hard. Someone said that one of the nicest gifts that you can give to someone who's bereaved is talking about the person they've lost, em, but that's sort of withered on the vine a little bit now, and I find myself forcing [wife's name]'s name into the conversation, even with [son's name], you know, em, you know, he might say something and I'll say, 'Oh your mum was good for doing that, wasn't she?' You know, and [son's name] gets a bit tearful and what have you, of course he does, but em, so that's quite hard</p> <p>And we'd go to chemotherapy, and we were there 4 or 5 hours some days and eh, she'd be sat in the waiting room and I'd turn round and she'd be gone, she'd be over with someone, to hold their hand, (crying) just sitting, saying, 'How are you?' (crying) (pause). But (pause) and she'd go in, and they'd take her in the room and put the thing in and there was people coming over to me to say, 'How lovely is your wife?' (crying) (pause). And I'll tell you another thing about her, she, em, she got the oncologist sorted out. We had this oncologist called [oncologist's name], and he was horrible, no, no bedside manner whatsoever, em, and we used to go this old part of, eh, we would get the scan and go for the results and he would look and help us go through stuff and he'd tell us, he'd tell us the worst news, you know, 'Your tumour's growing, it's spread to this, it's spread to your liver from your colon,' just like that, you know, and then, it upset us both, and I'd hold her hand and she'd hold my hand (crying) (sniffs) and, she, we, we would walk out the, em, the consulting room and there was a big long corridor of people waiting to go in to see him and we were upset, you know, rightly so, upset, crying, we got the worst type of news you can ever get; so, [wife's name] said to him one day, 'Right, when I come, when 've had my scan, I want you to look at the results and I want you to phone me</p>	<p>Lines 806-829</p>
--	---	----------------------

	<p>at home and tell me, not sat in your office, having to walk out in front of the public, being upset like this.' And he said, 'Oh I can't, I'm too busy.' She said, 'You can, and you will.' She said, 'Because if you phone me at home and say, "Your tumour's growing, eh, there's not much else we can do," at least I can put the phone down and make myself a cup of tea in my comfortable home and sit with my husband, in comfortable surroundings and support and comfort each other. In public, you know, walking out into a corridor with all these people there,' and he did. She got him sort of, she got him trained up. He did do that, he phoned us up and said, 'Yeah, I'll do that.'</p> <p>I sometimes wonder, don't you, eh, everyone does, what life would have been like if we hadn't met a particular person, em, (pause) and how hers would have turned out. Cos she, I think she would have been the spinster of the parish, cos she didn't bother with men much and she had a bit of a domineering mother, and em, she used to come home from school, and you know, she was 22, she was teaching, she used to sleep in her bed in her mum's living room, in a two bedroomed house, and her sister used to sleep in the spare bedroom and her mum would be sat, laying in the bed next to her, smoking, and three o'clock in the morning, reading books, and [wife's name] was just asleep. And she would have to get up for school the next morning. She used to come home in the night to go shopping for her mum. You know, her mum was a bit of an emotional cripple really. Eh, em, not very, not a very nice person really. One of the things I think meeting [wife's name] was the fact that, it was getting together and us wanting to get married, I took her out that environment and she could be herself. Cos she always, her mum was a very domineering person and [wife's name] would always defer to her judgement on wallpaper or furniture, just for a simple life, a simplified life really, it wasn't worth arguing, you understand. So, when we got married and we</p>	<p>1408-1431</p>
--	--	------------------



	<p>had our own little home, it had an outside toilet, our first house, but, em, we were happy there, and we, in the, days, the 1980s, the early 1980s, councils gave you grants to improve houses for a bathroom and stuff like that. So we were very happy and she could go into her own home and em, (sighs) and out her own stamp on it and be her own person, if you like, and sort of, you know, make her own choices about stuff. But she had to sort of defer to mum to simplify her own life really. So she, I think she, she was always lovely and that, but I think she grew as a person because of that really, and of course, when she had [son's name] she just sort of like absolutely blossomed. He was the love of her life (crying). Apart from me, of course (laughing)!</p>	
<p>Volunteering to help others also as a way of meeting others and self-preservation/helping yourself</p>	<p>I was looking at doing some sort of voluntary work, just to get me out the house and meet people and maybe help out at a foodbank or maybe working for Macmillan, something Macmillan in some capacity. There was some, I'll tell you, I did phone someone up and I did say, oh sorry, I've been one of these NHS responders, you know the phone goes off and you can help someone; I've helped three or four people. I've talked to an old lady, I've phoned an old lady who, who, wan- needed a dentist appointment. She said, 'Oh, thank you, love!' She said, 'You don't need to, my daughter's going to take me,' but I got talking to her for 25 minutes, but it was nice, and I, I do get something from it cos I'm quite lonely and talking to her was nice for me as well.</p> <p>I've been thinking about doing some other voluntary work but obviously the pandemic got in the way, cos you couldn't, you know, there's a lot of face-to-face stuff, it's nice to speak to someone on the phone, but I want to do face-to-face, to meet people for god's sake, you know, just for my own wellbeing. Cos you derive a lot by being giving and being nice to people and doing something worthwhile, I think. It gives you a, gives you a boost to your self-esteem, you know (sniffs). Cos sometimes you can be down on yourself and think, 'Well,</p>	<p>Lines 670-678</p> <p>Lines 694-702</p>

	<p>what do I do to help people. I sit here all day.’ You know, (laughs) and life’s bit more than that, for god’s sake!</p>	
<p>The pandemic as an obstacle to making meaning after loss</p>	<p>I’ve been thinking about doing some other voluntary work but obviously the pandemic got in the way, cos you couldn’t, you know, there’s a lot of face-to-face stuff, it’s nice to speak to someone on the phone, but I want to do face-to-face, to meet people for god’s sake, you know, just for my own wellbeing. Cos you derive a lot by being giving and being nice to people and doing something worthwhile, I think. It gives you a, gives you a boost to your self-esteem, you know (sniffs). Cos sometimes you can be down on yourself and think, ‘Well, what do I do to help people. I sit here all day.’ You know, (laughs) and life’s bit more than that, for god’s sake! And, so, I will, I will look a bit more into that, going forward, but like I say, the pandemic’s put a big kibosh on a lot of that, hasn’t it, but hopefully, you know, I’ve been double-jabbed, em, (pause), em, hopefully going forward I can find some sort of niche I can sort of, fall into and help people a bit more.</p> <p>it’s just a support network really, and of course, Covid, not being able to go out and meet people, not go for a pint in the pub, and maybe get chin-wagging with people, eh, going to the, I started going to the pictures on my own, me and [wife’s name] liked the pictures and I quite enjoyed it; it felt a bit weird and sad really, going to the pictures on my own, I felt a bit sad really, Billy no-mates (laughs). But I wouldn’t let it stop me, cos it was a particular film I wanted to see.</p> <p>I did some sort of, during lockdown I used to go for a walk, a two mile walk, I’d go out in the snow and that and I hadn’t seen anyone for weeks. I was talking to [son’s name] on the phone, but it’s not the same as a physical sort of visit. I used to get talking to people, I used to stop and say, ‘How’re you doing?’ and that, and start chatting and I’d start gabbling on, and, and I’d leave them, and ‘See you!’ ‘See</p>	<p>Lines 694-705</p> <p>1329-1334</p> <p>1508-1515</p>

	<p>you again!' And I'd come back and I used to think that bloke or that woman will think that I'm a bit needy cos I don't see anyone and then I'm sort of like, I got this great need to talk. You know, cos I wasn't talking to anybody, so (sniffs), but I think most people are in the same boat actually.</p>	
<p>Face-to-face contact important</p> <p>Phone contact more detached</p>	<p>I've been thinking about doing some other voluntary work but obviously the pandemic got in the way, cos you couldn't, you know, there's a lot of face-to-face stuff, it's nice to speak to someone on the phone, but I want to do face-to-face, to meet people for god's sake, you know, just for my own wellbeing.</p> <p>I do say to myself, sometimes he FaceTimes me and I say, and I don't answer it, and I text him and I say, 'Just give me a ring,' like, because sometimes the mask slips and when the kids are on the other end of the phone and it's, 'Hi grandad!' I can't maintain that joyful exterior cos I'm not feeling it and I don't want to get upset in front of them</p> <p>I did some sort of, during lockdown I used to go for a walk, a two mile walk, I'd go out in the snow and that and I hadn't seen anyone for weeks. I was talking to [son's name] on the phone, but it's not the same as a physical sort of visit. I used to get talking to people, I used to stop and say, 'How're you doing?' and that, and start chatting and I'd start gabbling on, and, and I'd leave them, and 'See you!' 'See you again!' And I'd come back and I used to think that bloke or that woman will think that I'm a bit needy cos I don't see anyone and then I'm sort of like, I got this great need to talk. You know, cos I wasn't talking to anybody, so (sniffs), but I think most people are in the same boat actually.</p>	<p>Lines 694-698</p> <p>Lines 799-802</p> <p>1508-1515</p>
<p>Feeling sad, difficult feelings important</p>	<p>some days are good and some days are indifferent and some days are bad. I still suffer badly from being tearful and feeling unsettled</p>	<p>Lines 717-721</p>

<p>Going through grief and loss and the emotions that go with that</p> <p>Balanced emotional reaction</p>	<p>and missing her and hurting and (pause) but you know, it's, someone said on twitter I think it was, 'I've cried thousands of tears for my wife and do you know what, she's worth every single one.' I thought that was quite lovely, really.</p> <p>I think you have to try and accentuate the positive, like, yes talk about your loss and your grief and how much it hurts and how much you miss them and how difficult it was being there, caring for someone who's dying of cancer, and all this type of thing, but there has to be a ying and yang, you have to talk about some other aspect of your life.</p> <p>I'm always conscious, you know, when we talk about grief, of losing [wife's name] in the early days, I used to say to him, 'How are you feeling, [son's name]?' 'How are you? Do, do, do you cry?' 'Do you let it out? Do you talk to [daughter-in-law's name] about it?' You know. Em, 'Cos you need that. You need that outlet.' And that's why I went to the counsellor cos I needed that outlet to talk to someone, just to, just to cry to someone, really.</p> <p>I think it can crack people up if you're not careful, if you're not open and honest, eh, you know (pause) (crying).</p>	<p>Lines 761-765</p> <p>Lines 767-772</p> <p>Lines 783-784</p>
<p>Memory of her in the places she went to</p> <p>Comfort from possessions left behind</p> <p>Wanting to know more about her life before their relationship</p> <p>Continuing a bond with her through</p>	<p>it's, it's so hard sometimes. Even going shopping in Sainsbury's, walking the corridors [wife's name] used to walk and that, and going to the bread counter and standing where she used to stand and get the bread and get it cut and just all these little things.</p> <p>I haven't dealt with [wife's name]'s clothes or anything like that, there the wardrobe, cos one of the things I was hoping to have [wife's name]'s sisters to help me with that, you know, she had a lot of clothes, [wife's name]. She liked her clothes. I was hoping they would maybe help me with that. But, they're not doing any harm there in the wardrobe, and I do derive some comfort from it, I'll be dead</p>	<p>Lines 399-402</p> <p>Lines 721-729</p>

<p>possessions and places</p>	<p>honest with you, sometimes I do go in her wardrobe and I sniff her jumpers; it's, it's, it's a natural thing, I can, I can smell her Chanel perfume. I used to spray it on my pillow sometimes (crying) (sniffs). Em, and I look at photos and I look at love letters she wrote when we were, first got married.</p> <p>there's an outdoor centre for school kids, and we, we got married and the first week we got married, she went to Carlton, she took six kids to Carlton, she was away for a week, she wrote me letters every day and I wrote her and I've kept them (crying) (pause). So, I look at those (pause).</p> <p>And that's another funny thing, I'll tell you, I will tell you this and it's really, really weird. It's an aspect you might hear from other people; [wife's name] went to university at South Wales in a place called Caerleon, and she lived there for three years, I know nothing much about her life down there. And we went to Wales on holiday and we never went to Caerleon; we went to Cardigan Bay for a few weeks, but we never went to Caerleon. When she died, I had this absolutely, massive, like, compulsion to go down there. I don't know why. I, I, I talked to [widower friend's name] about it, and he said, 'Go.' And I thought, 'Where's this coming from?' And the only thing I sort of rationalise it was, 'Do I want to go down there because this was the time in her life when she was 18, young, vibrant, fit, healthy, you know, life's ahead of her.' (Sniffs). (Crying). (Pause) Cos, yeah, I don't, I still feel it now and then, you know, and when I go down to Salisbury, em, to see [widower friend's name], it's not far from Salisbury, Caerleon where [wife's name] went to university, and it's a nice place, it's a nice campus and what have you; I've thought about taking my bike on my car and setting myself a route and having a cycle round there. It's weird, but, (laughs), I don't know where it's come from and sometimes, I think, 'Am I a bit mad?' But, I don't know what I've felt this really strong urge</p>	<p>Lines 730-733</p> <p>974-990</p>
-------------------------------	---	-------------------------------------

	<p>to go down and visit Caerleon, where she went to university.</p> <p>I don't know where it came from Lillian, but I'm just putting it out there because I just can't make rhyme or reason of it, know what I mean? I have thought about it, and the only reason I can think of and it's not a very good one, is the fact that it's a part of her life that I didn't know much about, em, and she was a bit unhappy when she was down there actually, cos I've seen, she had some diaries and they're upstairs in a drawer and I've read them. And I think she was quite unhappy while she was down there, maybe a bit homesick, eh, eh, her mum, sort of, was on her case all the time, 'You won't come back here to look after me!' And all this type of thing, you know. Em, but she still came, even though she was unhappy there some of the time, em, and she got her qualification and she came back to Middlesbrough and eh, got teaching jobs (sniffs) but em, (pause) that's, I think that's the only, like, strange thing I think that I can really relate to you about that.</p> <p>I get out in the fresh air and I do 30, 40 miles and exercising about in the fresh air and there's a village up there called Welby and there's a lovely bench there, I've got these strategic benches all around the area where I can sit and have a rest and have a drink and a biscuit and that and I'll sit and I'll, there's one particular one, and I know why taken to it because I used to sit on that bench and I used to phone [wife's name]. And she'd say, 'Where are you, [name]?' And I'd say, 'I'm at Welby. I'm just sat having a rest.' And she'd have a chat with me, and she'd say, 'How long will you be before you get home?' 'About 45 minutes.' 'Right, I'll put the dinner on.' You know, so I sit there and it's, there's a plaque on the back and it's, em, 'to Harold and Margaret Something' and 'who loved this village', you know, it's really lovely. I sit on that bench</p>	<p>Lines 1002-1013</p> <p>Lines 1113-1123</p>
--	--	---

	<p>Gardening, I'm not a great gardener. [Wife's name] was a gardener, she liked the garden; I think it's hard work but I try and keep on top of it</p>	<p>Lines 1123-1125</p>
<p>Loss of partnership/ feeling alone</p> <p>Learning curve of being on your own</p>	<p>I have found it all a bit frustrating, I've had to carry on with a teacher's pension, eh, they are terrible the teachers' pensions, god, em, to get that right, but I got it right in the end. It's a steep learning curve really to look after yourself after all these things and bills, and change of providers to this that and the other, and you know, unforeseen things coming in. Whereas, when you're a team, you work it out together, don't you? But when you're on your own, you think, 'I don't want to make a mistake,' cos you've got no, you've got no voice there telling you, 'No we're not,' or 'We'll go for it,' you know.</p> <p>I'm thinking about changing my car shortly and em, I'm a bit apprehensive about that; I think that I'll go to the showroom and someone will, some salesman will tie me up in knots cos I'm not very financially astute, really. I think someone could easily diddle me; I think. But I might have my son and he's an accountant, so he might know. But em, well, all in all, I think I'm doing ok.</p> <p>Some of these guys, they do my head in. You know, grow up for god's sake, put your big boy's pants on; it is hard, you know, it, but, some of the things they come out with you think, 'Come on.' It is hard going shopping on your own, you know, cos me and [wife's name] always used to go shopping together. We used to see colleagues from school and we were always together, no matter what we were doing, we were always together, shopping, or whatever it was, down the town, shopping for clothes, we were always together, but some, some people, eh, and I'm talking about men in particular; women seem much more resourceful.</p>	<p>Lines 743-749</p> <p>Lines 750-754</p> <p>1372-1379</p>

<p>Too much negative thinking unhelpful</p> <p>Dwelling on loss unhelpful</p>	<p>I think I am doing pretty good actually because like, one of the other guys, I was speaking to [widower friend's name], one of the other guys they put me in touch with, the bloke from down south, em, he was right by his boot straps and I must admit, I kept in touch with him for about six, eight weeks, and he was getting me down, I had to, sort of like, it was no good for me; he was too negative all the time, and you know, it was like, sort of dragging me down a bit. Where I, I, I think you have to try and accentuate the positive, like, yes talk about your loss and your grief and how much it hurts and how much you miss them and how difficult it was being there, caring for someone who's dying of cancer, and all this type of thing, but there has to be a ying and yang, you have to talk about some other aspect of your life. Well, this guy was like sort of too in-your-face on the negative and I thought, 'I don't need this at this moment in time.' So, I'm not very proud of myself, I didn't like, send him a curt email saying, you know, keep your opinions to yourself, you know, I just let the relationship sort of wither on the vine, really. Cos, we, we had each other's' phone numbers and he was texting me, like, at quarter to one in the morning, and I'm not sure he wasn't drinking. I did sympathise with him, but I thought, 'I've got to fight my own battle,' in a way, 'I'll try and help you but sometimes try and help yourself as well.' Em, he was a bit sort of 'in your face' sort of thing, so, but, I've kept the relationship with [widower friend's name] going, (pause). Our [son's name], [son's name again] thinks I've done well and I think that he's done well as well.</p> <p>so I pushed myself, cos I'm quite a shy person really, until you get to know me, but em, so I went to her, 'So is this the, like, the self-help group for bereavement?' 'Oh yeah,' you know, and I sort of sat down, I felt a bit reluctant, I was like, sort of, impinging on their club. And I sat there and I've never had such a depressing two hours. So, I sat and listened, and em, and I'm not putting any time limit on loss, but some</p>	<p>Lines 756-774</p> <p>1038-1053</p>
---	---	---------------------------------------



	<p>of the people were saying,' Oh, I lost my dad six years ago,' and, and, it, and, and, I thought, 'I don't need this.' And I thought, 'I, I,' you know, 'I, I lost my wife six months ago,' and I'm not, I'm not, like, I suppose it is sad to sort of critique, but I thought, 'I'm in a better place than them and I only lost [wife's name] six months, six weeks, six, seven weeks ago. I feel, I feel like I've got a strength that they haven't.' And, I told this to the counsellor, and look, if people derive some comfort from sat there, you know, talking about the, the loss, and here's me talking to you about my loss, but sat talking about my loss like that felt good on them, but I thought it was a bit sort of like, depressing., you know. I said, 'In six years' time, I hope I've moved on. I don't need to sit in a group of people and say about how I lost my wife six years ago,' you know. So, I thought it was a bit like that, and funnily enough, the counsellor agreed with me.</p> <p>I find on some of the websites and some of the forums (pause) it's almost, eh, and I'm not going to put this very well, it's most like they like the place they are and they don't want to escape from it, em, they want to talk about death and grief and that all the time, em, 'I've had a bad day today, I've had a terrible night, I've had an awful week,' and eh, and a lot of them just keep repeating it. You know, and I think, it, it, it's a hard place to be in sometimes, as an external observer sort of thing, looking at it</p> <p>I think there's a, there's a significant minority, I would say, of people on there and it's all sort of like the (pause), they haven't, I won't even say moved on, cos I don't know about this concept about moving on, em, (pause), sort of, sort of, derived some sort of warped sense of pleasure about being, sort of, in that position of having a loss and, and, and (pause) and wallow in it. And, they're the wrong words these maybe, but that's all I can say, em, you, you, you pick one particular individual and they just keep repeating the same stuff, it's almost</p>	<p>1056-1062</p> <p>Lines 1079-1087</p>
--	---	---

	<p>like they're saying they want the attention maybe, or something like that, you know, I don't know.</p>	
<p>Supportive employer important</p> <p>Concern for remaining family members and their mental health after loss</p>	<p>I'm always conscious, you know, when we talk about grief, of losing [wife's name] in the early days, I used to say to him, 'How are you feeling, [son's name]?' 'How are you? Do, do, do you cry?' 'Do you let it out? Do you talk to [daughter-in-law's name] about it?' You know. Em, 'Cos you need that. You need that outlet.' And that's why I went to the counsellor cos I needed that outlet to talk to someone, just to, just to cry to someone, really. Em, and, he, he, I, he's got a very pressurised job, eh, he's good at it, but he has a very pressurised job, but I worry about him, like, the fault lines and his, sort of, psyche. Em, because I sometimes think, sometimes, in the early days it was going on in the background and you know, when, when, when [wife's name] died, Deloitte were fantastic. 'Go, go,' you know, I phoned him up and said, 'I think you need to come here,' on a Friday afternoon, you know, 'Your mum's took a turn for the worse,' and he came straight up, and Deloitte were fantastic, they were great, you know, 'Take as long as you (<i>breaks down crying</i>) want.' But then, a week or so after, you know, they want you back at work, sort of thing, don't they? He's got quite a responsible position so I worry about that, and I did worry about the fact that he's got a high-pressure job, em, a lot of demands on him, and this, sort of, grief, bereavement, loss niggling on in the background and he's not dealing with it. And I think it can crack people up if you're not careful, if you're not open and honest, eh, you know (pause) (<i>crying</i>).</p> <p>I sometimes wonder about how things would have been if, I sometimes think I'm lucky the fact that, if you can be lucky, that [wife's name] died while I was retired. If I'd been, if I'd still been working when she'd died, you know, I'm not sure the school would have been fantastically supportive like, with having time off. I don't know, I might be wrong, but it was a</p>	<p>Lines 767-784</p> <p>Lines 1229-1248</p>

	<p>very, very pressure cooker type of situation at the school, very difficult, a lot of staff under tremendous, it was a failing school, it's all knocked down now and gone but it was a failing school, so I think, if I'd have maybe lost [wife's name] and had maybe a few weeks off and had to go back to school, I think I'd have, I think I maybe would have handled particular situations badly, particularly challenging behaviours from kids, em, I may have had to be off work for a long time, you know, to get myself put right, if you like, to gain enough strength to go back into that sort of environment because, like I say, looking after [wife's name] for 18 months, it depleted my resources, emotionally and physically and I wasn't particularly looking after myself, I was looking after her, and that was difficult, so, in some respects I, I count my blessings in a way that I was retired when she got ill and she was retired, em, cos I wouldn't, you know, some of these people on these forums do say, 'I'm not looking forward to going back to work. I have to go back to work soon. I've got to keep a roof over my head.' And, I sometimes think how lucky am I, you know, that, I feel for you there, the fact that you know, you've lost your husband or you've lost your wife and you have to go back to work; lost a child for god's sake, and going back to work. So, I think I'm em, eh, lucky in that respect.</p>	
<p>Difficulty in maintaining positive outlook</p>	<p>I do say to myself, sometimes he FaceTimes me and I say, and I don't answer it, and I text him and I say, 'Just give me a ring,' like, because sometimes the mask slips and when the kids are on the other end of the phone and it's, 'Hi granddad!' I can't maintain that joyful exterior cos I'm not feeling it and I don't want to get upset in front of them</p>	<p>Lines 799-802</p>
<p>Motivation to be who she would want me to be if she were still alive – continuing the bond with her and</p>	<p>she wrote all these notes out really well about Christmas and what to put up, and one of the things she wrote was about who I've got to get in touch with and what I've got to do and this and that, and at the end of it she wrote '[P's name], live life to the full.' (Breaks down crying). (Sniffs). (Pause). And I don't think I'm</p>	<p>Lines 921-930</p>

<p>motivated to keep the bond after death</p>	<p>living life to the full, but I'm living life as best I can, I think. And, (pause), like I say, I won't give into despair, although I do feel despair sometimes, a bit, finding it difficult, you know, I think, I try to keep busy and move around a lot cos it's hard to sit with it sometimes, I think. It settles on you, sometimes. (Pause). (Crying). So, even though I haven't got her, I just try to live the life and be the person she'd want me to be. She wouldn't want me to, like I say, be bitter, and nasty and, em, and, like sort of, so resentful about what's happened to me</p> <p>I was amazed, when [wife's name] died in February, by August I was outside, it's quite a big house this, I was painting the outside of the house. Rubbing it down, undercoat and primer and all that, and I was amazed, I was up the ladder, 'Oh be careful, up the ladder,' and all that, but you know, but, why not? [Wife's name] would want me to keep the house nice, she wouldn't want me to sit, you know, sat like that, you know, and feeling sorry for myself. And I do feel sorry for myself sometimes, but she wouldn't want me to, and sometimes I, I, I don't hear her speak to me but I think, 'What would she say?' And I'd hear her voice, you know, sort of thing, telling me, you know, so, so, (sighs) that's about it really, I think.</p> <p>I can cope without [wife's name], I find it hard, but I can cope without her and she'd want me to. Cos, I loved her and she loved me and she would want me to cope. She'd want me to be strong and loving for my grandkids and my son, and be there and be there for our [son's name], (crying). Em, I, I, I am a strong person and I think, I think you've got to be a strong person to show a bit of weakness sometimes and sensitivity and as far as I'm concerned, the world needs more sensitive people.</p> <p>I wanted better, and I don't know where that comes from really, cos my brothers haven't got that, they live similar lives, so, a couple of them have been divorced, been violent towards their wives, haven't brought their kids</p>	<p>1338-1346</p> <p>1387-1392</p> <p>1493-1500</p>
---	--	--

	<p>up particularly well, em, the kids haven't done particularly well. And I think, if I'm honest, it's [wife's name] (crying). It's [wife's name]'s influence. (Pause). Cos she always wanted the best, she was very strong-minded, you know, and I'm not all about just the material stuff. I'm about values, and manners and politeness and sensitivity and being nice to people and, you know, so, I'm all over the place, aren't I?</p>	
<p>Social media as helpful</p> <p>Television as helpful</p>	<p>social media, em, Macmillan; not just Macmillan, they've got a fantastic web-page, website with, em, a lot of people who've, you know, there's categories of, if you've lost a child, if you've lost a wife, if you've lost a sister or dad, and if you've lost a wife to cancer, and a lot of people post on there their experience, you know, of losing their wife to cancer, and this and that, you know, and I've posted a few times on it, but it can get a bit, and I'll tell you a story in a minute, and also the Cruse Bereavement forum, em, that, that, that's good and there's an organisation called, have you heard of this, WAY UP: Widowed And Young?</p> <p>So I've been on that website and I've, I, I, I, I've done a few posts and read quite a lot about people's experiences and what have you</p> <p>You know, and I think, it, it, it's a hard place to be in sometimes, as an external observer sort of thing, looking at it and thinking, I, like I say, I have looked at a lot of the posts and engaged with a few of them and got something out of it, eh, and talked to them and, you know, (<i>can't make out 1.28.27</i>) and I've given a bit of advice to people</p> <p>I do dip in and out now and then, em, but I don't go on them so much now, eh, eh, I don't think I need them so much.</p> <p>Yes, they were helpful in the beginning just to read other people's experiences, you know, about loss and you feel like you're not on your</p>	<p>1018-1025</p> <p>1029-1031</p> <p>1061-1064</p> <p>1078-1079</p> <p>Lines 1091-1094</p>

	<p>own then, don't you? Obviously, it's not just happened to me, it's happened to other people. And, em, so, and there is some nice people on there. I, I, I, I, I would consider myself to be one of the nice people on there.</p> <p>YouTube videos I've watched about grief and loss and, you know, try and derive something from it. Em, funnily enough, I've done a few</p> <p>it's called After Life, and he's really, really struggling with it. It's a comedy, comedy drama. There's six episodes, half an hour episodes, and there's two series now and there's a third series that's come out, and it's the most successful thing he's ever done given the feedback he's had from people who have been bereaved. And people said, 'Oh, you don't want to be watching that, [P's name], you've just lost [wife's name].' Anyway, I watched it. And I absolutely derived something from it cos he's really, really struggling, he's not very nice to people, he wants to kill himself, I don't, but he wants, he wants to kill himself, em, his wife, it was very difficult to watch when I first started, cos the opening series she, she, she's left him video messages and she's having cancer treatment in hospital and she's lost her hair and she's got a cap on and she's saying, like, 'I love you' and you know, (pause) (crying) but it's, it's bittersweet, em, and one thing I will say about Ricky Gervais, some, some of it is a bit daft but a lot of it is very, very, em, profound, I think. And I don't know why, I don't know much about Ricky Gervais but he sort of gets it in the writing, so he sort of, I don't know who he's lost in his life or a friend or what have you, but he sort of gets it. He, he, there are some really profound lines in it. He, he, meets the character, she's, she's quite sad actually, she's a famous actress out of Downton Abbey, I can't remember her name now, you'll know her, and she sits on a bench at her husband's grave every day and he goes and visits his wife and he sits with her, and they have these sort of talks with each other, and she, sort of, she's</p>	<p>Lines 1133-1134</p> <p>Lines 1147-1171</p>
--	---	---

	<p>sort of counselling him in a way, you know. He has this rubbish job, and that's, on a local newspaper, eh, and he hates his life, cos he had a nice house and he's lost his wife to cancer and what have you, but he slowly and surely, he's coming to terms with it through a difficult journey. And it's really, really good actually, I enjoyed it. Em, some very cutting moments; I can't say I didn't shed tears when I watched it, cos I did, (coughs) but then you start laughing at something cos he's quite funny as well.</p> <p>You know, for all, for the little I've gleaned from reading some of these forums, it's, it's all anecdotal, isn't it, but from what people say on the forums about you know, some, some, some, you know, a lot of women, they've downsized, moved house, got stuck into the garden, you know, they're doing this and doing that, you know, and some of them are suffering really badly and that, and taking antidepressants and really suffering, some of them are drinking quite a lot, they're very honest a lot of people, well, quite a few men, they, they, I don't know if this sounds harsh, they come across as a bit babyish, like, sort of, they can't cope without their wives. I can cope without [wife's name], I find it hard, but I can cope without her and she'd want me to.</p>	1379-1388
<p>Everybody grieves differently</p> <p>No time limit on grief</p>	<p>I'm not putting any time limit on loss, but some of the people were saying, 'Oh, I lost my dad six years ago,' and, and, it, and, and, I thought, 'I don't need this.' And I thought, 'I, I,' you know, 'I, I lost my wife six months ago,' and I'm not, I'm not, like, I suppose it is sad to sort of critique, but I thought, 'I'm in a better place than them and I only lost [wife's name] six months, six weeks, six, seven weeks ago. I feel, I feel like I've got a strength that they haven't.</p> <p>I know counsellors maybe shouldn't maybe voice opinions, eh, but, she did sort of said, 'Yeah, if it's not what you need, [P's name], not what you want,'</p>	<p>1042-1047</p> <p>Lines 1054-1056</p>

	<p>I think there's a, there's a significant minority, I would say, of people on there and it's all sort of like the (pause), they haven't, I won't even say moved on, cos I don't know about this concept about moving on, em, (pause), sort of, sort of, derived some sort of warped sense of pleasure about being, sort of, in that position of having a loss and, and, and (pause) and wallow in it.</p> <p>I don't think I need that now, I don't go on it much and eh, and I would say that WAY UP, it can be, it can be very much a clique and they do, they do a lot of like get togethers and parties and Christmas dos and that, and I'm not a party person really.</p>	<p>Lines 1079-1084</p> <p>Lines 1095-1097</p>
<p>Keeping busy</p> <p>Being outside</p> <p>Exercise</p> <p>Hobbies</p> <p>Getting on with life</p>	<p>Exercise, my bike, being out in, like I say, I try to move about quite a lot cos like I say if, if you sit for too long it settles on you and you can start to feel a bit agitated. I do get agitated, I do feel unsettled and no matter where I go, I do feel uncomfortable. You know, and I feel like, em, it's the grief fairy giving me a visit, you know. And I go out on my bike and I get out in the fresh air and I do 30, 40 miles and exercising about in the fresh air and there's a village up there called Welby and there's a lovely bench there, I've got these strategic benches all around the area where I can sit and have a rest and have a drink and a biscuit and that and I'll sit and I'll, there's one particular one, and I know why taken to it because I used to sit on that bench and I used to phone [wife's name]. And she'd say, 'Where are you, [name]?' And I'd say, 'I'm at Welby. I'm just sat having a rest.' And she'd have a chat with me, and she'd say, 'How long will you be before you get home?' 'About 45 minutes.' 'Right, I'll put the dinner on.' You know, so I sit there and it's, there's a plaque on the back and it's, em, 'to Harold and Margaret Something' and 'who loved this village', you know, it's really lovely. I sit on that bench. So, cycling, I'll be out in the fresh air. Gardening, I'm not a great gardener. [Wife's name] was a gardener,</p>	<p>1110-1125</p>



	<p>she liked the garden; I think it's hard work but I try and keep on top of it.</p> <p>I read a lot, you know, em, novels, em, I've read over the years, over the, em, stuff on grief, articles on grief. There's a lady called Megan Devine, I don't know if you've heard of her.</p> <p>it's called After Life, and he's really, really struggling with it. It's a comedy, comedy drama. There's six episodes, half an hour episodes, and there's two series now and there's a third series that's come out, and it's the most successful thing he's ever done given the feedback he's had from people who have been bereaved. And people said, 'Oh, you don't want to be watching that, [P's name], you've just lost [wife's name].' Anyway, I watched it. And I absolutely derived something from it cos he's really, really struggling</p> <p>I've read Richard Coles book The Madness of Grief, I've read that quite recently, the only reason was that it was 90 pence on Ama- on Kindle, so I thought, 'I'll have a bit of that.' So that was quite a lovely story in losing his partner to alcoholism he died, he died of, but there's some quite profound bits and pieces in there.</p> <p>I started going to the pictures on my own, me and [wife's name] liked the pictures and I quite enjoyed it; it felt a bit weird and sad really, going to the pictures on my own, I felt a bit sad really, Billy no-mates (laughs). But I wouldn't let it stop me, cos it was a particular film I wanted to see. So, I went, and I got talking to a, actually, I got talking to a bloke at the pictures actually, em, and I think these are all like, little baby steps you take and like, little hurdles you step over to develop as a person on your own and to develop as a person to formulate some sort of life for yourself without someone who was there before. Cos you've got to, you've got to, sort of, take pride in that, really. Em, cos, you know, I was amazed, when</p>	<p>Lines 1125-1127</p> <p>1147-1153</p> <p>Lines 1171-1175</p> <p>1331-1343</p>
--	--	---

	<p>[wife's name] died in February, by August I was outside, it's quite a big house this, I was painting the outside of the house. Rubbing it down, undercoat and primer and all that, and I was amazed, I was up the ladder, 'Oh be careful, up the ladder,' and all that, but you know, but, why not? [Wife's name] would want me to keep the house nice, she wouldn't want me to sit, you know, sat like that, you know, and feeling sorry for myself.</p> <p>You know, for all, for the little I've gleaned from reading some of these forums, it's, it's all anecdotal, isn't it, but from what people say on the forums about you know, some, some, some, you know, a lot of women, they've downsized, moved house, got stuck into the garden, you know, they're doing this and doing that, you know, and some of them are suffering really badly and that, and taking antidepressants and really suffering, some of them are drinking quite a lot, they're very honest a lot of people, well, quite a few men, they, they, I don't know if this sounds harsh, they come across as a bit babyish, like, sort of, they can't cope without their wives. I can cope without [wife's name], I find it hard, but I can cope without her and she'd want me to.</p> <p>I'll just go on and keep doing what I'm doing, really, and hopefully life will improve. Eh, like I say, I am grateful for what I've got and what I've had, I'll never forget that. Better I knew her for 38 years, 40 years, than not knowing her at all.</p> <p>I'm just getting on with it. I mean, you, you'll know more, you'll know better than me but, when you go and see these other people, the differences and the similarities in people's experiences. I'm sure you'll find a lot of people who will say maybe a lot similar to what I've said, and maybe some a lot different, I don't know. It's, it's strange isn't it. I've found that, you know, looking at some of the websites and that, big similarities but obviously they'll be differences as well. But em, I just carry on with</p>	<p>1379-1388</p> <p>1402-1404</p> <p>1432-1439</p>
--	--	--

	<p>it, that's all, you have to do what you can do, you have to deal with the cards what you've been dealt, haven't you.</p>	
<p>Family relationships – children and grandchildren in particular – helpful and important after loss</p> <p>Loss would be more difficult to bear without supportive, close, family relationships</p>	<p>, I'm close to my son and my grandkids, em, not so much my daughter-in-law, if I'm honest with you. Em, she's, she, she loves our [son's name] and he loves her, that's the most important thing, they love, she's a fantastic mother, but I'm a bit, sort of, removed from her. I'm not as close to her as I'd like to be, like, [wife's name] was to my dad, you know, that closeness, you know, they say that sort of, when your son gets married you gain a daughter, well I don't feel like I have really. Although I feel that our [son's name] has married into her family, she hasn't sort of married into ours, you know, and it's a bit sad, really.</p> <p>But as long as [son's name] loves her, he loves her, they're happy, that's the most important thing. The kids are brought up beautifully, they are beautiful kids; they're very polite and well-mannered and what-have-you.</p> <p>I wouldn't criticise her for feeling that really, cos sometimes it's hard to control your feelings and emotions, isn't it, and they just come out. Em, but I haven't got a great relationship with her either; she's perfectly fine, perfectly polite when she comes here, eh, but, she's not what, you know, like I say, [son's name] has a better relationship with his in-laws than me and [wife's name] had with her, I think. (Pause). Em, so that's a bit sad, really. But, like I say, as long as they're all alright and fit and healthy and they look after themselves and they love each other and he's got a good life our [son's name] going forward</p> <p>I don't think anything's been too much of a hindrance on me cos (sighs) I haven't, I don't think I've got that big a life really, I haven't got a massive circle of friends, eh, eh, I've got a few acquaintances, I don't get many messages, texts, phone calls, em, so I've got no-one in my</p>	<p>Lines 1180-1187</p> <p>Lines 1192-1195</p> <p>Lines 1216-1223</p> <p>Lines 1248-1257</p>

	<p>life really to hinder, our [son's name] could hinder me if he, if he had a mind to, or, but he wouldn't, he wouldn't, because he loves me, em, I think the relationship with [wife's name]'s sisters, like falling out with one but the other one has taken it upon herself not to contact me as well, em, that's been a hindrance to me and that has really, really bothered me in the last, good few, I sometimes find myself waking up and it bothering me, eh, em, in the morning, and I get out of bed, and once you get out of bed and you start moving, you feel better.</p> <p>It's funny, you know, it's amazing when one person dies, she was like the hub of the family, what the wheel went round and it just changes everything, and I find it incredible really, you know. Em, the world seems a bit alien sometimes to me, you know, and a bit threatening, and a bit, em, cos I'm on my own a lot of the time; it's just em, I don't know people and eh, (pause) you know, all our relationships were sort of like, fine, when [wife's name] was alive, and then (pause) she dies, and not long after there's this schism in the family. Cos emotions run high, and you don't handle things particularly well, and we all make mistakes, I make mistakes, everyone does, you don't handle things very well, and then it changes even more, and one, one thing you do need when you lose someone is a bit of a support network and the only support, really, I've got is our [son's name]. And he loves me and he FaceTimes me every night religiously, and he'll phone me and sometimes when I can't stomach the FaceTime cos I'm feeling upset, and that doesn't happen very often, but it does happen, and I do tell him that, he'll phone me when he's got the kids to bed and we'll have a good chat and what have you</p> <p>I can cope without [wife's name], I find it hard, but I can cope without her and she'd want me to. Cos, I loved her and she loved me and she would want me to cope. She'd want me to be strong and loving for my grandkids and my son,</p>	<p>Lines 1290-1303</p> <p>1387-1392</p>
--	---	---

	<p>and be there and be there for our [son's name], (crying). Em, I, I, I am a strong person and I think, I think you've got to be a strong person to show a bit of weakness sometimes and sensitivity and as far as I'm concerned, the world needs more sensitive people.</p>	
<p>Timing of loss in lifespan affects meaning making</p>	<p>I sometimes wonder about how things would have been if, I sometimes think I'm lucky the fact that, if you can be lucky, that [wife's name] died while I was retired. If I'd been, if I'd still been working when she'd died, you know, I'm not sure the school would have been fantastically supportive like, with having time off. I don't know, I might be wrong, but it was a very, very pressure cooker type of situation at the school, very difficult, a lot of staff under tremendous, it was a failing school, it's all knocked down now and gone but it was a failing school, so I think, if I'd have maybe lost [wife's name] and had maybe a few weeks off and had to go back to school, I think I'd have, I think I maybe would have handled particular situations badly, particularly challenging behaviours from kids, em, I may have had to be off work for a long time, you know, to get myself put right, if you like, to gain enough strength to go back into that sort of environment because, like I say, looking after [wife's name] for 18 months, it depleted my resources, emotionally and physically and I wasn't particularly looking after myself, I was looking after her, and that was difficult, so, in some respects I, I count my blessings in a way that I was retired when she got ill and she was retired, em, cos I wouldn't, you know, some of these people on these forums do say, 'I'm not looking forward to going back to work. I have to go back to work soon. I've got to keep a roof over my head.' And, I sometimes think how lucky am I, you know, that, I feel for you there, the fact that you know, you've lost your husband or you've lost your wife and you have to go back to work; lost a child for god's sake, and going back to work. So, I think I'm em, eh, lucky in that respect.</p>	<p>1229-1248</p>

Need for support after loss	I think what you are doing is important. You know, cos, cos, the, the I talk about support networks and I think, you know, there's a dearth of support networks for people experiencing loss, you know.	1360-1362
Being a man and making sense of loss	<p>I'm going to be really blunt here, I think some men, some men, in my experience, are babies, you know, they've ben molly-coddled by their wives maybe, they go on about having to go to the shop and having to cook a meal and banging on about all that. I mean, I don't, you know, I'm no cordon bleu chef; I do cook for myself but I do, I do, I do have Marks and Spencer microwave meals.</p> <p>Some of these guys, they do my head in. You know, grow up for god's sake, put your big boy's pants on; it is hard, you know, it, but, some of the things they come out with you think, 'Come on.' It is hard going shopping on your own, you know, cos me and [wife's name] always used to go shopping together. We used to see colleagues from school and we were always together, no matter what we were doing, we were always together, shopping, or whatever it was, down the town, shopping for clothes, we were always together, but some, some people, eh, and I'm talking about men in particular; women seem much more resourceful. You know, for all, for the little I've gleaned from reading some of these forums, it's, it's all anecdotal, isn't it, but from what people say on the forums about you know, some, some, some, you know, a lot of women, they've downsized, moved house, got stuck into the garden, you know, they're doing this and doing that, you know, and some of them are suffering really badly and that, and taking antidepressants and really suffering, some of them are drinking quite a lot, they're very honest a lot of people, well, quite a few men, they, they, I don't know if this sounds harsh, they come across as a bit babyish, like, sort of, they can't cope without their wives. I can cope without [wife's name], I find it hard, but I can cope without her and she'd want me to. Cos, I</p>	<p>1366-1370</p> <p>1372-1392</p>

	loved her and she loved me and she would want me to cope. She'd want me to be strong and loving for my grandkids and my son, and be there and be there for our [son's name], (crying). Em, I, I, I am a strong person and I think, I think you've got to be a strong person to show a bit of weakness sometimes and sensitivity and as far as I'm concerned, the world needs more sensitive people. (Pause).	
Better she was in my life and I lost her than her not being in my life at all	I am grateful for what I've got and what I've had, I'll never forget that. Better I knew her for 38 years, 40 years, than not knowing her at all. Like I say, it would have been so easy to miss that opportunity if we both hadn't gone out that night. It was, sort of, meant to be, really. Em, eh, (pause) so, I'm happy, and I made her happy and she made me very happy (crying). Eh, (pause). Better to have loved and lost, I suppose. And old cliché, but it is, isn't it? (Sniffs). I sometimes wonder, don't you, eh, everyone does, what life would have been like if we hadn't met a particular person, em, (pause) and how hers would have turned out.	1403-1410

### **Reflexivity**

Reading Graeme's interview is really difficult and I have to keep stopping. His grief floats off the page, and feels heavy. Reading about his wife and her death, and his sadness, despair and loss, I feel my own. This is probably the most difficult interview as it taps into my own feelings of grief and loss, and vicarious grief and loss, watching my parents, when my sister died. The associated helplessness is difficult to feel, and the burden of the loss, that feels imposed, unchosen, heavy and bleak, feels real.

While there is a tragic story at the heart of Graeme's interview, and a resulting isolation, for which he feels responsible and wants to 'do something' about, I am left with a message of hope from Graeme. He is a resilient, caring, thoughtful man who has generously given his time and his thoughts and feelings, engaging with the topic in a disarmingly honest way. The hope lies in his message of 'getting on with life' and remembering his wife's life, bringing her into the interview, and in that way, bringing her to life.

Support v isolation

Difficulty moving on, planning, and watching others move on, plan their futures.

APPENDIX L

INITIAL FOUR THEMES GENERATED FROM ISHAN'S INTERVIEW

There are different levels of analysis, leading to 4 different categories of emerging themes. The categories are in the physical, social, psychological and spiritual dimensions, as from reading the transcripts through several times, each loss impacts each of these 4 areas of each of the participants' lives. From Ishan's interview, there are emerging themes in each of these 4 areas, illustrated below.

<u>Ishan quote</u>	<u>Theme</u>
<p>I'm sure I could have spoken to them about, about it to my parents at any time that I wanted. But, I made the decision myself that I didn't really want to. And I think, in part, as well it was also because it really, it, I found it too difficult to talk about it to them, as well, sort of thing, em, so, it's not like I blame them for it. It was a decision that I made consciously, I think. (lines 121-125).</p> <p>when I was younger, I didn't have a choice, and then when I did have a choice, I picked her anyway. Em, so, I think when I thought about that and people ask me, you know, how difficult it is to deal with the situation, I say, 'Well, look, if I had the option to do it all again, knowing how painful life is now, I'd do it all over again, because when I had the choice, I did it anyway. So, I can't say now that I regret any sacrifice that I made or I regret anything that I did, because I had the choice and when I had the choice, I made the same decision as when I didn't have a choice. So, I guess that made me, em, feel a lot better about it. But that's something you can only reflect on retrospectively, that I know that I wouldn't have changed anything anyway (lines 229-237)</p> <p>I remember, like, we were all sort of sat round and we couldn't really quite believe what was happening, that we were sort of</p>	<p><b><u>Action and making an impact on the world</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- After my loss, I can consciously choose my responses; I am <b>free</b> to act; however, choice and freedom can lead to feelings of guilt</li> <li>- My chosen actions can be meaningful and help me incorporate my loss and the death into my life</li> <li>- Yalom, van Deurzen, (Sartre?)</li> </ul>



free to enjoy (pause) this weekend of our life. And like, you know, it was a great hotel, like, you know, we had a great time there, we walked on the beach, it was great, great weather, sort of went around Newquay and stuff, it was great. And I think, I remember it was there my mum was really sort of emotional about, she goes, you know, 'We never took you kids anywhere and now you kids are taking us on holiday,' and stuff and it was like, 'It's fine, that's, that's, that's our reality. It's ok.' Em, but certainly, I remember early I felt really guilty that I didn't really have anyone to care about, sort of thing, and I didn't really have that much to do. That was, I think for all, for all of us that was quite tough. (*lines 325-334*).

