Ultimate Coping Strategies: The Differences Among Parents of Murdered or Abducted, Long-Term Missing Children

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to assess, through naturalistic inquiry, the differences between and relationships among coping strategies of parents of murdered or abducted, long-term missing children, where the offender was non-familial. Multiple data sources were used to examine two areas: The perceptive differences of coping among parents of murdered children in contrast to parents of abducted, long-term missing children, where the offender was non-familial; and the ways in which coping strategies of parents of murdered children differ from the coping strategies of parents of abducted, long-term missing children, where the offender was non-familial.

This phenomenological study used a non-random, purposeful sample selected from contacts established through the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children/Florida Branch (NCMEC/FL). The sample included four participants where the child was the victim of a non-familial homicide and four participants where the child was the victim of a non-familial abduction and has not been recovered. An interview and observational approach, incorporating audio-recorded interviews of unstructured, in-depth and open-ended questions of each participant in a

one-on-one setting, was utilized. Participant feedback, the verification of the researcher’s interpretations and conclusions were conducted.

A single dominant theme emerged when analyzing the similarities and differences among the groups: The duration of expected coping dependent upon the likelihood of resolution. Parents of abducted, long-term missing children associated effective coping strategies as those devised to sustain the parental survivor through long-term circumstances. In contrast, parents of murdered children, who had acquired resolution, responded with coping mechanisms to deal directly with the loss.

The analysis identified that both groups suffered comparable bereavement symptoms, and utilized similar coping strategies, during times of ambiguous loss. The two groups mirrored each other emotionally until the time that parents of murdered children attained the first stage of resolution: clarification of the ambiguous loss through outcome determination. At this point, parents of murdered children were then able to embark on the different emotional and physiological track toward the identifiable stages of resolution.

Dedication and Acknowledgements

This dissertation is dedicated to the many individuals who provided support, direction, and encouragement. First, and foremost, I would like to thank my wife, Joye, and our daughter, Emily, for allowing me to pursue my academic endeavors. Anyone who has endured the process will understand what I mean.

I owe special thanks to my committee: Dr. Carole Warshaw, Dr. William Leary, and Dr. John Sullivan. These individuals created an environment that provoked thought and discussion that led directly to the completion of this research.

I must extend thanks to each of the parental survivors, who so courageously created a narrative of their personal life event so that others may better understand how to cope if tragically faced with a similar loss. Sadly, the number of parental survivors will continue to grow.

I am grateful to Nancy McBride of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children/Florida Branch. Without her assistance this research would not have happened. I am privileged to call her a colleague and friend.

I wish to extend a special thanks to Lt. R.V. Howard, who instilled in me the belief that obstacles are merely worthy goals and that I was capable of attaining any goal I desired through structure, discipline, and focus.

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The murder or abduction of a child is an experience that profoundly alters one's life. Parents of murdered and abducted, long-term missing children find themselves in a world turned upside down. The loss is complicated by a variety of consequences that are minimized through the use of coping strategies. It is not uncommon for the healing process to last months or years. Those parents who are faced with the sudden abduction or murder of a child encounter an immediate demand to respond to bereavement issues and coping strategies (Sprang, McNeil, & Wright, 1989).

The recent increase of public and legislative awareness has brought the issues of crimes against children to prominence. This increased awareness has resulted in some positive changes: public consciousness, better reporting procedures, improved investigative responsiveness and strengthened legislative reaction. "However, research concerning the abduction and murder of children remains scarce" (Boudreaux, M. C., Lord, W. D., & Dutra, R. L, 1997).

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to assess, through naturalistic inquiry, the differences in

coping strategies among parents of murdered or abducted, long-term missing children, where the offender was non-familial. This study further identified relationships between coping strategies among parents of murdered children or abducted, long-term missing children, where the offender was non-familial. The information obtained in this study identified what differences between the two groups exist in the bereavement process and identified specific coping strategies used by parental survivors. The data will, perhaps, encourage federal and private funding to create and sustain bereavement support groups.

Research Questions

The following research questions were to be examined using multiple data sources:

Research Question 1: What are the perceptive differences of coping among parents of murdered children in contrast to parents of abducted, long-term missing children, where the offender was non-familial?

Research Question 2: How do coping strategies of parents of murdered children differ from the coping strategies of parents of abducted, long-term missing children, where the offender was non-familial?

Operational Definitions

A support group was operationally defined in this study

as a self-help organization designed to provide emotional support and information to parents who have suffered the loss of a child to homicide or abduction. The support group is inclusive of the main headquarters and any officially recognized chapters.

The legal definition of a child is any individual under 18 years of age. A child was operationally defined in this study as any person, under the age of 21, of a biological, step, or adoptive parent or legally appointed guardian, where the child remained financially dependent upon the parent.

Murder is legally defined as the unlawful killing of one human being by another, especially with premeditated malice. Smith and Zahn (1999) identified murder as the intentional infliction of “death of another person without extreme provocation or legal justice.” Murder was operationally defined in this study as the death, by homicide, through the unlawful act by a non-familial perpetrator.

There is no legally defined period delineating the notion of a long-term missing person. For the purposes of this study the concept of a long-term missing person was identified as the non-familial abduction of a child who has been missing for a minimum of two years and has not yet

been recovered. The two-year minimum criterion was selected in that “trauma, being such an emotional experience, requires passage of some time for any form of healing and transformation to occur” (Parappully, 1997; Volkan & Zintl, 1993).

Extensive inquiry found no detailed research on the issue of long-term missing children. Statistical reporting varies from region to region, identifying a discrepancy in actual reported numbers of missing children. There exists a clear absence of an agreed upon definition of long-term missing as it relates to statistical information. This establishes questionability in assessing the statistical accuracy of reported missing children.

According to Webster’s II New College Dictionary (1999), the term familial is an adjective that refers to any person of, or related to, a family; a fundamental social group in society typically consisting of a man and woman and their offspring; or two or more people who share goals and values, have long-term commitments to one another and reside usually in the same dwelling place. The National Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMART), conducted a study in 1998, for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and identified children missing due to non-familial abduction

as “Children who are taken or unlawfully detained by someone who is not a parent, relative, or legal guardian without the knowledge or consent of a parent or legal guardian” (Hanson, 2000). For the purposes of this study, non-familial was defined as any person not the biological, step, or adoptive parent or legally appointed guardian, or one directly related to a family.

In light of the frequency that child abduction and child murder is occurring today, the issue of coping, related to child abduction and child homicide, is both significant and deserving of research. Understanding the dynamics of coping strategies is an important area of research for a variety of reasons. Research on coping may provide an understanding of appropriate intervention techniques available to minimize the impact, both psychologically and physiologically, on parental survivors. Research may reduce the time necessary for coping strategies to become effective, thereby arriving at a more normal condition sooner than previously attained (Sutliff, 1994).

Literature Review

Research suggests that the loss of a child to homicide or abduction was the most arduous type of loss a parent can endure. Parents are expected to protect their children from harm. Clearly, parents are unprepared psychologically to cope with a tragedy of this magnitude. The unexpected, sudden loss of a child may be more difficult to grieve than anticipated death (Maxwell, 1994). The trauma is so

significant that it leads to a “structural collapse,” resulting in a sense of helplessness and loss of identity (Benyakar, Kutz, Dasberg, & Stern, 1989). Three fundamental beliefs are compromised: benevolence, meaning, and self worth (Janoff-Bulman, 1992).

Parental survivors may ultimately be required to confront the gruesome details of the murder or abduction if, and when, a criminal trial ensues. Upon discovery of the murdered or long-term missing child’s body, parents are immediately faced with an onslaught of bereavement symptoms. Understanding the multitude of likely symptoms that follow and developing coping strategies can help the grieving process (Bucholz, 1999).

It is reported that the grief experienced by the loss of a child is unique due to the inherent parent-child bond and the protective role assumed by the parent. Key to the phenomena of attachment is the expectation of safety and security. The loss of, or separation from, one’s child triggers the normal process of bereavement. In order for resolution to occur, the bereaved must experience these processes (Maxwell, 1994).

The United States Department of Justice and the Washington State Attorney General’s Office conducted a study on Case Management for Missing Children Homicide

Investigation. This study assessed 577 cases with 621 victims murdered by 491 killers. The cases were specifically related to child abduction and murder. The cases were taken from urban, suburban, and rural areas. Of importance to this study is the revelation that strangers perpetrated 53% of the child abductions leading to murder, and that 70% of the cases were motivated by sex. It was reported that 67% of abduction murder cases are originally reported as missing or runaway incidents. The causes of death are typically violent: strangulation, stabbing, blunt force, and firearm. Sexual assault occurs in approximately 45% of the murders. The study also reported that there is an average of 100 child-abduction homicide cases

investigated in the United States each year. (Hanfland, Keppel, & Weis, 1997).

In contrast, an earlier study looked at child murder in Miami-Dade County, Florida from 1956 to 1986. During this time, there were 171 children murdered by 161 adults. The age of the victims ranged from newborn to 12 years. It was reported that approximately 10% of the children were murdered by strangers or unknown persons (Crittenden & Craig, 1990, p. 208).

A comprehensive study, known as the National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMART 2), recently completed the collection of data designed to measure the incidence of several categories of missing children. NISMART 2 (Hanson, 2000) categorized missing children into the following eight categories: (1) Runaway/thrownaway; (2) non-family abduction; (3) family abduction; (4) custodial interference; (5) lost and voluntarily missing; (6) missing due to injury; (7) missing due to false alarm situations; and (8) sexually assaulted. NISMART 2 defined a thrownaway child as a person who experiences one of the following situations: (1) the child was directed to leave the household; (2) the child was away from the home and a parent refused to allow the child to return; (3) the child ran away but the parent/guardian made no effort to recover the child; or (4) the child was abandoned or deserted. The data analysis will take place in 2000 (Hanson, 2000).

The original NISMART study gathered and extrapolated nationwide data from 1988. This study identified that between 3200 and 4600 children were abducted by non-familial offenders each year. The obvious distortion in these figures, when compared to other studies, is that

NISMART operationally defined non-family abduction to include:

(1) The coerced and unauthorized taking of a child into a building, a vehicle, or a distance of more than 20 feet; or

(2) the detention of a child for a period of more than an hour; or

(3) the luring of a child for the purposes of committing another crime (Sweet, 1990).

The figures can be confusing and misleading. Although NISMART identified that each year between non-familial offenders abducted 3200 and 4600 children, the study used what it termed as a legal definition to arrive at these numbers. Closer inspection of the data by Finkelhor, Hotaling, and Sedlak (1990), revealed that non-familial offenders, according to what was identified as a stereotypical kidnapping, abducted an estimated 200 to 300 children per year. Therefore, the number of non-familial abductions varies significantly dependent upon how the term is operationally defined.

An exploratory study was conducted comparing the effectiveness of two styles of grief support groups: Open-ended or close-ended. The study, using a non-random, purposeful sample of 57 children aged 6 to 12 years of age

from Salt lake City, Utah, identified that the groups were similar, except along the issues of the number of deaths experienced and who died. Important to this study was the finding that supported the effectiveness of grief support groups. The study identified that grief support groups decrease grief and associated symptoms. Although support groups are a prominent means of intervention in effectively dealing with coping strategies, there is limited research on bereavement support groups (Graham, 1999).

Maxwell (1994) conducted an exploratory study, using both qualitative and quantitative components. The study explored parental bereavement of two groups coping with the sudden, unexpected loss of a child: a Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) group and a Non-Familial Abduction-Deceased group (NFA-D). The study began with an initial sample of 31 SIDS families and 10 NFA-D families. Assessments were made at three intervals: (1) no more than 60 days following the child's disappearance or death; (2) approximately 4 months following the child's disappearance or death; and (3) approximately 8 months following the child's disappearance or death. Four families in the NFA-D group withdrew from the study, leaving a final sample of 6 NFA-D families.

The researcher utilized structured interviews to address the qualitative component. The following

quantitative instruments were used: The Family Inventory of Life Events (McCubbin, Patterson, & Wilson, 1979), the Family Crisis Oriented Personal Evaluation Scales (McCubbin, Larsen, & Olson, 1981), the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test (Locke & Wallace, 1959), the SCL-90-R (Derogatis & Cleary, 1977) and the Frederick Reaction Index (Frederick, 1985). An important difference appeared between the groups. It was reported that “the most pronounced differences between the groups of families were reflected in trauma symptom levels, with the NFA-D group demonstrating significantly higher levels than the SIDS group at each time point” (Maxwell, 1994, p. 88).

Another quantitative study examined the relationship between coping strategies and symptomatology, assessing two specific coping strategies: avoidance and denial. The sample consisted of 49 adults who were either the victim of a violent crime or had suffered the loss of a family member to homicide. Three self-reporting inventories were utilized: the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI)(Derogatis & Melisaratos, 1983), the Impact of Events Scale (IES) (Horwitz, Wilner, & Alvarez, 1979), and COPE (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). The BSI measures psychological symptom patterns, looking at primary symptoms (anxiety, hostility, depression, paranoia) and global indices of

distress (severity, positive symptom distress, positive symptom total). The IES measures characteristics associated with stress, observing symptoms related to post-traumatic stress disorder. COPE is a self-reporting instrument that calculates how people respond to stress.

The results reported, “Several types of coping were found to be associated with level of symptomatology. Social support, active coping and avoidance were all utilized at higher levels when positive symptoms were greater” (Sutliff, 1994). The study identified a lack of any significant relationship between coping and distress levels. The results did identify a “positive correlation between avoidance and symptomatology” (p 55). Sutliff (1994) noted:

> Avoidance as a means of coping with symptoms may exacerbate symptoms by blocking the necessary function of working through or processing the experience and its associated feelings. Conversely, avoidance coping strategies may be necessary for the individual to maintain an equilibrium during the process of adaptation to stress (Janoff-Bulman, 1989).

It was reported that violent crime is associated with negative experiential effects. Through the exploration of the emotional trauma of rape victims, data confirmed that

victims of violent crime experienced fewer positive emotions and more negative emotions. Positive emotions were described as joy, contentment and affection. Negative emotions were described as anxiety, depression, anger, and guilt. Yet, time did reduce the symptoms associated with negative emotions (Davis & Friedman, 1985).

Maxwell (1994) proffers that defining non-familial abduction is, at best, controversial. The percentage of non-familial abductions, although relatively small, is significant nonetheless. In noting the implications of public perception, Maxwell continues:

> The public image of such an event is typically the dramatic taking of a child by a stranger to a remote location where he or she is detained indefinitely, held for ransom, sexually violated, and in some cases murdered. However, this type of abduction accounts for a relatively small percentage of kidnapping cases.

Research (NISMART, 1990; Crittendon & Craig, 1990; Maxwell, 1994; United States Department of Justice and the Washington Attorney General’s Office, 1997; Boudreaux, Lord, & Dutra, 1997) consistently reported that the number of non-familial abductions was significantly less than familial abductions. The research indicated that children are at greater risk of murder or abduction by a

non-familial offender as the child progresses through school. Family members were more likely to offend where the child is an infant, toddler, or preschooler. Acquaintance offender victimization peaked in elementary school and non-familial offender victimization increased in prominence with middle- and high-school children (Boudreaux, M. C., Lord, W. D., & Dutra, R. L, 1997).

Another exploratory study quantitatively examined the characteristics of parental response patterns in coping with the murder of a child and assessed life change events that occurred as a result of the murder. The sample included 250 members of Parents of Murdered Children, Inc. from 13 selected chapters. Specific background, demographic, and criminal/civil court data was provided. Instrument selection included the Texas Inventory of Grieving (TIG) (Faschingbauer, 1981) and the Life Events Inventory (LEI) (Horowitz & Wilner, 1977). The TIG measures the frequency and duration of bereavement symptoms experienced by a person facing the death of a loved one. The LEI measures a person’s response to specific stressors as a result of events that occur in one’s life.

The study reported that, although parents of murdered children generally did not seek out professional counseling as a mean of dealing with their loss (no more than 13.9%

from a single demographic group sought professional assistance), those respondents who did seek professional counseling reported the intervention as positive. It was also reported that the psychological and emotional response to their child's murder was varied and long-term, requiring up to five years to return to a pre-murder baseline. Although overwhelming emotional and physical responses were highest immediately following the homicide, the passage of time did permit a return to normalcy (Rinear, 1984).

Ulvila (1996) administered a qualitative study to explain how Viktor Frankl's (1984) concept of the search for meaning applies to homicide survivors following a loss to murder. Frankel (1984) proposed that a person's primary motivation in life is the search for meaning. The research details trauma, grief and the impact of bereavement by murder. The study did not seek out a causal relationship; instead, the focus was on the search for meaning engaged by homicide survivors.

The researcher interviewed four subjects, using the following inclusion criteria: At least six months, and not more than three years, had passed since the homicide. Therapists referred three participants and one participant was referred through a mutual friend. Unique to this study was the disclosure to the participants by the researcher

that the researcher, too, was a homicide survivor. The researcher wrote, “I used self-disclosure along with empathy and validation to make the experience of this interview different from other interviews the subject might have experienced so that the true essence of the phenomenon could emerge” (Ulvila, 1996, p 37).

The researcher looked for clusters of meaning within the transcripts of each interview. From there, a sense of the whole, mean-making strategies, and common and unique themes were described. The study reported that each homicide survivor “sought meaning by using reasoning, reflection, conceptualization, striving for logic and order” (Ulvila, 1996, p 65). The subjects in this study reported to seek equilibrium and order, as well as meaning.

Support Groups

She was no longer wrestling with the grief, but could sit down with it as a lasting companion and make it a sharer in her thoughts. George Eliot (1819–80).

Even in the most supportive of intra-familial circumstances, outside assistance can enhance one’s ability to deal effectively with the bereavement process. Participation in a support group of individuals who have experienced a similar loss can be therapeutic and beneficial. Support groups can provide encouragement, understanding, and hope from a “we have been there”

perspective (Schmall, 1993).

Support groups provide a means for survivors to deal with unresolved grief responses, allowing emotional energy to deal with the present and the future. Support groups also provide a setting in which cultural differences are minimized. Cultures construct socially acceptable channels of grieving in accordance with recognized cultural norms. The bereavement process is directly impacted when cultural issues provide little or no opportunity to grieve. At issue for the survivor is the prospect of many cultural constraints: (1) depravation of the ability to openly grieve; (2) restrained, discouraged or frustrated emotions; (3) an absence of emotional or cultural support systems; (4) social stigma directly linked to the loss; and (5) an absence of bereavement traditions (Tramonte, 1998). Participants in bereavement support groups minimize the cultural differences, instead finding comfort and solace in the commonality of the loss (Brown, 1987).

The literature identified that support groups serve specific functions in providing a safe environment in which to access information, find understanding, look for cohesion, and open channels for communication. It is reported that participation in a support group does enhance coping strategies through awareness of the grief process

and associated feelings (Graham, 1999). Participation in a support group allows parents to address their grief individually by sharing their experiences, hearing others' ordeals, and learning coping skills (Corr, Nabe, & Corr, 1997; Hughes, 1995).

Hannah Graham (1999) identified five benefits of grief support groups. First, grief support groups allow individuals to deal with their grief individually by sharing their experiences, hearing others' ordeals, and developing coping skills. Second, grief support groups identify ways to educate survivors in order to understand others' grief while expanding the available resource network. Third, participation in support groups is believed to result in a significant reduction of bereavement symptoms by increasing coping and adaptive skills. Fourth, support groups ease bereavement symptoms while preventing impending problems in dealing with the loss. Finally, Graham (1999) notes several studies (Bahrey, McCallum, & Piper, 1991; Kalter & Schreier, 1993; Piper & Joyce, 1996) have reported that individual counseling is less efficient and more costly than support group intervention. This suggests that services are better provided to a group of grieving parents.

Parents of Murdered Children

The National Organization of Parents of Murdered Children, Inc. (POMC) was formed as a national self-help organization, designed solely to offer emotional support and information about surviving the loss of a loved one to murder. Parents of Murdered Children, Inc. have expanded its main operations to include formal branch chapters in 26 states. POMC also provides contact people, in 43 states, who provide the same level of support as Chapters in areas where there are not enough members to sustain a Chapter. This organization has established Chapters across America and provides support to over 100,000 survivors each year. POMC identifies the following specific organizational objectives:

1. To provide emotional support to survivors in coping with bereavement and to assist in the restoration of normalcy to survivors' lives.
2. To provide contact with similarly bereaved individuals in a regularly scheduled self-help environment.
3. To provide information concerning the bereavement process and the criminal justice system.
4. To communicate to professionals the inherent problems faced by survivors.

5. To enhance societal awareness of survivor-based issues (The National Parents of Murdered Children, Inc., 1998).

Parents of Abducted, Long-Term Missing Children

There has been no specific research conducted on the issue of long-term missing children. As recently as 1999, the United States Department of Justice, through its Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, had funded the development of a supportive network for families of missing and abducted children. Project H.O.P.E., later renamed Team Hope, utilizes trained parent volunteers to provide information, assistance, and support to requesting agencies and families. Parents of family abduction, non-familial abduction, international abduction, and runaways represent the support group volunteers. Trained volunteers are currently active in 18 states and Canada.

Team Hope is a support group for parents of missing children. Team Hope provides a forum in which parents of missing children receive support specific to the uniqueness of having a missing child. Trained volunteers are currently active in 18 states and Canada. Team Hope identifies a mission in a letter dated April 19, 1999:

> There is comfort in talking to someone when you don’t have to explain or justify your feelings. There is

energy created by finding out how other parents have survived their search, their child's birthdays, holidays and all the day-to-day challenges. Our desire is to help parents find others to talk to who have been through a similar type of abduction or simply don't know where their child is.

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

The Adam Walsh Child Resource Center was established in 1982 and merged with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children in 1990. The Adam Walsh Center became the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children/Florida Branch (NCMEC/FL) in 1995. The NCMEC/FL provides case assistance to families of missing and exploited children and support services to law enforcement.

A private, nonprofit organization, the NCMEC/FL operates under a Congressional mandate, working in cooperation with the United States Department of Justice/Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, coordinating the efforts of law enforcement, social service agencies, schools, and public and private sectors to find missing children and prevent child victimization.

The Bereavement Process

Weeping may endure for a night,

but joy cometh in the morning. Psalms 30:5, Hebrew Bible.

The most common responses to abduction and homicide include a deep sense of shock; preoccupation with the loss of the abducted or deceased; concern with the cruelty and violence associated with the act; intense anger toward the perpetrator or criminal justice system; intense inquiry into the details of the investigation; disruption of appetite and sleep patterns; depression and hopelessness; and an inability to move forward through identifiable stages of bereavement (Rinear, 1988).

The grieving process, as it applies to homicide and abduction, is unique in that the grieving process is the strong, emotional response to the sudden loss. The response is unavoidable and normal. These emotional responses are both psychological and physiological. Typical examples include, shock, denial, depression, helplessness, guilt, anger, and alienation. Bereavement is characterized by a synergism of loss, trauma, and victimization. Bereavement, as it relates to homicide or abduction, is unlike other forms of bereavement on a personal, as well as, a social level. On a personal level, the survivor experiences loss, trauma, and victimization. Victimization results from the stigma attached to the murder. Personal and social changes

result in threats of deterioration and opportunities for growth for the surviving parent (Bucholz, 1999).

Bucholz (1999) identifies that, although an abundant number of studies have been conducted relating to bereavement, very few “have addressed the unique problem encountered by those who have endured the sudden, traumatic death of a loved one.” Survivors of abducted or murdered children are suddenly faced with an intense feeling of loss of control and unpredictability in a world which is presumed to be safe, secure, fair, and just (Janoff-Bulman, 1992).

Corr, Nabe, and Corr (1997) identified four stages in the bereavement process. Initially, a survivor needs to acknowledge the reality of the loss. Second, a survivor must work through the anguish of the grief. Third, a survivor needs to adjust to the reality that the loss may be final. Finally, the survivor must emotionally displace the deceased and move forward with one’s life (Mille, (1997).

Research has consistently revealed that the grief process is not readily acknowledged in our society. Failing to effectively channel grief toward a more functional future results in an expression of long-term, dysfunctional behavior, such as anger, abuse, and neglect. Developing an

understanding of the grief process is invaluable to those in crisis. Braza (1993) found, “There exists a distinction between grief and mourning: Grief is one’s own personal experience and loss conducted privately. Mourning, on the other hand, is grief gone public. It is the outward sharing and expression of the pain.”

As stated earlier, no two individuals respond in exactly the same way. The impact of the bereavement process is multi-faceted. It involves dealing with physical, behavioral, emotional, spiritual, and thought pattern issues. Working through the stages of bereavement requires taking these issues in time frames: a moment, an hour, a day, a month, or even a year at a time. The experience of losing a child to abduction or murder means not returning to who you once were. Life will be different. Schmall’s (1993) article, “Coping with Your Loss and Grief,” identifies with clarity the prospect of grief experienced in the abduction or murder of a child: “Grief is like an ocean -- it ebbs and flows; sometimes it rolls gently; other times it pounds hard. With time, the pain of grief will lessen.”

Rinear (1984) wrote that the bereavement process is biologically determined and occurs in distinct stages. Using a study by Best (1981), Rinear (1984) identifies,

“These stages have been described in a variety of ways by different writers, but include a period of shock, an interval of searching and yearning, a time of disorganization and depression, and ultimately successful effort at reorganization and mitigation” (p 31).

The grief response to the long-term abduction or murder of a child varies with the age of the child. This was believed to be due to the ever-changing relationship that exists between the parent and the child at various stages of development and maturity. A sense of mortality and a loss of continuity can consume the parental survivor. It was reported that the loss of an adolescent child tends to produce severe responses of anger and guilt, often making it difficult to establish resolution. In contrast, the loss of adult children, although grieved no less, provides an environment more amenable to resolution for the parental survivor (Raphael, 1983).

Two components are identified as critical to dealing with the loss of a child: the relationship that exists between the parents and societal gender role expectations. Anger can be targeted from one parent to another, leading to a breakdown in the relationship. Personal intimacy and social interaction can impede the effort to move through the stages of bereavement. This can be the result of gender

role expectations placed on parental survivors by society. The roles are clear under normal circumstances: The mother is expected to externalize the emotional response, actively seeking support. The father, in contrast, is strong and supportive, internalizing emotional responses. Yet in the world of child abduction and murder, normal circumstances are different. Society will question the lack of emotional response on the part of the father or the over-exaggerated response of the mother. These conflicting expectations can lead to miscommunication, in which one parent fails to recognize that the other parent is mourning (Donnelly, 1982).

Coping Strategies

The grief process is an extremely complex and individualized system used to come to terms with the abduction and/or murder of a child. Survivors seeking to move through the stages of bereavement, to attain some sense of normalcy, find numerous obstacles to the process. Family and friend intervention can directly or indirectly result in cohesion or disorder. The loss endured through abduction and/or murder has social, physiological, psychological, behavioral, economic, and familial implications (Graham, 1999).

The National Organization of Parents of Murdered Children, Inc. (1998) identifies the following five “thoughts on coping:”

1. Do not be surprised at the strong emotions that surface such as shock, disbelief, anger, frustration, denial and the loss of faith in God and people.
2. Expect to feel numb, confused and depressed. It is normal to withdraw and keep your feelings internalized.
3. It is not uncommon to experience primal fear, suddenly believing the world is inherently unsafe and violent.
4. Understand that grief takes different paths for different survivors. Be easy on yourself and your expectations of yourself and others.
5. Seek out support. Becoming involved with other survivors who have endured a similar situation will enhance the recovery process and channel emotions constructively.

Access to Respite Care and Help (ARCH), through the National Resource Center Coordinating Office, identifies the following specific healing strategies for anyone who is grieving: Become aware of your own personal issues surrounding grief; recognize your own fears, attitudes and beliefs about grief; acknowledge the grief; be there --

mere presence or acknowledgement is of great importance to someone who is grieving; listen -- share the pain without judgment or advice; offer permission to grieve; recognize that people grieve in different ways; create a memory journal; and develop and encourage support groups (Braza, 1993).

Research identified a variety of coping mechanisms available to parental survivors. The survivor themselves are directly connected to the process of renewal. Identifiable stages must be traversed in the return to normalcy. These stages include the establishment of security, commemoration and bereavement and a reconstruction of common life events and practices (Herman, 1992). Successful coping is often borne through social support systems, derived through compassion and understanding from family, friends, and community (Stylianos & Vachon, 1993). Religion, too, can provide a powerful sense of strength and support to a parental survivor (Pargament, 1996). It was suggested that prior encounters with stress and trauma could improve and strengthen the physiological and psychological response to coping (Burgess and Holstrom, 1978).

One study proposed that coping is attained through a fundamental discovery of meaning. Transformation occurs

through the facilitation of four processes and seven resources. The processes include acknowledgment, finding meaning, personal resolution and reaching out to others for support. The resources include spirituality, a enduring bond with the victim, individual qualities, previous coping experience, self-care, compassion and empathy, and social support (Parappully, 1997). The search for meaningfulness can cause a reassessment in the parental survivor's perspective, leading to a reestablishment of priorities. What was once trivial becomes significant, revealing what is indeed meaningful (Janoff-Bulman, 1992).

Methodology

Based upon the complex nature of the human response to bereavement and coping, this researcher selected to use a

qualitative approach. Most research in the area of homicide bereavement and related coping strategies has been quantitative. A majority of studies have been conducted through questionnaires and scales, followed by comparative analysis. Some studies have included interviews after completion of an analytic inventory. Qualitative methods were used because the area of research has not been directly studied (Lewis, 1997).

This phenomenological study used a non-random, purposeful sample. The sample was selected from contacts established through the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children/Florida Branch (NCMEC/FL). This nonprofit organization is located in Lake Park, Florida. Access to the particular sample identified for this study would be difficult under the best of circumstances. Yet, this researcher’s long-term relationship with the NCMEC/FL has eliminated many obstacles to the study. The sample included four participants where the child was the victim of a non-familial homicide and four participants where the child was the victim of a non-familial abduction and had not been recovered. It was expected that the use of the NCMEC/FL, an internationally recognized organization committed to child advocacy, would increase the availability and cooperation of the obtainable sample.

After clearly identifying the operational requirements of the research, the NCMEC/FL provided assistance in isolating 25 cases applicable to the study. Investigative intake files, newspaper articles, and other pertinent data were reviewed to identify participants meeting the operational parameters. In selecting the sample for this study, this researcher intended to encompass a range of victim characteristics based upon several major criteria, i.e. age of the victim; sex of the victim; time elapsed since the murder or abduction occurred; and geographic location. The range of characteristics is detailed in Table 3.1 and Table 3.2. The geographic location, specific to the location of the offense, is found in Figure 3.1.

Table 3.1
Characteristics of the Abducted, Long-term Missing Group

Case	Parent	Victim	Age	Gender	Time Elapsed Since Incident	Geographic Location
A	Barbara	Doreen	8	Female	16 years	Florida
B	Joan	Bobby	11	Male	11 years	Minnesota
C	David	Emma	19	Female	6 years	Georgia
D	John	Lori	20	Female	11 years	Florida

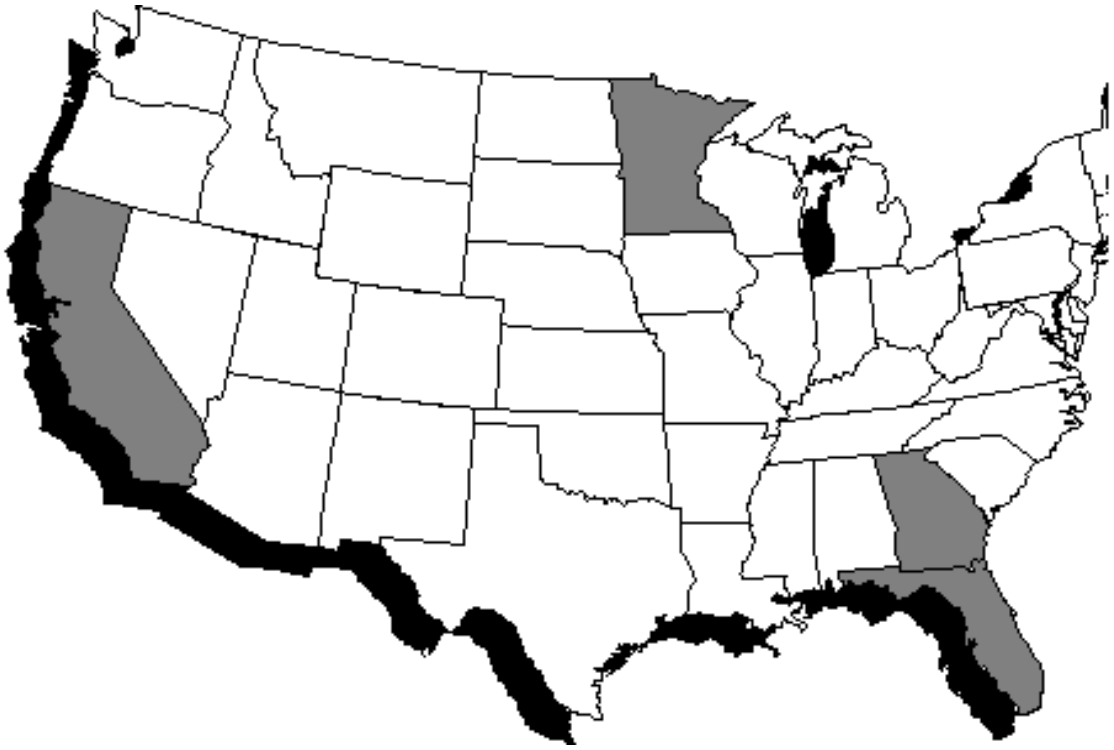
Table 3.2
Characteristics of the Murdered Group

Case	Parent	Victim	Age	Gender	Time Elapsed Since Incident	Geographic Location
E	Lynn	Mary	4	Female	5 years	Florida

F	Natalie	Susan	8	Female	2 years	Florida
G	Samuel	Gina	12	Female	7 years	California
H	Larry	Robin	13	Female	2 years	California

Figure 3.1

Geographic Location – State in which the Offense Occurred



Following a review of the prospective available sample, this researcher identified eight specific cases that met the criteria of the study. The NCMEC/FL, upon a request from the researcher, made informal telephone contact with

each of the eight persons to inform them of the study and solicit interest in participation. The extent of information provided to each contact was limited to identifying the researcher's professional and academic background, the content of the study and a projected time frame when the interviews would be conducted.

The researcher was informed by the NCMEC/FL that seven of the eight individuals contacted expressed a strong interest in participating in the study. The NCMEC/FL was unable to contact one set of parents by telephone, so a letter was forwarded to their residence (see APPENDIX A). Several weeks later, one person did contact the NCMEC/FL, expressing an interest in participating in the study.

The design of this study took into consideration the possibility that, due to the nature of the topic, a participant may wish to be excused prior to, or during, the interview. This researcher, therefore, identified two additional participants who met the research criteria and agreed to participate. Should any of the eight original participants decide to withdraw from the study, these individuals would be included in the research.

It should be noted that other parental survivors met the criteria of the study, but did not become part of the sample for a variety of reasons. The predominant reason for

exclusion was an inability to locate the parent through a last known address. Other reasons included that, although it was believed the offender was non-familial, this fact could not be confirmed and the parents were still under an umbrella of suspicion; an undisputed mental instability of the parent prior to the incident, aggravated further following the incident; no response to a contact letter provided by the NCMEC/FL; and the imminent commencement of a criminal trial, which returns us back to the “Time Elapsed Since Incident” component.

This researcher established that the abduction or murder of the child must have occurred at least two years prior to the interview. This operational aspect was set so that the study would not interfere with ongoing criminal proceedings and to allow parental survivors to move through previously identified stages of bereavement. Previous research (Lipschultz, 1999; Murphy, 1999; Poussaint, 1984) identified that the earliest stages of bereavement are wrought with emotional responses that interfere with coping strategies. Therefore, this operational constraint was instituted relevant to the needs of the study.

Several things occurred that impacted the final sample selected for the study. This researcher intended to contact the NCMEC/FL, Parents of Murdered Children, Inc. and Team

Hope in an effort to identify available participants. This became unnecessary, in that the NCMEC/FL, after all, possessed access to both groups. This fact negated the necessity to contact Parents of Murdered Children, Inc. or Team Hope.

The NCMEC/FL does act in a support capacity, providing case assistance to families of missing and exploited children and support services to law enforcement. Whereas the NCMEC/FL is often the first to offer support, parental survivors are often directed to a more traditional support environment that can function as a support system for as long as necessary. In contrast, Parents of Murdered Children, Inc. and Team Hope function as traditional support groups. A traditional support group utilizes trained volunteers to offer emotional support, information and assistance to requesting agencies and families. In some cases, scheduled meetings are held. On the other hand, some contacts are established and maintained through telephone contact. Traditional support groups may also provide access to professionals trained to assist in the areas of bereavement and coping.

Using the NCMEC/FL did require, in some cases, that this researcher contact law enforcement and prosecutors to act as a contact between the researcher and the parental

survivor. Contrary to the expectations of this researcher, there was a total lack of cooperation from law enforcement investigators and prosecutors. This researcher was unable to locate a single law enforcement investigator or prosecutor willing to identify potential participants or agree to establish a contact if requested.

Greatly reducing the available sample was an operational component critical to the focus of the study: A non-familial offender. Research statistics consistently reveal two important facts. First, NISMART reports that family members commit the majority of child abductions; although the study identified that the number of non-familial abductions is still regrettably high. NISMART also reports that, according to the legal definition of abduction, non-familial offenders abducted between 3200 and 4600 children. It was also reported that, according to the stereotypical definition of abduction, non-familial offenders abducted between 200 and 300 children (Finkelhor, Hotaling, & Sedlak, 1990). Second, the Washington State Attorney General’s Office (1997) study reported there are an average of 100 child abduction-homicide cases investigated in the United States each year.

This research did not use questionnaires or tests. A qualitative interview and observational approach was chosen to create a voice into the world of parents of murdered or long-term missing children. The narrative exploration and discovery may benefit those parents who, in the future, must live through the horrific loss of a child to murder or abduction without recovery.

This researcher's professional background in law enforcement lent itself well to the proposed research design. With fifteen years as an investigative specialist, the researcher enjoyed the recognition in the criminal justice community for possessing a well-developed repertoire of investigative, interview, and observational skills. This researcher possessed an understanding of the need to develop and maintain a connection, or close relationship, with those being interviewed, while creating an atmosphere that was non-threatening, yet solicitous.

Finally, this researcher had over eight years of investigative background specifically focused on child exploitation and child abuse. This researcher has received awards, both locally and nationally, for his efforts in the investigative arena directly related to the investigation of child exploitation and abuse.

Interviews are thought to be powerful instruments for exploring complicated emotions and experiences (MacLaren, 1980). Historically, individuals have made sense of their experiences through narrative reporting. Interviewing does not test a hypothesis. Instead, the utility of an interview is to enhance the understanding of what other people experience and to bring meaning to that experience (Bucholz, 1999).

This researcher conducted audio-recorded interviews of each participant in a one-on-one setting. The audio recording was not meant to be intrusive, but was utilized to document and validate the research for future replication efforts. The interviews were comprised of unstructured, in-depth and open-ended questions (see APPENDIX E). A search for common themes and patterns was conducted. Each participant was mailed an informational contact letter (see APPENDIX B) and consent forms (see APPENDIX C and D). Each package contained a stamped, self-addressed envelope. The participant's return address was placed on the response envelope, but the name did not appear. Written informed consent was obtained prior to the initiation of all interview and observational phases.

Interview appointments were set once it was confirmed that the consent forms had been signed. One participant, a

parent of an abducted, long-term missing child, did withdraw from the study upon reviewing the informational contact letter. The participant's decision was based upon one specific word that appeared in the letter. That single word was murder. The word appeared in the context of the title of the dissertation. The inclusion of that single descriptor was enough to trigger an emotional response strong enough to withdraw from the study. A second participant failed to respond to the Consent Forms. Although the researcher had been informed during the initial contact with the individual that an ongoing litigious circumstance may preclude their participation in the study. No explanation was provided or sought.

Low inference descriptors supported by field notes document each participant's account of events. Participant feedback, the verification of this researcher's interpretations, and conclusions were conducted (Johnson, 1997). Participant feedback was an extremely important component toward achieving interpretive validity. Areas of miscommunication were clarified through the use of member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All names and references to victims were changed to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

In assessing qualitative research, the reader must be

aware that quantitative evaluations are seldom relevant and qualitative research should not be assessed with the same strategies. Krefting (1991) supports the view of Agar that a qualitative language should be developed, replacing "reliability and validity with such terms as credibility, accuracy of representation, and authority of the writer" (p. 173). Further supporting this approach is Guba's (1981) model, which proposes evaluative strategies that include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Therefore, this study addressed the issue of internal validity through the strategy of credibility (interview technique, member checks, reflexivity and triangulation) and objectivity confirmability (triangulation and reflectivity).

Findings

In light of the frequency that child abduction and child murder is occurring today, the issue of coping, related to child abduction and child homicide, is both significant and deserving of research. Understanding the dynamics of coping strategies is an important area of research for a variety of reasons. Research on coping may provide an understanding of appropriate intervention techniques available to minimize the impact, both

psychologically and physiologically, on parental survivors. Research may reduce the time necessary for coping strategies to become effective, thereby arriving at a more normal condition sooner than previously attained (Sutliff, 1994).

According to the stereotypical definition of abduction, non-familial offenders, each year, abducted between 200 and 300 children (Finkelhor, Hotaling, & Sedlak, 1990). The Washington State Attorney General's Office (1997) study reported there are an average of 100 child-abduction homicide cases investigated in the United States each year. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to assess, through naturalistic inquiry, the differences in coping strategies among parents of murdered or abducted, long-term missing children, where the offender was non-familial. This study further identified relationships between coping strategies among parents of murdered children or abducted, long-term missing children, where the offender was non-familial. The information obtained in this study identified what differences between the two groups exist in the bereavement process and identified specific coping strategies used by parental survivors.

The findings are divided into three sections. The first section, Individual Case Interviews, provides an in depth

look into individual interviews. A descriptive assessment will provide insight into the interview, the incident, and the interviewee. The interviews are chronologically presented in accordance with Table 3.1 and Table 3.2. This descriptive assessment will establish a foundation for the following sections.

The second section, Within-Case Analysis, responds to Research Question 1: What are the perceptive differences of coping among parents of murdered children in contrast to parents of abducted, long-term missing children, where the offender was non-familial? This research question will be answered through a Within-Case Analysis of each group: Parents of abducted, long-term missing children and parents of murdered children. The study identifies the contrast in mechanisms of coping brought into play within each of the two groups.

The third section, Cross-Case Analysis, responds to Research Question 2: How do coping strategies of parents of murdered children differ from the coping strategies of parents of abducted, long-term missing children, where the offender was non-familial? This research question is answered through a Cross-Case Analysis of each group: Parents of abducted, long-term missing children and parents of murdered children. The study identifies differences in

mechanisms of coping brought into play between the two groups.

Individual Case Interviews

Parents of Abducted, Long-Term Missing Children

Interview A: -- Barbara --

It was a Sunday afternoon in 1984, in a quiet, rural Florida town that Barbara was faced with the discovery that her eight-year-old daughter, Doreen, had disappeared while walking to a neighborhood food market near her home. Sixteen years later, Barbara's daughter has not been recovered. Authorities believe they know the suspect, but they have been unable to prove it.

Barbara lives in a meticulously maintained residence, centered in a middle-class neighborhood of homes that were built over 30 years ago. Despite the ingress of a population vastly different from the one that existed 16 years earlier, Barbara steadfastly refuses to move, still believing that Doreen might come home. When that happens, Barbara wants to be there. "I'm still here 30 years later, thinking maybe she will still find her way home."

The interview was held at the dining room table. Barbara spoke in very soft tones; so much so that it was necessary to listen intently to the conversation. Barbara

lacked an ability to remember explicit details, likely the result of 16 years passing since the abduction. “It’s like another lifetime. It’s like she almost didn’t exist. To look back, it’s almost like she wasn’t there.” Her responses were direct and concise. There appeared to be no observable presence of Doreen in the home, as Barbara unwittingly gave most of Doreen’s personal belongings away to psychics, whom Barbara believed would help. In spite of an absence of success, she still uses psychics in an attempt to bring her daughter home.

Barbara described her daughter as a beautiful little girl, who was ambitious and outgoing. Few other details were provided. The interview was difficult for Barbara. Several times during the interview she admitted, “It’s so very hard to go back and rehash this.” Barbara further stated, “I didn’t really want to (do the interview), only because it hurts. It helps some, but hurts a lot.”

Barbara faced the first day of her daughter’s abduction without any assistance from law enforcement or professional support. Although a police report was taken, there was no real search effort conducted. It took more than 24 hours to generate interest from the police or the media. Once these groups were involved, frustration turned to hope. An adversarial relationship developed between her and a

missing children’s organization no longer in operation.

Barbara was unable to comprehend the prospect that her daughter had been abducted. “It’s hard to imagine that you’re child has been kidnapped. It just couldn’t register that she had been kidnapped. You didn’t hear of things like that.” Internalizing her emotions, she found the onslaught of support “smothering. I had no time to myself.” Yet it did not take her long to discover that her shyness was a vice. “I had to come out of my shell. I had to find my daughter.”

Barbara utilized several coping strategies that she believed generated negative effects: particularly alcohol abuse and drug addiction. Although these strategies did help in the short-term, Barbara was unable to recommend them, citing personal detrimental experiences resulting from the strategy.

Through it all, Barbara maintained hope. A source of strength was achieved through a personal advocacy effort, specifically directed at identifying sexual predators at the local level, generating awareness of their presence, and ultimately becoming involved in the effort to reincarcerate them. “Helping to get child molesters off the street became a mission in life.”

Resolution is something Barbara longed for. She

reported that, “I need closure. I need that more than anything. I think I could cope a whole lot better that way.”

Interview B: -- Joan –-

Bobby can you hear us? We send you our prayers.
We send you all our strength and our love.
We’re not giving up until we bring you back home.
We are Bobby’s hope. Bobby Can You Hear Us, Joan

It was mid-evening, October 1989, in a small northern town. Joan’s two young sons, Joseph, aged 10, and Bobby, aged 11, along with an 11-year-old friend, rode their bicycles to a nearby store to rent a movie. On the return home, a masked, armed gunman, stepped out onto a gravel road about one-quarter mile from Joan’s home, confronting all three boys. The offender ordered the boys to the ground and asked their ages. The friend was set free, being told not to look back or he would be shot. The masked gunman then turned Joseph’s younger brother over, looked into his face, and told him to run into the woods or he would be shot. As the two young boys ran into the woods they glanced back to see the masked gunman grab Bobby’s arm. When they reached the wooded area and looked back a second time, Bobby was gone. Eleven years later, Bobby has not been recovered.

Joan was interviewed at a hotel in South Florida. She had flown there as a guest speaker for a conference, which provided training for Crimes Against Children investigators. The effort to conduct the interview in her home was met with mild resistance. Joan expressed a concern that her advocacy took her away from home quite often, and she preferred the privacy at home with her family on those rare weekends she actually made it home. Joan's strong commitment to, and involvement in, advocacy, leads one to believe that the interview was held, nonetheless, in an environment that was "home" to her.

Joan was very open and direct in both her desire to participate in the study and in her responses. She possessed a great ability to express her thoughts through words and expressions. "I was told that I have a way of describing things so people can understand. I have met parents who can't."

Returning to the abduction that occurred 11 years earlier still produced strong outward emotions. In spite of her high profile advocacy role, Joan still took long pauses for thought and composure, occasionally fighting back tears, especially when she returned to the incident itself. "There was resistance at the vehicle. It makes you cry. It was like his toes dug in. I'm so mad!"

When I first met Joan, about two years ago at a child advocacy conference, she wore a lapel pin depicting Bobby at 11 years of age. At the time of this interview, Joan wore a similar lapel pin, but this time the picture depicted Bobby age progressed to what his current age would be. “I am not living in a fantasy world that, you know, he’s happily going to college somewhere, or married, or whatever. I have no delusions about him being a happy-go-lucky 11-year-old.”

Joan described her son, Bobby, as a sport fanatic. “He played every sport imaginable.” He was a bright child who was bothered by unfairness. “If it wasn’t fair, it troubled him a lot. Which I find amazing, because this is so unfair now.” She remembered that her son stood up for people, always willing to help anyone.

Joan described most psychological and physiological responses consistent with bereavement: anger, the inability to function, fear, loneliness, and denial. Although divorce was discussed, a sense of responsibility and guilt negated the option. “We just couldn’t do anything more like that to our kids. So we hung in there, just out of need.”

Staying very focused, Joan worked directly with law enforcement, deriving what she described as the strength necessary to get through the ordeal. “Law enforcement was

really one of my biggest sources of strength, because they took away the craziness." She also spoke of developing a law enforcement sense of humor that helped her to cope. "One time my sister and me made batches of trail mix. We called it 'hot-on-your-trail' mix."

Joan has become an advocate "la célébrité." She has helped to create a foundation whose primary objectives are to assist families of abducted children and direct legislative change relative to the exploitation of children. She, too, was on the Board of Directors for the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and has recently been hired by the Department of Justice/Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to provide ongoing training to professionals involved in crimes against children investigations. What drives her? "It's understandable what happened with Bobby 11 years ago, but it is unconscionable if it happens again. I am just out there to be that conscience."

Barbara's primary frustrations came from sources in which she maintained a very close relationship: Law enforcement and missing children organizations. "I thought initially, everybody was looking for Bobby. What I found out later was that there was a lot of interagency bickering. And not just in law enforcement, but with

non-profits.” In an otherwise trustful relationship, territorial disputes created confusion. “If you add up the total number of finds from non-profits, it’s more than the total number of missing.”

One day, six years later, Joan cleaned out and painted Bobby’s room. “It was really eerie.” Barbara described her home setting. There were no shrines. Yet, pictures, awards, and plaques maintained a sense of presence in the home. Joan questioned whether the decision to change Bobby’s room was depressing or heartening. “We used to have four kids. Now we have three.”

In spite of the ambiguous loss, Joan insisted “at some point you get to looking at, not just what’s missing, but what’s left. And I was just desperately wanting to hold on to some of what was left.” As noted in other interviews with parents of abducted, long-term missing children, Joan sought resolution, regardless of the outcome. “We deserve to know the truth.”

Joan shared an experience she had while speaking to a group of second graders. When asked how long your parents would look for you if you got lost, the children were screaming different times. She remembered one young girl who, frantically waving her hand, waiting to be called on, said, “We’re not replaceable.”

Interview C: -- David --

In March 1994, David’s daughter, a 19-year-old college student, was last seen taking a lunch break from her part-time job at a softball club. Although more than a thousand people were present at the field that day, no one knew what happened to Emma. Emma’s college roommate found her car parked next to a gas station adjacent to the softball park. The vehicle was abandoned, with the door open, the alarm off, and the keys in the ignition. A few weeks after Emma’s disappearance, an unidentified male called a hotline set up at the college to say he had Emma. The caller said Emma was fine, but lonely. And as proof of his truthfulness, he stated he would leave one of Emma’s rings at the telephone booth. Family members identified the ring. Six years later, Emma has not been recovered. Authorities believe they know the suspect, but they have been unable to prove it.

The interview with David was conducted at his home, an upper-middle class neighborhood of neatly maintained homes. The residence is located on a busy throughway street cutting through this old South Florida neighborhood.

From the onset of the interview, it was apparent that David was consumed by anger, distrust, and disillusionment.

His responses were saturated with strong emotion and profanity. In that his focus was anger, particularly at a government system that failed him in obtaining justice and resolution, it was difficult for him to maintain focus on the interview questions. He was visibly tense throughout the interview, intermittently clenching his fists and jaw. David's posture varied significantly throughout the interview: From strong and direct to defeated and weary.

David was clear that the primary reason he agreed to conduct the interview was in an effort to obtain a favor: To bring Emma's case back into the public light through the media. "I wouldn't have done this (interview). If you had called me, I wouldn't be sitting here with you." The reader will recall that each participant was initially contacted by the NCMEC/FL to establish interest in involvement in the study.

David described Emma as "everything that a parent would want out of a kid." She excelled academically in high school, graduating Cum Laude. Emma participated in sports and other extracurricular activities. "She partied hard, studied hard. Everything she did, she had commitment for it." She spoke three languages and wrote two of them. She was accepted, with scholarships, to three major universities. Emma aspired to sit on the Supreme Court, a

goal that, most who knew her, believed she would fulfill.

Following the abduction, David immediately found himself dealing with a system that was unable to resolve the case. As time passed by with no answers, the anger festered into a wound that, six years later, shows little sign of healing. Convinced the identity of the abductor is known, David seeks revenge, although moral and religious issues negate the possibility of fulfilling that option. He knows the suspect's release to the day: December 18, 2003. David has exhibited various stages of bereavement: shock, denial, frustration, and disbelief. Yet, anger rises to supplant those emotions.

David, admittedly, had turned to prescription drugs and alcohol in his effort to cope. "I've taken pills for about three and a half years. I'm back on medication again." "I drank a lot. (It) killed my liver."

David's anger was directed at law enforcement, the media, the criminal justice system, and the government. He understands clearly that the roller coaster ride has been a personal battle to survive. "I have become very self-destructive." David believed that if he were someone important, something would be done. "One person doesn't matter. They don't care about that. We're just numbers – a statistic." He felt abandoned by a law enforcement

community or media that hasn’t returned his calls in three years.

David saw his support as situational. Immediately after the abduction, politicians came forward because it was politically correct. The media came forward because it was a story. Law enforcement did their job because of the media’s focus. Support also came from his religious beliefs. He refused to blame God. “God had nothing to do with this.” David added that God gave him strength. “I don’t think I could have handled this myself.”
Yet, he stated that the worst part of his life is right now. “I don’t believe in anything.” He believed the cynicism has stripped him of all religious conviction. David appreciated the public’s support. “Somebody walking down the street and hugs you and says nothing.” He noted that the people who said the least gave him the most: A hug, a grasp of the hand, or a tear.

The most common-day events provoked anger. Seeing someone cut somebody off in a car. Driving too fast with a child in the car. Watching the news. “I would go berserk. I got involved in trying to solve the world more than anybody.” But the worst scenario of all plays in David head: How she must have felt. He fantasized her last words were, “My daddy’s going to kill you.”

David identified the most effective coping strategy as sleep, noting that this is the only time he felt at peace. Yet that peace was difficult to achieve and appeared fleeting. David, too, sought closure. He also admitted to not wanting “to live like this anymore.” He takes one day at a time – entirely absent of hope. He confessed, “I wish I could die tomorrow. I’ve put a gun to my head three times.” And in a contradictory manner added, “With that being said, I will try to make the next six and a half years the best way I can for my family.”

The interview ended with a visit to Emma’s room. It had been cleared out. Her bedroom set was sold, with the remaining tangible memories placed in a footlocker in a closet. The locker held the most recent flyers, two soccer balls, and a Christian cross. Emma’s retired, number 19 soccer jersey, was displayed in a frame on the bedroom wall, along with a street sign bearing her name: A memorial bestowed by the city after her abduction. David’s home, as well as his home-office, was replete with photographs of Emma and the other family members.

Interview D: -- John --

John’s daughter, Lori, was a 20-year-old college student when she disappeared while on a leisurely walk near

a university in northern Florida. At approximately 6:00 PM in February 1989, Lori told her roommate she was going for a walk and never returned. An extensive search provided no clues.

Tucked quietly away in an historic section of the city, this upper class neighborhood overlooked the intra-coastal waterway. The homes sit securely behind electronic access gates and with yards protected by walls. The interview was conducted in an expansive, airy, and sunlit living room. Family pictures sparsely filled the walls and countertops.

John was very business-like in his approach to the interview. His responses drew a clear picture that his approach to the effort to find his daughter was similar: “We’ve got to treat it like a business. If we had a project that was failing I wouldn’t just sit here and let it go down the tubes.”

As the result of a less than amicable divorce, John regrettably noted that he “really didn’t spend much time with (Lori) until she actually got into junior high. He had remarried and had a son, five years younger than Lori. It was the developing relationship between John’s son and Lori that helped bring the family closer together. “Both of them, I think, liked the idea of having a brother and sister.” Lori then went off to college.

John remembered the first call, from Lori's roommate. She told him that Lori was missing. At first, John believed there was an explanation. "I was worried, but I really just thought I'm going to kill her in the morning when I find out where she was." The next morning John traveled to north Florida. He was met by a full contingent of law enforcement. Being an administrative manager of 100 million dollar projects, John recognized the limitations of the local law enforcement agency. They were undermanned and ill equipped to handle this investigation.

Within the first week, John utilized his political and managerial prowess to amass a volunteer force of over 1000 people to execute a one-day, full-scale search of the area. The result: "We came up with absolutely zip. Not a thing."

John hired personnel from a public relations firm to implement a plan. "So what we did was essentially set up, almost a business." Public and political figures were brought in to do public service announcements. The plan called for a new focus: "We decided we were going to try to do it from a publicity standpoint."

John spoke of emotions that started from worry and concern through guilt, despair, and helplessness. He was forced to endure ransom demands and false leads. Yet, involvement and control were key factors in John effort to

cope. He personally set up a command center that was monitored 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The center received over 1000 leads a month. Although he refused to lose hope, he noted, “You’ve got to be dumb to believe that every day that goes by isn’t worse; because the statistics tell you if you don’t find somebody in a few days, the odds are you’re not going to find them.”

Unique to this interview was the discovery that, since the abduction of Lori, John has faced other significant losses: His wife to a motorcycle accident and his best friend to a murder. John was able to differentiate between the various losses and the mechanisms used to cope with them. He noted that, what made coping with the loss of Lori so unique, was there was nothing to compare it to. “Do I understand whether I’m coping right with Lori? I don’t know 2 or 3 people in the United States that are dealing with what I’m dealing with.”

John suggested he copes by doing everything he possibly can, “that I didn’t feel like I left any stone unturned.” He identified his greatest sources of strength as developing through the relationships he had with his family, law enforcement, and the media. Excluding rare adversarial moments, these relationships were maintained throughout the ordeal. The only ongoing adversarial

relationship occurred with his ex-wife.

John also uses advocacy to help cope. He has chosen to assist on a case-by-case basis, in a one-on-one relationship with other parents dealing with abduction. He admitted the price, both emotionally and physically, was very high. “I realized after one case that I just couldn’t do it (anymore). I went into a funk and just couldn’t get out.” He believed the ongoing contact with parental survivors of abduction blocked his ability to lead a normal life. John also regretted not seeking professional help. “I think, in a nutshell, more than anything, mine’s been probably a refusal to deal with it, more than anything else.”

John sought closure. “I want the best of both worlds: If she’s alive, I would want to tell the world; but if she’s not, I want to close it. I don’t want to wake up every morning wondering again, whether I haven’t done something I should have.” He recalls speaking with the mother of a woman who has been searching for her daughter for 18 years. “I walked out there, and I think it’s the first time I really thought to myself, Jesus Christ, I hope I’m not sitting here 18 years from now going through what she’s doing. And here I am 12 years later.” Yet, he deals with the conflict that five years ago his ex-wife had Lori

declared legally dead. “I just didn’t want, emotionally, to acknowledge that she was dead. I didn’t want the world, everybody out there who was still helping Lori, to read that Lori’s been officially declared dead. Because to me, that was sort of an admission on the family’s part that she was and there wasn’t any point in looking anymore.”

Parents of Murdered Children

Interview E: -- Lynn --

In a remote, rural neighborhood, south of a major city in central Florida, Lynn’s daughter, 4-year-old Mary, was playing on the front porch with her older sister and friends. Shortly before dinnertime, she could not be found. After a five-day search, Mary’s battered body was found in a neighbor’s shed. Mary had duct tape placed across her face, was sexually molested, and drowned. An 18-year-old neighbor boy, who helped in the search, later confessed. Five years have passed since that tragic day.

Far off the commonly traveled path, secluded from those even passing by on a throughway over a mile to the south, sits a neighborhood of mobile homes and wood frame houses. On the front porch of Lynn’s mobile home sits an ominous looking dog, appearing to protect those inside from intrusion. Yet this is an illusion – as is the appearance

of tranquility permeating this quiet residential neighborhood. The reality: five years ago this neighborhood, and this family, was rocked by the abduction and brutal murder of Mary. The incident still impacts the lives of those residing here, confirmed through continuing contact with Lynn and other family members to reaffirm and console.

Lynn still visibly grieves, clearly displaying emotional moments throughout the interview. The interview was conducted in the living room, with Lynn securely settled into an easy chair. She was very animated with her gestures, expressions, and voice. Her memories were vivid and detailed, possessing an uncanny ability to articulate thoughts and feelings, both past and present.

Lynn wanted, very much, to share her experiences – to tell her story. Lynn unapologetically displayed her emotions, which ranged from laughter, to anger, to hurt, to resolution. Only two pictures of Mary were observed in the living room: one of Mary at two-years of age with her sister and another 8x10 oil portrait of Mary received from a stranger following the funeral. There were no memorials in or around the home, although a neighborhood park is named after Mary. As Lynn notes, “It’s the fact that people who didn’t know her affirmed her life and they affirmed her

death. That it had value. Even her death had value, because it made them think, it made them hurt, it made them afraid. Because how many little blond-haired four-year-olds are out there in the world?”

Lynn described Mary as “hard to describe.” Being the third generation to be born on a particular day made her special from the start. Mary was “spoiled rotten, being the baby.” Mary’s response to most situations was, “It’s cool, it’s no problem,” believing that if someone would just listen to her long enough she would eventually be understood. Mary wouldn’t sleep by herself, always being found in the morning in bed with her older sister. The memories were intense. And Lynn feared losing the memories, revealing, “It’s a whole other loss. All I have of her are my memories, you know?”

Lynn spoke in detail about how the emotions would ebb and flow during the week before Mary was recovered. It started out with “that little fear, right here in your belly” through the realization that in a life shattered by the loss of a child, “There are no pieces to pick up. You just had a great big hole torn into your life – there are no pieces. There’s a great big, gaping vortex that’s sucking everything in.”

Fear, despair, and anger were dominant themes during

the time of the search. Anger at one's self, for not being able to make things right. Each of these emotions was described as being experienced at levels of monumental proportions. Deals were made with God: "I was going to give up everything – chocolate! I'll give up chocolate!"

When informed of the confession to the murder by her 18-year-old neighbor, Lynn vehemently denied the loss. She refused to accept the outcome without a body, noting, "I didn't have to believe him until he gave me a body. And I wouldn't believe him. It seemed quite reasonable to me." Mary's battered body was recovered from the neighbor's shed. Lynn stated, "I could literally feel my whole body just drawing itself in and just shutting down. It was physically and emotionally and spiritually the most painful moment in my life." Lynn prayed that things would not get worse, but it did.

Lynn had many sources of support, specifically her family, friends, neighbors, and faith. Interestingly, according to Lynn, each one of these sources of support would intermittently surface as an obstacle to coping. "The choice of one brought my faith to its lowest point, but the choices of the many took it to its highest." Lynn described an emotional roller coaster as being endured, taking a tremendous toll on the mind and body. Lynn remembered, "You

feel like you’re dying. Every second you can just feel a part of you die.”

And yet Lynn did cope. Her faith was instinctive, while participation in a support group provided the foundation to learn how to cope with the loss – to learn how to get through the self-blame. Still living next door to the crime scene gave rise to ongoing emotional experiences. “It’s been five years. I’m still grieving. I still feel pain!”

Lynn was unafraid to hurt, cry, hide, or externalize her emotions. “This was your child. They deserve your tears; they deserve your pain. Let it come.” Yet questions continued: Have I really coped? Have I gone on? Am I different? Have I healed?

Interview F: -- Natalie --

In a middle-class neighborhood in northeast Florida, eight-year-old Susan inexplicably disappeared while outside playing with friends. An extensive weeklong search ended in the recovery of Susan’s body. Susan had been beaten over the head and stabbed numerous times. Susan was found entombed under the offender’s bed, where, when he was not in school or helping in the search effort, he slept above the victim for a week. The offender, a 15-year-old boy who lived across the street, was tried as an adult. He was

found guilty and sentenced to life in prison without parole. Two years have passed since Natalie and her family were forced to cope with the abduction and murder. The offense was particularly heinous due to the brutality of the acts committed upon Susan.

The neighborhood is traditional America: large oak trees shade the quiet residential homes, revealing nicely maintained lawns, and a rustic ambiance. Walking into Natalie’s home, one immediately felt the presence of Susan. After a morning-long interview, one would expect Susan to come running downstairs, excited about a new day. A walkthrough of the downstairs living area reveals an abundance of family pictures. One unfamiliar with the course of events would expect that a fully intact family lived within these walls. Susan’s presence was everywhere; clearly a source of comfort and strength for Natalie.

The tone of the interview changed dramatically throughout the conversation. Natalie maintained an outward presence of control. Starting out upbeat and energetic, this researcher was taken on a roller coaster ride of hesitations, pensiveness, emotional sighs, and notable stress. Natalie was very open and direct, although her voice would visibly trail off when speaking of moments that clearly revisited a painful moment. Her posture was strong

and confident, solicitous of the opportunity to share her experiences. Yet, it was clear that any direct contact with tangible items (photographs, videotapes, signs), linked to Susan, brought a sense of peace and comfort to Natalie. This intensified through physical contact with the items. Natalie gently handled a multitude of items, closely observing each, while drawing them nearer to her.

Natalie described Susan as “just happy. She was the happiest kid. She still believed in Santa Claus, she was only eight years old.” Susan was further described as being extremely shy, loving, and spiritual. Although very adept at sports, basketball in particular, Natalie spoke of a soft side, an emotional side of Susan. Natalie identified a sense of guilt in favoring Susan, a promise broken that she would never do that to her children. With remorse, Natalie stated, “ But I did. I felt always like I favored Susan. But that’s because Susan and I got along so well. We were opposites.” This remorse was met with the belief that God took Susan because Natalie loved her too much; “God was trying to teach me a lesson by saying you can’t get that attached. They’re not yours. This is my gift to you.”

Guilt played a strong role in Natalie’s movement through bereavement and coping. She asked many questions: What if I would have done something different? Why would

God have let this happen? Why did this have to happen to Susan? Why didn’t I spend more time with her? Did this happen because I’m a bad mother?

Natalie was able to proudly announce that she took eight years off from work to be with her daughters “during the most important times,” returning to work only when it was “time to let them become themselves.” And yet the sense of loss was overwhelming when Natalie stated, “It was like when she walked out that front door she just disappeared.”

Sustenance was gained from a city that came to a standstill, offering strength and support in the search for Susan. The abduction created a strong sense of confusion, hoping for the best and fearing the worst. “The longer one is gone, the worse it is.”

Natalie identified how crisis revealed uncharacteristic traits in those affected by the incident. “I was trying to figure everybody out,” she offered. It was confounding to see other children playing while one is in a desperate search for their own child, while fighting a fear that any sign of weakness might affect the outcome. Natalie vividly remembered the stunning moment when she and her husband received confirmation: “Susan is no longer with us.” Disbelief. “It was almost like a dream, yet it was like it was right there on top of you.”

At that moment, life changed. Normal, as was previously known, was never the same. As a parental survivor, she now faced the challenges of the criminal investigation and prosecutorial effort. Natalie identified an adversarial relationship with prosecutors, painting a clear image of irony when encouraged by the State Attorney's Office to accept a plea bargain, reassuring the family they did not want to suffer the details of a trial. Natalie responded, "Do you know what a plea bargain does? It's a bargain. It means that I am, I'm giving him a bargain, he didn't give Susan any bargains." Her pleas fell on deaf ears; the judge accepted the plea agreement, in spite of Natalie's wishes.

Natalie resolved, "You've got to deal with this. You can't let what's happened – if you let him take you down, then he's no longer hurting her, but he's hurting me, too. He's just destroying me and I'm not going to let that happen."

Natalie identified several learned coping strategies: the ability to forgive, experiencing comfort, and the discovery of the ability to help others are acquired, learned mechanisms. "Learning what made me happy, what gave me a sense of fulfillment, it fulfilled that blank inside me." Interestingly, Natalie believed that instinctive strategies, although appearing to be instinctive, are more

likely acquired through external sources, such as family, peers, friends, and religious association.

Natalie’s primary mechanism for coping was entry into the field of advocacy. “If I can just stop one child from making a mistake that they end up in jail for the rest of their lives. For the rest of my life I will fight for justice for kids.”

During a post-interview inquiry, it was pointed out that since the abduction and murder, Susan’s bedroom had not been changed in any way. Natalie noticeably withdrew when asked about seeing Susan’s room. Her response was immediate, with a firm, yet polite mannerism. “No; we can’t do that.” This researcher was shown the room from the foot of the stairs, where it was revealed that Susan’s bedroom door always stayed open.

Although visits to the cemetery are not typically part of Natalie’s routine, she was eager to share a visit to this location with this researcher. Again, upon arrival Natalie appeared to draw strength and find solace in touching the grave marker and arranging the items left by strangers. The interview concluded with a visit to an advocacy organization of which she has become actively involved. Her office space displayed an array of photographs of Susan, along with greeting cards from people

she had never met.

Interview G: -- Samuel --

During a slumber party in October 1993, 12-year-old Gina was abducted at knifepoint from her bedroom at her home in California. Gina was abducted from her mother's home, some 30 miles to the north of Samuel's home. On a cold December evening, 65 days after the abduction, Gina's body was recovered. The suspect was identified and convicted. In response to the events that occurred, Samuel became an advocate of legislative change for the rights of children.

The interview took place in the Samuel's home-office. The room, airy and bright in shades of pastel, is abounding with photographs of Gina. The visual centerpiece of one wall is a framed oil painting of Gina. The painting dominates the atmosphere of the room. The home is set in a quiet, bayside setting, with mountains to the west and the bay to the east. The pace is unhurried and tranquil.

Samuel is an entrepreneur. Well-spoken and confident, he responded with directness and purpose to each of the interview questions. Rarely did his voice trail off, although there were moments of hesitation and thought, likely reflecting the loss.

Samuel described Gina as a sweet kid. She was stunning beautiful, an opinion supported by the photographs that graced the walls. Gina loved acting, and had pursued this love in school, as well as in a local theater group. Her shyness made it hard for her to make friends, yet one of her last conscious decisions was to run for Student Council at her new school.

Samuel noted that Gina's birth changed his life, understanding unconditional love for the first time. He added, "Just as her birth changed my life forever; Gina's death changed my life forever as well, but certainly in different ways."

Samuel remembered, in vivid detail "the utter disbelief" in being told Gina was abducted. The details of the abduction were clear, because it was witnessed by some of Gina's friends. For 65 days, Samuel experienced the symptoms of bereavement linked to ambiguous loss: Bone-chilling fear, disbelief, denial, hope, and inconsolable grief, identified as the "wobbly knee moment."

Samuel was compelled to maintain a clear mind; totally focused on the issue: Finding Gina. He derived comfort from many sources. First, and foremost, was his immediate family. Another source was a total stranger, who committed resources to the search effort, but was later removed from

the search effort after it was discovered that this stranger was a convicted sexual predator. A single FBI agent also provided support, by reminding Samuel that he better get his act together. “You have to be the general in charge of fighting the battle for the life of your child.” Finally, Samuel utilized a strategy he termed “media investment.” Media involvement will force law enforcement to work harder.

Being a divorced parent caused Samuel concern. “Nobody is going to care about a kid from a dysfunctional family! We’re all from dysfunctional families; but you let the cracks show and people are going to say that’s why.” So two sides existed: The one presented to the public and another played out in private.

Samuel and his family never gave up hope during the search. Once Gina was recovered “the hope was gone. That was just a moot point. It becomes academic.” Yet, Samuel was clearly thankful for having resolution. In his contact with another parent whose daughter had been missing for 12 years, he stated, “Just watching her made me realize I’m way better off. I’m way better off than she is.”

Samuel now focuses on a non-profit organization he created. The mission: To create the premier missing children’s foundation in America. He has been involved in

changing laws specific to child exploitation, recognizing the benefit in understanding the technologies that are available today that were not available when Gina was abducted and murdered.

Samuel was inspired by his daughter’s final words: “Please don’t hurt my mother and sister.” He believed his daughter taught him the truly greatest lesson he has learned in life, something that allowed him to cope and move forward. In disbelief, Samuel stated, “As she faced her worst fears, that she could put the welfare of somebody else ahead of herself!”

Interview H: -- Larry --

It was June 1998, at 7:30 PM, when Larry’s 13-year-old daughter, Robin, left her house in southern California to walk her dog. She did not return. However, the dog returned at 8:20 PM trailing its leash. The FBI classified Robin’s case as a stranger abduction. Two men were seen in the area prior to the abduction, and a witness saw a "frightened" Robin in the same car with two men at about 7:45 PM. Seven months later, a body was found about three miles from Larry’s home. Two days later the body was positively identified as that of Robin’s. No arrests have been made. Two years have passed since Robin’s abduction and murder.

The residential area where Robin was abducted was located on a military installation. Although the military base had been closed years earlier, as many other bases had, a portion remained open to house military families. The area is remote, yet accessible to the public. The interview was held at a residence the family had moved to since the abduction and murder of Robin. Conversing in the comfortable living room, Larry was excited to give the interview. He had a story, and wanted very much to tell it. The home is brimming with reminders of Robin. Photographs and cards adorn the walls and fireplace mantle. Birthday cards, made by Robin, are placed on the refrigerator door. Robin's fish tank sits against one wall in the living room, and Robin's dog still runs the house.

Larry described Robin as the youngest of three children. He described her as shy, quiet, and hard working. He was unable to recall a single incident requiring discipline. Larry was extremely proud of his daughter. He spoke of a reading deficiency that became apparent when she was in third or fourth grade. Robin worked hard to prove she could overcome the deficiency. Larry noted, "She has progressed so much that she doesn't have to go to the class anymore. She can go to the other regular class, instead." Robin played softball and soccer. She didn't have many

friends. The family had lived there for only six months, arriving in the middle of the school year. She was abducted the week after school let out. Robin loved animals. She was given a dog for her birthday. Larry appears to draw strength in speaking about Robin. “The memories are perfect.”

Immediately after the abduction, Larry noticed what he called coincidences: “So many strange occurrences happened that night that it doesn’t make sense. Coincidences do happen – but the more coincidences you have in a situation, either something else is going on or it becomes more and more astronomical.” Larry also blamed himself because, the night of the abduction, was the only evening since they had lived there that he had to stay late at work – another coincidence. The immediate feelings were apprehension and uncertainty, leading into shock. Larry recalled how thoughts became a blur. As the night progressed, he remembered one vivid emotion: “Utter terror!”

The search was for naught. Larry’s faith in law enforcement, initially strong, was severely compromised. Larry discovered the police were not searching for his missing child. The reason? The Police Chief informed Larry that he had been working in the town for 20 years and there had never been a child abducted in this town, so there must

be something else going on here. Reported false-sightings further diluted the search effort.

This absence of support evoked strong emotions of loneliness and despair. “I had this terrible feeling that we are going to have to do this on our own, no one is going to help us. I felt so utterly alone.” A friend referred Larry to a missing children’s organization. Finally, he felt, someone thought this was serious. Things started moving forward. His military command sent 10 people to initiate a search. The FBI got involved. A missing children’s organization arrived with a contingent of trained personnel to assist. And the media arrived. “For me, the media became my way of getting the word out. I was able to keep the media for two months because I was accessible.” Larry described the relationship with the media as supportive. “I used them.”

Larry insisted on maintaining hope, in spit of the knowledge that as time wore on, the likelihood of her safe return was diminishing. “There were two choices we had. We could either keep this hope alive and keep looking for Robin and keep doing everything we can to get Robin back or we can give up and go on with our lives. How can any parent ever do that and just say she’s gone?”

Two significant events occurred that impacted the

coping. The first event occurred 12 days following the abduction. After being informed that a body was discovered in the area, Larry was forced to await the identification. As the story of the discovery crossed the TV reports, Larry remembered writing a letter about how he felt at that moment. If the body was identified as Robin's, Larry was going to give the letter to the media. The remains were not those of Robin.

The second event, and certainly the most significant to him, occurred four months after the abduction. Larry attended a Christian worship service and was born again. "All of a sudden I knew something dramatic happened. All of a sudden it made sense. God prepared me for this moment."

Two months later, Robin's badly decomposed remains were located three miles from the military base and identified. Prior to speaking to the media, Larry retrieved the letter he had written six and a half months earlier. The letter was "full of hate and bitterness to the world." Larry expressed shock, expecting that he had written something profound. He noted, with awe, that if Robin had been recovered early on, he "would have been a person full of hate, full of bitterness, full of anger. I would have been consumed by anger. How could I help my wife? How could I help my son? God prepared us for this." Larry remembered

looking for meaning and finding it through God. He remembers looking for peace and finding it through God.

Larry revealed a desire to move into advocacy. “One of the things I want to do with the foundation, if we had the money, is to be able to fly anywhere, to help people focus on what they’re going through. It costs a lot to be able to do those things.”

Within-Case Analysis

Qualitative research necessitates the exploration and interpretation of complex data, resulting in the management and synthesis of ideas, resulting in the discovery of themes and patterns. The Within-Case Analysis and the Cross-Case Analysis for this study was accomplished through the qualitative coding of data through the synthesis of concepts described in Table 4.1. The data was gathered through the use of recorded interviews, field notes, and other text and documents related to the field of study.

The within-case analysis identified the contrast in mechanisms of perceptive coping within each of the two groups studied. Prior to identifying the specific differences of perceived coping strategies, one should note the very interesting patterns that developed through the analysis. The initial analysis will assess the role of

support (Table 4.2), emotional response (Table 4.3), work (Table 4.4), and the media (Table 4.5). The section closes with the within-case analysis of perceived coping strategies used by PALTMC (Table 4.6).

Table 4.1
Coding

1. COPING STRATEGIES
Ineffective Strategies Effective Strategies Substance Abuse or Use Advocacy Resolution Normalcy Faith
2. SUPPORT MECHANISMS
Friends Professional: Police, Medical, Judicial, Support Groups Family: Immediate Other: Psychics, Strangers, Political

3. EMOTIONAL RESPONSES
Blame Confusion Crying Anger Denial Depression Fear Frustration Guilt Shock Hope
4. WORK / EMPLOYMENT
5. MEDIA
Adversarial Supportive

Parents of Abducted, Long-Term Missing Children (PALTMC)

The Role of Support Mechanisms

The parents of abducted, long-term missing children (PALTMC) reported that support was dependent upon external criteria, specifically derived through the perception of the contact and/or intervention (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2
Within-Case Analysis Assessing the Role of Support Mechanisms of PALTMC

Construct	Comment	Role
Friends	"A friend of mine, we're best friends. She was with me all the time."	+
	"I had some very close friends that carried me along as well."	+
	"The truth is, you really find out who your friends are."	+
	"I got support from my friends. One in every 10 friends; The other nine couldn't face me. It's not that that they weren't my friends. If they came, they just couldn't handle it."	-
Professional	"Law enforcement was really one of my biggest sources of strength, because they took away the craziness."	+
	"I was lucky that I had plugged into NCMEC, because they really gave me information; some facts to go with all the confusion."	+
	"There was another missing children's place north of here. That was a terrible place; I had a bad experience with them."	-
	"The Judge made us go to therapy. It didn't help, no!"	-
	"I found out later there was a lot of interagency bickering. And not just in law enforcement, but with non-profits."	-
	"You've heard of the turf battles between agencies and they are very real."	-
	"Nobody cares, because they haven't called me in three years."	-
	"Do not expect the police to help you. You're on your own."	-
Family	"If I didn't have Beth, I don't know if I'd be alive today."	+
	"We still had a family. We still have three other children. We still had our love for each other. I didn't want to lose anything more."	+
	"The family did exactly what I expected them to do."	+
	"I looked around me and I feel like I was all alone on this one."	-
	"My family, who looked at me for strength; I was falling apart inside."	-
	"Her mother had Lori declared legally dead five years ago. I fought that."	-
	"I finally got an injunction against her."	-
Other	"There were a lot of nice people offering help; anything they could do."	+
	"Prayer groups. That helped a lot."	+
	"Within an hour he had gotten a hold of the Governor, and his office, his Chief of Staff. We had the dogs like in two hours."	+
	"An awful lot of it was volunteer stuff."	+
	"I was just so lucky to have all these people around me."	+
	"People who said the least gave me the most."	+
	"(The government) abandons you."	-
	"There were so many rumors and bogus stories and psychics and all that."	-
	"Those psychics made me crazy."	-
	"If Emma is never found, if the government never does anything about it, this will kill me."	-

Note: User Assessment + = Positive Influence on Coping
- = Negative Influence on Coping

Friends were considered by most as a source of strength, yet often the friends inability to know what to

say or do in confronting the parent created tension. David stated, “I got support from my friends. One in every 10 friends; the other nine couldn’t face me. It’s not that that they weren’t my friends. If they came, they just couldn’t handle it.”

Also important was the role of professional intervention: Law enforcement, the judicial system and psychological or psychiatric intercession. Law enforcement was generally perceived as maintaining a supportive role in the relationship, in spite of the fact that they were inadequately trained to handle abduction investigations.

Joan testified, “I respect the effort they were putting out, and the organization.” And yet, David, dismally disenfranchised with the efforts of both government and law enforcement, had few kind words to say about law enforcement. “The police tried to manipulate me.” “It was like watching the Keystone Cops.” “Nobody cares because they haven’t called me in three years.”

Although most parents of abducted, long-term missing children believed that professional intervention would result in a positive outcome only one person took advantage of the service, forced by the Court to seek advisement. This single contact with a psychologist left Barbara dissatisfied with the intercession. “The judge made us go

to therapy," adding that the one-on-one intervention did not help her to cope.

John suggested that therapy was beneficial, whether it was coping with loss or stress. When asked if that was something he wished he had done, he stated "I have, on one occasion for about three months, I went to this woman who's a psychiatrist. And it was really a combination of a lot of things. It was not only Lori - it was my best friend, and relationships. I think, in a nutshell, more than anything, mine's been probably a refusal to deal with it, more than anything else. I just don't – not that it hasn't caught up to me, because it did." John's experiences, although unique to this study, in that he suffered multiple losses in a short period of time, contradicted the theory of Burgess and Holstrom (1978), who opined that prior encounters with stress and trauma could improve and strengthen the physiological and psychological response to coping. John still felt strongly that, in spite of multiple losses, he still made use of denial in coping with each loss.

This pattern of refusal for parents of abducted, long-term missing children to solicit professional assistance is in contradiction with Rinear's (1984) study, which reported that, although parents of murdered children generally did not seek out professional counseling as a

mean of dealing with their loss (no more than 13.9% from a single demographic group sought professional assistance), those respondents who did seek professional counseling reported the intervention as positive.

The family, as a support mechanism, relied heavily on the relationship that existed prior to the abduction. In all but one case, the family was generally perceived as a dominant source of support. At the same time, in many instances, the family also generated some of the most significant negative aspects for coping. Support, other than the aforementioned, was divided. Strangers were a wonderful source of comfort and coping, while the least beneficial source of coping was derived from the contact with psychics. Political contacts enhanced the ability to get things accomplished that would have otherwise been unattainable; yet, the process had little to do with coping.

The Role of Emotional Responses

In assessing the role of the emotional response to the coping process (see Table 4.3), the researcher evaluated 11 emotional responses (Table 4.1) that lead a parent through the bereavement process toward coping. The parents of

abducted, long-term missing children in this study reported symptoms of each component. Five emotional responses were significantly higher than all others. These emotions, listing the dominant emotion first, were frustration, depression, hope, anger, and denial. Participants in this group assumed little blame and or guilt in being the cause of the abduction.

The predominant focus of blame or guilt was at their inability to find their child, their inability to offer support to family and friends, or missed opportunities of a desirable future with their missing child. John remarked, “Intellectually, I hadn’t spent enough time with Lori, number one; and number two, she was off at college. Nobody knows what their kids are doing at college. I did the best I could. So I really didn’t have a guilt trip in the sense that, if I was a better father she wouldn’t have gotten in the wrong place. I think that’s just stupid.” David, too, mentioned, “Emma was a dream come true and I didn’t know it. And that hurts me deeply that I didn’t have more time with her. I took her for granted, big time.” If parents did blame themselves for not being protective enough, that emotional response evaporated quickly over time.

The respondents did disclose that blame is often directed toward a spouse, law enforcement’s limited

abilities, or the absence of political support. Joan remembered, “It pitted us against each other.” “I would look at him different.” And yet, David was strong in his assurance that one should not blame one’s self. “That’s the only thing that’s not good, is blaming yourself.”

Confusion, fear, crying and shock were all symptoms reported by the parents. But these emotional responses did not surface as dominant responses. Frustration was, first and foremost, the emotional response that dominated the interview. The sources of frustration were many: The ambiguous loss, the absence of resolution, the law enforcement response, the criminal justice system, the political process, the unfairness of life itself, and the diminishing odds of closure as time moved on. Depression created an environment conducive to the development of negative physiological and psychological responses. These responses led to extreme variations, from physical illness,

Table 4.3
Within-Case Analysis Assessing the Role of the Five Dominant Emotional Responses of PALTMC

Construct	Comment	Role
Frustration	“So, it’s like my daughter’s missing and they’re thinking I did it.”	-
	“I don’t take it much to heart anymore, because there are a lot of them (psychics) who said she was coming home.”	-
	“It’s the only way I see Doreen, is an 8-year-old. She’s frozen in time.”	-
	“Sometimes I think it’s never going to be resolved.”	-
	“It got harder as time went on, because time goes on.”	-
	“There are times when I just – I’m tired and I just want to go away.”	-
	“I don’t know what is normal. But what I live is not normal.”	-

	“We used to have four kids, now we have three.”	-
	“Everything inside of me was just screaming. What happened was so wrong. It’s just wrong.”	-
	“So you just kind of do what it is you have to do to survive.”	-
	“And we come up with absolutely zip. Not a thing.”	-
	“Goddamn it! Let’s find out what happened.”	-
	“What’s my choice? As long as I’m alive I’ve got to deal with it.”	-
	“I find I have a real inability to let anyone back into my life.”	-
	“It tears me up, because all what happened to us. If it would happen to a Senator or a member of Congress, then things would change.”	-
	It just amazes me that we became a number, a statistic.”	-
	“The odds are against me, so I’m not going there.”	-
	“I want to contribute more to the world, to our community, and they won’t let me.”	-
Depression	“It could get you down a lot, where you would feel like you were sick all the time.”	-
	“I still get her poster done, a picture done. He doesn’t say anything about that, because it puts me in such a depressed state for a while.”	-
	“I just couldn’t function. I was sad all the time.”	-
	“It’s like having a hole in your heart.”	-
	“It was very lonely, because even my family, who was there with me, like my sister and my brother, and my husband and kids, nobody knew what I was going through.”	-
	“If you asked me to compare my life to February 28, 1989, it sucks! If I drew a graph of my life from the day Lori disappeared, the line would rise and drop, but at a much lower level.”	-
	“You’ve got this thing going on that’s eating you up.”	-
	“I wish I could die tomorrow. I’ve put a gun to my head 3 times.”	-
Hope	“I’m still here 30 years later, thinking maybe she will still find her way home.”	+
	“I’m right here and I probably always will be, thinking she could (return).”	+
	“Maybe a family wanted a little girl and took her.”	+
	“For months I would wake up every night, or stay up every night, and expect to see him running up the driveway.”	+
	“I totally believe, with all my heart, that there are missing kids out there living a lie. I believe, as a searching parent, I believe Bobby could be one of them. Maybe he’s not. But he could be!”	+
	“I mean in the real world, after a month, did I think I was going to find Lori? I thought there was 10% chance. I kept hoping against hope.”	-
	“Do I hope today she comes in the door? Yeah. Do I believe it? No!	-
	“(Do you have hope at all?) Of what? You mean alive? No.”	-

Note: User Assessment + = Positive Influence on Coping
- = Negative Influence on Coping

Table 4.3 (Continued)
Within-Case Analysis Assessing the Role of the Five Dominant Emotional Responses of PALTMC

Anger	“There are times I just get irate and get mad at the world.”	-
	“The media are like sharks. They say they’re your friends.”	-
	“I was very demanding, immediate, and impatient. And he was trying to be solid. He was trying to be the male thing: The strength; the pillar. I hated that.”	-
	“We don’t have the answers. If Bobby is not alive, there is a man out there that steals and murders children. I am just not okay with that.”	-
	“When I’d come home at night, you can imagine: I was no ball of laughs. I was either a wreck or I was angry or mad.”	-
	“I’ve become very cynical.”	-
	“I do have a lot of anger; a lot of hate.”	-
	“Has that hatred or anger changed over time? No!”	-
	“I hold that judge in contempt! I hold the whole system in	-

	contempt!”	
	“I begin to understand the frustration of some of those people that get on top of the roof and shoot down. You know what I’m talking about? That guy in Texas, you know what I mean? Pow! Pow! I’ve been there. I’ve been there.”	-
Denial	“You know it’s so hard. It’s like another lifetime. It’s almost like she didn’t exist.”	-
	“I just couldn’t register that she had been kidnapped.”	-
	“It’s like I have her back. Oh, it helps me cope; the light of my life (My granddaughter).”	-
	“You try and think, figure something out; but most of the options you don’t want to look at.”	-
	“I guess I really didn’t have a whole lot to hang onto.”	-
	“Frankly, I don’t want to talk about it.”	-
	“Denial was instinctive. That, to this day, the hope that there’s this one-millionth of a chance.”	-
	“Coping is just coping by denial, by just continuing to try and solve it.”	-
	“I took it that Emma was alive, somewhere!”	-
	“I really want to disappear. I want to be able to go someplace and just tune out.”	-
	“I don’t remember her voice anymore.”	

Note: User Assessment + = Positive Influence on Coping
- = Negative Influence on Coping

to loneliness, to the inability to function, to the craving to end one’s life. David acknowledged, “I wish I could die tomorrow. I’ve put a gun to my head three times.”

Hope, also a dominant theme with this group of parents, presented itself at a variety of levels. The long-term, abducted children in this study have been missing for between 6 and 16 years. Hope, although at hand and very real, was not over emphasized by unrealistic expectations. When faced with the expectation of the safe return or recovery of their child, the responses, again, varied. John admitted, “Do I hope today she comes in the door? Yeah. Do I believe it? No.” And with unbridled conviction, Joan asserted, “I totally believe, with all my heart, that there are missing kids out there living a lie. I believe, as a

searching parent, I believe Bobby could be one of them. Maybe he’s not. But he could be!”

Anger was often directed at external sources: Law enforcement, the criminal justice system, the media and that lack of answers. Anger was an emotional response that often led to other emotional components, i.e. crying, confusion, fear, and shock. Although most parents had the ability to control the anger through refocusing on other activities, such as advocacy, David has sustained his intense anger at a system he believed failed him. “I do have a lot of anger; I have a lot of hate. Has that anger changed over time? No!” David’s anger has led him to better understand why everyday violence occurs. “I begin to understand the frustration of some of those people that get on top of a roof and shoot down. You know what I’m talking about? That guy in Texas, you know what I mean? Pow! Pow! I’ve been there. I’ve been there.”

Denial also played a strong role in the emotional response of the parents. Denial, although perhaps not the most effective coping mechanism, is nonetheless a mechanism used to get through the day-to-day, month-to-month, and year-to-year ordeal. Denial allowed hope. John stated, “Denial was instinctive. That, to this day, the hope that there’s this one-millionth of a chance.” Denial prevented

acceptance of the situation. “It’s like another lifetime. It’s almost like she didn’t exist.” Denial solicited surrogacy, as when Barbara spoke about her eight-year-old granddaughter: “It’s like I have her back. Oh it helps me cope; the light of my life.” And denial removed artifacts from the past. David remorsefully confessed, “I don’t remember her voice anymore.”

The Role of Work/Employment

The parents in this group were unable to identify any positive roles that employment had in the process (see Table 4.4). Work itself, and the need to maintain gainful employment were a constant source of concern. Regardless of the implications, work-related processes and financial implications were negative. There was no question that work was an effective strategy in the return to normalcy, but the negative implications were clear. The responses were unmistakable: The return to the workplace is necessary, unavoidable, and a source of great frustration.

Table 4.4
Within-Case Analysis Assessing the Role of Work/Employment of PALTMC

Construct	Comment	Role
Work	“I wasn’t working for like a month. I just couldn’t leave here.”	-
	“Being away from here, thinking I’m going to be at work and she’s going to come home.”	-
	“We spent a lot of money overall. And like I said, seven-and-a half years of lost income.”	-
	“I was even feeling guilty about work. I was trying to do a few hours work.”	-
	“In the back of your mind, you’re saying, cripes, if I lose my job, what am I going to do?”	-
	“I used to really enjoy what I did. I don’t much anymore. I do it so I can pay the bills.”	-

	"I owned my own business, so I didn't work. I actually did maybe one-tenth of my business in the first two years. I'm doing about half as much now than what I used to."	-

Note: User Assessment + = Positive Influence on Coping
- = Negative Influence on Coping

The Role of the Media

The media played a significant role in how the parent of an abducted child copes with the ambiguous loss (see Table 4.5). Although adversarial incidents did occur, the media generally maintained a supportive role. The role, nonetheless, might be looked at as parasitic. The media needs the story; the parent needs the media. Strong media attention typically forces law enforcement to increase its investigative commitment. The undisputable issue with the media is the fact that the media has the ability to immediately reach an enormous audience in a very short period of time. This issue was critical to the investigation and, ultimately, the coping process of the parental survivor.

Table 4.5
Within-Case Analysis Assessing the Role of the Media for PALTMC

Construct	Comment	Role
Adversarial	"One reporter is walking around banging on the windows because I wouldn't come out."	-
	"On the talk shows I'd get blind-sided."	-
	"What I learned very quickly is if you called the press and didn't have anything to say, they get real pissed."	-
Supportive	"The reporters started coming out everyday, which was good, because I was getting her picture out there."	+
	"She helped me out like you wouldn't believe. She threw me a letter and said, You think the police are working on this? You're crazy. You read this letter I wrote to them and	+

they’re not doing anything.”	
“I looked at them as allies – you guys can help me.”	+
“I just know the power and impact they have. They reach more people than I ever could.”	+
“I made a deal with the local TV station that if they’d let me fly their helicopter (to search), I’d give them all the reports live.”	+

Note: User Assessment + = Positive Influence on Coping
- = Negative Influence on Coping

Perceived Coping Strategies of PALTMC

The research looked at five other areas that would impact the subsequent ability to cope. These areas, addressed individually, are as follows: (1) Substance Use/Abuse, (2) entrance into advocacy, (3) resolution, (4) normalcy, and (5) faith. The implications of these areas directly impacted the direction and ability to effectively cope with the ambiguous loss of one’s child.

Fifty percent of the parents of abducted, long-term missing children, in this study, became dependent upon controlled substances and alcohol. Although this sample is too small to apply to a general population, the statistical implication should not be abandoned. The substance abuse included the addiction to marijuana, extended use of Valium, and other medically prescribed anti-depressants. Although Barbara insisted that the marijuana helped her cope, she refused to offer the strategy as effective. “The marijuana did help. It really did help. I didn’t get my mind all fogged up. It just – I could smile again

sometimes.” In spite of her effort to exclude marijuana consumption as a viable coping mechanism, she did disclose that the legal issues precluded her from recommending marijuana to cope. Barbara also abused alcohol. “I had a few drinks and I would pass out,” admitting that “drinking just made it a lot worse. It would just intensify it.”

David abused both alcohol and controlled substances. He remembers, regrettably, “I wish they hadn’t given me the drugs – that numbed my sharpness. They kept me numb for two years.” David, too, divulged, “I drank -- a lot; killed my liver.” He is emphatic in his effort to discourage other parents facing abduction from using alcohol or controlled substances to cope. But David is a realist: “If you need them to calm you down, to bring you to a level so you can analyze things better, do it. But get off them as soon as possible.”

Three-quarters of the parents of abducted children reported entrance into some level of advocacy. The general reason was to find some meaning in the ambiguous loss. The advocacy effort traversed the scale from a local to a national endeavor. Barbara spent some of her time identifying, picketing and helping to reincarcerate local child molesters. She offered, “Helping to get child molesters off the street became a mission in life. It made

me feel good to get one."

John identified that part of his "coping was to help other families." He decided to provide one-on-one support to families suddenly faced with an abducted child. In his admission that the one-on-one contact was emotionally tough, John felt his advocate role was an attempt to "make something positive come out of a terrible thing." His effort exacted a physical and emotional toll. "It really kicked the shit out of me. And I realized I just couldn't (keep doing this) if I was to try and lead some kind of normal life."

Joan immersed herself in the advocacy effort. She was recognized nationally as a spokesperson for missing children, generating awareness for law enforcement and the general public. "It's because of the other work that I've done that people know who I am. It's a sort of fame that goes with the effort. I can live with it. It's just, sometimes, very awkward." Joan established a well-known foundation to assist families of abducted, long-term missing children and was involved in developing legislative change. A significant portion of her time is spent in her advocate role. She believes this role has been helpful in enabling her to find meaning and to cope with the abduction of her son. "I do think it's making a difference. We've got

to try.”

David was a stark contrast to the others. David wanted to make a difference, but his anger impeded any move toward advocacy. “I felt so insignificant and so betrayed by the big shots in Washington.” In frustration that precludes healing, David exclaimed, “I want to contribute to the world, to our community, and they won’t let me.”

Resolution, regardless of the outcome, was a common theme among the respondents of parents of abducted child. The uncertainty of ambiguous loss became an obstruction to closure. “I need closure. I need that more than anything.” One parent simply stated, “With no closure it’s difficult to cope.” Another defended that “we deserve to know the truth.” The statements continue without hesitation: Joan pleaded, “I want to know what happened. I want to know who did this. I want to know where he is.”

In spite of an absence of resolution, parents continued to strive for normalcy. And yet one question arose that redefined the concept of normal: “I just don’t know what normal is.” There was a strong desire to “get into some kind of pattern of life.” Normal was now different. There was no discussion of long-term plans. Normal was situational. Parents of abducted children had a normal public life, which was vastly different from their normal

private life. There were discussions among several respondents concerning publicly perceived role expectations. Those roles would vary dependent upon the situation the parents found themselves in. With exasperation, one parent confessed, “You must go on with life; but the pain is still there.”

The final issue addressed the role that faith plays in the -coping process. Three of the four parents identified that they believed in God. Their levels of commitment to their religious beliefs were varied, but none exhibited a strong sense of religious commitment. No one was willing to accept that God was to blame for the abduction. Joan maintained, “My pat answer to that is God didn’t do this.” And yet Joan finds great interest in the fact that her son’s abduction caused individuals proclaiming great faith to have lost faith because God didn’t answer their prayers. In contrast, others who professed to never praying suddenly found the Lord in their lives.

David, who was most filled with anger than any other parent, provided a conflicting relationship with his religious conviction. He admits, “God has nothing to do with any of this.” Yet David continues, “I don’t think God has anything to do with anything here. God is here. God loves us. But we got free will.” David goes to church to

“try to get the anger away from me.” The contradiction: David speaks of going to church and “all you hear here and there is an echo. There’s nothing there. When you cry it just echoes.” In spite of a professed strong religious belief prior to the abduction of his daughter, he acknowledges, “I don’t believe in that anymore.”

Coping Strategies

The parents of abducted, long-term missing children were able to identify what they perceived as ineffective and effective coping strategies. Interestingly, parents identified more effective strategies than ineffective strategies (Table 4.6).

Clearly, controlled substance and alcohol abuse were perceived as ineffective in creating an environment conducive to coping. In spite of the fact that few parental survivors seek professional intercession, failure to seek this assistance was perceived as detrimental to the healing process. In contradiction to what research suggests, journaling was a rarely used mechanism for coping.

Table 4.6
Within-Case Analysis of Coping Strategies Used by PALTMC

Construct	Comment	Role
Ineffective	Alcohol Abuse	-
	Controlled Substance Abuse or Use	-
	Failure to Seek Psychological Treatment	-
	Maintaining a Journal	-
	Blaming One’s Self	-

	One-on-One Advocacy	-
	No Time Alone	-
Effective	Discover a Sense of Control – Involvement	+
	Advocacy Effort	+
	Learning to Stay Emotionally Level	+
	Pace Yourself	+
	Return to Work / Staying Busy	+
	Maintain Hope	+
	Positive Thinking	+
	Use of Marijuana	+
	Write Your Thoughts and Opinions	+
	Write Letters to Your Missing Child	+
	Maintain What You Still Have: Family, Marriage	+
	Cry, Scream, Be Angry	+
	Talk to Someone Who Has Been Through It	+
	Find Meaning	+

Note: User Assessment + = Positive Influence on Coping
- = Negative Influence on Coping

When it was used, it provided little benefit. And yet, Joan, who found journaling the least helpful, ended up writing about her experiences for a local newspaper. Joan remembered, “That was really good for me to focus on what were my current thoughts for the day and what leads were going on and what else we could all do.”

Although it appeared that a majority of parents of abducted children enter into some form of advocacy, care should be used when deciding what environment is favorable to function as a coping mechanism. John was unmistakable in describing the impact of proving one-on-one support to family of a missing child. Other possible avenues of advocacy were to join, or create, a foundation, or become involved in legislative change impacting child exploitation.

Strategies essential to effective coping required processes that were both instinctive and learned. Pacing one's self was critical to the emotional and physical well being of the parental survival. John discovered, "I realized, emotionally, when I'd come a wreck – hey, you can't keep going if you allow yourself to get this up or down." "The thing I learned after the first couple of weeks was I just didn't get excited one way or the other." Another important strategy was to speak to someone who had been through the loss of a child. John recalled, "I remember how important that was to me – that somebody who had been through it. It's easy for everybody else to say you've got to take care of your self. But he'd been through it."

Respondents believed that time did heal; time did help one to move forward with one's life. John stated, "So yeah, does time help? Yeah it helps. But Jesus Christ, it's been 12 years. So it takes a while." Joan responded in kind, "Obviously, the pain isn't as raw as it was at the very, very beginning. But this past fall it was 11 years. Bobby was 11 years old and now he has been gone 11 years. It was like, God, how can this be. It doesn't lessen. There is a part of you that goes on and then every once in a while your heart will just contract."

Maintaining what one still had was a common theme among parental survivors. Joan affirmed, “At some point you get to looking at, not just what’s missing, but what’s left.” And Barbara concurred, “If I didn’t have Beth, I don’t know if I’d be alive today; because I knew I had to take care of her – I had to be there for her.”

Hope was an overriding theme among parental survivors of abducted children. Hope revealed itself with a range from unquestionable through doubtful, but still present. As noted earlier, the long-term, abducted children in this study have been missing for between 6 and 16 years. Hope, although at hand and very real, was not over emphasized by unrealistic expectations. When faced with the expectation of the safe return or recovery of their children, the responses, again, varied. John said, “Do I hope today she comes in the door? Yeah. Do I believe it? No.” In contrast, Joan implored, “I totally believe, with all my heart, that there are missing kids out there living a lie. I believe, as a searching parent, I believe Bobby could be one of them. Maybe he’s not. But he could be!”

Finally, most respondents found that some sense of control or involvement in the investigative process helped one to cope. Survivors who were sheltered from the investigative process felt an intensified sense of

helplessness and an increased loss of control. Barbara recalled, with great frustration, “I tried to help them with the search. They wouldn’t allow me to do it. They said stay out of that – stay home.” In contrast, John, who possessed great administrative and managerial skills, used those skills to his benefit. “What we did was essentially set up, almost a company.” John, recognizing that the local law enforcement agency was ill equipped and understaffed, established a working relationship with the agency. “It gave me ability to get in the middle of it. I would have been incredibly frustrated if I had been locked out like normally happens.”

And in this relationship was born a function related to coping: “It also gave me a sense of purpose.” David’s anger and frustration became an obstacle to effective coping. David believed law enforcement and the political process significantly minimized his involvement in the investigative process. “The more I analyze this, the more I realize what has taken place and my ability to do anything about it leaves me more empty. What’s the answer? For me to cope? I’m coping? I don’t know. Am I coping?”

Parents of Murdered Children (POMC)

The within-case analysis identified the contrast in

mechanisms of perceptive coping within each of the two groups studied. Prior to identifying the specific differences of perceived coping strategies, one must note the very interesting patterns that developed through the analysis. The initial analysis will assess the role of support (Table 4.7), emotional response (Table 4.8), work (Table 4.9), and the media (Table 4.10). The section closes with the within-case analysis of perceived coping strategies used by POMC (Table 4.11).

The Role of Support Mechanisms

The parents of murdered children (POMC) reported that support was drawn from a variety of sources typical to those facing a crisis (see Table 4.7). Although friends were discussed as a source of support, the role of this group was significantly less than all others talked about. In one case, the respondent stated, “We had very few friends. So a lot of times it was just us.” This was due to the fact that they had lived in the area for less than six months. It was, therefore, understandable that the role of friends would be negligible to the coping process.

Although the support of friends were occasionally mentioned, it appeared as more of an afterthought or obligatory recognition that they were present at all. “I didn’t even pay to much attention to other people around

me," recalled Lynn. One instance was cited where the close friendship that developed became another issue with which to deal. Failing to receive the kind of support that was expected, one parental survivor admitted, "He and I grew

Table 4.7
Within-Case Analysis Assessing the Role of Support Mechanisms of POMC

Construct	Comment	Role
Friends	"I'd much rather be with my friends. They bring me more comfort."	+
	"I didn't even pay to much attention to other people that were around me."	-
	"We had very few friends."	-
	"He and I grew very close; a little too close. I guess my husband didn't give me the kind a support I thought I needed and I got a little attached to my friend."	-
Professional	"Relying on others that were there to help me: My family, friends, The victim advocates; let them do their job. As long as they were in control, I was in control."	+
	"Learning to get through my self-blame. I had to learn how to do that -- that wasn't instinctive. I'd still be holding onto that today. My group; that was my bereaved survivors of homicide."	+
	"The FBI knew exactly what to do."	+
	Child Quest International sent five people down."	+
	"What the therapy did was bring a lot of things out in our marriage. That wasn't so helpful. It really didn't help our marriage, but it did make me a stronger person."	+ / -
	"I am just irate at my local police department because we're wasting time."	-
Family	"Ultimately the family is the one. It's not going to be a bunch of well-meaning strangers that are going to get you through this. It's going to be your family."	+
	"Relying on others that were there to help me: My family, friends, the victim advocates; let them do their job. As long as they were in control, I was in control."	+
	"My family showed up. They came from where ever they were."	+
	"Mark is not really an emotional person; he's very quiet and he wasn't really giving me a whole lot of support. I think he was lost in his own grief."	-
	"It was like we were polarized."	-
	"I couldn't help myself; I couldn't even help my wife."	-
	"We just put on this front that everything was really cool between us (me and my ex-wife), because we just figured people are going to have to buy into that. Nobody's going to care about a kid from a dysfunctional family!"	-
	" I was trying to figure everybody out."	-
	"I could have strangled the bitch at that moment, because it seemed she was blaming Gina for her own kidnapping."	-
	"I was as though we were polarized. We had the same concern, the same feelings, the same, fears; but we were on different wavelengths."	-
	"I didn't even pay to much attention to other people that we around me."	-
Other	"He just came up on his own; that was fantastic. If he hadn't been there I would have been alone in the world. But he was there, which meant that at least somebody else had gone through it."	+
	"People were just getting out of bed and coming to search."	+
	"This city stopped doing anything, except to look for Susan. It was incredible, the outpour."	+

“People hug us in the streets all the time and wish us the best.”	+
“This stranger, who’s willing to do all this stuff for our kid – six weeks down the line we find out this guy’s a convicted pedophile.”	+ / -
“Gina’s mom got into this Eastern Spiritualist guy.”	-
“ A lot of times they would say the wrong thing; but they meant well.”	-

Note: User Assessment + = Positive Influence on Coping
- = Negative Influence on Coping

very; a little too close.”

The parents of murdered children identified that family, professional contacts and other sources of support were equally involved in their ability to cope. Professional intervention, i.e., law enforcement, the judicial system and psychological or psychiatric intervention, was critical to the respondents’ ability to cope with the murder. The capabilities of law enforcement, as perceived by the parental survivor, became a source of strength and frustration. Larry was emphatic in his pleas to law enforcement, when he noted he was “irate at my local police department because they were just wasting time.” Larry remembered his discussion with the local police chief, who was adamant in his denial that an abduction could have occurred, because the police chief, living in the area for the last 20 years, was unable to recall an abduction occurring anywhere in the region. This compromised confidence was quickly bolstered by the appearance of the Federal Bureau of Investigations. “The

FBI knew exactly what to do.” The positive perception enhanced the ability to cope.

The parental survivors of murdered children recognized that, although support groups were a source beneficial to the coping process, few took advantage of the source. Lynn was unquestionable in her recognition that her participation in a bereavement support was instrumental in learning to overcome her self-blame. “That wasn’t instinctive. I’d still be holding onto that today.” Natalie divulged that participating in therapy made her a stronger person; but almost cost her a marriage. “What the therapy did was bring a lot of things out in our marriage. That wasn’t so helpful.” Larry and Samuel did not seek professional assistance from licensed practitioners or support groups.

Each of the respondents cited the family as a significant source to coping. Yet, specific weaknesses in this channel of support were noted as well. Immediate family was referred to as having the strongest impact on managing the crisis. Samuel emphatically stated, “Ultimately, the family is the one. It’s not going to be a bunch of well-meaning strangers that are going to get you through this. It’s going to be your family.” “My family showed up. They came from where ever they were.”

In contrast, some respondents identified the inability of family to offer support. Natalie, whispered, “Mark is not really an emotional person; he’s very quiet and he wasn’t really giving me a lot of support. I think he was lost in his own grief.” Larry revealed a polarization between himself and his wife. “I could not relate to me and I could not relate to her. I couldn’t help myself; I couldn’t even help my wife. What about my son?” Remnants of a previous relationship appeared more strained. An ex-wife who suggested that perhaps her missing daughter contributed to the abduction through carelessness elicits the following outburst: “I could have strangled the bitch at that moment, because it seemed she was blaming Gina for her own kidnapping.” In an effort to portray an air of normalcy on the part of the divided family, Samuel admitted, ”We just put on this front that everything was cool between us, because we just figured people are going to have to buy into that. Nobody’s going to care about a kid from a dysfunctional family.”

Other sources of identified support included that received from the community and individuals. Discussions revealed the caution that should be used by persons trying to offer assistance. Samuel spoke with compassion and surprise when he identified an individual that became

immersed in the search process. “This stranger, who’s willing to do all this stuff for our kid – six weeks down the line we find out this guy’s a convicted pedophile.” The crimes this person committed were similar to those ultimately endured by Gina.

Samuel was undeterred by his past, believing that anyone who offered assistance was not evil. There was also comfort in a community outpouring of support. “People were just getting out of bed and coming to search.” Natalie recalled, “This city stopped doing anything, except to look for Susan.”

The emotional support included personal contact: Larry recalled, “People hug us in the streets all the time and wish us the best.” And sometimes that stranger has more to offer. Samuel could not forget a father of an abducted young boy who came to meet him. “He just came up on his own; that was fantastic. If he hadn’t been there, I would have been alone in the world. But he was there, which meant that at least somebody else had gone through it.” Respondents identified that, although some comfort could be derived in finding out one is not alone, it was imperative to the coping process for advocacy efforts offered by other parental survivors to focus on the needs of the parent suffering the loss. Being subjected to the details of other

families brought little solace and degraded the coping process. Lynn offered, with compassion and understanding, “A lot of times they would say the wrong thing; but they meant well.”

The Role of Emotional Responses

In assessing the role of the emotional response to the coping process (see Table 4.8), the researcher evaluated 11 emotional responses (Table 4.1) that lead a parent through the bereavement process toward coping. The parents of murdered children in this study reported symptoms of each component. Five emotional responses were significantly higher than all others. These emotions, listing the dominant emotion first, were hope, anger, denial, fear, and depression.

Only two respondents in this group blamed themselves for contributing to the loss. These feelings, later resolved, described the “guilt of feeling like I wasn’t a good mother; that I had loved her a little too much.” Natalie also believed that perhaps God was trying to teach her a lesson by saying, “You can’t get attached. They’re not yours.” The resolution was attained through the realization that she did not control the actions of other people, thereby eliminating her involvement in the offense. Lynn admitted to experiencing what she identified as “the

should haves." She should have done this or she should have done that. Lynn did acknowledge that involvement in a bereavement support group permitted her to "get through my self-blame." Larry and Samuel never mentioned or described any component of blame.

Table 4.8
Within-Case Analysis Assessing the Role of the Five Dominant Emotional Responses of POMC

Construct	Comment	Role
Hope	This I can say unequivocally: Never for a moment did I give up hope after that talk with my FBI friend."	+
	"I had to convince myself that, despite the bleak outlook, that she was alive."	+
	"What kept me going was she's coming back today."	+
	"I just had to keep telling myself that she was going to be okay."	+
	"I just kept the hope that she would be alive somewhere and that someone would let her go."	+
	"The hope was gone. That was just a moot point; it became academic."	-
	"As the days continued to go by, yes, we knew that the odds of her coming back safe were less and less."	-
	"If she's dead, it's best to know. Because it's kind of ridiculous to have hope when there is no hope."	-
	"I convinced myself that they had found Gina and she was dead."	-
Anger	"I was suspicious of everybody."	-
	"I could have strangled the bitch at that moment, because it seemed to me she was blaming Gina for her own kidnapping."	-
	"I start reading this letter to myself, and its' this letter that's full of hate, full of bitterness, full of anger."	-
	"I can't tell you all the emotions, but it's almost like they're heightened to monumental proportions. You feel it in every fiber."	-
	"Whoever that person was at the moment I had to give my plea, I hated them with every of my being."	-
	"I hate it here (at home). This place is my physical manic state of my hate."	-
	"How could another human being do that to someone and then proceed to help hunt for her? He slept on the bed she was under."	-
	"At this point in time, I wasn't really sure whether God was going to be apart of my life."	-
Denial	"I just knew she was going to come home. I could not be one of those parents that had a child snatched out from underneath them."	-
	"This is a safe place. It really is!"	-
	"I was just telling myself that she was going to be okay. I can't even say that I was praying to God that she would be okay. I was demanding and begging and pleading and bargaining and doing all that. I was going to give up everything ({laughing}. Chocolate. I'll give up chocolate!"	-
	"I didn't believe them when they came and told me eventually that they found her, because they didn't have a body. I wouldn't even believe it until they told me they had her body."	-
	"I couldn't get her back if I wasn't strong. I don't know where that came from, but it sounded good. So I lived by it."	-

Note: User Assessment + = Positive Influence on Coping
- = