

MALE ADOLESCENT RESILIENCY AFTER LOSING FRIEND

Resiliency in Male Adolescents After the Death of a Close Friend



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Resilience is the interaction of self-righting tendencies that move children toward healthy adult development (Benard, 2004) in the face of adversity. Despite the seemingly dismal circumstances that surround some children, a large majority is able to persevere to create and maintain a successful life (Benard). Existing literature suggests that there are two main sources of resilience that youth are able to utilize: phenomenological strengths and environmental protective factors. Phenomenological strengths are the personal traits particular to an individual (i.e. empathy, resourcefulness, humor; Benard). Research indicates that these traits are not special qualities that *cause* resilience in youth, but that we are all biologically predisposed to cultivate these strengths and use them for survival when faced with adversity (Watson & Ecken, 2003). Furthermore, the weight of these strengths can vary from culture to culture, and some may be valued more in one region than in another (i.e. autonomy is valued more in the United States than in other collectivist cultures; Bernard). In contrast, environmental protective factors refer to the important people, places, and specific social structures that promote healthy development in children who experience hardship. An effectively protective environment that allows children to feel accepted and safe can help them develop the phenomenological strengths mentioned above and protect them from risk (Masten & Reed, 2002). The intricacies of these internal and external factors of resiliency are vital to aiding both researchers and practitioners in their work involving youth who are exposed to risk and adversity in their lives.

A particular type of risk faced by many adolescents results from the loss of a close friend, which can be a life-altering event that disrupts normal and healthy development (Robin & Omar, 2010). The peer group dominates life for a typical adolescent and increasingly shapes his/her formations of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and a sense of identity. Simultaneously, the typical adolescent slowly becomes more critical of and desires independence from his/her own parents

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and family (Noppe & Noppe, 2004). Being a part of a social support system that offers feedback and definition (Malone, 2008), an adolescent who loses a peer experiences a disruption to the normative growth process during an already complex and sensitive period of development. The nature of a non-normative life event, one that is not typically expected to occur, is another harmful characteristic of loss experienced during adolescence. The leading cause of death among 12-18 year olds is accidents (often involving motor vehicles, then firearms, respectively), followed by homicide, then suicide (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2004). Because the death of an adolescent is likely to be a sudden and/or violent event, it often evokes a particularly strong acute traumatic reaction in addition to the long-term grief generally associated with bereavement in the “survivor friend”, which Malone describes as the peer who is still living, (p. 24). Unlike adults, adolescents are consistently developing new cognitive and emotional understandings and are often forced to reinterpret the death repeatedly as they mature; this cyclical process can result in what researchers call *complicated bereavement* which lasts an extended period of time (at least 6 months) and significantly impairs an individual from resuming his/her normal life (Robin & Omar, 2010).

Because of the potentially damaging emotional, cognitive, and physical effects that the loss of a close friend can have on a young adult, it is crucial that we learn more about the ways in which these “survivor friends” have managed to cope with their losses and demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity. Research has been conducted on the topics of parental, spousal, and sibling bereavement, but there is a gap in the literature that focuses on the loss of a close friend during adolescence. Even fewer studies distinguish between the bereavement and coping strategies of male versus female adolescents, and those that do typically note that girls (23%) are more likely than boys (19%) to experience the death of a peer (Rheingold et al., 2004)

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due to the larger network of people they identify with (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). Within the population of young male “survivor friends” who are resilient, literature points to high levels of autonomy, problem-solving skills, and social competence in particular as their crucial strengths (Benard, 2004). Previous studies have cited that anywhere between 20% and 40% of young adults have experienced the death of a close friend (Rheingold et al., 2004; Ewalt & Perkins, 1979), but that they are often overlooked as few adults recognize the severity of this type of loss (Rask, Kaunonen, & Paunonen-Ilmonen, 2002). While fairly little is known about the adolescent experience of losing a peer, there is clearly a significant portion of the youth population that can identify with this phenomenon. This study attempts to bridge the gap in knowledge and identify successful coping strategies and sources of resilience in male adolescents who have experienced the death of a close friend.