I had to go through the worst thing that I could ever have gone through in life and it's happened, it's already happened, and I'm still here, sort of thing. Em, but I remember at the time knowing that and thinking, 'Right, I could do what I do best and that's, em, when I'm afraid and I'm upset, I'm very good at pretending that I'm not. So, I can just do that thing that I do when I'm a fighter, when I just pretend that everything's ok, knowing that I'm dying inside, but I'll just put on a front of being tough. That's all I did as a fighter, sort of thing. I was always afraid, but I just never let anyone see it because fighter's like, fighters are like predators, once you smell blood, that's it, you go for the kill, sort of thing. If you're in a fight with someone and you see that they're afraid or they hit you and they don't hurt you, it's very, it's very difficult to respect them after that. Then you go in for the kill. And it's the same thing in this situation, I thought, 'I'm, I, I'm, I feel really vulnerable, I'm really upset, em, I'm literally dying inside but I could just do this thing where I just put on a front and say, you know what, I'm fine and just sort of tough it out, like I'm used to toughing it

out,' sort of thing. But I made the decision very quickly that I didn't want to do that and I wasn't going to do that sort of thing, I was going to sort of, just let the feelings, sort of, come as, as and when they came, and I was going to deal with it, sort of thing. (lines 496-512)

So, sometimes I feel like I'm bullet proof, really, and you can use that in many different ways; I could go around hurting people if I wanted to, I could go around insulting people if I wanted to, because there's literally nothing that anyone, anything that anyone can say or do to me that's going to make me feel any worse than what I feel right now. But I know that I definitely did not want to be that guy, that's not how my dad raised me, really, em, and that's not how I live my life, but I saw that happen to him. All of a sudden, he wasn't the sort of happy-go-lucky guy, he was a bit horrible, really, and I could tell it was just because he had been through something awful, em, and when you go through something awful you sort of lose your inhibitions because you've been through something terrible and I could see and hear that he was becoming a bit horrible, really. Obviously, it's difficult to approach someone on that subject because they've just lost their mum, but I could see it and I know, and I knew that I never wanted to be like that (lines 547-558).

I just started focusing on myself really. With regards to myself, ok, yeah, it was incredibly painful, and it still is, as I'm sure you can tell, but, (pause) you eventually have to realise that, I had to realise that her life was always limited and actually maybe to have kept her alive any longer maybe would have been a little bit selfish really (lines 768-772)

Em, whereas now, there's none of that, sort of thing, so I can, I can, I can spread my

wings and not feel guilty about it. Em, so, so that's good, em, even though I do feel guilty about it somewhere (laughing). (lines 926-929).

there's an image where they ask you if you want to witness the cremation, right, the family is allowed to witness the cremation. And you sort of think, I remember at the time thinking, I definitely need to be there for that point, for that part, because I need to be there with my family, and I kind of need that closure sort of thing (lines 1011-1014).

It is important for Ishan to be there for the cremation with his family. This is about authenticating his loss externally, with family, to then begin to incorporate the loss internally. Ishan chooses to witness the symbolising of his loss and this is an action that is meaningful for him.

I always thought I was waiting for a moment where, like that (*clicks fingers*), and suddenly everything will be ok again, sort of thing. And I think I realised over time that that moment was never coming and I think that when I realised that I'd need to accept a new, sort of, baseline of, of being and feeling then that's when I started to move on, really, rather than waiting for a moment where I would snap back to where things were like before. (lines 56-61).

I thought, 'I'm, I, I'm, I feel really vulnerable, I'm really upset, em, I'm literally dying inside but I could just do this thing where I just put on a front and say, you know what, I'm fine and just sort of tough it out, like I'm used to toughing it out,' sort of thing. But I made the decision very quickly that I didn't want to do that and I wasn't going to do that sort of thing, I was going to sort of, just let the feelings, sort of, come as, as and when they came, and I was going to deal with it, sort of thing. (lines 506-512).

I said to myself, I needed to process what I was going through here, because this is literally the worst thing that could ever happen and it's happening right now. If I, if I don't process it, (pause), you know, I'll fall

#### **Action and making an impact on the world**

- I feel responsible to deal with my feelings about this loss and act in a meaningful way after my loss
  - Dealing with this loss is my responsibility
- A more passive position can mean that a person is struggling to make meaning after their loss, somehow, expecting meaning to be made without their responsibility or active involvement

off a cliff edge, basically. Em, so I made that, knowing how good I was at fronting and toughing stuff out, I knew that in this case I definitely did not want to do that. And I don't know where that came from, but I just knew that I wanted to process it. (lines 520-525)

I'd always figured that if I just went through it, eventually, I'd get to the other side of it. Whereas if I just kept sort of, putting off processing it, maybe I'd jump off a bridge or something, I don't know. (lines 528-530).

I don't have my source of happiness and outlet anymore. And so, these feelings that would normally evaporate, and I wouldn't have to worry about it, right? Now they sort of fester and linger somewhere in my mind and they manifest as, maybe like, anger or something else or extreme feelings of being upset that I never had to deal with for, em, you know, a large part, certainly throughout my entire childhood and my early adult life, now, all of a sudden, I have to, like, develop a level of emotional intelligence that I never had to have before (laughs), em, and I'm learning, sort of thing. Sometimes I feel that if I can't make sense of something or I'm really angry, that I'm becoming, like, I'm, it feels like I'm becoming a bad person, like, there's a darkness that I can't escape, when, but that darkness would turn to light when I'd see her, sort of thing, and I'm consciously aware that I don't have that anymore, sort of thing. I don't have someone (pause) that I love and I consequently, I don't have someone who loves me, em, (pause) regardless of all of my flaws, unconditionally, if you like. Em, so, to have lost that is, yeah, that's probably the biggest agony of what I lost, basically. (lines 68-694)

I keep finding that there are different elements to how the pain is striking me,

It feels like Ishan is struggling to find himself after the death of his sister. He says he wants to 'process' and 'go through' the feelings; however, he is struggling to make sense of his feelings and take responsibility for his feelings, regulation and behaviour without his sister in his life.

Since he lost his sister, he does not have a 'relational home' for his feelings, which he now sees as his sole responsibility.

Ishan is struggling to take responsibility for his reactions here; he realises there are

really. Em, and I'm trying to make sense of that, really. And I'm aware of it, I guess that's the first step, but sometimes, yeah, I can feel like, I'm not a good or a nice person to be around and that's not necessarily my fault. It's just that I've been through something that's really bad and (pause) I'm trying my best, sort of thing. (lines 699-703).

I want to have an outlet for it, but I don't. I don't have someone I can go to anymore and immediately it's going to be ok. And so, this pain, just never sort of extinguishes, it sort of naturally burns out, sort of thing, over a period of days or weeks, sort of thing. (lines 713-716).

I was too numb to process it for the first year, or two, but eventually, when I began to think about it a bit more, I was like, 'I feel, yeah, I feel a deep sense of regret,' sort of thing. So, I try, I try not to (pause) regret anything now. I just try to make sure that I get things done when they, when they should be, sort of thing, eh, regardless of how busy I am, sort of thing. (lines 829-833).

I certainly wasn't going to duck away from the responsibilities that you have to go through when someone dies, like, organising the funeral, which is just, you know, it's just awful, isn't it? Em, you know, having to, when you have to go and dress that person when you prepare them for the funeral, that's just awful, sort of thing, and then, like, (pause) there, there's an image where they ask you if you want to witness the cremation, right, the family is allowed to witness the cremation. And you sort of think, I remember at the time thinking, I definitely need to be there for that point, for that part, because I need to be there with my family, and I kind of need that closure sort of thing (1007-1014).

times when he reacts in a way that is not 'good' or 'nice', however, he does not see that as his 'fault'; rather, he is reacting to what has happened to him, which has been 'really bad'.

I needed to experience it from a closure point of view, but experiencing it was, yeah, really awful, yeah, (laughing) traumatic, I guess, if you want to say. (I: Yeah). Em, and then of course, I've got the rest of my life to deal with that, you know, one way or another, so, I, I figured I wasn't going to rush it but (laughs) em, I know that it's something that I have to deal with, there's a responsibility there. And I never wanted, you know, some people, who you might know, who have lost someone and they just lose themselves, right? I never wanted to be like that (1030-1037).

She's, was (pause) yeah, it's not to say that she was a part of my life, she was, she was my life, sort of thing, em, so, you know, like I said, I try not to beat myself up about it, sort of thing. I just sort of try and roll with the punches, kind of thing. (lines 994-1001)

Here, Ishan sounds very passive; he is 'rolling with the punches' that life throws at him – life is the 'do-er' and Ishan is the 'done-to'. There is no sense of responsibility or agency here, and no recognition that Ishan can choose his responses and actions as he makes sense of his loss and incorporates it into his life.

if I'm not challenging myself, I feel like I'm not learning anything, sort of thing. Em, so, you know, whenever there's an opportunity to just go for something, em, I just go for it, really, and sort of, just forego the feeling of like, nervousness or awkwardness or, or uncomfortableness that other people may express, em, just go for it really. Like, eh, like, you know, like, I went to the Netherlands for, for my placement, I probably wouldn't have gone abroad, em, I don't, I know I always wanted to go abroad, I probably wouldn't have gone because I probably would have gotten away with just doing something local and got to, sort of, live here, but I think, eh, yeah, I was like, ok, I'm going to the Netherlands, I'm going to learn a new language very, very quickly and I'm going to have to adapt to a very different way of being. But, em, rather than saying it was a culture shock, I just took it in my stride because, you know, what's there

**Action and making an impact on the world**

- Being active and action helps me to make sense of the loss and incorporate the loss into my life
- Making the most of opportunities is important

to be afraid of, really? It can't possibly be as bad as what I went through, right? Em, and that just for anything really (lines 586-597)

I guess I haven't had a significant event that I can say that I wouldn't, that I've done that I wouldn't have done otherwise, but, you know, just the little things, I guess, and I hope that if there was something more significant that I would just, yeah, just not be afraid, really, just go for it, really. (lines 602-605).

And that's something that I was too numb to process it for the first year, or two, but eventually, when I began to think about it a bit more, I was like, 'I feel, yeah, I feel a deep sense of regret,' sort of thing. So, I try, I try not to (pause) regret anything now. I just try to make sure that I get things done when they, when they should be, sort of thing, eh, regardless of how busy I am, sort of thing. (lines 829-833).

<u>Quote</u>	<u>Theme</u>
<p>I don't know if we will go into sort of, the depths of the relationship that I had with my sister, basically, but, at the time, obviously, it wasn't just me going through that loss, obviously, I have a sibling, I have another sister, who's older than both of us, and obviously my mum and dad as well, so I think at that time (pause), I was obviously in a lot of pain, but my priority was to make sure that my parents were ok, really, and so, between me and my sister, we made the decision that we would just focus on them. (lines 93-98).</p> <p>I mean, my life was that element of care over someone for (pause) 24 years, basically. Like, that indepen-, that, that</p>	<p><b><u>(Dis)Connection (from) to others</u></b></p> <p>Family relationships:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prioritisation of parents after death of sister</li> <li>- There is a sense that the family has been destabilised after this loss</li> <li>- The close/enmeshed/blurred relationship with his sister before her death impacts how he can make sense of it after she has gone.</li> <li>- The blurred boundaries have impacted meaning making and made it more difficult</li> </ul> <p>Ishan prioritises his parents and their grief after the death of his sister. He is used to</p>

dependency never went away. And obviously when you are young, I was three years younger than my sister, but obviously I have an older sister, who is three, who was, who is six years older than me, and was three years older for, so she remembers, just about remembers life before my sister who came along, who passed away came along. And I don't know any other way of being; so, I was born three years later and I know that, and I was, I always had an intuitive knowledge, and as I got older that I had someone in my life who was more important than me. And that was the deal. That was, like, my baseline. There was no other way of being, sort of thing. (lines 170-179).

I had almost three people that I lost in, in a split second, and I know it was really tough for me and obviously for my parents as well, who obviously had to change their entire life after having this child, em, and then for my sister as well. My sister, em, grew up, obviously she was three years older, but she also grew up in a time in our family where we were not as financially em, well off as we are now, so, she, so, my sister was always like an older sister but also always a parent as well because my parents had to go, had to work to keep our, ourselves afloat, and so she had to be a parent from the age of three. So, for all of us, I think, all that element of our life just, literally just evaporated in just, just a second. (lines 262-270)

So, like, what essentially tied our family together was her, and the experiences that we had with her. So like, you know, I remember being at school and hearing people talk about things like Lanzarote, eh, like, Disneyworld and, like, Fuerte-, Fuerteventura, and, and, like Florida, and me thinking that they were just places just down the M1 and actually because I'd never fathomed ever going abroad, that,

putting others' needs before his own and indicates that it is vital to him that his parents survive this loss.

Ishan prioritised his sister when she was alive. Often, when he talks about her, there are blurred boundaries between them; it often sounds like he saw his sister *as part of* him. She helped him to regulate and to 'feel better'. He 'needed her' as much as she 'needed' him.

Ishan has to find a new way of being, as does his family, who have lost their 'glue'.



that situation, and people would always talk about these things, and, me and my sister, my older sister, would now talk about, 'Oh, do you remember that summer where, that summer holiday where we spent the entire time in the children's ward,' eh, or, you know, 'Do you remember that guy we met that summer when we spent our entire summer in the children's ward,' sort of thing. So that's the memories that we have, and her, and her life was basically what tied us all together. Em, so, I think quite early on, we all felt quite guilty when we didn't really have that much to do (laughs) (311-322)

Sometimes I feel that if I can't make sense of something or I'm really angry, that I'm becoming, like, I'm, it feels like I'm becoming a bad person, like, there's a darkness that I can't escape, when, but that darkness would turn to light when I'd see her, sort of thing, and I'm consciously aware that I don't have that anymore, sort of thing. I don't have someone (pause) that I love and I consequently, I don't have someone who loves me, em, (pause) regardless of all of my flaws, unconditionally, if you like. Em, so, to have lost that is, yeah, that's probably the biggest agony of what I lost, basically. And I always thought it was her who needed me, and I never really thought that actually, I needed her as much as she needed me sort of thing. (lines 687-695).

She's, was (pause) yeah, it's not to say that she was a part of my life, she was, she was my life, sort of thing, em, so, you know, like I said, I try not to beat myself up about it, sort of thing. I just sort of try and roll with the punches, kind of thing. (lines 998-1001).

I realise that, I think up until, I think, when she passed away, if I watched a film where somebody passed away in the film or there was like a, an element of heartbreak in the

Losing her is like losing part of himself, it changes who he is. While it changes his family too, it changes how he feels about himself and also fits with the **Who Am I Now?** emerging theme.

He has lost a 'relational home' for his feelings, and he no longer feels 'unconditional love'. This suggests that he feels alone with his feelings of loss and does not share them with others.

**(Dis)Connection (from) to others**

- More empathy for others as a result of loss

film, I couldn't really, I couldn't really empathise with it. Like, I could sympathise, I knew that someone had lost someone or someone, em, had felt some heartache, but I could never really say that I could truly empathise with that situation, as, as I saw it played out in front of me. I think what changed pretty much immediately since she passed away is that my sort of, em, (pause) yeah, my sort of like, eh, emotional barometer just, like, reset. Now, for example, I can't watch a film where there's an element of death in it and not feel the pain of that character. I think that was something that I was surprised changed almost immediately, that my, eh, that my ability to empathise just, yeah just completely eh, completely began, if you like (laughs). And I know that's a definite change in me that I notice, that I can't really not empathise with a situation, and that's how I think I've changed, personally (lines 340-352).

I think, maybe, a year or two before my sister passed away, my friend, my, one of my best friends, em, his mum was diagnosed with terminal cancer and she passed away, em, quite close to when I went through what I went through, basically. So, I'd had that experience of being, like, by his side as he went through that basically, em, and you know, obviously, I knew his mum quite well so that made it more difficult for me as well, and I am quite close to his dad, we are good friends, em, and then obviously, you know, [friend's name] who's my friend, em, we were always very close and he told me, you know, the, the details of her final moments, basically, and how tough they were to live through, and even again, obviously, I knew his mum quite well; I could sympathise, and I did, and I was there, and I went to visit his dad on the day she passed away and stuff, I couldn't quite empathise because I hadn't been through that sort of thing; em, losing

- More aware of other people's feelings; he identifies with other people's pain more easily. This helps him get in touch with his own pain, and process the feelings.
- He does not empathise in a way where he wants to help others and their pain, he feels his own pain in the telling of their story; this might indicate that he is struggling to incorporate the feelings and the loss, as he lost the 'part of himself' that would help him do that when his sister died.

Sharing this experience has been important for Ishan, as it allowed him to talk about his experience in a 'dialogue of mourning' (Leader, 2008). He can access his own

someone before their time. Em, but then obviously, I went through what I went through quite soon after and I got to talk to [friend's name] about it, sort of thing. We talk, em, when we can, about the sort of, finer, intimate moments of dealing with, like, the end of someone's life, really. Em, so I kind of felt that I was somewhat prepared from previous experiences to go through what I've been through, really, em. (lines 559-574).

feelings in talking about this with others who have lost loved ones.

Em, but fundamentally if I don't trust the people I'm delegating stuff to, then it's very difficult for me to do that. And I actually end up getting more stressed out, basically (laughs). Which isn't a great situation to be in, em, but I think I'm learning a little bit, as I go on really, just to basically to trust people a little bit more. What's been difficult is that I had someone who I had to love like her life depended on it, because their life did depend on it, right? (I: Yeah). And that way of being for an entire lifetime is how I've treated everything else in my life, sort of thing. To do it as if my life depended on it. So, obviously, my free time when I was younger was limited because of the care I had over my sister; so, the things that I was allowed to do, like, taekwondo, like football, or, or things that I had, you know, and the few friends that I was able to actually, who understood exactly what I was going through and, em, and who were able to accommodate the fact that I could never really come to their birthday party or I could never play out when they asked but they still wanted to be my friend, those friends are like, those friends are like, you know, family to me basically, I don't see the distinction there because they accept me for what I am, sort of thing. And when you have to, when you live a life that everything you do, you do like your life depends on it, it can be very, very hard if someone doesn't reciprocate that level of, em, due care and affection over stuff. (lines 645-662)

**(Dis)Connection (from) to others**

- Re-evaluation of relationships after loss
- Can feel either more connected to others or not want to waste time on relationships that are not mutually meaningful and supportive

Ishan feels different to others as he is aware that not everyone has had experience of bereavement.

I always, since then, I've tried to appreciate people around me who are, who have been there for me, sort of thing. I think it's, yeah, I think I've found a new sense of appreciation for not only life, but for the people around me who I can count on, sort of thing. Em, but also, maybe a bit more ruthless in the sense of, if someone (pause) I feel has, yeah, let me down, once, it's very difficult for me to then trust them again, sort of thing. And it's because I know that, that that situation could have happened, sort of thing. Em, so, yeah, I've definitely become a bit more, less trusting as a result. I don't know if that's a good or a bad thing, but yeah, I feel like I've become a bit more ruthless, em, with my conviction, I think. Like, I'm happy to stick to a decision, em, now, rather than umming and erring about something, particularly if that means cutting someone out, cutting someone out of my life, sort of thing (laughs). Which I'm not sure if it's a good or a bad thing, it's just one way that I've changed, really. (lines 840-851).

I remember I had, yeah, maybe four or five quite intense, em, quite brutal sessions with the counsellor here, where I just, I just went for it. those sessions were really intense and I just told him everything that I felt and how I felt at the time and obviously it was really tough, but, he said to me at the time that he was quite amazed how well I could articulate how, what I was going through at the time. And I think that really helped; not talking to someone about it, but just the fact that I was able to communicate what it was that I was thinking at the time. And I think that if I hadn't done that, I probably would have felt a lot worse, but I did, and I just went for it, really, and em, yeah. And I don't think even I can say though that really, really hard, that they helped numb the pain or

**(Dis)connection (from) to others**

- Communicating my thoughts and feelings freely is helpful to make sense of my loss
- Counselling was helpful as the feelings were heard and witnessed but left behind
- Communicating difficult feelings to friends and family can feel selfish and heavy
- Communicating feelings around loss is painful and difficult as it can trigger painful feelings
- Feeling understood by others is helpful
- It feels as though Ishan 'used' the counsellor as an object to vent to, not a person with whom he developed a dialogical relationship.

anything like that, they just helped me organise my thoughts and then I sort of, tried to move forward after that, really. (75-82)

And I didn't really have any real outlet for how I felt at that time. And I remember thinking that if I spoke to my mum and dad about it and got really upset that would make me seem a little bit selfish because if I was in a lot of pain, I couldn't imagine what they were going through, really. Em, so I never really spoke about it too much with my family. Em, and then, I think when you talk about something as, as visceral as losing someone as important, as close to you, as someone you have a duty of care over, I think, people always tell you that they're there for you, but then, the level of detail you want to go into, I think, makes it quite difficult to have those conversations and people to be comfortable around you with it, I think. Obviously, from the counsellor's point of view, that's their job, really, and you sort of go there as a blank canvas and you just say it and when the door closes it's sort of, it's kind of like it's over. But obviously when you talk to friends about it, it stays forever, really, doesn't it? So, then I always thought, you know, I didn't know if I had any friends that I really could, whatever, would want to darken with what I was going through really. So, I just decided not to. Which is probably why I enjoyed those counselling sessions so much because it was someone that I knew that, you know, ultimately, it was just their job to listen. It didn't really matter if they cared or not. It was just someone I could just talk to, really, and try to make sense of something. (98-115)

And so this was one of those situations where, like, life had hit me really, really hard again. And this was a feeling that I couldn't really, em, share with anyone else

It could be that this illustrates something about Ishan's experience of relationships as objectifying (caring for his sister, looking at her 'charts' and 'numbers', not able to communicate with her). He was also unable to talk to his friends about the situation as he did not want to be selfish or negatively impact his friendships by talking about his bereavement and his 'dark feelings'.

- There is no 'relational home' and this may impact his ability to make sense of and meaning from his losses
- Could Ishan's reluctance to be vulnerable in front of friends and family be linked to his masculinity? He does not say this, however, it is in line with hegemonic masculinity, which is also represented in Ishan's life in the form of fighting and being a fighter, a masculine hobby, where no vulnerability is possible.

There is a sense that Ishan wants to share his thoughts and feelings with another person or other people, to give words to his experience, but he expects not to be cared about and so a dialogical relationship and vulnerability are difficult, if not impossible, for him.

because no-one really understood how much it really meant to me. (396-399).

And when I have people around me, for example, who just make an honest mistake, and I'm just absolutely livid, and you know, and I know that I would never have felt like that otherwise but sometimes I feel like the pain of what I've been through surfaces through me becoming a lot angr-, very, very angry, very, very quickly, and I know that's not something that I used to be like. Em, because when I have got a little bit angry sometimes, people, they look a bit afraid because they haven't seen that for the previous 20-however many years of my life, now all of a sudden, I'm extremely angry, quite quickly. And, you know, I, I used to be a top-class fighter as well, so, when I get angry (laughing), people do tend to get a little bit afraid because they know what I'm capable of. Of course, I, it's not that I'd ever think about hitting anyone or hurting anyone, it's not in my, my blood to do that (411-421)

And, like, like, you know, I think that's one of the reasons why I feel very angry now, is that, em, when you've been through the worst thing ever, and you're, and you're, and you're still here, it's like, well, it's very difficult to threaten me. Like, what are you going to threaten me with? The worst thing that's ever happened in my life has happened, so what could someone possibly do to me, sort of thing? Nothing, right? And I'm a top-class fighter, so, you know, it's very difficult for me to feel physically threatened and I can't really be emotionally threatened either because I've coped with the worst thing ever. So, sometimes I feel like I'm bullet proof, really, and you can use that in many different ways; I could go around hurting people if I wanted to, I could go around insulting people if I wanted to, because there's literally nothing that anyone, anything that anyone can say or do

Ishan often feels very angry with others and defends against any closeness, vulnerability or real contact. I also felt this way in the interview with him, where he talked 'at' me.

to me that's going to make me feel any worse than what I feel right now. But I know that I definitely did not want to be that guy, that's not how my dad raised me, really, em, and that's not how I live my life (540-552).

