Illustrating an Integrated Typology of Meaning Reconstruction in Discourse: Grief-Related Disclosures

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A typology of meaning reconstruction in grief-related discourse is offered as an extension to extant approaches to meaning making as a factor in relieving distress. Sensemaking, acceptance or resignation without understanding, realization of benefits via positive reappraisal, and realignment of roles and relationships are advanced as the 4 types of meaning reconstruction that are formed by the 4 intersections of Park's (2010) categorical distinctions in meaning making (i.e., searching for comprehensibility/searching for significance and assimilation/accommodation). Interpretive analysis of grief-related texts from an emotional disclosure study reveals 25 themes across the 4 types. Related theoretical insights and practical implications are discussed.

A growing body of evidence indicates that the making, or reconstruction, of meanings, is often a valuable way of managing distress and grief. Theorists and empirical researchers have described these meanings but inconsistency and overlap exists between the approaches. Drawing from Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, and Larson's (1998) depiction of categories within two construals of meanings, Gillies and Neimeyer's (2006) model of meaning reconstruction pathways, Park's (2010) model of meaning making, and MacKinnon et al.'s (2013) "discrete subtypes of meaning making" (p. 222), we pose a typology of four meaning reconstruction types (i.e., sensemaking, acceptance or resignation without understanding, realization of benefits via positive reappraisal, and realignment of roles and relationships). We believe they represent the intersections of the levels of two of Park's important meaning-making process distinctions (i.e., searching for comprehensibility/searching for significance and assimilation/accommodation). To illustrate the utility of this typology, we analyze the texts provided by individuals who focused on their own grief while engaging in a classic emotional self-disclosure study.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND RATIONALE

Meaning Reconstruction and Meaning Making

Tait and Silver (1989) suggested "the ability to find meaning in an event plays a key role in influencing psychological impact and the process of recovery" (p. 355). Related to the emotional disclosure paradigm, "writing about or confronting traumatic experiences is beneficial in that it helps the person understand, resolve, and find meaning in the experience" (Pennebaker & Susman, 1988, pp. 331–332). Further, Neimeyer (1998) has proposed "the reconstruction of a world of meaning" as "the central process in grieving" (p. 65).

Park's (2010) model of meaning making for facing distress includes several tenets that are relatively well established in both theory and data from relevant investigations. These include that global meanings, including beliefs and life goals/purposes, serve as templates for interpreting potentially stressful experiences, that situations are appraised for meaning, and that distress is produced by discrepancy between global and situational meanings. To resolve such discrepancy, individuals often engage in meaning-making efforts.

Though extant evidence is mixed, it appears to indicate that efforts to make meaning may be less efficacious for dealing with stressors like grief than are actual "meanings made" (Park, 2010), that not all efforts produce meaning, and that many meanings made are productive but not necessarily all of them. According to Park (2010), "many theorists have proposed that meaning-making attempts should lead to better adjustment only to the extent that individuals achieve some product (i.e., meaning made) through the process" (p. 261). For instance, Coleman and Neimeyer (2010) determined that the search for, and attainment of, meaning by elderly widows and widowers were not correlated and that successful early attempts at sensemaking are indicative of long-term adjustment. Moreover, the factor structure of Steger, Frazier, Oishi, and Kaler's (2006) Meaning in Life Questionnaire indicates that the search for, and presence of, meaning should be assessed independently. Just as attempts to make meaning do not always create meaning (see Park, 2010, pp. 285–286 for a full review), meanings are more likely to be found when positive ones (e.g., benefit finding, positive reappraisal of stressor) are searched for (Wu et al., 2008) than when causal blame is pursued or rumination over unanswerable questions like "why her?" is enacted. Though there is no guarantee that adaptive outcomes follow when meaning-making efforts are successful (e.g., Lepore & Kernan, 2009), there is enough evidence in the limited amount of pertinent investigations to warrant hope that they will (Park, 2010).

Park's (2010) categorical distinctions among the processes of meaning making, and the kinds of meanings made, are especially useful. Meaning making includes "the processes in which people engage to reduce (the) discrepancy" (Park, 2010, p. 259) and may be more or less automatic or deliberate, and more or less cognitive or emotional in nature. A major distinction drawn in Park's review of meaning making is between searching for comprehensibility and searching for significance. The former regards matters of causality and reasons for occurrence of the distressing event, whereas the latter involves assessing the impacts and consequential values of the event. Another distinction in meaning making is between assimilation and accommodation (Park, 2010). When discrepancy is reduced with alteration of situational appraised meaning to better align with global meanings, processes of assimilation have transpired. Conversely, processes of accommodation involve evolution of global meanings to better incorporate situational ones. Accommodation is somewhat akin to Janoff-Bulman's (1992) "shattering" of "assumptions" about the benevolence, meaningfulness, and worth of life, ourselves, and others, by discrepant events and meanings. In Park's model, meanings made include making sense of what has happened; accepting its having happened; achieving attribution and causal understandings; perceiving the existence of positive consequences; shifting one's identity to align with the new reality created by the event; changing of global beliefs, goals, and purposes; and reappraising of the event.

Gillies and Neimeyer (2006) nominated sensemaking, finding benefits in the loss, and undergoing identity transformation as the primary meaning-related activities of grief. *Sensemaking* regards understanding how the loss of life happened and what it means. The benefits that accompany the loss may include new appreciation of others, the deceased, or life itself. Altered versions of self-identity might involve perceiving oneself as stronger or as supporting causes important to the deceased. MacKinnon et al.'s (2013) presentation of the meaning reconstruction model acknowledges sensemaking, benefit finding, continuing bonds between survivors and the deceased, and family meaning making wherein relatives co-construct meaning following their loss.