Literature Review

Support for the positive outcomes associated with the two dimensions of resiliency mentioned earlier (phenomenological strengths and environmental protective factors) are grounded in the extant literature. Upon a review of examples of current research it is important to keep in mind the interrelatedness of the two dimensions and that resilience is best demonstrated when each one is present and balanced within its own right, as well as in regards to the other.

Environmental Protective Factors

In a study aimed at describing the coping process of adolescents who experienced the loss of a loved one, Rask, Kaunonen, & Paunonen-Ilmonen (2002) gathered data from two self-report questionnaires from 89 adolescents (ages 14-16). Questionnaires primarily used two open-ended questions to determine (a) what helped them in coping with their loss and (b) what hindered them in coping with their loss. Using content analysis, the researchers determined that many of the

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respondents (34%) received emotional support from their friends throughout the coping process and cited that it was “easiest to talk” with friends and that they were the most available for support. About another third (31%) stated that they relied on their immediate family (parents and siblings) and close relatives (grandparents), who assisted in their bereavement. Interestingly, several students in the study actually cited the official social support system (i.e. school and its faculty, staff, and counselors) as unhelpful. Students largely sought out the social support they needed from those who knew them the best: their friends and family.

Other studies analyzing the supportive factors that surround a young adult after the death of an important person maintain two common themes throughout them: seeking support primarily from those who were close to him/her before the loss and maintaining a sense of normalcy by continuing typical routines and activities.

Support from friends/family/teachers/counselors For adolescents who experienced the death of a parent, Gray (1989) found that a peer was reported as the most helpful source of social support (40%), followed by another parent (26%), a family member (16%), then a counselor (10%). Ringler & Hayden (2000) surveyed 85 participants using open-ended questions in a study examining the experiences and perceptions of adolescents who utilized social supports after the loss of a peer, grandparent, or another person. Overall, the researchers found that respondents utilized support from parents, but even more often from their peers. This was especially true in the case of *peer* loss, in which respondents typically sought out numerous other peers (in some cases nine or more) simultaneously for support. O’Brien (1991) reports that adolescents often “only [feel] comfortable talking to peers who [were] close to the deceased” (p. 437). This conclusion seems logical because one’s peers are likely to be grieving the loss in a similar way, resulting in a shared experience and mutual support. In the case of peer loss, almost 75% of

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respondents reported receiving helpful support from a teacher at one point, likely because teachers also knew the adolescent who died (Ringler & Hayden, 2000).

Support from structured routines/distractions Not all adolescents report wanting to confront their distress during their bereavement process even when those close to him/her are available and offering their social support. Some prefer to keep busy in their daily lives and maintain as much normalcy as possible (Balk, 2011). This alternative method of coping is consistent with what is called the dual process model of coping with loss (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). A study by Morin & Welsh (1996) found that a group of students rated: “go to school” (36%) as the most helpful advice they received after experiencing a death. This suggests that the school environment provides benefits to adolescents that are absent in other contexts, such as a structured routine, a general feeling of safety, or expectations for behavior. Previous studies have also emphasized the distraction support offered by normal routines and one’s peers (Gray, 1989) as a coping mechanism, further reinforcing the idea that, at least at times, the most helpful strategy for an adolescent in bereavement is to consciously avoid his/her distress (Bonanno et al., 1995) by continuing a normal routine.