I had a falling out with my boss and I love my boss like a father figure, basically, sort of thing, and when we fell out, it was awful. And I was just there, sat there like I'm burning alive, that's how intense the pain is, and I want have an outlet for it, but I don't. I don't have someone I can go to anymore and immediately it's going to be ok. And so, this pain, just never sort of extinguishes, it sort of naturally burns out, sort of thing, over a period of days or weeks, sort of thing. (710-716)

I was reading this article, em, quite close to after when my sister passed away, it was someone, em, someone had written, in the BBC an article about having gone through like a, I think she, she, had a, what's it called, a still birth, I guess, and she'd written some very, very, em, eh, (pause) sort of, (pause) emotive piece, em, that was really, really articulate, basically describing exactly what I was going through to the absolute detail, sort of thing. And I was like, yeah, this, this is, this is exactly what I'm going through, sort of thing. And, I remember, like, even if I hadn't gone through what I was going through, reading this, or someone else objectively reading this, you get a feeling from how she'd written it, how awful it was what she was going through. Like, it was so very, very difficult to read. And I was like, 'Wow, like, this is my reality.' Sort of thing. And I guess, in some way it makes me feel not so bad about things, like, what I'm going through is really tough and not everyone has gone through it, sort of thing, so I try not to beat myself up too much about it. I just accept

- The BBC article helps Ishan feel that he is not alone with his experience and his feelings and this is helpful for Ishan
- This is not a relationship, reading the article is something Ishan does on his own, so he does not have to burden others with his feelings, or be vulnerable in front of anyone. This disconnection from others could impact his ability to make sense of his loss – there is no human, feeling 'other' to share his experience. There is no dialogue.

that I, something really awful has happened and just try to, just try to move on basically. (728-741)

I think, you know, no matter, and obviously you've got family and everyone at some point has experienced loss but you always feel really alone with how you feel about it personally, right? Cos it's very personal to you, em, so, em, yeah, to know that other people have gone through something equally as difficult and been able to, sort of, get through it and carry on, excuse me, em, it's always, em, I don't want to say it's nice to hear, but always, you know, encouraging to know you can get through it, sort of thing. And I always wanted to, to get through it. I didn't want this experience to be the thing that destroyed me, basically. (747-752).

So even though, I probably do feel a little bit better when I talk about it, I can still talk, like sometimes, it might feel like it just happened only yesterday when I talk about how much it, the pain and stuff em, but, yeah, it's defi-, I'm definitely somewhere along the line with it now, I just have no idea where, sort of thing. (lines 954-957).

You know, initially, when people say things like, 'Oh you'll get better in time,' and you're like, 'But it's not getting better in time,' it's not, not, it's not helpful to hear people say that it'll get better in time because it hasn't, if I'm being honest. (627-629).

Ishan feels alone with his grief and his experience of loss. He is aware that others have lost people they love, however, his experience is unique to him and this isolates him from other people.

There is a sense that talking about his experience is retraumatising for Ishan, as when he does talk about it, it can feel 'like it just happened only yesterday'. This might explain why Ishan prefers to read about other people's experiences and not talk to others, and also why it feels as though making meaning from his losses is difficult.

**(Dis)connection (from) to others**

- Language used to talk about loss and to the bereaved is meaningful and can be helpful or unhelpful in helping them make sense of and make meaning from their loss



<u>Quote</u>	<u>What is my purpose in life?</u>
<p>I remember for a long time just being quite, eh, (pause) lost with it, really. Not in the sense that, em, I couldn't understand it. The type of area that I work in, you know, I deal with morbidity, mortality, quite often, I'm a scientist really, so I understand the, like the biology of life and death, so not in that sense, but, like, yeah, sort of, like, searching for what it really meant to me, I guess, and then, em, a long period of sort of (pause) learning how it had really affected me, I think, em, and I think I'm still doing that really, now, really. I'm not really sure if I could say where I am with it, but I know that it feels different now to what it felt like very acutely, really, where it was very numb, and very, sort of, (pause) difficult, I think. (41-49)</p> <p>I was three years younger than my sister, but obviously I have an older sister, who is three, who was, who is six years older than me, and was three years older for, so she remembers, just about remembers life before my sister who came along, who passed away came along. And I don't know any other way of being; so, I was born three years later and I know that, and I was, I always had an intuitive knowledge, and as I got older that I had someone in my life who was more important than me. And that was the deal. That was, like, my baseline. There was no other way of being, sort of thing. (172-179)</p> <p>That was, like, my baseline. There was no other way of being, sort of thing. So, my, so, for example, if I was at home and it was cold, em, my first thing wasn't, my first thought wasn't, 'Oh, I'm cold, let me do something about it.' My first thought was, 'I'm cold, that means she might be cold, so go deal with that first and then worry about me,' sort of thing. And let's say, if I'm hungry and I think, 'I'm hungry,' but the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Loss has caused me to re-evaluate my worldviews and my purpose in life</li> <li>- The way that I have lived my life has been destabilised/shattered due to this loss</li> <li>- Loss has not challenged the worldview that life should not be taken by the act of another</li> <li>- Life/the world is unfair and unjust.</li> </ul>

first thing I do is check the clock and make sure that her feeding time hasn't come up, cos that's the priority and that's how I lived my life. That, that, that, that was my life for 24 years, for my, and for the entire of her, of my sister's life for my parents and the same for my other sister as well. So, I always had to live life where something or someone was much more important than me and that was, but because that was my only reality, it's not like that defined who I was because that's just who I was, sort of thing, and I didn't have to make any changes to my life, that's exactly what it was. (178-189)

I still remember the abruptness of it, really, em, it sort of, yeah, in a second it all seemed to evaporate, really. Em, so, obviously, obviously, she was someone that I had, someone that I had a lot of responsibility over, em, so, as I got older, I felt, I began to feel what it was to be a parent but of course, she was still my sister, so we had that dynamic that, you know, she was my sister, and then also she was my best friend as well, by virtue of spending most of my life with her. So, when, I think when I realised as I got a bit older that, and the, the, and when I say I had a choice, I think that's when I began to realise what it was to be a parent: you're sort of obliged to love someone whilst being in love with them at the same time. I can't really explain it because I don't, I don't have a child, but I assume that's what being a parent actually is. You have to love someone unconditionally because (pause) that's your child, a biological extension of you. But also, you kind of, in love with them at the same time, in the sense that it's someone you adore, kind of thing, and you love unconditionally whether, you know, they upset you or not, really (laughs) sort of thing. So, it was that, and of course, then it was my sister as well, but also, my best friend, em. So, I had almost three people

that I lost in, in a split second, and I know it was really tough for me and obviously for my parents as well, who obviously had to change their entire life after having this child, em, and then for my sister as well. My sister, em, grew up, obviously she was three years older, but she also grew up in a time in our family where we were not as financially em, well off as we are now, so, she, so, my sister was always like an older sister but also always a parent as well because my parents had to go, had to work to keep our, ourselves afloat, and so she had to be a parent from the age of three.

So, for all of us, I think, all that element of our life just, literally just evaporated in just, just a second. And then all of a sudden it felt really strange that, em, we weren't getting her ready to go to school any more, em, (pause), her, her feed and her medicine time, although it was that time on the clock, it was like, right, this is something that we've been doing for decades yet (pause) we don't have to do it anymore. And, I remember that was really, really strange at the beginning, em. And certainly, like, I would spend just a lot of my time just, em, shouting her name from across the house, em, and then, just, just because she was quite, em, auditory (248-276)

And then all of a sudden, like, I remember, even sometimes, like, I would still call her name as I walked through the front door. (281-282)

And even now if I, you know, if I've been somewhere, or had an awful day at work, going, to the kitchen, my first thought, even, sometimes I used to feel my feet turning to the right, and then it's that realisation that she's not there, sort of thing. Em, which was really, really difficult at the beginning, it was like, em, it was like having to relive the moment she passed away over and over again each time that element of her life had to be relived. Em,

obviously now, you get used to it, sort of thing, and sometimes, I still go to her room as if she'd be there, but sort of, em, I guess the, the intensity of the pain, sort of, wains a little bit, even though it doesn't feel like it (pause) inside, it, it's a little less intense, I must admit. (293-301)

I remember it was there my mum was really sort of emotional about, she goes, you know, 'We never took you kids anywhere and now you kids are taking us on holiday,' and stuff and it was like, 'It's fine, that's, that's, that's our reality. It's ok.' Em, but certainly, I remember early I felt really guilty that I didn't really have anyone to care about, sort of thing, and I didn't really have that much to do. That was, I think for all, for all of us that was quite tough. (329-334)

I think one thing that has changed is, em, the, the, what I feel is the injustice of having gone through what I went through makes me really, really angry sometimes. Not like anger that's directed at someone, but I just, you know when they say, like, 'Life's hard,' this is, I'm sure this is what they are talking about, sort of thing. And sometimes I feel, like, an overwhelming sense of anger, which is non-directional, it's just because of what I've been through (402-407)

I was the carer and so it's very difficult to move into the position where you need to be cared for. Em, I always found it then difficult to, sort of, accept, well, I found it difficult initially to accept help at the time. I think everyone needs help at some point, right? (623-626)

I need to be in charge of everything, really, but I need to also delegate tasks to other people. Em, but fundamentally if I don't trust the people I'm delegating stuff to, then it's very difficult for me to do that.

Ishan's life when his sister was alive was full of purpose and meaning – he found purpose and meaning in looking after her and in thinking about her needs at all times.

And I actually end up getting more stressed out, basically (laughs). Which isn't a great situation to be in, em, but I think I'm learning a little bit, as I go on really, just to basically to trust people a little bit more. What's been difficult is that I had someone who I had to love like her life depended on it, because their life did depend on it, right? (I: Yeah). **And that way of being for an entire lifetime is how I've treated everything else in my life, sort of thing. To do it as if my life depended on it.** (644-652)

And so like, in the morning, em, I'd sort of, when I'd get up, before, em, I'd, before I'd done anything, the first thing was, you know, to make sure that I'd gone to see her, eh, and like, ask my dad or my mum, you know, 'Did she sleep ok? How is she doing?' Sort of thing and wished her all the best as she went off to school and then the day centre where she was. And then even, if she got back before I did, or if I got back, if she got back before I did, em, or whatever time anyone got back, my first thing was walk through the door, touch base with her, sort of thing. And so, I had, not only a sense of perspective, but I also had a physical source of happiness that I could touch whenever I needed it, sort of thing, and it didn't matter how awful life was, as soon as I'd see her, all of that would evaporate into nothing, sort of thing. And I had that, sort of. And now, I live a life where this project, everything else that I do, the relationships I have with friends and whatever, it's, it's like my life depends on it. And when that doesn't go, when that's not going very well, or, or a relationship breaks down or something, I don't have my source of happiness and outlet anymore. And so, these feelings that would normally evaporate, and I wouldn't have to worry about it, right? Now they sort of fester and linger somewhere in my mind and they manifest as, maybe like, anger or something else or extreme feelings of being

When she died, he no longer had his sister to care for, and the routine around providing her care was lost. He gives many details about caring for his sister, giving the impression that telling me about this care is meaningful for him, to externalise his feelings in language, to make sense of them with me, before he can internalise them. He seems to enjoy talking about his sister in the present, metaphorically bringing her to life for me. His life now does not involve care for her, it involves his work, however, there is a struggle for Ishan around 'giving' himself to his work in the same way as he did to his sister, as he realises his high standards and perfectionism, and his short temper, make him difficult to be around. This is a challenge to his worldview and how he has lived his life for the 24 years his sister was alive with him.

upset that I never had to deal with for, em, you know, a large part, certainly throughout my entire childhood and my early adult life, now, all of a sudden, I have to, like, develop a level of emotional intelligence that I never had to have before (laughs), em, and I'm learning, sort of thing. (668-687)]

I think the most way, the best way that I've made some meaning out of what's happened is, of course, I always accepted that, em, I never was struggling to understand why everything happened. It's not like there's an injustice and you know, it's not like they were murdered or something like this, you know, I couldn't imagine what that would be like, to just, one day they're there and the next day they've gone, and it's taken from you. Like, it's actively taken from you, I couldn't imagine how difficult that would be. (757-763)

And I think what I've realised maybe a year or two down the line, that I was filled with a very, very deep feeling of regret, that I didn't go and see him more often. And even though I knew, we both knew that we shouldn't take time for granted, the reality is that we did (800-803)

I was too numb to process it for the first year, or two, but eventually, when I began to think about it a bit more, I was like, 'I feel, yeah, I feel a deep sense of regret,' sort of thing. So, I try, I try not to (pause) regret anything now. I just try to make sure that I get things done when they, when they should be, sort of thing, eh, regardless of how busy I am, sort of thing. (829-833).

like I said, living with regret is very, very difficult, em, and even though, like I say, I try not to beat myself up about it too much, it's there, whether I like it or not, it's definitely there. So, always, I guess, yeah, I

With Ishan's brother, there is a challenge to his worldview. He now realises that taking time and people for granted is risky – people can die in an instant, meaning that second chances are lost.

always, since then, I've tried to appreciate people around me who are, who have been there for me, sort of thing. I think it's, yeah, I think I've found a new sense of appreciation for not only life, but for the people around me who I can count on, sort of thing. Em, but also, maybe a bit more ruthless in the sense of, if someone (pause) I feel has, yeah, let me down, once, it's very difficult for me to then trust them again, sort of thing. And it's because I know that, that that situation could have happened, sort of thing. Em, so, yeah, I've definitely become a bit more, less trusting as a result. (838-847)

I feel like I've become a bit more ruthless, em, with my conviction, I think. Like, I'm happy to stick to a decision, em, now, rather than umming and erring about something, particularly if that means cutting someone out, cutting someone out of my life, sort of thing (laughs). Which I'm not sure if it's a good or a bad thing, it's just one way that I've changed, really. (847-851)

I was never allowed to, I was never allowed to get away with not being able to do anything, em, my entire life, I took responsibility even though it didn't necessarily ask for it, it was how reality was, and I never made any mistakes because if I made a mistake, somebody's life was dependent on it, so I have very, very high standards of myself, personally and professionally, which makes me quite highly strung and that's not necessarily a person that you want to be around. You know, who wants to be around someone who just (pause) you know, doesn't accept anything less than the best, em, and from a personal point of view, em, never gets tired, never accepts, em, less than the best from people personally as well? Em, and that's definitely, like, whereas, if my sister were still here, I would still be someone who's a bit more agreeable, whereas now I

have no ability to, to cut people any slack, it seems, because I was never afforded that privilege when I was growing up, sort of thing. (872-883)

Whereas, what I really need to be doing is just accepting that everything doesn't need to necessarily be done to the highest possible standard all of the time, sort of thing. But, em, I find it quite difficult. And I think maybe one of the reasons is because I know that (pause) you know, if you don't make the most of situations sometimes, it, you, sometimes a second chance might not come around. Like, I don't have a second chance with my brother to spend the time that we should have spent, you know? And sometimes I feel that personally as well, like, if I don't do something or, professionally, or if I don't do something, what if I'm not given a second chance? The reality is that people always give you a second chance, but, I, yeah, I, maybe that's one thing I, yeah, that I struggle with, maybe, knowing that I can give people a second chance and people can improve and that people would give me a second chance, if I made a mistake as well. (886-897)

I know that, sometimes if we had to go, we would have to leave her in a, like, respite care, with people that we trusted though, but to leave her for more than a day would be extremely difficult, emotionally, sort of thing. Because she would miss us a lot as well. Em, whereas now, there's none of that, sort of thing, so I can, I can, I can spread my wings and not feel guilty about it. Em, so, so that's good, em, even though I do feel guilty about it somewhere (laughing). (923-929)

You know, I hadn't really expected it, I remember I sent him a message on his birthday to say, em, 'Happy birthday, mate!' Em, my best friend was getting

**What is my purpose in life?**

- Existential isolation- I alone face my death



married, em, (pause) later and I remember saying, 'I'll see you at the wedding,' sort of thing. And I sort of left it, you don't really think anything more about it, of it, really. Then, I came home and my mum said to me, 'Oh yeah, do you, do you know that [name] passed away last night?' And I was like, 'I'm not really sure what, what you're saying, really.' Yeah, and she, she said it again and she said it, but it didn't really register as anything, I couldn't, I was too sort of, numb to really register what it was. (386-393)

With my brother, he'd had a, he'd had a brain haemorrhage earlier on in his life before and his doctor basically told him that he was very lucky to be alive and if it happened again, you're not coming back from it, sort of thing. So, basically, live your life like every day is your last, basically. And then, obviously, you know, again, you put it to the back of your mind, particularly as someone gets older and grows up and is well and fine, you think, 'Yeah, nothing is ever going to happen,' you just sort of, by virtue of you get to take things for granted. And like you know, like I said, you know, I was at Loughborough, he was at Leicester, doing architecture at the same time. And even though we were, what, ten miles from each other, we never quite got round to seeing each other, em, as often as we should have done. And it's always the case of, you know, something comes up, and you're like that, 'Oh, don't worry, we'll reschedule, we'll reschedule, we'll reschedule,' and then you never do and then all of a sudden, he went to bed and he never woke up. And I thought I, whereas with my sister it was a prolonged, chronic thing, my brother it was very acute. And I think what I've realised maybe a year or two down the line, that I was filled with a very, very deep feeling of regret, that I didn't go and see him more often. And even though I knew, we both knew that we

- Loss of innocence as realisation that death happens to us all and is a prerequisite of life
- Stolorow's daily absolutisms and how these lose their protective mechanism after the loss of a loved one
- Life can be random and suddenly be no more; Ishan has two experiences of this and so he can feel angry when he feels that he is not a priority for other people and there may not be a second chance, the opportunity will be lost due to the fragility of life

shouldn't take time for granted, the reality is that we did (787-803)

And, even if I had to cancel, I would always make sure that we rescheduled, and when, let's say, I make plans with someone, and someone says, 'Oh sorry, mate, I can't make it,' it fills me with a deep, deep, sort of, feeling of, like, anger. Like, if someone goes, like, 'Don't worry, no-one's going to die,' I'm like, 'Well! (laughs) Never mind,' sort of thing. But it does make me feel really, really bad that, em, if I have to cancel something on someone or if someone cancels something on me, for whatever reason. So obviously, you have to understand because life throws these things up, but when someone, when I feel that someone has prioritised something over me that I feel shouldn't really have been done, it just makes me feel extremely angry (817-825)

And that's something that I was too numb to process it for the first year, or two, but eventually, when I began to think about it a bit more, I was like, 'I feel, yeah, I feel a deep sense of regret,' sort of thing. So, I try, I try not to (pause) regret anything now. I just try to make sure that I get things done when they, when they should be, sort of thing, eh, regardless of how busy I am, sort of thing. (829-833)

like I said, living with regret is very, very difficult, em, and even though, like I say, I try not to beat myself up about it too much, it's there, whether I like it or not, it's definitely there. So, always, I guess, yeah, I always, since then, I've tried to appreciate people around me who are, who have been there for me, sort of thing. I think it's, yeah, I think I've found a new sense of appreciation for not only life, but for the people around me who I can count on (838-843)

Em, but also, maybe a bit more ruthless in the sense of, if someone (pause) I feel has, yeah, let me down, once, it's very difficult for me to then trust them again, sort of thing. And it's because I know that, that that situation could have happened, sort of thing. Em, so, yeah, I've definitely become a bit more, less trusting as a result. I don't know if that's a good or a bad thing, but yeah, I feel like I've become a bit more ruthless, em, with my conviction, I think. Like, I'm happy to stick to a decision, em, now, rather than umming and erring about something, particularly if that means cutting someone out, cutting someone out of my life, sort of thing (laughs). Which I'm not sure if it's a good or a bad thing, it's just one way that I've changed, really. (843-851)

Whereas, what I really need to be doing is just accepting that everything doesn't need to necessarily be done to the highest possible standard all of the time, sort of thing. But, em, I find it quite difficult. And I think maybe one of the reasons is because I know that (pause) you know, if you don't make the most of situations sometimes, it, you, sometimes a second chance might not come around. Like, I don't have a second chance with my brother to spend the time that we should have spent, you know? And sometimes I feel that personally as well, like, if I don't do something or, professionally, or if I don't do something, what if I'm not given a second chance? The reality is that people always give you a second chance, but, I, yeah, I, maybe that's one thing I, yeah, that I struggle with, maybe, knowing that I can give people a second chance and people can improve and that people would give me a second chance, if I made a mistake as well. Even though, I've always tried, when people say, you know when someone turns round and says, 'Well, have you never made a mistake?' 'Well, no.' And not because I am perfect, but because I was never afforded

<p>the privilege of that, sort of thing. Em, yeah, which again can make me quite difficult to be around (laughing) sometimes, I think, to, I'm aware of it so I'm trying, trying to learn from it, sort of thing. (886-901)</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Spirituality and belief in the circle of life is not part of Ishan's interview</li> </ul>

<u>Quote</u>	<u>Who Am I Now?</u>
<p>I don't think the pain of the loss has ever really gone away, and I think what I'm learning is, at the time you just, when it's acute, you know, one month, one year, two years, that, you sort of, I always thought I was waiting for a moment where, like that (<i>clicks fingers</i>), and suddenly everything will be ok again, sort of thing. And I think I realised over time that that moment was never coming and I think that when I realised that I'd need to accept a new, sort of, baseline of, of being and feeling then that's when I started to move on, really, rather than waiting for a moment where I would snap back to where things were like before. And I think, yeah, realising that, that moment was never coming, was probably the time where I was able to sort of, at least, move forward, rather than being sort of like, spun in cycles (54-63)</p> <p>Em, yeah, like I said, living with regret is very, very difficult, em, and even though, like I say, I try not to beat myself up about it too much, it's there, whether I like it or not, it's definitely there. (838-840)</p> <p>I think people think that it's a lot, that it's raw because I can articulate what I've gone through like it happened yesterday, (I: mm) because that, what I went through is, for as</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The loss is a burden I carry, changing my life</li> <li>- Can there be meaning in this burden?</li> <li>- This pain is always with Ishan, something he carries every day.</li> <li>- The burden of loss is not something to be 'got over', rather, incorporated into life going forward</li> <li>- [NB. Camus's Sisyphus finding meaning in rolling the boulder up the hill every day]</li> </ul>

<p>long as I live, I don't think will ever, will ever leave me, sort of thing. (951-954)</p>	
<p>And even now if I, you know, if I've been somewhere, or had an awful day at work, going, to the kitchen, my first thought, even, sometimes I used to feel my feet turning to the right, and then it's that realisation that she's not there, sort of thing. Em, which was really, really difficult at the beginning, it was like, em, it was like having to relive the moment she passed away over and over again each time that element of her life had to be relived. Em, obviously now, you get used to it, sort of thing, and sometimes, I still go to her room as if she'd be there (293-299)</p> <p>I was like, 'I feel, yeah, I feel a deep sense of regret,' sort of thing. So, I try, I try not to (pause) regret anything now. I just try to make sure that I get things done when they, when they should be, sort of thing, eh, regardless of how busy I am, sort of thing. (830-833)</p> <p>I know that I'm different, em, I'm trying my best not to become a really bad person (laughs), even though I've seen it happen to, to other people, really, em, and that's just how I try to manage it, really, because I wasn't a bad person when she was alive and certainly she wouldn't have wanted me to become a bad person after she died, so yeah, it's a battle, I think is probably the best way of describing it, that I'm always trying to manage. Em, I'm just trying my best, I'd say. (1037-1042)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Who Am I Now?</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Who she/he was influences my life going forward, my bond with her/him continues after her/his death and impacts my life</li> <li>- The past influences the present/constructive use of the past informs the present</li> <li>- [Minkowski's idea of time]</li> </ul>
<p>I think, em, if you'd asked me even, like, a year or two ago, then the answer would definitely have been 'no'. Eh, and I think I remember for a long time just being quite, eh, (pause) lost with it, really. (40-42)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Who Am I Now?</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Making sense of my loss takes time, and we are all different in the amount of space and time that we need. There is no right or wrong or generic approach.</li> </ul>

I'm not really sure if I could say where I am with it, but I know that it feels different now to what it felt like very acutely, really, where it was very numb, and very, sort of, (pause) difficult (47-49)

I think what I'm learning is, at the time you just, when it's acute, you know, one month, one year, two years, that, you sort of, I always thought I was waiting for a moment where, like that (*clicks fingers*), and suddenly everything will be ok again, sort of thing. And I think I realised over time that that moment was never coming and I think that when I realised that I'd need to accept a new, sort of, baseline of, of being and feeling then that's when I started to move on, really, rather than waiting for a moment where I would snap back to where things were like before. And I think, yeah, realising that, that moment was never coming, was probably the time where I was able to sort of, at least, move forward, rather than being sort of like, spun in cycles (55-63)

it's that realisation that she's not there, sort of thing. Em, which was really, really difficult at the beginning, it was like, em, it was like having to relive the moment she passed away over and over again each time that element of her life had to be relived. Em, obviously now, you get used to it, sort of thing, and sometimes, I still go to her room as if she'd be there, but sort of, em, I guess the, the intensity of the pain, sort of, wains a little bit, even though it doesn't feel like it (pause) inside, it, it's a little less intense, I must admit. (295-301)

I needed her as much as she needed me sort of thing. And, later, when you realise you've lost that, it's like, ok, now the pain has hit me again, but on a different level of, em, or on a different layer of complexity to the pain that I'm going through, sort of thing. So, that's been particularly

- This is in line with phenomenological thinking and CoP, rather than a more medicalised approach to grief that can be pathologizing after an amount of time perceived by a manual or a clinician with a manual as 'too long'.