We have uniquely identified four types of meaning reconstruction as formed at the intersections of the assimilation/accommodation (i.e., adjusting situational meaning to better match global meaning or vice versa) and the searching for comprehensibility/searching for significance (i.e., understanding causes or impacts of an event) dichotomies (see Figure 1). *Sensemaking* is
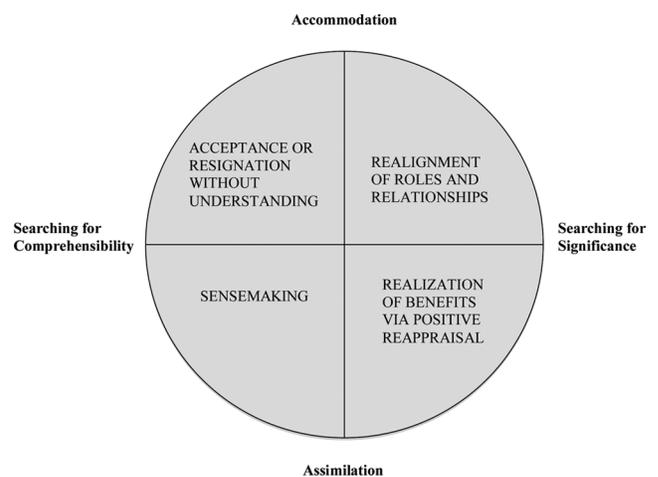

FIGURE 1   Types of meaning reconstruction formed at intersections of meaning-making processes.

equated with assimilation of situational meanings achieved by searching for comprehensibility. *Acceptance or resignation without understanding* is cast as accommodation of global meanings by way of having searched for comprehensibility. *Realization of benefits via positive reappraisal* is posed as assimilation of situational meaning that occurs when searching for significance. Finally, *realignment of roles and relationships* involves accommodation of global meanings by way of having searched for significance.

Sensemaking: Comprehensibility/Assimilation

Sensemaking may involve attainment of better comprehensibility as to why a traumatic event has occurred. The event may then be better framed within global meanings. Attributing the unexpected death of a young person to God's will is an example of sensemaking as searching for, and attaining, comprehensibility by assimilating the event into global religious beliefs. Parents of deceased children who have engaged in the least amount of sensemaking are prone to the highest levels of grief severity (Keesee, Currier, & Neimeyer, 2008). Making sense especially alleviates complicated grieving associated with unanticipated losses (e.g., death by accident, death of the youthful; Coleman & Neimeyer, 2010; Currier, Holland, & Neimeyer, 2007). According to Davis et al. (1998), sensemaking may be conceptualized as having recognized how the loss of a family member was predictable; accepted by patient; accepted or expected by survivor; seen as the result of God or fate; or resulted in the growth of survivors' understanding.

Acceptance or Resignation Without Understanding: Comprehensibility/Accommodation

When individuals cannot identify reasons for distressing events (i.e., comprehensibility), they often adjust their global meanings (i.e., accommodation) accordingly. For example, some survivors of losses eventually decide that no sense is to be made and that they must either accept or resign themselves to a world where things happen that have utterly no explanation. For lack of acceptance or even resignation, continued and unfulfilled efforts to attain sense may lead to frustration and even rumination about the (unattainable) reasons and causes. Among the meanings made that were evident in interviews with family members of deceased hospice patients, Davis et al. (1998) coded the understanding that some things just happen and the acceptance of not knowing why.

Realization of Benefits via Positive Reappraisal: Significance/Assimilation

The distressed will usually strive to determine the value and impact of an upsetting event (i.e., significance).

When undesireable assessment contrasts with global meanings, such as a forecast of a purposeless empty life without a loved one, situational meaning may be revised accordingly (i.e., assimilation). Perceiving a death as motivation for dedicating the remainder of one's life to a cause, such as starting a domestic violence foundation in a victim's name, is an example of such positive reappraisal. The loss is reconstrued as encompassing an opportunity to inspire benefits.

Emotional distress is often alleviated through alteration of the appraisals that led to the distress. In fact, Burleson and Goldsmith (1998) noted that, "reappraisal emerges as a key—and, perhaps, the central—coping mechanism through which emotional change occurs" (p. 257). Smyth (1998) posited that reappraisal may explain improvements experienced by disclosure investigation participants. Lichtenthal and Cruess (2010) found the role of benefit finding in disclosure trials to be particularly efficacious for dealing with grief. Davis et al.'s (1998) survivors found benefits in gaining perspective about life and its happy aspects, coming to understand the kindness of supportive others, experiencing growth in their own character, bringing about benefits for others by adopting related causes, and lauding the end of their loved one's suffering.

Realignment of Roles and Relationships: Significance/Accommodation

In evaluating loss (i.e., searching for significance), survivors may find incompatibility with the global meanings that Park (2010) labeled as "self-in-world" and "subjective sense of meaning or purpose," which imply identity, and as goals, or "desired end states (Karoly, 1999) or states already possessed that one seeks to maintain, such as health or relationships with loved ones (Klinger, 1998)" (Park, 2010, p. 258). Accordingly, survivors may implement accommodation (i.e., the changing of global meanings) by adopting new visions of roles in the world (e.g., widow, candidate for dating) or adapting relationships with loved ones (e.g., the deceased, surviving relatives).

Nerken (1993) posited the role of insight and meaning regarding self-identity as instrumental in the experience of grief. Survivors are often forced to see themselves, their goals, and their purposes in life differently. Visions of lonely reality are considered as new roles (e.g., widower, survivor, seeker of new romance) and new endeavors (e.g., assuming household duties, resuming careers) are incorporated into personal identity. Neimeyer (2004) detailed how loss brings about the transformation of one's self-narrative, which "consolidates our self-understanding, establishes our characteristic range of emotions and goals, and guides our performance on the stage of the social world" (p. 53).

Reconceptualization of one's relationship with the deceased is another way of accommodating global meaning regarding significance. Despite Freudian-inspired beliefs regarding the importance of "letting go of" and "moving on" from the deceased so as to avoid pathological and complicated grief, the continuation of bonds is popularized in many contemporary positions regarding noncomplicated grief (e.g., Walter, 1996). In formally presenting a productive "continuing bonds" model of grief (see Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996), Silverman and Nickman (1996) claimed that, "maintaining an inner representation of the deceased is normal" (p. 349). The efficacy of continuing bonds is not inevitable (Klass, 2006) and both the attachment style of the survivor (Stroebe, Schut, & Boerner, 2010) and the nature of the bonds (Field & Filanosky, 2010) likely influence the mourner's disposition to do so.