Phenomenological Strengths

In addition to the environmental protective factors that can help children flourish even under adverse circumstances, there are personal traits that if allowed by a supportive environment to develop successfully can enable a child to become resilient. In one study, researchers investigated the incidence of adolescent peer loss compared to other losses, such as the loss of a grandparent or another person (Ringler & Hayden, 2000). Approximately 70% of the respondents had experienced a death of some kind, and those who had not were asked to focus on their most difficult problem (p. 214). The researchers obtained a sample of 85

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university students (60 females and 25 males) aged 17 to 20 who participated in the study for course credit. The respondents were asked to report retrospectively on their high school years (defined as ages 14-19 by the researchers), and administered two questionnaires. The first questionnaire asked general autobiographical questions about their high school experiences, peer groups (using checklists with a few Likert-type ratings), and if they knew someone specific who had died during those years, about whom they were asked to answer specific questions. The second questionnaire asked the student to focus on one loss they experienced in particular and asked about their belief and social support systems. Specific questions about their belief systems asked (1) whether the participant had religious or spiritual beliefs at the time of the loss, (2) whether these beliefs had changed or developed, and (3) how helpful these beliefs were to the participant. Results from the study indicated that, in terms of peer loss, about 63% of participants reported that religion or spirituality was very helpful in coping with the loss. Of that group, about two-thirds reported that their belief system had not changed at all after experiencing the loss of a peer. In these adolescents we see that a personal trait such as a developed sense of purpose manifested in faith or spiritual beliefs can be a useful tool to attribute meaning to misfortune. This study strengthens support for the idea that resilient youth may draw strength from religion/spirituality to achieve a sense of stability and coherence in their lives (Benard, 2004).

In another study by Bugge et al. (2012), researchers created and investigated the effectiveness of a Body Awareness Program (BAP) on bereaved adolescents who cited typical physical responses to grief. In conjunction with the emotional reactions that we experience after the death of a loved one, we often experience physical reactions such as bodily pain, sleep disorders, lack of energy, and increased sensitivity (Zisook & Shuchter, 1994). To actively avoid the pain of their losses, adolescents reported keeping busy and tiring themselves out physically.

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In addition, merely speaking about the loss resulted in a bodily stress reaction (headaches, back and neck pain, difficulty breathing, constricting of the chest) (p. 2164). These physical responses, if they remain unaddressed, can ultimately discourage bereaving adolescents from addressing their trauma altogether and inhibit a healthy grieving process (Scheeringa et al., 2006). The BAP consisted of 10 sessions with a sample of 15 adolescents (aged 13-18) that focused on three main themes: (1) grief and coping skills, (2) loss history, and (3) grief and relationships. The exercises that the participants took part in were aimed at improving overall body awareness and bodily reactions to stress as well as breathing and relaxation techniques to aid in the coping process. Data were collected through the BAP and through in-depth group interviews, focusing on their bodily reactions and their evaluation of the effectiveness of the program in regulating their bodily reactions. The main findings indicated that the participants found the techniques useful when they applied them to their “real-life” scenarios, and that it was easier and more meaningful to speak on their bereavement process after utilizing the techniques they learned in the BAP. This is especially important for adolescents, who often find it more difficult to express their emotions verbally (Stokes, 2004). From the participants in the study we can see that the cultivation of one’s self-awareness and mindfulness (through a program like BAP or otherwise) can be a factor in one’s resilience.

A third study focused exclusively on the phenomenon of adolescent peer loss and what made teens more or less resilient in the face of that loss. Johnson (2010) focused on teens who had lost a friend due to homicide. The participants were made up of 21 African American girls who were between the ages of 16 and 19. The participants were interviewed and the data received were divided into three main categories: (1) information about the participant herself (i.e. her activities, social network), (2) the participant’s bereavement experiences, and (3) a

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debriefing of the interview. After analyzing the narrative data using grounded theory, the researchers found that the participants who were able to find a rationale and engage in a process known as meaning making showed more positive outcomes in their own post-traumatic bereavement. Specifically through what the researchers call *motivational constructions* (p. 133), successful respondents were able to draw conclusions about the loss of a friend that motivated them to better themselves (academically or socially) and place an increased value on the relationships that still remained in their lives. The *meaning making* process witnessed in the study appears to be a factor in one's resilience after the loss of a close friend during adolescence.