It took time for Ishan to begin to develop more of a sense of agency, and to accept the 'new baseline' which is life with this burden of loss. Prior to that, Ishan describes a more passive position where he was 'spun in cycles' by his feelings of loss and grief

Ishan is reluctant to admit that his pain is less intense now compared to immediately after her death. Time has helped lessen his pain. His reluctance may, in part, be the guilt he feels at having 'freedom' to 'spread his wings' and live his own life for himself, rather than prioritise her, which is what he did for 24 years. This change in life purpose is difficult for Ishan.

unhelpful, that, cos, as it's progressed, it's not like it's got any easier, it's just that I keep finding that there are different elements to how the pain is striking me, (695-700)

I'm trying my best, sort of thing. And sometimes when I let it get the better of me and I snap at someone or I'm really angry or I'm just a mardy arsehole, basically (laughs), em, at that time, it shouldn't be like, 'Yeah, it's that person's fault that I feel like this,' but the reality is that I know it's me and then sometimes I think if I'm becoming a bad person, em, and hopefully I'm not because I'm aware of it, so, I think sometimes that I just need a bit of time (703-708)

And that's something that I was too numb to process it for the first year, or two, but eventually, when I began to think about it a bit more, I was like, 'I feel, yeah, I feel a deep sense of regret,' sort of thing. (829-831)

it might feel like it just happened only yesterday when I talk about how much it, the pain and stuff em, but, yeah, it's defi-, I'm definitely somewhere along the line with it now, I just have no idea where, sort of thing. And I think rather than sort of try to look and see where the end of that line is, I've just accepted that it will come whenever it comes, sort of thing, and not force it, sort of thing. Cos, I know that it won't just happen in the blink of an eye, it will take time, and I'm happy for that time, for as long as it's going to take to come but just not, you know, self-destruct in the meantime, sort of thing. (955-962)

I would feel a very visceral, physical pain, em, which was just the worst thing I think I've ever experienced that something that I was going through emotionally was hurting me physically as well. Em, so I had both

Ishan is aware that he needs more time to process and work through his feelings around the death of his sister; he is consciously aware of the need for time, however, it is not clear what he will do with the time. My understanding of Ishan's words is that he is a passenger and time is the driver; he is hoping that time will heal him without any active participation from him. This could also lead to complications with meaning-making as Ishan is not the agent of change in his own life.

Ishan distinguishes between emotional and physical pain. His emotional pain seems to be a constant factor in his life, however, his physical pain has improved over time.

elements of those pains, sort of thing, that didn't seem to subside. Obviously, eventually, the physical pain does, but, yeah, the emotional one, it's just, it's just sort of like, it's not like, a pain is, like, a feeling you, you describe as something that you are going through, but that pain never really, sort of like, never seems to really go away. (971-977)

What's obviously still difficult is obviously when it's her birthday or it's em, like, Mother's Day or Father's Day or Christmas or anyone else's birthday and she's not there, then that pain can come back, so it's not like a one-way journey, it's almost like I'm yo-yoing sometimes, em, and that's ok. (994-997)

I think one thing that has changed is, em, the, the, what I feel is the injustice of having gone through what I went through makes me really, really angry sometimes. Not like anger that's directed at someone, but I just, you know when they say, like, 'Life's hard,' this is, I'm sure this is what they are talking about, sort of thing. And sometimes I feel, like, an overwhelming sense of anger, which is non-directional, it's just because of what I've been through and then sometimes I feel like my patience is a lot more limited than what it used to be, em. And, em, (sighs), sometimes I can feel like, I'm, I'm just at that point where I'm going to snap at someone. And it's not their fault, it's just because I'm really, really angry, and I've been through this really awful thing and I'm still here (402-410)

sometimes I feel like the pain of what I've been through surfaces through me becoming a lot angrier, very, very angry, very, very quickly, and I know that's not something that I used to be like. (413-415)

But I know that as I get angrier from, and I'm sure this situation that I've been through bleeds into that a little bit, but I

Time does not heal in a straight line. Ishan describes this process as a 'yo-yo', where he can feel better and then all of a sudden, feel triggered and in pain again.

### Who Am I Now?

- I feel punished by this loss
- I have lost a part of myself in losing my sister
- This loss has physically hurt me
- The world has hurt me
- I am 'done-to'
- I am struggling to make meaning from this loss

Ishan feels anger, however his rage does not always have an object, towards which it can be directed, he describes it as 'non-directional' and 'overwhelming'. This ties in with Freud's idea of anger after loss, with the relationship with the deceased being important to understand in order to make sense of the bereaved's angry feelings. According to Freud's theory, it could be that Ishan's anger is unconsciously for his sister who has died, for leaving him, but he cannot consciously direct his anger towards her as she has died. His anger is now displaced onto other objects, or none (non-directional) in his life. Their relationship was further complicated by the level of care Ishan had over her, and Ishan wants to protect her from his anger, even in death.



find myself getting really angry (pause) not, not quickly, but I feel as though I'm getting to a level of anger that I haven't ever got to before and it's just because, I sometimes think, I've been through all these awful things and I'm still here, em, and when something, sort of, goes wrong, I sort of default to like, quite a high level of anger. Not necessarily an anger that I express, but certainly an anger that I feel. And I think that's one thing that's definitely, definitely changed, I can't deny it, really. It's a, it's yeah, I'm just being honest, really. (I: Yeah). That's the truth. But I think it's because of, I feel like an element of injustice that I've been dealt by life, really, not that I'm angry with someone, sort of thing. (441-450)

that whole mindset or mentality you sort of develop as being a top-class fighter. I think that helped me through what I was going through. (457-458).

Because I remember when my sister passed away, I remember thinking, like, as soon as she passed away, I remember thinking, 'This is awful. This is, like, the worst thing I've ever been through, the worst thing that I've ever experienced.' (478-480)

If my other sister passed away, yes it would be incredibly painful, but she had a life that was independent of my own, right. She had her life, she lived it. Em, if my best friend passed away, again, their life is independent of me. They had their time, we had our memories, we enjoyed it. Whereas my sister, her life was never independent of mine, we were always, our lives were always intimately tied to one another. And a large part of who I was, was her and, and she was never really independent of me: she was just, she was a part of me. And she died. And so, imagine, exactly, I had to go through the worst thing that I could ever have gone through in life

In talking about the 'fighter mentality' or 'mindset' helping him in his grief, Ishan implies that he has felt attacked by this loss, that he needs to defend himself from it.

and it's happened, it's already happened, and I'm still here, sort of thing. (lines 490-498).

Em, and that's something that I've found really, really difficult because if I had a bad day or no matter how tough life got, I always had a sense of perspective; that, here's my sister who's really unwell, but is battling through all of these things, but the reality is that she was, she had this, like, radiant, because she was quite sensory and quite auditory, when she'd hear a sound or eh, a bright light she'd have this, like, really vibrant cheek, like, ear-to-ear smile, basically, that would just ignite my life, basically. And my life wouldn't feel complete until I'd seen that smile, sort of thing. And so like, in the morning, em, I'd sort of, when I'd get up, before, em, I'd, before I'd done anything, the first thing was, you know, to make sure that I'd gone to see her, eh, and like, ask my dad or my mum, you know, 'Did she sleep ok? How is she doing?' Sort of thing and wished her all the best as she went off to school and then the day centre where she was. And then even, if she got back before I did, or if I got back, if she got back before I did, em, or whatever time anyone got back, my first thing was walk through the door, touch base with her, sort of thing. And so, I had, not only a sense of perspective, but I also had a physical source of happiness that I could touch whenever I needed it, sort of thing, and it didn't matter how awful life was, as soon as I'd see her, all of that would evaporate into nothing, sort of thing. And I had that, sort of. (lines 662-678).

So obviously, you have to understand because life throws these things up, but when someone, when I feel that someone has prioritised something over me that I feel shouldn't really have been done, it just makes me feel extremely angry, sort of thing, em. (823-825).

Whereas my sister, her life was never independent of mine, we were always, our lives were always intimately tied to one another. And a large part of who I was, was her and, and she was never really independent of me: she was just, she was a part of me. And she died. And so, imagine, exactly, I had to go through the worst thing that I could ever have gone through in life and it's happened, it's already happened, and I'm still here, sort of thing. (493-498)

I'm very good at pretending that I'm not. So, I can just do that thing that I do when I'm a fighter, when I just pretend that everything's ok, knowing that I'm dying inside, but I'll just put on a front of being tough. (499-501)

it's just that I keep finding that there are different elements to how the pain is striking me, really. Em, and I'm trying to make sense of that, really (699-700)

the emotional trauma is just incredibly exhausting, like, it's really, really tiring, but, even though it's, you know, bereavement is a feeling, it was almost, it was so intense that actually, like, my arms would ache as well. And like, I would feel a very visceral, physical pain, em, which was just the worst thing I think I've ever experienced that something that I was going through emotionally was hurting me physically as well. (969-974)

That moment was worse then, em, when the doctor came round and finally pronounced her as being dead, basically. That was not as bad as that moment because I had no idea what was happening and I was just witnessing it like (pause), like I'd just been kicked, eh, you know, in the stomach really, really hard, sort of thing, and it was even worse than that, sort of thing. And I'll never forget that image em,

and it's that moment is the worst moment of my life, sort of thing, and it happened and I took that blow but I'm still here, sort of thing. (1024-1030)

I think that when I realised that I'd need to accept a new, sort of, baseline of, of being and feeling then that's when I started to move on, really, rather than waiting for a moment where I would snap back to where things were like before. (58-61)

But, somewhere in your mind you think, 'Ok, you have to accept the fact that, eh, all the time you had was almost borrowed time, and you sort of, you just (pause) rejoice in the happiness that you got 26 years out of it,' I guess. (382-385)

what I'm going through is really tough and not everyone has gone through it, sort of thing, so I try not to beat myself up too much about it. I just accept that I, something really awful has happened and just try to, just try to move on basically. (739-741)

it might feel like it just happened only yesterday when I talk about how much it, the pain and stuff em, but, yeah, it's defi-, I'm definitely somewhere along the line with it now, I just have no idea where, sort of thing. And I think rather than sort of try to look and see where the end of that line is, I've just accepted that it will come whenever it comes, sort of thing, and not force it, sort of thing (955-959)

### Who Am I Now?

- I accept this loss as part of my life now
- Loss is part of who I am now

---

## APPENDIX M

### MASTER OVERARCHING THEMES AND SUB-THEMES WITH QUOTES

Theme 1: INEXORABLE DEATH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Making sense of death</li><li>- The Sisyphean burden</li></ul>



“Sometimes, for a moment, I have a flash of resentment that she has the privilege of dying first. It seems so much easier that way.” (Yalom & Yalom, 2021, p. 69).

This idea of carrying the internalised object into the present and the future, to use the memory of the lost person to inform decisions, goes against what Freud wrote in *Mourning and Melancholia*, where mourning ‘successfully’ is about detaching from the deceased.

Klein makes the case that our internal objects are injured after the loss of an external object. She argues that the straits of the depressive position will have to be run through with each significant loss we experience. This involves re-creating our internal world, understanding the good and the bad in the lost object.

“There will be no-one holding my hand. Yes, my four children and my eight grandchildren and many friends will spend time with me, but alas, they will not have the power to penetrate the depths of my isolation.” (Yalom & Yalom, 2021, p.69)

“What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end.” (Nietzsche, F. W. (1974). *Thus spoke Zarathustra*. Penguin Classics.

- 
- **Making sense of death**
  - Belief in destiny, fate gives meaning
  - Belief in God or a higher power
  - The circle of life, the inevitability of death
  - The universe is something greater than us all. "One is a piece of fate, one belongs to the whole." (Nietzsche, 2004).
  
  - **The Sisyphean Burden**
  - Loss is a heavy burden I carry and I will carry it for the rest of my life
  - There is meaning in this burden I carry, as I carry my dead loved one with me as an internal object; they continue to impact my life
  - I accept/am angry about this loss and this burden in my life.

### **Theme 1: Inexorable death**

This theme is about recognising that we have one precious, precarious life: we are each alone, and we will all die. Awareness of this 'circle of life' gives meaning to many of the participants – the idea of 'destiny' and a 'higher power' is something that they cannot rationally understand, but soothes their loss. It can happen to anyone, it happens to everyone, and it's "nature's wild indifference" (Graeme). Many of the men feel lonely and isolated in their lives, they also feel that they carry a heavy load as a result of their loss; however, there is meaning in this burden, as they feel that it is important to 'honour' the legacy of the person/ people they have lost and remember them. Carrying this burden, which is also a mental representation of the lost person, is meaningful for the person left behind, it keeps the person alive in their life and it keeps their influence alive.

#### **Sub-theme 1: Making sense of death**

**John:** "I think it's probably a belief in, eh, there being a higher power. I, I would like to think that I'm Christian, em, I think that there's a higher power. I also think there is destiny and I also think that, eh, you can change your own destiny as well." (124-126)

**John:** "I don't think. No. I, I just, it's, it's just the eh, (pause) inevitability of it, you know? I think: it happens, you're taken early, and we don't know why, em, but it just happens." (216-218)

**John:** *(asked about his bereavements and making sense of them in his life)* "I don't think I've ever tried to make sense of them other than, it was their time. I believe there is a grand plan, I guess, sometimes that belief is tested, you know, why did [first wife's name] get taken at 54 when she shouldn't have been? But, em, (pause) I like to think there is a grand plan and I'm surprised I'm still here (laughs). I'm enjoying being here and trying to give back what I can to help other people, so, (pause) (sighs). [First wife's name] probably affected me the most, but yeah." (xx-xx)

**Kevin:** "I've shed tears for [friend's name] and, but, more than anything, I think I'm more of a, sort of, I think I've got this belief that, how can we mourn when there's nothing to

---

actually mourn, when, sort of like, our, there is something more, you know? They're at peace, there's no pain anymore." (17-20)

**Kevin:** "As humans, how, how, how do we keep going when you know it's going to end? We pass it on, and we think we'll pass it on forever and ever, but you know, and that's where you start getting into stuff like, what, that is, insofar as, 'Are we part of something bigger?' Because if we are not, it's, sort of like, maybe it's fine, maybe it is the fact that we've been given this small window and we just have to do something with it. It's making sense of the whole thing, you know?" (122-128)

[“I shall end our book with the unforgettable opening words of Nabokov’s autobiography, *Speak, Memory*: ‘The cradle rocks above the abyss, and common sense tells us that our existence is but a crack of light between two eternities of darkness.’ That image both staggers and calms.” (Yalom & Yalom, 2021, p. 222).]

**Kevin:** "Death isn't an ending, cos it's not an ending. It's literally, scientifically, not an ending and they've proved that, you know, and you only have to look at, sort of like, sort of, you know, the seasons, you know, you look at the garden and you sort of see everything go to sleep and die and it all goes back into the Earth and that feeds everything and brings it to life the follow, the following, em, Spring, you know, em. It's just, I think, cos with regards to how we deal with life and end of life, I think that it should be, I don't know, I mean, again this is all stuff that's coming out the top of my head now, it's sort of like, em, it, I just think, I just think, I think if we learnt how to live with the end of life, I think it would make us see life differently and do things differently in life." (306-327)

[“That concept – *the more fully you live your life, the less tragic is your death* – rings so very true for me. Some of our favourite writers champion that viewpoint. Remember how Kazantzakis’s life-loving Zorba urged: ‘*Leave death nothing but a burned-out castle.*’” (Yalom & Yalom, 2021, p. 222)]

**Brandon:** "So, even though I don't understand their deaths entirely, even when people ask me, 'How, how did your parents die?' What I tell them, it changes, like, my mum was in a coma and she had a cardiac arrest, but is, is that the reason she died? Probably not, like, you know, my, like I said, my dad, you know, he had a, a, MS. Was that the reason that he died? It can be a part of it but, the main reason, you know, I don't fully know, do you know what I mean? So, it's kind of like, yeah, so, I've just kind of made peace with that, you know what, like, I don't understand anything right now, maybe, maybe in time I might. And maybe at that point, maybe it might help me in my journey, but, but thankfully, even though I may not understand every single thing there is to understand about their passing, but I'm still, I'm still at peace, so, I, I think that main thing is to like, not disrupt that, you know?" (500-510)

**Brandon:** "That's what really helped me be at peace, knowing that my mum, you know, she didn't, when I think about her life, she didn't, wasn't, you know, she did the things she wanted to do, you know, spend time with people she wanted to spend time with. And with my dad, unfortunately, that wasn't the case with him, but would I want him to be just suffering and you know, so like, if, if, like I said, I, I, I know best, God knows best. So, if it was his time, then that's, I'm at peace with that, you know?" (536-541)

---

**George:** “So for me, the sheer arbitrary cruelty of it, was kind of reassuring. (Pause). So, it sounds horrible, but it’s that whole thing of, ‘Why me?’ reframed as, ‘Well, why not me? Why should I be insulated from loss, you know, and tragedy?’ And it’s a sense of, we went in, there was nothing that could be done, everyone did what they should do, and we did what we should do, and it was just one of those things. And it was a terrible thing, but it was just one of those things. That was helpful.” (200-205)

**George:** “It is not there for me to learn a lesson. It is for me to choose to make of it what I want to. But it’s not, it wasn’t an Act of God designed to test me, to make me a better person. Because I’ve done a lot of things out of that that have not been great.” (240-242)

**Graeme:** “Now, wife’s name, you know, she liked a drink, she liked a, a, a fish and chips and pizza and a blow out every now and then, but generally speaking, she, she was slim, she looked after herself, her weight fluctuated a bit, you know, like more people, em, she liked a blow out, but she did take care of herself and that, em, so, I don’t, I don’t think you can make any sort of sense of the fact that, I’ve probably said it wrong, it’s just nature’s blind indifference. It, like, bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people.” (864-875)

### **Subtheme 2: The Sisyphean Burden**

“One always finds one’s burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He, too, concludes that all is well. The universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.” (Camus, A. (2005). *The myth of Sisyphus*. Penguin Books: London. p. 119)

“The genius of Camus is to recognise that Sisyphus’ response to his plight is heroic in that he affirms his life and holds his head high in his everyday drudgery in spite of his hopeless destiny. He finds meaning in his daily occupation, which he knows will be undone again the next day. His wretched condition does not get the better of him. He accepts that there can be no sunshine without shadow and that we have to know the night as well as the day and accept that difficulty is unavoidable if we are to accomplish anything.” (van Deurzen, E. (2010). *Everyday mysteries: A handbook of existential psychotherapy*. (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.) Routledge: East Sussex. p. 106).