Continuing bonds, the maintenance of an ongoing relationship with the deceased (Field, Gao, & Paderna, 2005), takes many forms. Normand, Silverman, and Nickman (1996) found that children of deceased parents interact with their ghosts, hold dearly to memories of them, and become living legacies to them. Moss and Moss (1996) examined widowed persons and discovered they used continued caring, intimacy, and commitment; family ties; and identity support to preserve connections with their spouses. Dennis (2008, 2012) described survivors being "advised" internally by "voices" of the lost and preserving material objects, such as urns, favorite drinks, and trees planted in honor, as points of connection.

Finally, relations with other living survivors may be modified according to the loss they have shared. Davis et al. (1998) found that survivors needed to prioritize their families as more important sources of support after surviving the death of a relative.

Self-Disclosure Paradigm and Grief

The beneficial outcomes of emotional self-disclosure regarding traumatic events and associated distress are both well-documented and largely supported (e.g., Pennebaker & Chung, 2011). The typical Pennebaker-style disclosure study involves instructing research participants to write or talk about a stressful or traumatic event for approximately 20 minutes for 4 successive days. Multiple studies have found that those in experimental groups tend to enjoy a variety of physical, physiological, emotional, and career-related advantages over those in control groups (see Pennebaker & Chung, 2011). Pennebaker and his colleagues have shown that distressed individuals arrive at more functional understandings of their situations when they verbally express their related feelings. Disclosers who employ larger amounts of causal (e.g., "because," "reason") and insight (e.g.,"understand," "realize") words, thus indicating their better understanding and sensemaking about their traumas, enjoy more benefits associated with the paradigm (Pennebaker, Mayne, & Francis, 1997).

Smyth (1998) performed a meta-analytic review of 13 articles representing investigations of the emotional disclosure paradigm and identified factors for the existence of disclosure benefits. In descending order of effect sizes, measures of psychological well-being and physiological functioning showed the most improvement, followed by those of reported health outcomes, and then those of general functioning outcomes (Smyth, 1998). Disclosers recruited as college students achieved greater scores on measures of psychological well-being than did nonstudents (Smyth, 1998). Their disclosures were not limited to college-related difficulties, however. Instead, most focused on isolation and loneliness or loss of family; a fair amount also wrote of suicidal thoughts. These topics have a clear relevance to those of disclosers considering grief.

Though nonstudents may be older in general, age was not a moderating variable in Smyth's (1998) analysis. Male participants secured greater levels of benefits than did female participants (Smyth, 1998). Across the 13 studies, participants instructed to disclose about current traumas experienced superior outcomes to those instructed to focus on past or current traumas and the past or current conditions produced more favorable outcomes than did past only conditions (Smyth, 1998). As grief persists for most survivors long beyond the actual death of a loved one, it again seems to be a topic well-suited to obtaining disclosure effects.

A relatively small portion of disclosure studies has focused particularly on grief as the source of disclosers' distress. For example, Range, Kovac, and Marion (2000) demonstrated that writing about the loss of a loved one assisted participants with anxiety, depression, and their recovery from grief.

In sum, it is likely that recovery from distress and grief, within or without the disclosure procedure, results at least partially from meaning reconstruction and the processes of meaning making. Thus, the current project investigates (a) whether the intrapersonal form of communication that is disclosure about grief provides textual evidence of our meaning reconstruction in discourse typology (i.e., sensemaking, acceptance or resignation without understanding, realization of benefits via positive reappraisal, realignment of roles and relationships); and (b) whether different varieties of the typology's elements may be identified within disclosure about grief.

METHOD

Participants in this study were undergraduates enrolled in communication and psychology courses at a large

midwestern university. Data collection took place over a 5-week time period. Overall, 206 students completed their 4-day participation. They ranged in age from 18 to 45 with an average age of 19.86 ($SD = 2.63$). One hundred and two were male, 103 female, and one did not specify his or her sex; 81.1% of the sample was White. After signing informed consent forms, participants were randomly assigned to the control group or to a writing or speaking disclosure condition.

Upon completion of a demographic background information questionnaire, participants in all conditions were told to briefly describe a personal problem or stressor that they felt comfortable writing or talking about. Though many noted problems or stressors having to do with school, work, and family and romantic relationships, almost as many focused on domestic abuse, alcoholism, criminal activity, and assorted tragedies. Of the 206 participants, 19 (i.e., five in the written condition, 11 in the oral, and three controls; 10 females and nine males) chose a loss by death as the stressor of focus. Each of them described either just the event itself (e.g., "When I was 12 yrs old, my 16-year-old sister was diagnosed with cancer, suffered in the hospital for 6 months, and passed away," "The death of my great-grandmother that happened 2 weeks ago") or the event as well as how it has affected them (e.g., "About a year ago my dog passed away. Since then I have been working through feelings of loss and grief," "My father died of a brain tumor. Since then, I have had to deal with his absence and my own mortality").

Disclosure participants were instructed to keep their stressor in mind as they disclosed for the remainder of the study sessions and were reminded to do so at the beginning of each session. Beyond that, instructions included exhortations to "write (or talk) continuously without worrying about grammar, spelling, or sentence structure," and "to discuss your deepest thoughts and feelings about the experience." There were no suggestions to make sense of the event, to evaluate it negatively or positively, or to reassess one's own identity or relationships. The control group members were asked only to "describe in detail what you have done since you woke up this morning" and to keep "your description as objective as possible."

Each of the 16 grief survivors in the disclosure groups was assigned a pseudonym to protect his or her anonymity. Their handwritten copy and audiotapes were transcribed into 197 pages of double-spaced text.

ANALYSIS

The first and second authors agreed to identify all instances of meaning reconstruction (defined operationally as products of meaning making) in the transcripts and to categorize each of them among the four types of meaning reconstruction (i.e., sensemaking, acceptance or resignation without understanding, realization of benefits via positive reappraisal, and realignment of roles and relationships) or within an "other" category to test the exhaustiveness of the typology. According to Manning and Kunkel (2014), "deviant case analysis" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 278) helps to ensure the validity of a coding scheme. All examples were coded into the four types and none into the "other" category. The first paragraph of each of the four subsections of our meaning reconstruction literature review above contain definitions and examples of the four types of meaning reconstruction that were used as the operationalizations for coding.

Finally, themes within the types were identified by the first and second authors, who collaborated to renegotiate and revise the themes via Strauss and Corbin's (1998) constant comparative method. They first individually coded and performed memoing to record relationships among examples (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and then met to discuss codes and resolve disagreements. This iterative process was repeated until consensus was reached about the themes, and their constituitive examples, among the four types of meaning reconstruction.

RESULTS

The analysis provided textual evidence for our meaning reconstruction in discourse typology and uncovered different varieties of each of its elements. We now present the themes discovered within each of the four types of meaning reconstruction (see Table 1). Space prevents exhaustive presentation of examples but we do provide at least one representative example for each theme.

Sensemaking: Comprehensibility/Assimilation

In making sense, or attaining better comprehension as to why the death they were grieving happened and/or what it portends by way of assimilating situational meaning, participants provided examples of what we determined to be six themes: reason why/purpose, cause of loss, assignment of blame, loss as cause, predictable/prepared, and understanding life and death.

Reason Why/Purpose

Some surviving disclosers were able to identify a purpose for, or reasons for why, the loss may have occurred. Bridgette, who lost two grandparents from different sides of her family within 24 hours of each other, thought their deaths might have some purpose in that, "Maybe it's to make you stronger, maybe it's

TABLE 1
Themes of Meaning Reconstruction Types

Meaning reconstruction types	Meaning-making processes
Sensemaking	Searching for comprehensibility/assimilation
● Reason why/purpose	
● Cause of loss	
● Assignment of blame	
● Loss as cause	
● Predictable/prepared	
● Understanding life and death	
Acceptance or resignation without understanding	Searching for comprehensibility/accommodation
● No reason/no explanation	
● Questioning faith and god	
● Bad things happen to good people/unfair	
● Unpredictable life and fate	
Realization of benefits via positive reappraisal	Searching for significance/assimilation
● End of deceased's suffering	
● Deceased in "better place"	
● Survivor appreciation of deceased	
● Survivor appreciation of life and others	
● Survivor growth	
● Favorable contrast to other outcomes	
Realignment of roles and relationships	Searching for significance/accommodation
● Survivor roles	
● Survivor goals	
● Survivor realities (struggles and triggers)	
● Survivor values	
● Survivors' relationships	
● Continuing bonds: Presence	
● Continuing bonds: Interaction	
● Continuing bonds: Overseeing	
● Continuing bonds: Living legacy	

to show you more…that there's something there one minute and it could be gone the next."

Frank's grandmother passed away only a week before his participation in the disclosure study. He did not get the chance to see her because his father was estranged from her since her divorce. Frank concluded, "I think her dying was somewhat to make us all get together again, like at the funeral, to talk and for me to hear a bunch of good things about the kind of woman she was."

Cause of Loss

Disclosers sometimes made sense of the cause and effect relationship of factors and events. George's brother, Eamonn, was killed by a brain tumor because it was ignored for too long. "He was having intense migraine headaches. They were so bad that most of the time he couldn't stand up. But he would never complain about it, cuz he didn't want to worry anyone."

Harold unpacked the string of events that resulted in his witnessing, and being confused about, the death of his friend Tom in a motorcycle accident. "Tom was hugging like the inside of the road by the yellow line and eh, evidently the truck did not see him and continued to make his turn and eh Tom crashed into the front right

wheel of the truck…he seemed like he was breathing, doing alright. But I guess according to the doctor that was just from the aftershock."

Assignment of Blame

A more negative brand of sensemaking about causality is that which assigns blame to survivors. Disclosers were more apt to absolve others of blame that they had been previously assigned. Amy sympathetically noted her aunt's blaming of herself for the loss of Amy's grandmother, "My grandma died, and my aunt was staying with me and then I had a car wreck. (Laugh). She's blaming herself with, you know, the big black cloud (laugh)." Lance was 12 when he lost his then 16-year-old sister to cancer six years earlier. "I wrote an angry letter to Kristi's doctor…I was young, angry, immature. I realize now nothing could have prevented it."

Loss as Cause

The losses that survivors experienced were perceived, to differing extents, as directly responsible for adverse consequences. At the age of 9, Stephanie lost two aunts in a year. One died at 21 with brain tumors; the other

succumbed to leukemia at 25. Stephanie suffered direct repercussions in her life. "After their deaths I could never really focus on school. My grades dropped and I began to eat more...I used to be very outspoken and energetic. After they died I became very quiet." Bridgette lost both her grandparents within 24 hours of each other. She struggled mightily with the extent to which their deaths brought about many other negatives that she subsequently experienced, "Things are going downhill...Death brings upon a lot of change."

Predictable/Prepared

Survivors seem to be comforted by having been ready for the loss, or even retrospectively coming to understand it as foreseeable. Ivan's grandmother had just passed away during Christmas Eve at his house. He was able to reframe this loss as somewhat expected and even convince himself that it was not really as much of a shock as he thought:

> He told us that ah my brother and I this might be a last Christmas to be with our grandmother. So it wasn't like we were prepared necessarily, but it is like we had an idea... Now that I look back and think over it, I remember my grandmother sitting on the couch, and she was not really being herself, she looked kind of peaked. She looked awfully pale. I could tell there was a problem.

Harold realized, in hindsight, that as a daredevil, Tom's early demise could have been anticipated, "Tom was crazy, you can just picture, he was the adrenaline rush, he is the adrenaline guy."