Methods

Data for the current study was gathered via in-depth interviews with three male participants who had experienced the death of a close friend during adolescence (this period was defined as between the ages of 13 and 21 for the purposes of this study). The participants were between the ages of 23 and 26 at the time of the study. Each of the interviews was conducted over the phone with the participant, and lasted between 60 and 80 minutes. Participants were referred by individuals who knew the researcher, and participation in the study was voluntary. Two of the three participants requested that their identities be kept anonymous based on the sensitive and personal nature of the information being shared. The calls were recorded and later transcribed by the researcher, and notes were also taken simultaneously during the interview. The detailed accounts of each participant's personal experiences of bereavement and subsequent resilience are discussed.

Michael

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Michael is a 26-year-old male currently residing in Minneapolis, Minnesota employed as a counselor for homeless youth as well as a writer, poet, and mentor for others who share his passion for self-expression. When he was 13, Michael experienced the loss of a very close friend named Stephen. Stephen's mother, Donna, was a bright, but troubled physician who was identified as a paranoid schizophrenic. As a result of her worsening delusions, she became convinced that her son was going to be taken away by a child pornography ring and that the only other option for him was to pass on. Donna violently murdered her son with a kitchen knife when he was 13 years of age. At the time, Michael and Stephen attended schools nearby each other, played on the same basketball and football teams, and spent a large portion of their recreational time together. In the interview, Michael described Stephen as hyper talented and very well-liked by his peers; he had an infectious smile and laugh, and he was the most talented kid on the basketball team.

Likely because of the sudden and violent nature of Stephen's death occurring during his early adolescence, Michael experienced an extended period of complicated bereavement. He noted that with only a few exceptions, it was not until roughly eight years later that he began to demonstrate his resilience. Until that time his existing predisposition for athletics/exercise became obsessive (i.e. working out 4 times a day) and helped him to ignore the unpleasant thoughts regarding the murder of his peer. Furthermore, he developed unhealthy coping strategies involving self-harm and substance abuse. Michael noted, however, that one activity he maintained throughout these years was writing (poetry and short stories). Michael experienced a turning point when he was 20 years old: he got sober. He stated in the interview that recovery opened up his life, and as a result he began to explore his writing more deeply. Michael joined the University of Minnesota's Poetry Committee/Slam Team and with the encouragement from

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his poetry coaches and sponsor, he was encouraged to do some emotional exploration and created a poem about Stephen and how the loss affected him. Michael explained that he felt comfortable turning to these individuals because they had already established a safe haven for him (that of recovery and unconditional acceptance).

Richard

The second participant in the study is Richard. Richard is a 24-year-old male currently living in San Diego, California and is self-employed in the Information Technology and Services sector. About four years ago Richard lost a very close friend named Drew. Drew had been diagnosed with Muscular Dystrophy as a child, and his motor abilities subsequently weakened as time went on. Most individuals with Muscular Dystrophy have shorter life expectancies than average (variation exists due to differences in severity), and Drew was no exception. Richard and Drew had known each other since 9th grade in high school. Because they attended a smaller, private high school, Richard and Drew became very close friends over their time there along with several of their peers. They spent a lot of recreational time together outside of school, doing what Richard described as typical high school activities, such as going to parties or going to the movies. He noted that despite Drew being confined to a wheelchair, it never stopped he and his friends from doing anything and recalled a time when Drew and a group of friends drove up to Los Angeles for the day.

Richard learned about the death of his friend while he was travelling abroad, absent from his peer group that also knew Drew well. He explained that despite being aware of Drew's disease and its consequences, he always pushed away the negative thoughts about Drew's eventual passing, so hearing the news still evoked a traumatic and sudden reaction from him. Following Drew's death, Richard generally pushed others away as a result of him feeling more

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vulnerable, detaching himself from many new friends he had gained now that he was in college away from home. It wasn't until about one year later that Richard once again desired a core group of friends like the one he had growing up in San Diego. Building on his existing peer group and with a new appreciation for the relationships that remained, Richard became not only a more social individual again, but what he referred to as a *social connector*, responsible for bringing people together, a trait he had always admired in Drew.