**George:** “So it’s trying to incorporate them into their life, into our lives, so that they are not forgotten. The biggest fear that you have is that they will be forgotten because we are the only people who experienced it.” (73-75)

**George:** “I’m sitting here four years later, in front of you, that kind of shows to you that this isn’t a one-off event (pause). This is something that you, is there for life. It will change in intensity over time, but it’s still there. It doesn’t go away (pause).” (268-270)



---

**George:** “the meaning-making is not just from us, it’s from the children as well. It’s really good to see that we are not the sole carriers of that torch, that the children create stories and ideas of what their brothers might have done,” (488-490)

**George:** “So, the meaning-making is that when it’s shared, it’s a lot less burdensome, it’s a lot less hard, in terms of feeling like you’re the only person who’s carrying it and when you go, that memory goes as well. That’s the biggest fear. It’s trying to map those things.” (494-496)

**Graeme:** “I’ve just got to get on with it, and like I say, (pause) it’s not the life I’d chose for myself. I, I’d love [wife’s name] to be here, course I would, but I haven’t got her here and I’ve got to face that reality and try and make some sort of life for me, myself.” (666-669)

**Graeme:** “I don’t think I’m living life to the full, but I’m living life as best I can, I think. And (pause), like I say, I won’t give in to despair, although I feel despair sometimes, a bit, finding it difficult, you know, I think, I try to keep busy and move around a lot cos it’s hard to sit with sometimes, I think. It settles on you sometimes. (Pause). (Crying).” (931-935)

**Graeme:** “I know you said in your research about the meaning to it, and the only meaning I can derive from it really is that fact that, try and live as good a life as I can, and live the life and be a person [wife’s name] would continue to want me to be (*breaks down crying*). I can’t let it colour me. I can’t, I can’t. I have my bad days, but I won’t let it turn me into a person I don’t want to be. I won’t ever be bitter. I won’t end up, it is bitter, losing my wife like I have, but, it’s a bitter pill to swallow, but I want to maintain the fact that I’m a nice person, I was loved. I’m lucky for that, really, I’m lucky for that.” (915-921)

**Graeme:** “[Wife’s name] would want me to keep the house nice, she wouldn’t want me to sit, you know, sat like that, you know, and feeling sorry for myself. And I do feel sorry for myself sometimes, but she wouldn’t want me to. And sometimes I, I, I don’t hear her speak to me, but I think, ‘What would she say?’ And I hear her voice, you know, sort of thing, telling me, you know, so, so, (sighs) that’s about it really, I think.” (1349-1353)

**Graeme:** “I feel like I carry the burden myself, and don’t share it with anybody, and sometimes when you don’t share things with people, it can get on top of you. And sometimes I feel like things get on top of me.” (1295-1297)

**Graeme:** “Quite a few men, I don’t know if this sounds harsh, they come across as a bit babyish, like, sort of, they can’t cope without their wives. I can cope without [wife’s name], I find it hard, but I can cope without her and she’d want me to. Cos, I loved her and she loved me and she would want me to cope. She’d want me to be strong and loving for my grandkids and my son, and be there for our [son’s name] (*crying*). Em, I, I, I am a strong person and I think, I think you’ve got to be a strong person to show a bit of weakness sometimes and sensitivity and as far as I’m concerned, the world needs more sensitive people.” (1385-1399)

---

**Graeme:** “I just carry on with it, that’s all, you have to do what you can do, you have to deal with the cards what you’ve been dealt, haven’t you. I never expected to be a widow at that, at this age..... what keeps me on the straight and narrow and gets me back on track is thinking about, you know, I get sad about what I’ve lost, but I think about what [wife’s name] has lost. I think, and it stops me going, cos I think, ‘Jesus, look what you’ve got!’ And that to me is a good thought to have sometimes.” (1444-1451)

**Brandon:** “But it’s like they are adjusting to a new normal, so it’s like having to live life with that person not being there and these things are hard because, you know, like, it’s hard to lose someone and then, now, eh, adjust to this life and whether or not they are here and how do you do that? You know, what steps do you take? And that’s why it’s like, again, with things like the podcast and things like support groups, it’s there to help, because like, people are not alone, and sometimes, like I said before, you know, like, it’s more than four seasons, but grief is a lifetime thing.” (139-145)

**Brandon:** “I’m definitely proud of, of the person I’m becoming and yeah, it’s just unfortunate it’s taken that, but like, I’m here, so, all I can do now is just continue to grow and understand that like, even though my parents aren’t here, they, they still live in me and I, I, I am at peace with that, you know?” (44-449)

**Brandon:** “I can’t remove this grief, it’s almost like I see it as a, a backpack that I have to have all the time. Sometimes it’s heavy, sometimes it’s light but I think it’s a mindset and like, I know I can’t change what’s happened, but if I learn to live with it, then that’s what brings me peace. So, it’s not, so when I, when I talk about ‘it’s because of it’, it’s not because, you know, it’s all of a sudden I, like, I just woke up one day and could talk about it. It’s been years of trying to understand all what I’m going through, be it self-awareness, and feel like, actually, I’ve gotten to a place where like, ok, you know what, this is not going to go away, this is not going away.” (550-557)

**Kevin:** “This is probably one of the subjects that I’m an expert on in some ways but without being able to smile and laugh about it, you know? Because we have no choice, yeah, you know, we’ve got no choice.” (236-238)

**Kevin:** “I’ve drawn all the positives from all the people that I’ve, I’ve known because there have been negatives, but I mean, that’s life anyway, you have your ups and downs and so being able to, sort of, not sit there and think, ‘Oh god, do you remember when such-and-such and such-and-such?’ It was all the positive aspects I’ve taken from all the relationships, from my parents, cos we all have our love-hate relationship with parents, it’s what makes us, it’s part and parcel of it. So yeah, I mean, (pause) yeah, I would say that positivity is, is coming out of it. It, it’s, it’s almost, it creates a slant on things, a view on things, a point of view.” (542-549)

**Kevin:** “I have down days cos you’ve got to have your down days, cos it’s human, isn’t it? I mean, but I find myself pulling myself up again, pulling myself up, em, and if it doesn’t kill you, it makes you stronger, doesn’t it?” (644-647)

---

**John:** “Em, it’s just, you know, life happens and I think I am able to, for me, the way I deal with it, I am able to process it, know it’s happened, em, grieve, em, not dwell on it, put that in a box and move on. Em, and that’s what I had to do.” (68-70)

**John:** “I feel sad that I lost [first wife’s name], but I have moved on and I’ve found somebody else. I don’t forget her and, you know, sometimes when I talk about her, I can still well up.” (166-168)

**Ishan:** “I don’t think the pain of loss has ever really gone away, and I think what I’m learning is, at the time you just, when it’s acute, you know, one month, one year, two years, that, you sort of, I always thought I was waiting for a moment where, like that (*clicks fingers*), and suddenly everything will be ok again, sort of thing. And I think I realised over time that that moment was never coming and I think that when I realised that I’d need to accept a new, sort of baseline of, of being and feeling then that’s when I started to move on, really, rather than waiting for a moment where I would snap back to where things were like before. And I think, yeah, realising that that moment was never coming was probably the time where I was able to sort of, at least, move forward, rather than being sort of spun in cycles.” (54-63)

**Ishan:** “Living with regret is very, very difficult, em, and even though, like I say, I try not to beat myself up about it too much, it’s there whether I like it or not. It’s definitely there.” (838-840)

**Ishan:** “But I know that as I get angrier from, and I’m sure this situation that I’ve been through bleeds into that a little bit, but I find myself getting really angry (pause), not, not quicky, but I feel as though I’m getting to a level of anger that I haven’t ever got to before and it’s just because, I sometimes think, I’ve been through all these awful things and I’m still here, em, and when something, sort of, goes wrong, I sort of default to, like, quite a high level of anger. Not necessarily and anger that I express, but certainly an anger that I feel. And I think that’s one thing that’s definitely, definitely changed, I can’t deny it, really. ... That’s the truth. But I think it’s because of, I feel like an element of injustice that I’ve been dealt by life, really, not that I’m angry with someone, sort of thing.” (441-450)

**Ishan:** “I wasn’t a bad person when she was alive and certainly she wouldn’t have wanted me to become a bad person after she died, so yeah, it’s a battle, I think, is probably the best way of describing it, that I’m always trying to manage. Em, I’m just trying my best, I’d say.” (1039-1042)

**Rob:** “I guess, kind of, (sighs), going back to what I was saying about the legacy and that kind of thing, it, it’s nice trying to think of ways to remember people and trying to carry them on and that kind of thing, but it’s, it’s, it’s still never going to be the same as them being here and I dunno if (sighs) maybe sometimes I’m trying to do that as a kind of a way to try and scavage [sic] the memories, eh, kind of bring them back, that kind of thing. And it can feel a bit, em (sighs), just feel a bit, I don’t know what I’m really looking for sometimes.” (327-331)

**Rob:** “It does weigh on me some, always, maybe, and eh, it’s (sighs) I guess, (sighs) it’s (sighs). I won’t say it’s ruined my life but it’s kind of, it really feels like kind of a big reset button has been pressed or something like that and it’s, it’s just (sighs) it’s weird (sighs) it’s

---

weird how functional this recovery is sometimes. Like, em, just the way, just the fact that I'm back in normal life, but em, it's always there, hanging around." (357-362)

**Rob:** "And I guess I still haven't found exactly what, what I want, and maybe that's just something that I'll have to keep looking for forever, or it's just like an ever-evolving thing, but yeah, I think, I think the grief definitely does factor into that and it has definitely changed me and given me a new outlook and thoughts on things. Eh, and it's always going to stay with me so, it's, I think in the end it's just kind of going down this long, rocky road." (788-794)

**Rob:** "Sadly, that is the case in the end and eh, in the end, I can't really do much to change it. Em, so yeah. I think you have to just try and make lemon, eh, make lemonade out of lemons (laughs), that kind of thing." (590-591)

**Michael:** "So, I guess it kind of made me stronger and it's made me a bit more (pause) honest with myself, which is good." (119-120)

**Michael:** "I was keeping all of the stress in.... it really started to eat me up, which I didn't know at first." (246-251)

**Michael:** "Just because I've got my little brothers and sisters who are there. But I just don't want them to feel how I felt (pause) and I want them to have, to know that I'm there. Just to be that father figure for them." (295-297)

**Michael:** "Um, and then, I guess, that when he passed, one of the benefits was just trying to understand things from his perspective. You know, as to why he did drink and why our relationship was how it was, and is it because, maybe because he lost us to my mum?... So yeah, I guess it just works out to see things from another perspective, em (pause)." (239-245)

**Michael:** "I've got to focus on my own relationship with my son, just to make sure that he knows that I'm always there for him. And always being present. And just, not judging, I suppose, you know, my dad didn't judge me. Actually, I just wanna give what my dad gave, because my dad was always giving, so if you ever needed anything, if he had it, he would give it to any of us. And that's the same as how I want to be. Em, well, I just wanna be more present." (323-328)

## Theme 2: IDENTITY SHIFT

- 
- Changing relationships
- Action Man?

- **Changing Relationships**
- Having relationships with other people is important to me and gives my life meaning.
- I have re-evaluated my relationships after my loss and some have ended.
- isolation and alienation in relationships since loss
  
- **Action Man?**
- Incorporating my loss into my life through actions is meaningful for me/ Being a father and a provider limits the space to choose a meaningful career/job.
- The freedom to choose my actions and behaviour is helpful, but can lead to guilt about having the freedom to choose. Feeling that I don't have the freedom to chose is unhelpful.
- Making active rather than passive choices
- Acting authentically is important because life is impermanent and I might not get another chance.

“Contrary to a life either without solid substance or a life in which this substance is never affected, only the enthusiastic attitude means a life awake, a life in totality and authenticity... Enthusiasm is becoming oneself in the act of devoting oneself.”  
(Jaspers, 1971, p. 119)

“To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people just exist.”  
(Wilde, O. (2016). *The soul of man under socialism*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

“Only an entity for which in its Being this very Being is an issue, can be afraid.”  
(Heidegger, 1927a, p. 141)

"I'm beginning to rejoin life once again."  
(Yalom & Yalom, 2021, p. 219)

---

## Quotes from participants for theme 2: Identity Shift

### “I’m beginning to rejoin life once again.” (Yalom & Yalom, 2021, p. 219)

This follows on from the first theme; in realising that we are existentially alone and have one precious life, this puts in motion an identity shift for the participants and affects how the participants behave in their lives, both in terms of their relationships and their jobs/actions. The participants often feel grateful and appreciative for the close relationships in their lives, and these are affirmed by the loss. Kevin is reluctant to make new friends and develop new relationships as he has lost every relationship that has ever mattered to him. He is reluctant for someone new to matter to him and for him to have to suffer another loss. He describes writing (poetry, a novel) as his “perfect companion” to make sense of the losses. There is a sense of isolation and alienation from others since the loss. Other times, there are relationships that do not survive the loss. Is this the person ‘acting authentically’ and wanting only meaningful relationships in their precious lives? Or is this displaced anger, where the lost object has been internalised as only ‘good’ and not both ‘good and bad’? Does the bereaved person then unconsciously feel anger about being left behind, and this anger is displaced onto those people who are still living, rather than tarnishing the memory of the dead person who has been internalised as all ‘good’? Would it be meaningful for these participants to work through their feelings of anger at being left behind and acknowledging them?

Those men who have made active choices to act in a way that allows them to incorporate their loss into their lives – through writing bereavement policies for their employer, starting a bereavement podcast, writing poetry/a novel, keeping active through physical exercise, voluntary work – seem to be struggling less with their losses. Those men who are more passive in their lives – where the loss happened ‘to them’, where it feels like a punishment, seem to be struggling to adjust to their lives without their loved one. Two of the participants have tried to cope with their identity struggle by identifying with their lost loved one (Graeme and Rob), however, they are both left wondering, ‘Who am I?’ and ‘What do I want?’ For one of the participants, Ishan, this comes out as anger, which I understand as a response to the powerlessness he feels and his passive position – he acts out his grief and pain in fighting and in anger “which is non-directional”. He often talks of ‘going through’ his grief and ‘giving it time’, however, he is not acting in this journey, he is passively going through time, which seems to be frustrating for him and sounds more fanciful, or hopeful, than something that is within his control.

### Sub-theme 1: Changing relationships

**Rob:** “Cos it’s, even like, it’s brought me closer to, like, certain members of my family as well, cos, I was very close to my immediate family before, em, but, just like more, more kind of, eh, peripheral members of the family, like ones I don’t see too often, it’s just kind of inspired me more to just like, eh, be in contact with them and even contact old friends as well, who I’ve lost contact with over the years, ... it’s just kind of, yeah, let me think, (pause), let me realise how, like, how important these, it is to nurture these relationships and the fact, the fact that so many people were there for me and that kind of thing. I guess it, it’s almost like gratitude, but at the same time, I don’t want it to be just gratitude, cos it’s like you don’t want to just do it like ticking a box, “Oh, you were nice to me so I’ll be nice to

---

you". It's like, it's going beyond that maybe and asking them about things that they didn't, you didn't before, and just taking an interest and that kind of thing." (line 515 – 530)

**Rob:** "I find, I mean, most bereavement resources towards losing a loved, a partner, that sort of thing, are usually aimed at, well, middle-aged people at least, and it's, it can be a bit weird. I mean, I remember, I did talk to, I did briefly correspond with a pen pal from the US, who, eh, lost his girlfriend as well, in very similar circumstances. Sadly, it didn't really pan out in the end, but eh, I think he had tried to look for bereavement resources as well, it was all, it was all directed at kind of older people. I guess it can make you feel a bit alienated, that kind of thing." (144-154)

**Rob:** "I'll be honest, I don't really talk about it with people much anymore, even though I think about it a lot. It's kind of a tricky thing to bring up anyway, it's something I've talked to my support groups about a lot of the time. It's just, it's (pause), it's kind of you don't want to bring people down, almost." (299-302)

**Rob:** "I suppose being bereaved of a partner at 30 is so weird, I mean, being bereaved of, I suppose, a parent at that age is, can be weird as well, but it's just, it's just I feel, I feel like future relationships and stuff are just not (sighs), are just not going to be the same, and I don't mean to be able to recapture what I had, but I'll just be going in with that, with this extra kind of overhead of kind of what's happened before." (around line 340)

**Rob:** "I suppose on that 'life's too short' thing, it's kind of, it has definitely, I think, made me notice my mortality." (around line 540)

**Rob:** "I don't just want to almost waste life, that kind of thing. But, I suppose the biggest question is, what does that count as 'wasting life'? I mean, what is, what, what is 'time well spent', that sort of thing? And it, sometimes I can get a bit bogged down in, like, thinking and getting, like, panicked, like, thinking, 'It's passing so fast,' that sort of thing, em, like, I think I'm prone to a bit of anxiety anyway," (725-7xx)

**John:** "I don't like to be on my own. And I think quite a few men are like that and women, generalisation, tend to be happy with their own company a lot more than men are happy with their own company (laughs), maybe, em, but I know some men who wouldn't even think of getting remarried, you know, that sort of thing. Eh, I know if something happened to me [first wife's name] would have moved on and if something happened to [first wife's name], I would have moved on because we wouldn't want each other unhappy and lonely. Em, so, you know, life's for enjoying, enjoy it, so, yeah, unfortunate." (102-109)

**John:** "...shit happens, you know, and that's what it felt like, but since 2017, em, life has turned around again for me and I'm very happy and a really, really nice lady I married and eh, life's good." (117-119)

**John:** "But you know, every experience in life is a benefit to you, it builds a person, em, so, I've had those experiences. I probably (pause), I don't know whether, I don't really have close male friends and I don't know whether it's because my two best male friends died, em, early, or just a matter of circumstance. My best friend in high school, [name], we are

---

still in touch; he lives in Prince Edward Island, Canada, em, you know, we are in touch and if I go back, I see him, em, but, yeah, (pause). Yeah. I, I'm, I know a lot of people but have very few close friends (pause). And I don't know if that's because of that or it's just the way I am, I don't know." (204-211).

**Graeme:** "I found that relationships have withered on the vine, even close ones I didn't expect, [wife's name]'s two sisters" (231-233)

**Graeme:** "I didn't handle it very well. I should have bit my tongue and not responded, but I did respond .... And it was just horrendous and I haven't spoken to her since.." (around line 450)

**Graeme:** "it's like picking an apple out of a fruit bowl and all the other apples fall into a different place. It's very difficult, you know?"

**Graeme:** (*talking about his son*) "I think it's improved our relationship; I think we are a bit more open and that with each other, more honest about how we are feeling." (804-805)

**Graeme:** "I don't have that relationship now. I wish I did. ... I'm not sure it would ever be the same now if they came tomorrow. We would talk about her, but we would talk about [wife's name] a lot and that was a big comfort for me." (962-971)

**Graeme:** "I think the relationship with [wife's name]'s sisters, like falling out with one but the other one has taken it upon herself not to contact me as well, em, that's been a hindrance to me and that has really, really bothered me in the last good few, I sometimes find myself waking up and it bothering me." (1260-126x)

**Graeme:** It's funny, you know, it's amazing when one person dies, she was like the hub of the family, what the wheel went round and it changes everything. ... all our relationships were sort of like, fine, when [wife's name] was alive, and then (pause) she dies and not long after there's a schism in the family. Cos emotions run high and you don't handle things particularly well, and we all make mistakes, I make mistakes, everyone does. You don't handle things very well, and then it changes even more, and one, one thing you do need when you lose someone is a bit of a support network, and the only support I've got, really, I've got is our [son's name]." (1297-1307)

**Graeme:** "I've found myself so isolated and so alone, especially with the pandemic for god's sake, you know, I didn't expect that. Em, I've found it very, very challenging." (242-243)

**Graeme:** "I am lonely and I do feel isolated; my son does his best.... But other people have withered on the vine a bit, em, and you know, people have got their own lives, I'm not daft, and you know, people have got their own families, their own problems, their own issues, their own ambitions, you know, but, things have sort of, lessened a lot. And sometimes, I do get down about being on my own so much and it's hard, it's hard to deal with mentally because obviously when you live with someone for 40 years, you know, and then you're on your own all the time." (304-312)



---

**Michael:** “And I just kind of learned that, you know, I guess, when it comes to deaths in families, it can be quite toxic if things aren’t organised. There’s always, everyone’s got an opinion. So, at that point I just decided to cut everybody off, other than my immediate family. (Pause). On my dad’s side, I just didn’t want anything to do with any of them. Not after the funeral.” (6x-71)

**Michael:** “So, I guess it kind of made me stronger and it’s made me a bit more (pause) honest with myself, which is good. And it’s taught *[sic]* me what I need to do in regards to parenting and in my own relationship.”

**Michael:** “And I just feel that in that moment, no-one outside of my partner and my immediate family, like, my household as in my immediate family, actually made that effort (pause). Even some of my close friends, they didn’t actually come. I don’t hold it against them, it’s strange. I don’t hold it against any of them actually, em (pause), but I know, again, everyone’s busy as well, so, I don’t know, I don’t know what you can do.” (168-174)

**Michael:** “‘I wonder how I would be remembered?’ So now I’m thinking about my own death, not my death, but how I’d be remembered and whether people would see me as having an impact.” (403-404)

**Ishan:** “..but my priority was to make sure that my parents were ok, really, and so, between me and my sister, we made the decision that we would just focus on them.” (9x-98)

**Ishan:** “... her life was basically what tied us all together.” (32x-32x)

**Ishan:** “I always, since then, I’ve tried to appreciate people around me who are, who have been there for me, sort of thing. I think it’s, yeah, I think I’ve found a new sense of appreciation for not only life, but for the people around me who I can count on, sort of thing. Em, but also, maybe a bit more ruthless in the sense of, if someone (pause) I feel has, yeah, let me down, once, it’s very difficult for me to trust them again, ... I feel like I’ve become a bit more ruthless, em, with my conviction, I think. Like, I’m happy to stick to a decision, em, now, rather than umming and erring about something, particularly if it means cutting someone out, cutting someone out of my life, sort of thing (laughs). Which I’m not sure if it’s a good or a bad thing, it’s just one way I’ve changed, really.” (840-851)

**Ishan:** “I think that when you talk about something as visceral as losing someone as important, as close to you, as someone you have a duty of care over, I think, people always tell you that they’re there for you, but then the level of detail you want to go into, I think, makes it quite difficult to have those conversations and people to be comfortable around you with it, I think. Obviously, from the counsellor’s point of view, that’s their job, really, and you sort of go there as a blank canvas, and you just say it and when the door closes, it’s sort of, it’s kind of like it’s over. But obviously when you talk to friends about it, it stays forever, really, doesn’t it? So then, I always thought, you know, that I didn’t know if I had any friends that I could, whatever, would want to darken with what I was going through, really. So, I just decided not to.” (100-114)

---

**Ishan:** “And so, this was one of those situations where, like, life had hit me really, really hard again. And this was a feeling that I couldn’t really share with anyone else because no-one really understood how much it really meant to me.” (396-399)

**Ishan:** “What I’m going through is really tough and not everyone has gone through it, sort of thing, so I try not to beat myself up too much about it. I just accept that I, that something really awful has happened and just try to, just try to move on basically.” (739-741)

**Ishan:** “I know that (pause) you know, if you don’t make the most of situations sometimes, it, you, sometimes a second chance might not come around. Like, I don’t have a second chance with my brother to spend the time that we should have spent, you know? And sometimes I feel that personally as well, like, if I don’t do something or, professionally, if I don’t do something, what if I’m not given a second chance?” (around line 890)

**George:** “It definitely changes things; it changes friendships, it changes family relations because it’s that sense of judgement is the wrong word, but there’s an element of it.” (255-257)

**George:** “What went from a very close sibling relationship became quite a fractured one for quite some time. And I still don’t think we’ve really come back from that.” (423-424)

**George:** “Em, there’s a certain level of isolation, there’s a certain level of protectionism.” (242-243)

**George:** “I don’t like planning. And it’s not, it’s never been one of my strong points, but I don’t like planning, and part of the reason that I don’t like planning is because I feel that if I put too much investment into planning, generally something is going to come along and neuter it (pause). And, it makes it makes it hard for me to see the value of doing it.” (344-350)

**George:** “Yeah, it’s the secondary losses. Em, cos there’s some people, you know, it’s the classic thing of some people, some people will cross the road not to see you, em, particularly for people who never experienced loss, who have been incredibly lucky not to have experienced loss into their age, can find it very difficult to even comprehend that sort of thing.” (387-3xx)

**Brandon:** “I’ve definitely, like, had more appreciation for like, family and friends and understand that like, you know, I think, again, I just, I know they’re not always going to be there, but I think it’s appreciating them while I can and understanding, you know, having more meaningful relationships with family. Like, another positive is that there were some family members that I wasn’t really close to when my mum was alive but now, I’m like, it’s like we, we’re, our relationship has been ten times better and again, that’s another like, silver lining, you know, you can look at it like that. But it’s definitely helped me appreciate, em, the people around me more.” (472-479)

---

**Brandon:** “We take a lot of things for granted because like, we just think it’s going to be there, we’re going to have this for a long time, you know? But, it’s, it, it, it changes, like, and people is one thing we can’t just take for granted because, like, we can see people one day and the next week, you know, they are no longer here. And that’s how much it changes, you know? ... even though as much as, you know, I’m in a good space, I’m not going to be there forever and like, it’s not, it’s not to, obviously touch wood, we are going to be here for a long time, but, you know, but it’s just to say that like, it’s part of the cycle, we all, people come, people go.” (395-415)

**Brandon:** “Sometimes when you lose people young, it can be quite isolating because it’s, maybe you’re the only one out of your friendship group who’s lost someone, so you just don’t know how to react and, ‘Do my friends understand me?’ And that’s one of the major things as well, like, when I started the podcast, I didn’t really, I knew it wasn’t for my friends, not in a bad way, but you know, this is for people who are going through things and whilst, again, the support has been amazing, I’ve got to find a way to move with this.” (590-596)

**Kevin:** “I don’t know if maybe because I’ve lost all these people, eh, maybe, I’m a bit tired of losing people (pause) eh, maybe now that I’ve lost, I’m afraid. Again, it’s afraid of living, again, because maybe it’s me sort of saying (pause), “Let me withdraw and then I don’t have to have other people who I get close to and they go.” Cos you invest in all this energy to create relationships and they get, then they go.” (426)

**Kevin:** “So, I think writing has been the perfect companion, to be able to put it down and share it, which is, I think, the next best thing.” (line 550)

**Kevin:** “I’m more alone now because there aren’t as many people, because they’re all quite good, quite close friends, and so they’re all something to me. So, so, so I think the worst thing out of it is how empty my life has become since they’ve gone. But at the same time there’s this, in this sort of wilderness I’m in, I’m sort of finding all these answers, that are eventually coming out on paper.” (23-27)

**Kevin:** “But now I just sort of think, well, you know, even if I did become famous again, one day it won’t matter because I’ll be dead and then what’s the, it, it’s where I am now, so, it’s a sort of, it’s a form of attitude. I just sort of like, I just enjoy, sort of like, walking down the road and I see the sunlight through the trees and looking across the common and seeing the flowers.” (289-293)

**Kevin:** “I mean, people do fear their own mortality but I think they probably fear losing someone else more, cos at the end of the day, you know, the people are better off are the ones that have gone, you know, cos if, they’re ill, they’re not suffering, em, and it’s the people left behind who do all the mourning, em, yeah, I mean this is sort of like, where’s it all coming to? It’s making me think about how, how we live, how we live with the end of life, and so perhaps it should be a subject that’s approached.” (328-334).

**Kevin:** “Don’t worry about what’s happened, cos there’s nothing you can do about that, but em, what’s going to happen, like there is something you can do about what is going to happen, but that can only happen now. Em, so, so but yeah, you know, sort of like, when

---

you start talking about your own mortality, because mainly the questions are about how others' mortality has affected us but I think it comes down to our own mortality, which I think probably has much to do with what you are studying as how it affects us. We just, like I say, the more people that go, the more you realise that 'Woah!' You know?" (707-724)

**Kevin:** "I think losing people has made me more, sort of like, well, it's going to happen, you know, it's going to happen to me one day. And to be able to say to yourself, 'I will die one day!' you know? I think that's, I think that's the battle I'm winning because it's very slowly given me the courage to actually start making something, well, I say making something, I mean, if I died today I mean, if I was to look back over my life, I mean, I always thought I had to become famous to inspire, but I've inspired thousands of children, which I fell into completely by accident." (764-771).

### **Sub-theme 2: Action Man?**

**Kevin:** "So, this whole thing of how I cope with death, I find myself putting onto paper, and then other people read it and it gives them a comfort."

**Kevin:** "It's just making me do things; it's making me go back to projects that I've been putting off and I think, 'Well, why am I worried about what people think when you put something out?' So, like, poetry has fuelled me to finish off writing projects that I've been working on for ten, twenty years, which I've thought, 'Well, maybe they're not good enough.' But now I'm getting to the point where, ppphhhh, who cares?" (238-242).

**Kevin:** "Well, I think it's slowly making me unafraid of living, cos that's, I think I've probably always been afraid of living." (456-457).

**Kevin:** I think it's just sort of like, a question of doing things and it, I mean, if, (pause) if I write something, em, (pause), you know, it's cos, it's quite easy to get to the point, 'If such and such happens, don't worry, I'll deal with it.' Eh, I don't really know how to answer that question. It's just do. You have to do. You just get on with it." (659-663).

**Kevin:** "Maybe it's the fact that we've been given this small window and we just have to do something with it. It's making sense of the whole thing, you know?" (126-128).

**Kevin:** "I think it's just, sort of like, just making the most of it, making a difference to people, em, (pause). Making a difference and just, sort of like, getting on with it and doing stuff like this, which perhaps hopefully I've given you something that you will give something to someone else, do you know what I mean? And you've already given me something because I've heard things that I never thought I'd said before." (773-779).

**Brandon:** "I think it's just about, em, like living with it, living with it, and even, even with that, like, that's also allowed me to even do other things, like I think I mentioned with the podcast, like that's been something that I've been, it's been crazy the amount of people I've met, em, friendships I've, I've formed, even opportunities I've got from it. (74-78).

---

**Brandon:** “So, what I’m saying is that like, without like, if, if I wasn’t in this space where I was able to start the podcast or even like, em, change how I perceive grief, then I wouldn’t be doing these things. So, it’s like, even though like, it’s like, it’s, it’s bittersweet because I’m doing it in honour of my parents but, like, I wish I could be doing such things if they were here, if that makes sense?” (around line 90).

**Brandon:** “I think for me, the reason that I started the podcast is because, like, it’s not to kind of tell people how to deal with grief, but to make them understand that it’s a, it’s a everyday thing, but like, how you deal with it is important.” (112-114).

**Brandon:** “..when I started the podcast or I write about it, I didn’t kind of think, ‘Well maybe this is one way of me moving.’ It just happened, it was like a moment of realisation, actually this is, this is how I am doing it, without realising it.” (558-559).

**Brandon:** “I’ve got to figure out a way to move with this. Like, the onus isn’t on them, it’s on me to figure it out and I have done that with their support, of course.” (596-597).

**Brandon:** “I think the main thing for me is like, one thing I realised through my journey and experience is that with grief you can move with it. How you decide to move with it is, is, you know, dependent on you.” (155-157).

**Ishan:** “I think one thing that changed is, em, the, the, what I feel is the injustice of having gone through what I went through makes me really, really angry sometimes. Not like anger that’s directed at someone, but I just, you know when they say, like, ‘Life’s hard,’ this is, this is, I’m sure this is what they are talking about, sort of thing. And sometimes I feel, like, an overwhelming sense of anger, which is non-directional, it’s just because of what I’ve been through.” (402-407)

**Ishan:** “I could go around hurting people if I wanted to, I could go around insulting people if I wanted to, because there’s literally nothing that anyone, anything that anyone can say or do to me that’s going to make me feel any worse than what I feel right now. But I know that I definitely did not want to be that guy, that’s not how my dad raised me, really, em, and that’s not how I live my life.” (around line 550).

**Ishan:** “I can spread my wings and not feel guilty about it. Em, so, so that’s good, em, even though I do feel guilty about it somewhere (laughing).” (927-929).

**Ishan:** “I went to the Netherlands for, for my placement. I probably wouldn’t have gone abroad, em, I don’t, I know I always wanted to go abroad. I probably wouldn’t have gone because I would have gotten away with just doing something local and got to, sort of, live here, but I think, eh, yeah, I was like, ok, I’m going to the Netherlands. .. I just took it in my stride because, you know, what’s there to be afraid of, really? It can’t possibly be as bad as what I went through, right? Em, and that just for anything, really.” (588-597).

**Rob:** “Obviously, I can pin some blame on the pandemic for kind of shutting things down and it’s been hard to do anything anyway, but it’s (sighs) I don’t know. I kind of ask myself if

---

I was afforded the same opportunities that I was back in 2019, eh, late 2019, when I had that 'good phase', it's like, would I still have the drive to kind of do that and be that kind of person, that kind of thing. And em, it's, I don't know, it's almost like I feel I need something big, just, but I don't know what that is (laughs)." (247-252)

**Rob:** "I suppose, by kind of admitting that and kind of moving away from trying to emulate someone, it is kind of scary because it, kind of, (sighs) you're kind of going out into the world on your own and it's difficult trying to be your own person sometimes, I think, cos it means you have, you kind of, you have to direct yourself, like eh, you have to take risks and things like that. And em, it's kind of (sighs) as I say, I'm quite cautious when it comes to things and it sometimes, I'm just afraid to kind of get out there and eh, just, (sighs) sometimes it's not so much that something bad could happen but it's almost like, like thinking, 'Maybe this won't be for me?' and that sort of thing. And maybe not giving it a try for that reason. It, or maybe almost like, em, not wanting to do things cos I maybe worry that it wouldn't make me happy in the end." (473-48x).

**Rob:** "I guess being, being with [name] was a big boost to my self-esteem.....as well as being in love with her, I kind of, I kind of admired her, well, I admired how social she was and things like that; like, she had loads of friends . She felt like, kind of like, quite the centre of a lot of her friend groups. Em, and, that's, above everything that, that's the thing I want to take away from her the most. And it's not a case of being a carbon copy of her." (464-469)

**Rob:** I do sometimes wonder if I would have taken the promotion if [name] was still alive, em, cos, I mean, that (pause) well, she probably would have pushed me to do it anyway, so, it, but, I don't know if particularly I went for it as much because I was like, I just needed something just to kind of, almost like trying to prove myself to her, or something. It, it's, it, yeah, there are a lot of things that I can definitely identify that I've done, and even some that that I might not have done, em, yeah, it's, it's, it is kind of, there is that balance of things, eh, cos, yeah, even if you lose a lot, I suppose you, kind of, gain certain things as well." (604-611)

**George:** "It's very much about trying to create those spaces, which I did a lot at work, I'm a co-chair of a staff network, looking to a full, public sector body type of thing, with the two aims of trying to improve support and trying to influence policy change so that when people experience it, and particularly when they are at work, they don't have to worry about that, in addition. Em, so that's the big thing, for me." (48-53).

**George:** "How could you have such an experience of horror, tragedy, sadness; it completely reshapes you. I remember going, I think it was one of those sorts of moments, going into work and just thinking, 'Why am I spending all my time here with people I don't particularly care about, doing a job I am slightly competent at but have no joy in? Why am I spending all my time doing this? And part of the reaction when I returned to work was because it was so, not bad, but it was just so not there, helped push me to, eh, to move, to make that move. I'd been doing it for nearly a decade, and I moved, I moved. I still stayed in the same organisation, but I moved to a different bit of it doing a different thing, with different people and I'm still there now. Em, and it does change you." (229-237)

---

**George:** “I’ve been very lucky to have a workplace that’s supported me in allowing that to become part of my job. So, it’s badged as a corporate objective, I’m giving time to spend doing that; building the networks, writing the resources, doing the talks, doing awareness raising and the cake sales and all the rest of it.” (324-327)

**George:** “I don’t feel the need to have a charity named after them. I don’t want to do that. I’m quite happy to work in a sort of, not shadow role, but taking a step behind and helping facilitate things and move things along, and draw the connections, make the networks, produce things. That’s how it helps make something meaningful out of it because then it means that that loss is not, doesn’t go unrecognised and I can make use of my experiences to make it better for other people. I think the main thing is always making it better for other people, even if it doesn’t necessarily work for myself.” (370-376).

**George:** “And there is a sort of, you get the sort of sense from charities that they are desperately trying to reach out to ‘Men’ as a homogenous block. And it’s with the best of intentions, ‘Oh we want to reach ‘Men’. What do they like? They like ‘Sport’.’ So, you’ve got things like Sands United, which is a brilliant way of uniting people in parallel play effectively, so you don’t have to sit around in a room and talk to each other about things, but you do a shared activity that’s meaningful to you. You can do jogging or cycling and all those things, and then you can talk about it or around it in the spaces. And it’s very much in that space. Now that’s great if you like sport; if sport mystifies you, you’re screwed. Because there isn’t really anything else out there because it’s all badged at that.” (586-595).

**George:** “And yeah, talking with bereaved fathers is often, you know, there’s not that many of them that are active and vocal. Em, the ones that are almost have to overcompensate. The one thing I constantly see is, ‘I started this thing because there was no support out there for me, so I’ve set up this thing.’ And in a way that kind of hurts because there’s lots but there just isn’t co-ordination or understanding of that support there. ... So, the reason I don’t work for a loss charity is because if I make it my life, if I make it my sole thing, that’s not going to be helpful for anyone. And the writing was part of that thing. I think it was important to take a step away from that relentless focus.” (595-609).

**Michael:** “I try to write every now and then, just to see if I can get anything out of myself that I didn’t know was there.” (90-92)

**Michael:** “But then it’s difficult to balance that with work, so yeah. I just know what I need to do, but just doing it is a separate issue.” (290-291).

**Michael:** “I do feel pressure. But it’s em, it’s strange. Like, em, my partner doesn’t work, and she probably hasn’t done since, for four years, since the birth of our first one. So, I guess at work, it’s just me who’s working. Em, and then, I guess, the pressure normally comes from the work side of things, you know? Not being in control, but I don’t know what that’s linked to.” (354-358).

**Michael:** “It just kills me, it’s not something I like. (Pause). Yeah. I hate it with a passion. So, I’m happy with my family, but, I guess normally, I just walk around not happy. I kind of decompartmentalise everything. I’m happy with my personal life and the development and

---

growth, but then on a career wise, personally, I'm not happy. So yeah, sometimes, I just walk around in a blur." (377-381)

**Michael:** "Because he always used to say, you know, that we run the world, but it was just like a throwaway statement. But again, I guess, in hindsight, for me, it's kind of more empowering, you know, just kind of believing in yourself.... We shouldn't have any barriers or limitations. So, it's something that I always keep with me. Whether he meant it like that, cos he never really explained.... But for me, it kind of holds value in the sense that, you know, that we should be doing more. (Pause). So, maybe that's why I feel like I constantly want to do, because I don't feel like I've fulfilled anything, really." (386-394)

**Michael:** "I think that's one of the most evident things, that I just need to follow through more as well. So earlier, I said 'actions'. So, it's kind of like a prompt that I need to also do as well. Like, see him, see my mum, you know, just check in on people." (427-430)

**Graeme:** "It's so hard sometimes. Even going shopping in Sainsbury's, walking the corridors [wife's name] used to walk and that, and going to the bread counter and standing where she used to stand and get the bread and get it cut and just all these little things." (400-402)

**Graeme:** "And that's another funny thing, I'll tell you, I will tell you this and it's really, really weird. It's an aspect you might hear from other people. [Wife's name] went to university in South Wales in a place called C-, and she lived there for three years. I know nothing much about her life down there.... When she died, I had this absolutely massive, like, compulsion to go down there. I don't know why. ... I don't know where it's come from and sometimes, I think, 'Am I a bit mad?' But I've felt this really strong urge to go down and visit C-, where she went to university." (981-997)

**Graeme:** "I try to move about quite a lot cos, like I say, if, if you sit for too long, it settles on you and you can start to feel a bit agitated. I do get agitated, I do feel unsettled and no matter where I go, I do feel uncomfortable. You know, and I feel like, em, it's the grief fairy giving me a visit, you know? And I go out on my bike and I get out in the fresh air and I do 30, 40 miles and exercising about in the fresh air." (1110-111x)

**Graeme:** "I sometimes think that I'm lucky in the fact that, if you can be lucky, that [wife's name] died while I was retired. If I'd been, if I'd still been working when she'd died, you know, I'm not sure the school would have been fantastically supportive like, with having time off. ... I may have had to be off work for a long time, you know, to get myself put right, if you like, to gain enough strength to go back into that sort of environment." (1237-1246)

**Graeme:** "I've got my bike, and I like to read a lot, em, I've got my grandkids, I've got my garden to potter around in, although it's a pain in the neck sometimes. ... I've got my garden, eh, you know, I, I like watching certain things on television, and it's not enough. Here's me thinking it could be enough, but how could it ever be enough? She's left such a massive hole in my life. Em, unfillable. In everyone's life, really. (Pause). (Crying)." (489-495)

**John:** "Nah, live life for what it is and get on with it. So, that's my philosophy, I suppose, in a nutshell." (96-97)



---

**John:** “She was going to start travelling with me, and that was just a shame, eh, and it was, all this stuff we’d planned that was on the bucket list of things to do, yeah well, I don’t plan any more, I do it. If, and that’s take every day as it comes and grab every opportunity you can, em, that, that’s the em, I suppose that is what hit me when [first wife’s name] died. ... I tend to work hard and play hard because life is too short. My motto has always been though, since, em, we had a round shore in Norfolk, Virginia, and it must have been the mid-80s, I found a lovely bumper sticker, it said, ‘Life is too short to drink bad wine.’” (228-237)

**John:** It’s ‘Live every day as full as you can’. And I suppose I still work too hard, but it’s mostly, eh, charity and volunteer work, so eh, you know, it’s a great honour.” (269-270)

### **Some quotes from reading**

“The male role literature took it for granted that being a breadwinner was a core part of being masculine. But where did this connection come from? .... It was produced in Britain around the middle of the nineteenth century in the course of a broad realignment of social forces.... Definitions of masculinity are deeply enmeshed in the history of institutions and of economic structures. Masculinity is not just an idea in the head, or a personal identity. It is also extended in the world, merged with organised social relations.” (Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). Blackwell: Cambridge. pp. 28-29)

---

### Theme 3: MEANING IN HUMAN CONNECTION

- Sharing experiences of loss
  - Language matters
- Man, find your own words

- **Sharing experiences of loss**
  - Helping others helps me
  - Talking helps me to process what has happened and to make sense of it
  - Hearing other people's stories of loss (whether on television or in reality) helps me to access my own feelings
- **Language Matters**
  - Glib platitudes are unhelpful - I feel they silence me
  - Loss of innocence/ naïvety about my use of language
- **Man, Find Your Own Words**
  - There is no generic approach to loss; no manual or rulebook
  - Stereotypical Masculinity makes it more difficult for me to talk about my loss

Being able to articulate feelings, rather than act them out, is helpful to make sense of the loss and incorporate the loss into life.

*Richard III* (Shakespeare):

"If sorrow can admit society / Tell o'er your woes again by viewing mine."

In the West today, there is a decline, a collapse even, in the rituals we perform after the death of a loved one. Coming together at funerals is not a theme in this study, however, its absence is noted. Grief seems to have moved inwards, to be something more private. What does this mean for grief and making sense of loss and what are the consequences for our society?

---

### **Theme 3: Meaning in Human Connection**

The first two themes are related to how the participants feel about their lives and in their lives – existentially and behaviourally. The third theme is about how they make sense of their loss in their lives in a more social way. Counselling was useful as participants could ‘shut the door’ on what they said and leave it behind without being judged by the people in their lives. Human connection for the participants does not always mean telling the story of loss, which some participants struggled to do – what would they say? How would that come across? Should they be coping better? – there were several examples of the participants feeling increased empathy for others’ losses. My understanding of this is influenced by Leader’s concept of the *dialogue of mournings* (Leader, 2008), where we can access our own feelings of loss by witnessing and hearing about another person’s different experience of loss. This can be a written account, a TV programme, a book - the shared experience can be helpful in processing our loss and making sense of it. (What does this mean for group therapy for those who have been bereaved?) When loss is talked about, there was a subtheme about language; both the sensitivity of language and how unhelpful, and even downright annoying, glib platitudes are. Rather unsurprisingly, there was another sub-theme about how society’s expectation that grief should conform to a manual or else is pathological is unhelpful, and some of the men felt that women might find it easier to talk about loss, as they do not have society’s stereotypes being ‘strong and silent’ oppressing them. Running through all three themes is the idea that bereavement is a lonely, private experience, making us aware of our difference, our language, our pain, which is helped by a shared experience with other people who matter to us or by sharing our experience to help others.

#### **Subtheme 1: Sharing experiences of loss**

“Although ...these losses were not her own, can’t we see them as tools that allowed her to mourn? She was able to make something from how other people had represented their own grief. And we could call this a *dialogue of mournings*. A dialogue of mournings can have many effects. It can allow one person to actually start the mourning process proper and it can provide the material necessary to represent their loss.” (Leader, 2008, pp. 78-79)

**George:** “I think that’s what we all try and do, isn’t it? We all try and make it better for everyone who come, all involuntary members that come in. To reassure them that they are not going mad, to let them know there is help and support in different flavours and different stripes.” (43-35)

**George:** “It’s given me an insight I didn’t have before... so, it’s being able to sort of revisit some of those experiences with friends and family from a position of greater understanding and empathy... I think the whole things around trying to make things better for other people, there is an element of atonement for realising that I would only be doing this, people generally only do this stuff, when they’ve experienced it.” (313-322)

**George:** “It’s why, I think, things like peer support works so well because it’s important to people: you don’t have to explain. That’s the biggest thing: you don’t have to explain. Because by talking to them you already know you have a shared link, even if you don’t know

---

the details, and sometimes you don't need to know the details. You don't need to have the lengthy preamble about what happened; you can just go straight into it." (358-363)

**Graeme:** "I couldn't stop talking, and a lot of the time, I couldn't stop crying, em, but, I found that helpful." (357-358)

**Graeme:** "I've got quite pally with [name].....he lost his wife in March.... And we had been emailing each other for a year and he actually came up to visit me... and we did get out for a pint and a good chinwag and that, but we've been exchanging, eh, emails, and I've found it very helpful." (366-374)

**Graeme:** "And he sat there and cried as well, you know. And a lot of sort of, what he did was cry. He, he, his wife had been dead six months when he met me, and he took a lot from me, really. And I think sometimes it, it gives you a good feeling, how helpful you can be to others in a loss situation. And, and of course, he's been helpful to me, told me his story, you know." (519-523)

**Graeme:** "I've been thinking about doing some other voluntary work but obviously the pandemic got in the way, cos you couldn't, you know, there's a lot of face-to-face stuff, it's nice to speak to someone on the phone, but I want to do face-to-face, to meet people, for god's sake, you know, just for my own wellbeing. Cos you derive a lot by being giving and being nice to people and doing something worthwhile, I think. It gives you a, gives you a boost to your self-esteem, you know (sniffs). Cos sometimes you can be a bit down on yourself and think, 'Well, what do I do to help people? I sit here all day.' You know, (laughs). And life's a bit more than that for god's sake! And so, I will, I will look a bit more into that, going forward." (694-702).

**Graeme:** "Yes, they were helpful in the beginning, just to read other people's experiences, you know, about loss and you feel like you're not on your own then, don't you? Obviously it's not just happened to me, it's happened to other people." (1098-1100)

**Graeme:** "It's called *After Life*...I watched it. And I absolutely derived something from it, cos he's really, really struggling... I can't say I didn't shed tears when I watched it, cos I did (coughs) but then you start laughing at something cos he's quite funny as well." (1154-1178)

**Graeme:** "I think what you are doing is important. You know, cos, cos, the, the, I talk about support networks and I think, you know, there's a dearth of support networks for people experiencing loss, you know." (1367-1369)

**Brandon:** "It's a hard journey, but finding peace and being able to, like, even just be here today, just to speak about it freely, that is, you know, that's something that didn't happen overnight.....I want to help others and if that's, if that's through like, speaking or whatever it may be, and people can get some sort of like, em, encouragement, then I think, I think, that's what, that's what it's about.... Because at the time, anyone, like, I didn't know about any sort of, I didn't know about grief books, nothing. I just thought, 'This is something that is new to me and people around me haven't been through this.' (320-328)

---

**Brandon:** “I think for the podcast it was mostly because I didn’t really see anyone, like, my age talking about these things and it’s like, I wanted to give myself a resource that I, I didn’t see or know about, so like, when I think about it now, I, with people I have kind of interviewed, it’s like, I don’t want to kind of, so when I do it, when I, kind of, have conversations or the way I, kind of, maybe, like, record episodes or record ideas for episodes because I want to give people an understanding of, ok, like, things that you’re going to go through but you might not understand.” (571-577)

**Brandon:** “thankfully I’ve had a lot of support, em, and I, I’ve, like, I’ve had counselling, that’s something that I still want to do. Em, but yeah, I wouldn’t, I wouldn’t be where I am now, if I hadn’t, if I hadn’t gone through that, if I hadn’t had the support that I’ve had.... I don’t know how things would have panned out if I didn’t have that support or people around me.” (201-207)

**Kevin:** “I mean, maybe it’s because of all the other people that have passed as well that I just sort of think, em, it’s made it easier. And because I’d written most of this stuff by then as well.” (200-202)

**Kevin:** “So, I think writing has been the perfect companion, to be able to put it down and share it, which is, I think, the next best thing. I think, I think writing is one thing which is therapeutic but then, when you start sharing it, because then you know that’s, sort of like, going through the ether, it’s sort of like, it’s going to affect somebody else who’s going to take it on board, and they will take a bit of it and then it will affect somebody else. So, it’s just creating something positive beyond that, and you know that’s sort of, what I want to tell people about life, about, just about living.” (550-557)

**John:** “‘What can I do to help?’ That sort of thing, but, I don’t break down in tears because their loved one is in a bad way, but I understand what they are going through and ‘What can I do to help?’ is my first response, so, I understand. (Pause).” (201-203)

**John:** “I’m a very emotional person, I can cry while watching eh, television programs, especially if it’s a nice one, you know, em, but you know, when they say, em, ‘Men Don’t Cry’, well, it’s just absolute rubbish, because I do. I can at the drop of a hat. Em, but, eh, I wear my heart on my sleeve, I enjoy life, I have fun.” (144-147)

**Ishan:** “I was reading this article.....she’d written some very, very, em, eh, (pause) sort of, (pause) emotive piece, em, that was rally articulate, basically describing exactly what I was going through to the absolute detail, sort of thing. And I was like, yeah, this is exactly what I’m going through, sort of thing. And, I remember, like, even if I hadn’t gone through what I was going through, reading this, or someone else objectively reading this, you get a feeling from how she’d written it, how awful it was what she was going through. Like, it was so very, very difficult to read. And I was like, wow, this is my reality, sort of thing. And, I guess, in some way it makes me feel not so bad about things, like, what I’m going through is really tough and not everyone has gone through it, sort of thing.” (728-740)

**Ishan:** “there’s an image where they ask you if you want to witness the cremation, right, the family is allowed to witness the cremation. And you sort of think, I remember at the time

---

thinking, I definitely need to be there with my family, and I kind of need that closure, sort of thing.” (1010-1014)

**Ishan:** “I think what changed pretty much immediately since she passed away is that my sort of like, eh, emotional barometer just, like, reset. Now, for example, I can’t watch a film where there’s an element of death in it and not feel the pain of that character. I think that was something that changed almost immediately, that my, eh, that my ability to empathise just, yeah, just completely, eh, completely began, if you like (laughs). And I know that’s a definite change in me that I notice, that I can’t really not empathise with a situation, and that’s how I think I’ve change personally.” (34x-352)

**Ishan:** “I remember I had.....quite brutal sessions with the counsellor here, where I just, I just went for it. Those sessions were really intense and I just told him everything that I felt at the time... And I think that really helped; not talking to someone about it, but just the fact that I was able to communicate what it was that I was thinking at the time. And I think if I hadn’t done that, I probably would have felt a lot worse... they just helped me organise my thoughts and then I sort of, tried to move forward after that, really.” (75-82)

**Michael:** (*talking about writing*) “I think, em, just to get whatever I’m feeling out of me,.... Just to express. You know, sometimes it is difficult,... but sometimes I just want to get something out.” (125-129)

**Michael:** “You know, someone saying, you know, ‘I’m there if you need me,’ well, I’m not going to tell you to come. I’d rather you just come, and show up, and spend the time, rather than me having to call you, ‘Do you mind coming over?’ Because I’m already going to be in my shell. I don’t want to have to communicate, I’d rather people just come and be around me. Especially if we are considered friends or family, you shouldn’t ask for permission, you should just do it because you want to.” (164-169)

**Michael:** “When he passed away, after some time, I didn’t realise, but I had alopecia. Cos I was keeping all of the stress in. ... it really started to eat me up, which I didn’t know at first. And, then that’s when I had to kind of start to get things off my chest, start exploring why I feel how I feel.” (246-253)

**Michael:** “But I guess, yeah, I am definitely, the loss of my dad is making me kind of (pause) build on my communication, whereas normally I wouldn’t speak. I’d just be quiet. So yeah, it’s been good to talk, I suppose.” (302-304).

**Rob:** “I was watching *Breaking Bad* for the first time recently, just to go off on a tangent, eh, but, basically, the series features a young female character dying, eh, it’s like a different thing, but it still, that still kind of triggered me quite a lot, cos, eh, and especially the way the character’s boyfriend reacts to it, it kind of felt like really hard-hitting grief there, and it’s like, it’s really close to home. And I remember seeing something else and it was like a young bloke, he was in hospital, and it was, that was kind of hard as well. It’s, it’s (coughs) it’s trying to deal with these things, cos watching TV sometimes these things come up and it’s, I don’t want to like, eh, completely hide myself away, but it just, it’s just dealing with that or

---

kind of, eh, trigger coming on, that kind of thing, just, just the way it happens, I guess and trying to get through that.” (570-579)

**Rob:** I joined a support group around that time as well, which was like a, it was basically one for young people. ... I still actually see them and they are lovely people, which is all good.” (140-143)

**Rob:** “I think maybe there is a bit of reluctance in, em, talking about that sort of thing that I could do with getting over, cos, if I’m trying to kind of hide my own feelings then I’m not being honest with myself and it’s just like, it just kind of leads to this inner conflict.” (45x-462)

**Rob:** “I suppose what I was saying earlier about struggling to find people who have gone through the exact same thing of, like, losing a partner at my age, and while they [*girlfriend’s parents*] a different relationship to [*girlfriend’s name*], it’s good to know that, cos ultimately we can bond on, or kind of empathise with each other on losing [*girlfriend’s name*] cos that’s kind of the constant there. So yeah, it’s, they’ve been, like, really helpful and I really kind of appreciate the relationship I have with them. ... I hope I can, I can kind of help them, em, and just, yeah,... I feel that it has been a really helpful relationship; one of the most. So yeah, it’s good to have them around.” (665-683)

**Rob:** “I suppose, I’ve picked up new values and stuff, like, I do feel, I do feel more of an urge to, like, help people, eh, try to be more empathetic, and build relationships and things, which I suppose, is some form of meaning, kind of, eh, enrich others’ lives or help them, and that kind of thing.” (691-69x)

## **Subtheme 2: Language Matters**

**Rob:** I was very lucky in that my support network has been excellent, em, and I don’t think I’ve really had anyone who’s said anything about, em, [*name*]’s death that I would take umbridge with, which is good and quite rare, if the other people I’ve talked to are correct.” (119-122)

**Rob:** “I did say no-one has said anything that I’ve taken particular umbridge with, but I remember, I remember getting into, like, just a bit of a tiff with my friend once it was, he did come out with something stupid, em, and well, me and him are both particularly stubborn about things, and eventually I just had to confront him on it. He implied that I’d kind of been, he was almost, like, implying that I’d been using [*name*]’s loss as a kind of sympathy thing and that really rubbed me the wrong way, cos our, I don’t even talk about it that much.” (186-19x)

**Michael:** “I think actions speak louder than words. And I think that when people say that, em, ‘If there’s anything you need, just let me know,’ it kind of feels like they are putting the pressure on you to then come out and say, ‘Look, could you do this, would you mind doing

---

that?’ Whereas when you are grieving, I don’t think that you really want to go out of your way to inconvenience people.” (146-150)

**Michael:** “Unhelpful..? (pause). Just words. Just empty words. You know, anything that didn’t have a follow through. So, if anyone said, ‘Oh, I’ll come and see you’, and they didn’t see me, it’s just unhelpful. It doesn’t mean anything if you’ve said something, not that you lied, but you know, it’s just, you haven’t been honest. ... I’d rather you just do, don’t say you’re gonna do something and then you don’t do it. I’d rather you just be honest. That’s all I want now, really . It’s just honesty.” (179-185)

**George:** “So, for example, when I joined the Sands Board, it wasn’t for me, and I got contacted by a lot of dads of, ... saying, ‘Eh, ... I don’t tend to hang around here much because I don’t really do the language of angel babies’, and so stuff like that, so, I’ve found a different online forum, with online grief influencers, with Megan Devine being the big one, um, and Glow in the Woods, which is more of a sort of, literary, brutal form of expressing grief in words compared to the more sort of rainbows, unicorns, kittens, sparkles and heaven. It just didn’t, it didn’t work for me.” (160-166)

**George:** “And you know, it’s that sort of hesitation when signing someone’s maternity card, you know, they’re going off on maternity leave, and I find it really hard to write glib statements. It’s not a difficult thing to write, ‘Congratulations, hope everything goes well.’ But I feel like I can’t. Which is a really silly thing. But it’s that sort of level of, em, remove from us. It definitely changes things.” (251-255)

**George:** “So, there’s a poem called ‘Don’t Tell Me’, where it sets out, ‘Don’t tell me platitude x, because y’, and that’s the format of the poem. And I sent it to my, to my dad to say, I’ve seen this poem, I’ve found it really helpful in trying to understand what people are going through and why these platitudes are unhelpful.” (401-40x)

**George:** “You’ll have friends who might say, ‘What, what, anything you need?’ Well, I don’t know what I need. ‘Well, you can always call me.’ And things like that. And it’s the well-meaning platitudes that aren’t always backed up, because you can’t promise to always be there for someone, you can’t always be the four o’clock phone call. ... But when you set people up with that expectation, that can be quite heart-breaking when it fails. And I think that’s the thing around support, it’s so fragile.” (436-44x)

**Graeme:** “People have said, and you know, it’s quite irritating when people are like, ‘Oh, you’re doing great, Graeme, you’re doing marvellous!’ You know, you, you, you put this face on, don’t you? And I’ve said, ‘You want to climb inside me sometimes, I’m not really.’ I can’t go, you know, it’s, it’s so hard sometimes.” (396-400)

**Graeme:** “It is quite irritating what people say to you. You know, some people are quite nice but some people are a bit thoughtless and a bit insensitive when they say, ‘Oh you’re doing marvellous!’ And I think sometimes, when they say things like that, that abrogates their responsibility: I don’t like you feeling uncomfortable, so if I tell you you’re doing well, it won’t go anywhere unpleasant. Do you know what I mean? They can’t deal with me being sort of open and honest about it, and I don’t like people saying things like, you know, people



---

saying things like, 'Oh, she's gone to a better place,' or, 'God always takes the best.' You know, all this type of bloody thing, pardon my French, I'm sorry, but it just absolutely boils my urine. I, I, I always deal in reality, you know, she's died, she's dead." (402-411)

**Brandon:** "I think, ultimately, one thing I realise is, as much as support is great that I have, the decision to move this grief, like, people can't shift it for me or say like, 'This is what you need to do.'" (207-209)

**Kevin:** "And perhaps maybe I have been stuck, I mean, I mean, if there were hindrances, I mean the thing is, I have been, sometimes people say to me, 'Oh you should move on.' I mean, perhaps, I mean, maybe, I don't know if they see a part of me I can't see. I mean, maybe (pause), you know, it's like I've, because I've lost all the people that meant something and I'm finding it difficult to (pause) go out my way and meet people, it's like an energy thing." (417-422)

**Ishan:** "When people say things like, 'Oh you'll get better in time,' and you're like, 'But it's not getting better in time!' It's not, not, it's not helpful to hear people say that it'll get better in time because it hasn't, if I'm being honest." (627-629).

**Ishan:** "I hadn't really expected it. I remember I sent him a message on his birthday to say, em, 'Happy birthday, mate!' Em, my best friend was getting married, em, (pause), later, and I remember saying, 'I'll see you at the wedding!' sort of thing. And I sort of left it, you don't really think anything more about it, of it, really. Then, I came home and my mum said to me, 'Oh yeah, do you, do you know that [name] passed away last night?'" (386-39x)

**Ishan:** "When, let's say, I make plans with someone, and someone says, 'Oh sorry, mate, I can't make it,' it fills me with a deep, deep, sort of, feeling of, like, anger. Like, if someone goes, like, 'Don't worry, no-one's going to die,' I'm like, 'Well!' (laughs), 'Never mind,' sort of thing. But it does make me feel really, really bad that, em, if I have to cancel something on someone or if someone cancels something on me, for whatever reason." (818-82x)

### **Subtheme 3: Man, Find Your Own Words!**

**Michael:** "You know, sometimes it is difficult, not difficult to talk to friends or my partner, but sometimes I just want to get something out. And I know my friend who actually recommended me, he's coming and he's got a podcast. And I went on his podcast and I started speaking as well, so I feel that when I'm on platforms, I'm able to just express and I know that it's out there and I can kind of forget about it. It's done. Whoever hears it, hears it. But I've said what I've said. And hopefully it helps." (128-133)

**George:** "Educating people about the realities of grief and timing, and, cos there are still people who are rooted in the five, the five stages of grief, em, you know, and should be done by, by six months, and any time after that is, you know, pathological." (108-111)

**George:** "The bereaved father voices are there but there's not that many of them. And there is a sort of, you get the sort of sense from charities that they are desperately trying to reach

---

out to 'Men' as a homogenous block. And it's with the best intentions, 'Oh, we want to reach 'men'. What do they like? They like 'sport'. ... Now that's great if you like sport; if sport mystifies you, you're screwed. Because there isn't really anything else out there because it's all badged at that. And yeah, talking to bereaved fathers is often, you know, there's not that many of them that are active and vocal. Em, the ones that are almost have to overcompensate." (585-xxx)

**George:** "I think the main thing was being in, was fast-tracked into couples counselling by the hospital. That was so incredibly helpful because it allowed us to work through very quickly, not to work through, but to talk about things, and, and, and how to see how differently, cos clearly, my experience of the loss is going to be very different from my wife," (124-128)

**George:** "So, counselling was a big part of that, em, just having that sort of dedicated one-to-one support, having a sounding board, you know, being able to take that ball of wool and separate the right coloured threads, to work out which one is, needs to be dealt with first. Em, (pause) but that didn't always come easily. (Cough). So, with the fist, when we first lost the boys, we were fast-tracked. After that, I sort of returned, a little bit with some prodding, cos it was the whole idea of being strong for the family and feeling like I know all this stuff, so, I should be able to handle it." (13x-144)

**Graeme:** "I sat and listened, and em, and I'm not putting any time limit on loss, but some of the people were saying, 'Oh, I lost my dad six years ago,' and, and, it, and, and, I thought, 'I don't need this!' (1049-1051)

**Graeme:** "I was floundering a bit, and I thought, 'Oh, I need to talk to someone.' I was feeling unsettled a bit, and I went to see a counsellor, at the local hospice." (343-344)

**Graeme:** "I do try to make it part of the conversation sometimes, I do find it hard to do, a lot of people don't talk about her anymore, it's only been two years and I think, and then I think, sometimes I don't bring her into the conversation because I think other people will roll their eyes, 'Oh he's not talking about his wife again,' you know. And I think that's really hurtful, that, really. Cos I don't want to talk about the fact that she's dead, I want to talk about the fact that she's alive, she was alive and all she did in her life (crying) (sniffs) (pause). So, I found that hard." (649-65x)

**Brandon:** "I think one thing for me that really helped was, like, allowing myself to be in that grief. So, what I mean by that is, at times, like, we deal with things in different ways. Some people might not want to face what they are going through, so, that can come in the form of distractions, or whatever it might be, but for me, I was like, I didn't want to run away from it, and even though it was hard, it was very, like, isolating, and, just tough to deal. But, looking back now, I'm just glad that I didn't, kind of, suppress that, that sort of, em, I would say, eh, emotions, because I think often, when you suppress things, or you don't deal with things, somehow, one way or another, you're going to have to deal with it, and sometimes that's not always pretty." (42-50)

---

**Brandon:** “I actually realised, actually, yeah, maybe this is actually a good encouragement for men as well, like, you know, because sometimes we have this view that we don’t talk, we don’t, we just kind of be silent about things, and yeah, that’s true to an extent, but I feel like, also like, what it is as well, again, talking is not always something everyone might do. For some men, it might be just through some form of activity, or whatever that might be, like, so that might be their way of releasing things, or, and, or, worst-case scenario, there might be some men who, like, yeah, they don’t talk, so they might just, like, suffer in silence, they might just feel, ‘Actually, you know what? I don’t want to say something because like, what’s that, what’s that going to look like?’” (339-347)

**Brandon:** “Just on a last note, like I said, you know, as men, we definitely, I’m not saying everyone has to, has to be in conversation, but definitely, open up, and if you have that one friend or a set of friends, where you can confide in, like, it’s important to have, you know, because we can’t feel isolated with this, because with anything, like, if you suppress things or deal with it by saying you don’t need help, it’s going to, it’s going to come out, and it might not be in a way you can handle or you can control, so it’s actually important to realise, ‘What is it that I’m going through?’ and ‘How can I deal with it?’ So, whether that is through talking, an activity or channelling it into something that helps you process things, then, you know, that, that’s the main thing. So, talking is just one way, it’s not the only way; it’s just one way.” (620-629)

**Kevin:** “I find it very difficult; I mean, I get on with people but, it, it, it takes a bit of an effort to do what I’m doing now, I mean, especially over the last three years, I’ve become a bit reclusive. I think partly I want to do this as I want to be able to sit with some (coughs) excuse me! And talk to somebody. Em, not necessarily about death, about anything, but it’s been good, so far.” (232-23x)

**Kevin:** “There’s something I’ve got here with regards to this writing. So, so, so, it’s a place I feel comfortable in, with doing, and again, it’s therapeutic. It’s helping me cos I’ll write something and, and when I look back at it, I think, ‘Here, now, that’s what I’ve got to do!’ You know, it’s like an affirmation to yourself. It’s like something inside you speaking to you and you’re, sort of like, (coughs) and it’s bringing it back to you. It’s like a mirror.” (587-592)

**Kevin:** “I mean, there have been days I’ve been so down, but that’s not about losing people, that’s just perhaps about being more on my own. And when you’re on your own, you tend to, if you’re at home and you’ve got a big room like this, I mean, all your thoughts bounce back, you know? And sometimes, you just sort of think, ‘Oh god, flipping heck!’” (741-745)

**John:** “I suppose I’ve always been an overachiever and a born leader and am able to compartmentalise those things, and that’s probably what I’ve done.” (34-35)

**John:** “Life happens. And I think I am able to, for me, the way I deal with it, I am able to process it, know it’s happened, em grieve, em, not dwell on it, put that in a box and move on. Em, and that’s what I had to do.” (68-70)

**Ishan:** “It might feel like it only happened yesterday when I talk about how much it, the pain and stuff, em, but, yeah, it’s defi-, I’m definitely somewhere along the line with it now, I’ve

---

just no idea where, sort of thing. ... it will take time and I'm happy for that time, for as long as it's going to take to come, but just not, you know, self-destruct in the meantime, sort of thing." (955-962)

**Ishan:** "And I didn't really have any real outlet for how I felt at the time. And I remember thinking that if I spoke to my mum and dad about it and got really upset that would make me seem a little bit selfish because if I was in a lot of pain, I couldn't imagine what they were going through, really. Em, so I never really spoke about it too much with my family. Em, and then, I think, when you talk about something as visceral as losing someone as important, as close to you, as someone you have a duty of care over, I think, people always tell you that they're there for you, but then, the level of detail you want to go into, I think makes it quite difficult to have those conversations and people to be comfortable around you with it, I think." (98-1xx)

**Ishan:** "I'm a top-class fighter, so, you know, it's very difficult for me to feel physically threatened and I can't really be emotionally threatened either because I've coped with the worst thing ever. So, sometimes I feel like I'm bullet proof, really, and you can use that in many different ways; I could go around hurting people, if I wanted to, I could go around insulting people, if I wanted to, because there's literally nothing that anyone, anything that anyone can say or do to me that's going to make me feel any worse than what I feel right now." (around line 542)

**Rob:** "I did consider suicide....I did self-harm slightly as well, mainly just cutting, eh, yeah, my arms, that kind of thing." (65-70)

**Rob:** "It's almost like it's difficult to talk about in terms of the content of it sometimes, as well. Like, eh, yeah, it's like, if we, if we do bring up grief, what do we actually talk about? Eh, do I talk about how it happened again? I'm not sure I really want to do that, and it's like, (sighs) and sometimes it's like, it could end with (sighs) even if it, it just feels almost, like, counterproductive. I guess I can be too logical sometimes." (around line 305)

**Rob:** "I suppose there's that extra thing of, eh, of course, of being a man, it's kind of, eh, men, of course, there's they have the thing of, eh, they just don't deal with, or, they have their own way of dealing with mental health, and I think I kind of fall into that, to be honest, the whole 'strong, silent' sort of thing. And it's, it, it's almost subconscious, cos I'd admit I am quite, I'm not too much of an emotional person anyway, eh, I don't really know why that is. But, I don't know if it, kind of, subconsciously moulded me, or something like that. But, it's, it, sometimes it feels better for me that way, almost, though, and it's kind of (sighs), it would be weird, kind of, being pressured into talking about it. And yeah, it's, I think, I feel like there's an extra barrier talking to people, like, em, people I know and my loved ones about it, because, I suppose, there's a context in it of they kind of know about it, that kind of thing. Like, I've never really had trouble opening up in therapy, and that kind of thing. Em, but it's, I get, (sighs) I dunno, it's like, maybe I'm thinking of it too much long-term, like, 'What are people going to think of me, if I say that kind of thing, or say that?' or like, 'Is it dumb that I'm still thinking that?' and that kind of thing." (31x-326)

---

**Rob:** “recovering after bereavement, it’s always a difficult one as there’s no set book on it, or a manual, or whatever, em.” (48-49)

**Rob:** “there’s no, like, magic bullets in this, sadly. Em, and sometimes you’ve just got to just try to, just roll along with the, em, with what’s happening.” (262-26x)

**Rob:** “It’s kind of, almost, learning to find myself, almost, (laughs) or like, live with myself, that kind of thing, so maybe, I guess that’s where I’ll find the meaning, cos, once again, it’s a thing you can’t really, it differs for every person, so you can’t read, eh, read the meaning, or whatever, so yeah, it’s, as I say, it’s a long road, and it’s one split up into many different chunks and eh, yeah. I think I’ve just got to get, get to that area and find, and find it out, that sort of thing.” (769-774)

### **Quotes from reading:**

“‘Hegemonic masculinity’ is not a fixed character type, always and everywhere the same. It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable.” (Connell, 1995, p. 76)

“It is the successful claim to authority, more than direct violence, that is the mark of hegemony (although violence often underpins or supports authority).” (Connell, 1995, p.77)

“Violence is part of a system of domination, but is at the same time, a measure of its imperfection. A thoroughly legitimate hierarchy would have less need to intimidate.” (Connell, 1995, p. 84)

“The patriarchal order prohibits forms of emotion, attachment and pleasure that patriarchal society itself produces. ... Men no more than women are chained to the gender patterns they have inherited.” (Connell, 1995, pp. 85-86)

“Hegemonic masculinity is culturally linked to both authority and rationality, key themes in the legitimation of patriarchy.” (Connell, 1995, p. 90)

“A familiar theme in patriarchal ideology is that men are rational while women are emotional. ... This is a deep-seated assumption in European philosophy. It is one of the leading ideas in sex role theory,... and it is widespread in popular culture too. Science and technology, seen by the dominant ideology as the motors of progress, are culturally defined as a masculine realm. Hegemonic masculinity establishes its hegemony partly by its claim to embody the power of reason, and thus to represent the interests of the whole society; it is a mistake to identify hegemonic masculinity purely with physical aggression. Victor Seidler’s account of patriarchal culture emphasizes the mind/body split, and the way masculine authority is connected to disembodied reason.” (Connell, 1995, p. 164)

“Masculinity might be a straightjacket that is keeping men from ‘being themselves’, whatever that might mean. In their drive for domination, men may have neglected to prioritize vital aspects of being wholly human, particularly issues around mental health. In their drive to be successfully masculine, men may be preventing their greater self from

---

being successfully happy. I want to unpack what the American feminist Peggy McIntosh calls the 'invisible weightless knapsack' of male privilege, full of 'special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks', to see if it is as much a burden to some men as a boon." (Perry, G. (2016). *The descent of man*. Penguin Random House: UK. pp. 3-4)

"In 1976, social psychologists Robert Brannon and Deborah David outlined four basic components of traditional masculinity, or the male sex role. Number one was 'No Sissy Stuff'. The other three were 'the Big Wheel' which describes men's quest for success and status as well as their need to be looked up to; 'the Sturdy Oak', which describes men's air of toughness, confidence, and self-reliance, especially in a crisis; and 'Give 'Em Hell', which reflects the acceptability of violence, aggression and daring in men's behaviour. Of course, women also demonstrate these traits, but they are not seen as traditionally feminine. These components or rules of masculinity are strictly enforced: every man senses that his masculinity is under scrutiny and being policed, mainly by other men, just as he checks up on theirs. Every man knows that he has to behave in a certain way, dress in certain clothes, think he has certain rights, and even feel a particular way. But the world is changing, and masculinity needs to change too." (Perry, 2016, p. 10)

---

**APPENDIX N**  
**RESEARCH SUPERVISOR CONFIRMATION OF CONSENT**



**Research Supervisor Confirmation of Consent**

Name of student: Lillian Atkinson

Name of research project: **Men making meaning after loss: A thematic analysis of men's meaning making after the death of someone they love.**

This is to verify that as Research Supervisor for the above research project I have seen proof that appropriate consent has been obtained from the participants used in the project.

Supervisor's name: Dr. Michelle Ruger

Signature:

A small, square, grey-tinted image of a handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'M. Ruger'.