Understanding Life and Death

As survivors are left in life by the death of others, they come to new comprehensions of life in general, the life of the deceased, death in general, and their own mortality. Daniel focused his disclosures on the death of two friends in a rollover car crash. He was able to locate the meaning of one of the lives that was lost. "I think that he did a lot of good while he was here on earth, and I think he did what he was supposed to. I think that he made a lot of people's lives better. I think he was quite the hero." Brett's father died of a brain tumor when he was in fifth grade and he wrestled with his own fear of dying. "Another problem I have to deal with is my own death ...My grandfather also died of a brain tumor. This more than likely means I am next in line. I figure I have about 30 years left to accomplish my goals in life."

Acceptance or Resignation Without Understanding: Comprehensibility/Accommodation

Participants also indicated their own inabilities to understand why the deaths had happened and why they

had happened to their loved ones. Several participants resolved their discrepancy of incomprehensibility with worldview by either accepting, or resigning themselves to, a world where not everything is understood. Other themes of accomodating global meanings were the questioning of faith and/or God, and the recognizing of the unfairness of bad things happening to good people, as well as the unpredictability of life and fate.

No Reason/No Explanation

There were many instances of participants questioning essentially, "why?" and arriving at no full understanding of the reasons for their losses. Lance realized, "I still ask why it happened. And why it was her, why my sister?" Bridgette hedges between acceptance of, and resignation to, not knowing: "I don't understand what good that does. I don't understand how it shows me anything. I don't understand how it teaches me a lesson. I just don't understand and I don't know why and I don't know how to make things better and I don't, I don't think I ever will."

Questioning Faith and God

For some, the God that allows such loss to happen is one that may not deserve unquestioned faith. Daniel summarized his doubt, "You wonder why; why God would do something like that put that (sniffs) why God would let things like that happen? Why would anyone let it happen?" Amy reported her aunt's crisis of faith, "She was working for Campus Crusade for Christ as a missionary and like since my grandmas passed away, she's had a lot of like a lot of questions about her work and...questioning God."

Bad Things Happen to Good People/Unfair

One theme centers on the unfairness of bad things happening to good people. Daniel was puzzled about why death comes to those who so clearly do not deserve it, "I mean because you like to think to yourself good things happen to good people." Similarly, Theresa disclosed, "I just think about my grandma and grandpa and I think why did this have to happen to them? They were good people...especially my grandma, so suddenly."

Stephanie thought the unfairness applied not just to an aunt who was so good in life but also to the nieces and nephews who lost her and their other aunt as well:

> She was a very kind and peaceful person and I could never understand why it happened to her...I never understood how someone so kind had to die...I'll never understand why it had to be them. And why did my younger brothers/sisters never have the opportunity to meet them? I think that it was very unfair.

Unpredictable Life and Fate

Occasionally, a discloser would accept that the loss would change his or her belief in self-determinism. Caleb learned of a schoolmate who shot and killed his wife and was in prison for the crime. Besides his inability to understand what could have gone wrong and what the motive could have been, Caleb had to recalibrate his worldview of being in control of his own destiny. "I was a strong believer in that you can mold your own life, no one has a certain fate they're doomed or detained for. You can, no matter what, you can forge your life into the path you want. I guess life has funny ways of flipping things around on ya. Life's funny that way."

Realization of Benefits via Positive Reappraisal: Significance/Assimilation

Participants identified even the small compensatory outcomes that came as consequences of their huge losses. These instances of positive reappraisal equate with assessing the significance or value of the loss more desirably so that it better parallels positive global meanings. Themes included the end of the deceased's suffering, arrival of the deceased in a "better place," appreciation of the deceased's life, appreciation of life and other survivors, survivor growth, and favorable contrasts with possible outcomes that did not actually occur.

End of Deceased's Suffering

A sentiment often offered to comfort those who mourn someone who had been sick or struggling is that at least the loved one is not suffering anymore; apparently individuals comfort themselves in the same way. When discussing his sister's death at age 16, Lance tried to see good emerging from the situation in at least one way; it ended the complications she endured. Similarly, Ivan commented, "You know she won't have to worry. She had been having all kinds of problems the last few years." Jessica rationalized her great-grandmother's death by citing the benefits of her having escaped hardship. "Now she isn't suffering anymore cause she was very very independent and she didn't want people to have to help her and she wanted to live on her own and she couldn't do that she wasn't as happy."

Deceased in "Better Place"

Another common consolation that was probably easiest to identify and name, because it was often spoken verbatim by participants, is the envisioning of the deceased in another realm that is preferable to the one they left. Alice was sure that Jeremy, killed in a car accident right after speaking with her, had graduated to a higher existence. "I know that he is, you know, in a better

place that he never got to have much of a life here." Ivan also thought his grandmother had moved on to a happier condition. "I just continue to think that she is in a better place, and now she doesn't have to worry about being sick."

Survivor Appreciation of Deceased

One theme that involved survivors recognizing positives for themselves consisted of appreciating the deceased. They reminisced about the good times they shared and that they had the good fortune to have known the deceased. They recognized lessons they had learned from the deceased. They appreciated that good lives had been lived. Stephanie recalled that with one of her aunts, "When I was little we would always bake cookies and desserts. We had lots of good times." Bridgette cherished her grandfather's affection for her, "When I was little he always used to call me Miss America."

Jessica considered herself fortunate to have enjoyed, and learned from, her great-grandmother. "She has taught us a lot of what we all learn. At least I have I just consider myself lucky to have just known her, a great grandma for eighteen years…She showed it was important to be there." Jessica also took solace in the appreciation of the good life that her elderly relative had enjoyed. "She was basically ready for the past couple of years you know she was like, 'I lived a good life and my time is come to be over' and she is like 'I know I have lived a good life.'"

Survivor Appreciation of Life and Others

Survivors came away from their losses more ready to recognize the value of their lives and the people in them. Theresa vowed to value others more. "You can't just take them for granted, you have to live day by day and know that tomorrow might not be there…Enjoy their company and get to know the person better and not just judge them." Jessica acknowledged more appreciation of life and of others. "Just about life in general or like when you hear about something that happens even if it is in a different country. It makes you think about what you have right now and how you need to appreciate it."