Austin

The third participant in the study is Austin. Austin is a 22-year-old male currently living in the Los Angeles area who works in the field of accounting and finance. While attending high school in San Diego, Austin grew very close with his friend Alex. When he was 17, Austin travelled to Northern California with some friends and family for the weekend – that same weekend his friend Alex was killed in a car accident. The car was full of Austin's friends at the time, including Alex. Everyone in the car had been consuming alcohol at a party that night, and when the driver lost control, Alex was thrown from the car and sustained severe head trauma. Austin noted how this tragic accident was especially traumatic for him because, had he been in San Diego at the time, it was very likely he would have been in the car with his peers that night. Austin spoke of Alex in a very positive light, noting that he was very popular among his peer group and was known for his great sense of humor, his passion for surfing, and his artistic abilities.

Complicating both his traumatic reaction and normal grieving process was the fact that the driver of the car, another close friend of Austin's, was indicted for vehicular manslaughter and eventually spent a year in a detention center in San Diego. Due to the loss of his close friend and another being convicted, Austin explained that he initially withdrew a bit from his normal

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pattern of attending his (non-mandatory) summer lacrosse practices. An important factor that played a role in this decision was that the driver of the car had been a close friend who also played on the lacrosse team with him. However, as a substitute for the time he normally spent playing lacrosse, Austin instead chose to draw – an activity that Alex had been very passionate about – because it helped him feel closer to the friend that he had lost. He noted that he and Alex did not draw together very often before Alex passed away, but focusing on drawing allowed him to cope in a positive way.

Findings

Each of the participants in the study demonstrated their resiliency in the face of adversity: specifically, the death of a close friend. As discussed earlier, adolescent deaths are often sudden and/or violent events, and the nature of these events can complicate an already difficult grieving process. The participants described their experiences with the acute trauma and extended bereavement process associated with the death of a peer (Robin & Omar, 2010), and due to the differing nature of the deaths, these experiences varied. More important were the successful coping strategies that the participants had in common. Both the environmental protective factors of peer/mentor support, as well as the personal strengths involved in creating a rationale for the loss, played large roles in the resiliency of the participants.

Peers and Mentors as a Support System

Each of the participants reMichaelled that a strong factor that made a positive impact on their bereavement process was the support they received from their remaining peers. These findings are supported by previous literature that suggests peers (and more often a peer group of 5 or more) create a safe space for sharing and grieving, more so than parents and professional counselors because they also knew the peer passed away and were engaging in a similar grieving

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process of their own (O'Brien et al., 1991).

When asked whom he turned to for help after the loss of his friend, Michael explained that he received support primarily from select peers and mentor figures. Although these peers were ones he met years after Stephen's passing, he explained how instrumental they were in helping him navigate through the trauma and grief he had been avoiding for almost eight years:

My parents didn't know what to do when I became obsessive and didn't really have the resources to deal with something like that, so two of my [poetry] coaches were huge in my recovery, and my buddy Sam as well. He was one of the other poets on the team. He was kind of like an unofficial coach because he was a lot older than the rest of us. Those three in particular [...] were instrumental in that. And they're not counselors, they're artists and they're really empathetic guys, and they like me and they really cared about the story and cared about Stephen. We would stay up late and we would talk about it. We would talk about Stephen, and it was almost as though they knew him, just how open they were to working through the poems with me.

Similarly, Richard noted that his turning point, during which he began to demonstrate his resiliency, didn't occur until several years after the death of his friend. He explained how he had to consciously seek out the strong peer group relationships that were absent at the time he experienced the loss.

My senior year [in college] was when I was able to start coping, to start rebuilding myself, and that's when I really desired having a core group of friends again... just like in high school. I had pushed people away for so long that I had to learn how to get close to other people again. What played into this a lot was the fact that I went to a private high school where I knew the same 80 people whom I had know since the beginning of time.

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This sounds weird, but I didn't really know how to make friends because I had already known these people forever. I didn't know the skill of how to make friends. When I got to college I started realizing this, so I started to focus on that and from that point forward my life has been moving in a positive direction [...] I wanted to recreate [a close peer group like] what I had in high school with Drew.

Austin also commented on the use of his peers for support during his bereavement. He remembered the formation of support groups of many friends that formed almost immediately after the loss took place, and that conversations between his peers were not necessarily a part of those support groups.

My parents were there for support but I would absolutely say it was more of a peer [support group]. I think the first Monday [after the accident] none of us went to school. A lot of us just went to this girl's house and just kind of sat in her backyard. I'd say for probably about a week there were a lot of silent gatherings of people just wanting to be in each other's company and not necessarily talking too much or even doing too much [...] I would say we just sort of fed off of each other's presence for a while.

Despite the period of time immediately following the loss of a close friend, each of the participants demonstrated their resiliency through the use of peer support. Whether it was through a meaningful relationship with a mentor figure or a strong camaraderie amongst a group of individuals, the participants were able to develop positive coping strategies that allowed them to engage in healthy bereavement.

Meaning Making

Aside from the support of one's peer group, the participants in the study indicated that their ability to derive a sense of purpose from the death of a close friend played a large role in

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their resilience. These findings are consistent with previous research, indicating that young people seek to make sense of difficult and traumatic events like the loss of a friend by finding a place for that experience to fit into the larger narrative of their own personal lives (Balk & Corr, 2009). This factor of resiliency often manifests itself in behaviors, like improving one's relationships, attempting to achieve goals at a higher level than before the death, and/or a gain in one's sense of self or self-purpose (Johnson, 2010).

It became clear early on during the interview with Michael that a major contributing factor in his resilience was his ability to express himself through his writing. Even throughout the long period of time that followed the death of his friend, Michael never stopped writing. He explained that he had found purpose in giving others the chance to express themselves freely, the same way he was encouraged by his mentors to do so when he needed them the most.

What I learned from [performing the poem I wrote about Stephen] and why I'm so passionate about teaching poetry and working with homeless youth is the power of articulating your story and your emotions, and sharing that. It wasn't about writing a poem and performing it for a lot of people. It was about articulating my story and sharing it. Whatever ways that people can share stories - if that's dance, if that's painting, if that's music, if it's talking, if it's sculpture - whatever it is, finding a way to share your story and share it with someone else has been for me the most healing thing that I've ever encountered [...] Writing is what I had to keep me going... and I'm grateful I was able to tell the story.

For Michael, the chance to express his experience of how the loss affected him is what allowed that experience to become a part of his own personal narrative. He felt so strongly that this experience allowed him to begin to move on, that he now devotes much of his time and energy to

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creating a safe haven for others to do the same.

Similar to Michael's experience of finding a sense of purpose and direction after his loss, Richard described a turning point in his bereavement. He realized that after transferring universities, separating from his significant other, and losing his close friend, he had an opportunity to recreate his own identity.

It was the most significant period of my life because I was able to rebuild myself any way I wanted to... I kind of lost who I was in transferring [colleges], in breaking up with my girlfriend, and losing Drew all at once, and I had to rebuild my identify. But once I got the foundation built I started to become happy again. [...] I don't think it was a conscious decision, but I realize there was a correlation between Drew being the [social] connector, him passing away, and then I assumed that role [...] As I grew older I started to realize how important my friends are and how I want to contribute to them in any way I can. One of the ways I know how to do that is to get everyone together, and make sure everyone's having a good time – then I'm happy.

Through a re-creation of his own identity, Ryan was able to reestablish the relationships that were important to him. In addition, he realized that he had assumed the role that Drew always took: that of the social connector, and he appreciated the effectiveness that role had in terms of bringing together the important people in his life that remained.

As opposed to experiencing a turning point in his bereavement process, Austin described a gradual process that took place following the loss of his close friend that affected his daily thought process. He had always admired Alex's ability to think and act independently, and began to conduct himself in a similar manner. By finding a life lesson in the tragedy, he was able to move forward with his life.

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It was like, okay I'm going to make this decision with his attitude about that in mind, and that got me to thinking there was a butterfly effect. If all these people, still physically living, are changing their behaviors every day then his death can have a bigger physical impact on the world [...] through real tangible decisions through living people. That was one thought that helped me cope [...] making tangible decisions and behavioral changes and seeing all of my friends doing it as well.

Discussion

As previously noted, the purpose of this study was to fill the gap in knowledge in regards to how the death of a close friend affects an adolescent, and what specific features play a role in one's resiliency in the face of this adversity. The experiences of the participants in this study add to the limited amount of existing research on the topic, and can be used to better inform those who work with adolescents how to best support them when they are enduring a similar experience.

Based on the data from this study, we can see that adolescents may utilize certain environmental protective factors during bereavement, if they are readily available. For each of the participants in the study, the external factor most utilized used was one's peer support group. The participants' statements were aligned with the extant research that suggests adolescents tend to seek out their peers after experiencing the death of a peer (Malone, 2008). This safe environment allows peers to support one another while they share an emotionally, psychologically, and socially vulnerable period in their lives.

In addition, the data from the study indicate that the presence and utilization of phenomenological strengths played a role in the resilience of the participants. Through individual methods of creating meaning and a sense of purpose from the loss of a close friend, each of the

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adolescent males in the study was able to demonstrate their resilience. Michael capitalized on his sobriety and focused all of his energy on his writing, and used it as a therapeutic process.

Realizing how his self-expression played such a vital role in his ability to cope, he now devotes his life to creating a safe space for others to share their stories in a similar way. Richard was able to turn an emotionally vulnerable period in his life into a reformation of his identity, and eventually assumed a role as a social connector. He now has a new appreciation for his remaining relationships and finds solace in bringing together the people he deeply cares for.

Austin described how the loss of his friend has impacted his daily thought process. He was able to draw life lessons from the accident and use them to change his behaviors on a daily basis, and envisions a brighter future if others can improve their own behaviors as well.

As discussed earlier, resiliency is not a trait inherent in some individuals and absent in others; instead, resilience is a group of traits that can be elicited when circumstances necessitate them (Benard, 2004). It is important for practitioners who work with adolescents in bereavement to accommodate for variability in and emphasize the utility of these traits when given the chance to develop and aid in the adolescent bereavement process.

Implications

The current study provides implications for mental health professionals who work with male adolescents, particularly during a period of bereavement due to the loss of a close friend. While working with this population it may be helpful to examine both the external and internal factors that may help and/or hinder the adolescent's ability to cope with such a loss. In regards to environmental protective factors, it may be helpful to allow a supportive environment for peers to grieve together. Doing so will allow for the creation of a support group comprised of peers experiencing the same emotionally and psychological vulnerability. In terms of adolescents'

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phenomenological strengths, it may be helpful to encourage the individual to utilize their existing hobbies and interests as an outlet for self-expression. If the adolescent is unaware of their own strengths and/or does not have clearly defined interests, it may be helpful to explore characteristics that their friends admire about them and encourage ongoing participation in activities that build on those characteristics. Because of the differing interests and personalities in adolescents, it is encouraging to know that there are different approaches to resiliency when working with a diverse adolescent population.

Limitations

Although the findings from this study add to the literature on the characteristics of resiliency exhibited by adolescent males who experience the death of a close friend, there are several limitations that should be noted. First, there were only three participants in the study, and two of the three resided in the region of Southern California. The small, homogenous sample size limits the generalizability of the results of the study, so it is possible that male adolescents in different parts of the United States with different backgrounds are demonstrating aspects of resiliency different than those found in this study. Further research could improve upon this limitation by including a larger sample size from diverse (rural/suburban/urban) regions of the United States.

Second, though the study included only male participants in order to analyze what resiliency factors they demonstrated after losing a close friend, there was no control group of female participants to compare the findings with. Further studies could implement the use of a control group to better compare and contrast the similarities and differences of resiliency factors between male and female adolescents.

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