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**CONSTRUCTING GRIEF:
AN ANALYSIS OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S TALK FOLLOWING
THE UNEXPECTED DEATH OF A PEER**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Psychology
at Massey University.

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2002

ABSTRACT

This research explores how young people talk about grief following the sudden and unexpected death of one of their peers. The study investigates the construction of grief by analysing the everyday language young people use when talking about grief. Ten bereaved young people were interviewed and their interviews transcribed to produce texts of grief talk. These texts were then analysed using the Potter & Wetherell (1992) approach to discourse analysis.

The study identifies the discourse of control as an important part of the construction of grief in young people. The just world discourse that participants draw upon to construct their experience of grief as life changing and profound is also identified. Grief is constructed through talk as an external behavioural response as opposed to an internal emotion. Analysis of the talk also reveals that the participants construct grief as a collective undertaking. The embodiment of grief is identified as a way in which the participants combat the loss of ontological security caused by the death of their peer. The dominant youth culture discourse of un-emotionality is drawn upon frequently in the participants' constructions of grief. These findings offers a valuable new insight into the way in which young people construct grief differently to older adults following the sudden and unexpected death of a peer, and indicates the significance of the social and cultural context in which the study of grief occurs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the courage and co-operation of the ten people who participated in this study. I am grateful for the openness and honesty with which they talked about their experiences of grief and thank them for sharing their story with me.

I would also like to acknowledge the invaluable input of my supervisor Kerry Chamberlain, who has encouraged, inspired and guided me through this thesis experience.

I would like to thank my father, Graeme Munro, for always believing in me, supporting me unconditionally and taking such an interest in my studies.

Special acknowledgement and sincere thanks go out to the Armstrongs (and Bruno) for their endless optimism and support over the past two years, and their unwavering faith in me.

I am also extremely grateful to Anna and Tom for all their help. Finishing this thesis would not have been possible without their support and valuable contributions.

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