Survivor Growth

Participants also noted the growth and gains in strength that they and their families achieved for having survived losses. Some adopted new responsibilities and causes while others grew in knowledge and beliefs. In having to become the man of the house after his father died, Brett grew immensely. "I had to mature faster. Even so, I think that I benefited from the entire situation.

They say, 'what doesn't kill you makes you stronger.' I tend to agree with this statement. Although my family and I went through a lot of pain leading to and following my dad's death, all of us grew from the situation." Likewise, Ivan believes that he has grown personally from surviving his grandmother's death. "It has kind of helped me grow and mature to an extent . . . I have been stronger from the situation." Alice pointed out that she had become an advocate for an important cause as a result of losing Jeremy. "I became the president of SADD, Students Against Drunk Drivers, and I work with the DARE officer." Jackie had to decide to have her dog put down, a moral decision to reduce his suffering, despite her reservations about euthanasia. Within her disclosure, Jackie considered, "Will I use what I have learned from this situation? Have I learned anything from this situation? I mean, am I strong enough to make life choices? This is a dilemma which dictates the decisions I will make."

Favorable Contrast to Other Outcomes

Some disclosers were just grateful that things were not as bad as they could have been. About his courageous father who faced down brain tumors, Brett rationalized, "When his cancer made him incapable of working, he focused his energy towards fighting his disease. I don't know if that is what made a difference, but Dad lived nine months longer than anyone expected." Alice decided within her disclosures that Jeremy's swift death was favorable to a long or painful one. "Maybe he got off easier than some people who suffer."

Realignment of Roles and Relationships: Significance/Accommodation

In considering the consequences and values of their losses (i.e., significance), survivors accommodate their global perspectives on who they are and how they relate with others. Themes among their identity and relationship transformations are the roles and goals survivors now perceive for themselves, their apprehension of new difficult realities and adjustment of values; also, relationships are realigned including those between survivors and those between survivors and the deceased. To continue bonds with them, disclosers sense their presence, interact with them, are overseen by them, and live to honor and impress them as their legacies.

Survivor Roles

Some participants reshaped their own lives and identities within the context of surviving the deceased. Brett noted, "One of the responsibilities I had to pick up when Dad wasn't around was being the 'man of the house.' My grandfather helped to teach me some basic mechanics and other skills, so I could keep things around the house working . . . I also became the closet thing to a father my younger sister would know." When his middle sister was diagnosed and later died, Lance's much older brother, Steve, looked after him. "He just graduated college and his little sister gets cancer, he becomes a parental figure to me and is trying to hold the fam together in a crisis."

Survivor Goals

A critical part of identity lies in the ambitions individuals have for themselves and some altered their goals dramatically. Brett's new concerns about his longevity overrode his previous aspirations. "I would love to have children someday, but I sometimes wonder if that would be the right thing to do. I don't want to bring children into this world and then leave them fatherless." Brett also was inspired to singlemindedly pursue self-actualization professionally. "I decided I want to design propulsion systems for air/spacecraft and I am working towards this goal."

Survivor Realities (Struggles and Triggers)

Participants seem to have repositioned themselves as adopting a melancholic existence in which they must operate without their loved ones and their struggles are often catalyzed by the specific reminders that we are calling triggered memories. Stephanie observed, "Sometimes I find myself now missing them so much and remembering how they died that I just start crying or get into a very depressive mood." A substantial factor in the new morose reality appears to be the onset of triggered memories brought on by significant and, unfortunately, recurring dates or events. Lance explains:

> Sometimes people ask me, "Why don't you ever have any fun on Valentine's Day?" Well, that's the day my sister woke up in such excruciating pain that she couldn't move. She was 15 yrs old at the time. Just this past week, before this study started, I was thinking of Kristi a lot. I think it's the time of year Feb–Aug is the time she was sick. Anyways, I keep thinking about her crying.

Theresa's grief is made keen by particular music. "Little things remind me of them, like on Easter Sunday, we were in church singing a song and it reminded me of my grandparents because we sang that song at both of their funerals and I just started crying." Likewise, Jessica's sadness for the loss of her great-grandmother is activated seasonally. "This reminds me so much like her cause this was her favorite time of the year . . . The flowers start to bloom just the nice breeze and you can go outside without even wearing a coat and she would just sit outside."

Survivor Values

Values are a huge part of identity and the grief-related events may cause survivors to accommodate them accordingly. Jackie faces new dilemmas between her moral beliefs about humanity at large and her personal desires because of the paradox her dog's terminal illness presented:

> My dog was put to sleep about a year ago. I am finding the loss of the dog easier to deal with than the moral implications regarding the role humans should play in the life of animals, and to a larger extent, the role humans should play in nature. That is not to say that I didn't care deeply for my dog...Should I adhere to my beliefs even though things I hold dear might be adversely affected? This question transcends the loss of the dog and addresses the manner in which I should live my life.

Survivors' Relationships

Survivors disclosed that their relationships with family and friends were taking new priorities in their general schemes of what is important. His grandmother's demise solidified the rest of Ivan's family's ties. "We all got together and went to her grave site, and let balloons go. That was pretty cool. I did not know if it was a good idea at first, but it brought the family together." Harold found that the loss of his friend inspired him to value his remaining friendships more highly. "This tragic event, all of our lives, um, really helped in making my friends and I closer...Everything, it takes a new meaning, and you see it really like, what is important at the funeral."

Continuing Bonds: Presence

In their disclosures, some participants acknowledged ways in which they maintained contact and/or relations with those they grieved despite their corporeal absence. Harold seems to experience some ambivalence about his dreams in which Tom appears:

> Me and my friends were sitting down in the dream, we had already thought he was dead the accident had already happen and everything. We already thought he was gone, and he just comes walking into this restaurant, and me and my two friends were just sitting there just dropped our forks, and looked up...Then we just sat down and had lunch with him. It was really weird.

Alice continues to see Jeremy, including as he is represented in items that were valuable to him: "I still think I see him sometimes and every time I see Dallas Cowboys hat or coat or anything I think about him and there are certain songs that I suppose that I will always think of him when I hear those."

Continuing Bonds: Interaction

Survivors continue bonds with their cherished lost through visitation and conversation. Amy visits with her grandmother on a regular basis. "I usually almost every time I go home, go to her grave site, just talk to her. And tell her I miss her...And tell her major issues going on, you know, ask her for help." Harold reported his continued contact with his buddy during his frequent visits to Tom's gravesite "Just sit there by the burial site, just you know hang out with him, just kind of talk to him, just think about him the whole time...I would just put a little cigarette where his head should be...What do buddies do, have a cigarette together, shoot the shit."

Continuing Bonds: Overseeing

Disclosers described their conceptions of the deceased watching over them and looking out for their best interests. Theresa feels her grandparents doing exactly that. "Sometimes, I feel like you know, like they're watching over us." Harold reaches out to Tom in times of need. "I find myself praying to him more often than God. Every time I need some help or something oh dear God this and that. I don't say oh dear, just yo Tommy I need your help."

Continuing Bonds: Living Legacy

Living for the deceased and their principles and striving to make them proud, are among the properties of survivors' revised identities. Stephanie feels not just a tremendous connection between her college life and that of her aunts but also as though she is living it out for them:

> [This] has been the only school that I have ever wanted to go to and it is because of them. I can say that a lot of things that I have done at this school and still are doing are because of my aunts...I'm thinking about pledging a sorority, the same one as my aunt, and I'm not doing it for myself but for her...Like I'm living out the years that she couldn't finish.

Brett identifies stongly with his father's interests and is highly concerned with making his father proud. "And my enthusiasm for [the school's] athletics has jumped. There is also a desire to make my dad proud." Theresa has adopted her grandparents' values and worries about impressing them. I'm trying to think of how it would be today if they were still around. Like, would I be doing things the same...how proud would they be or how disappointed."

DISCUSSION

Like many qualitative projects, our interpretive analysis of a relatively small data set (i.e., 4 days of disclosure

from each of 16 participants) is prone to qualification regarding possible deficits in representativeness, generalizability, and objectivity. Nonetheless, our analysis of the texts of discourse provided by participants in a disclosure study provides justification for our typology of meaning reconstruction in discourse. The instances of meaning reconstruction we identified were coded within one of four types and a total of 25 themes emerged within the types (see Table 1).

Sensemaking within disclosure conditions has been likened to "translating the chaotic swirl of traumatic ideation into coherent language" (Harber & Pennebaker, 1992, p. 360). Indeed, our survivors revealed that they had apprehended causes of death, absolved those previously blamed, and discovered what their losses themselves had wrought. They were comforted when identifying purposes or reasons for loss or when they decided it had been predictable, even in retrospect. Many of those who did not locate reasons for their losses appear to have adopted new stances in their global positions such as that some events are just unexplainable, that life is sometimes unfair or unpredictable, and that their religious faith should be reconsidered.

Grief scholars (e.g., Davis et al., 1998; Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006) claim that better outcomes await survivors who are able to recognize any ancillary benefits to their losses. For our participants, positive reappraisals included acknowledgment of improved conditions for the deceased; appreciation of the deceased's lives and contributions, of life and other survivors, and of having averted even worse outcomes; and the growth of survivors. Besides transforming their evaluations of what had happened, disclosers showed that they were reshaping their general assumptions about their own identities and relationships with others. They adopted new perspectives about their new roles, goals, and values; their lonely realities, which for some had become minefields of triggered memories; and their relationships with other survivors. They also revealed how their basic understandings of relating with the deceased were evolving. They continued bonds with their deceased loved ones by way of envisioning their presence, visiting with them for interaction, perceiving their oversight, and living as legacies to them.

Our typology links directly to recent relevant conceptions. It subsumes Gillies and Neimeyer's (2006) meaning reconstruction pathways (i.e., sensemaking, finding benefits in a loss, and transformation of identity), Davis et al.'s (1998) construals of meanings (i.e., making sense of the loss and finding something positive in it), MacKinnon et al.'s (2013) subtypes of meaning making (i.e., sensemaking, benefit finding, continuing bonds between survivors and the deceased, and family meaning making), and Park's (2010) meanings made (i.e., sensemaking, acceptance, causal understanding, perceiving

positive changes, identity change, reappraisal, and change to global beliefs, goals, and life purposes).

Futher, our typology provides previously unavailable theoretical insight that might inform grief treatment and intervention efforts. The typology's equating of each meaning reconstruction type with some combination of Park's (2010) meaning-making distinctions (i.e., searching for comprehensibility vs. searching for significance and assimilation vs. accommodation) helps to solve problems regarding both exclusiveness and overlap within and among the extant schemes. Sensemaking is comprised of performing assimilation of events into global meanings when searching for comprehensibility of why they happened and what they mean. Acceptance or resignation without understanding involves accommodating global beliefs so as to incorporate the lack of comprehensibility attained. Realization of benefits via positive reappraisal resolves the undesirable impact or significance of events (i.e., assimilation) without alteration of global assumptions whereas realignment of roles and relationships addresses significance by transformation of larger understandings (i.e., accommodation). Those assisting others with their grief are thus provided with specific avenues for leading them to the desired end products of particular meanings reconstructed. For instance, a patient may not be able to reconcile his inability to attain comprehensibility in the form of sensemaking, because of the undeserved horrible death of his wonderful friend. His therapist might help him to explore the possibility that rather than suffer his assumptions about a fair world being shattered (Janoff-Bulman, 1992), he should consider accepting, or being resigned to, an accommodation of that global belief; she might suggest that the usually fair world is one in which bad things can and do sometimes happen to good people.

Our work also endorses the disclosure procedure as a suitable therapy for bereavement. Without instruction to do so, disclosers produced much meaning via the associated meaning-making processes. As profiled in our review above, the productivity of meaning reconstruction or meaning making for those dealing with grief has received a good amount of support in extant literature. A major tenet of disclosure studies is that while early days of writing or talking tend to feature expression of chaos and confusion, later days feature advances in understanding. While our study was not equipped with large enough numbers of participants to quantify such patterns, there was some anecdotal evidence to that effect. Participants seemed to grasp that they were making progress as a result of their disclosure sessions. In disclosures from participants' third and fourth day transcripts, they noted that they were "opening up," "providing more detail," "thinking about it more honestly," and realizing more that "things are going to get better," than they had in earlier sessions.

Analysis of artifacts of grief-related communication, interaction, and discourse are not new to our program of research. Besides the disclosure texts examined for the current project, eulogies (i.e., funeral or memorial service oratory), elegy (i.e., poetry for and about the dead), grief accounts (i.e., "written and published tales of fiction or non-fiction that prominently feature grief and its meanings" [Dennis, 2008, p. 802]), and grief-related self-help books have received our careful scrutiny and revealed patterns in the experiences and consolation of bereavement. The extent to which those analyses coordinate with our typology of meaning reconstruction in discourse is noteworthy.

Contemporary self-help books directed at the grief-stricken often advocate meaning reconstruction and continuing bonds with the deceased (Dennis, 2012). Eulogies were determined to feature praise for, and aspects of continuing bonds with the deceased; positive reappraisal; problem-focused coping in the form of suggested actions; and self-disclosure of emotion (Kunkel & Dennis, 2003). Elegy, across eras and cultures, displays raw emotion and meaning reconstruction regarding identities and relationships (Neimeyer, Klass, & Dennis, in press). Dennis (2008) detected in grief accounts the existence of six dimensions of the bereavement experience: restorative (i.e., sequences of actions and events that heal, cure, or fix); evaluative (i.e., positive reappraisal); interpretive (i.e., making sense of a loss regarding causality, meaning, and blame); affirmative (i.e., affirmation of relationship and loss and continuation of relationship); affective (i.e., expression of emotion); and transformative (i.e., change in survivors' identities, roles, and relationships). Almost all of the specific findings in these studies of grief-related discourse correspond closely to our types of meaning reconstruction and/or the themes within.

One series of exceptions to these connections does exist, however. The self-disclosure procedure is often referred to in the literature as *emotional* self-disclosure (Greenberg & Stone, 1992; Smyth, 1998) and emotional catharsis is evident in eulogies, elegy, and grief accounts, as well as within the disclosure texts analyzed for the current project. It is not immediately clear how to resolve this conundrum and repair this obvious blind spot of our typology, though Park (2010) drew a categorical distinction between emotional processing and cognitive processing within meaning making. Although expression of emotional states is evident in the discourses, the actual meanings reconstructed seem more the product of "the cognitive aspects of integrating experiential data with preexisting schemas" that Park (p. 260) defined as cognitive processing.

Even individual themes uncovered in our analysis offer intriguing implications. Disappointment theory (Bell, 1985; Loomes & Sugden, 1986), developed in the discipline of economics, proposes that, "if actual consequence turns out to be worse than (or better than) expectation, the individual experiences a sensation of disappointment (or elation)" (Loomes & Sugden, 1986, p. 271). Accordingly, a theme within our positive reappraisal type is favorable contrast to other outcomes. Moreover, in disappointment theory, the more unexpected an actual bad outcome, the greater the disappointment that results (Bell, 1985.) This aligns with the sensemaking efforts of some of our disclosers to retrospectively adjust how predictable their losses should have been.

There has been some discussion of spiritual questioning as it relates to meaning reconstruction in grief. For Moremen (2004–2005), interested in spritual questioning more at the end of the lifespan than as a manifestation of grief, it was a matter of spiritual exploration, meditation, and living in the moment as a philosophy of life. In Brokaw's (2008) heartrending account of helping a counseling patient deal with grief at Brokaw's terminal prognosis, it was more a matter of spiritual transformation wherein the patient enacted "a genuine move toward a more live relationship with God" (p. 606) and became more connected with her church. Conversely, among our disclosers resigned to not understanding the purpose of their losses, the questioning took the form of reduction of faith in God. Recently, similar themes of spiritual struggle to make sense of loss have appeared within the bereavement literature (e.g., Burke et al., 2011; Lichtenthal, Burke, & Neimeyer, 2011).

A few themes that exist across our types of meaning reconstruction with regard to significance might seem, with less than precise consideration of what they actually are, to be bases of overlap. Within the type realization of benefits via positive reappraisal, survivors appreciate others in their life. Within the type realignment of roles and relationships, survivors' relationships with others are reconceptualized. In the former, relationships do not change but personal evaluations of them do; relational and situational meanings are assimilated as reminders of the greater values of life and loved ones. In the latter, relationships evolve and become closer so they need to be reprioritized as well as reconstituted; global perspectives are accomodated. Also, within realization of benefits via positive reappraisal, survivors recognize how they have experienced growth (e.g., strength, maturity, insight, advocacy) as a result of their loss experiences. Meanwhile, within realignment of roles and relationships, they have adopted different roles and values. The former is integration of positive characteristics to assimilate evaluation of the loss into a worldview of goodness, whereas the latter is an accommodation of global self-in-world identity and beliefs to incorporate responsibilities relative to others (e.g., new man of the house) and personal morality systems. The nuanced

distinction needed to parse out these subtle differences is exactly the sort of careful consideration about grief and meaning that we hope to inspire.

It is important that we reiterate that our findings occur within the context of grief-related disclosure and may or may not pertain as closely to disclosure about other life events that are perceived to be distressing or traumatic. The extent to which our typology of meaning reconstruction captures the discourse of disclosure centered on other stressors is yet to be determined and perhaps comprises the basis of future investigations. For those interested in extending our line of inquiry, we might recommend an intervention-based investigation wherein different groups of grief disclosers are prompted to make sense of their circumstances, to consider the implications of not understanding, to find benefit in the loss they have suffered, or to realign their identities and relationships, including with the deceased. With pre- and post-application of grief quantifying measures, researchers might determine whether any of these types of meaning reconstruction are relatively more or less advantageous for the management of grief.

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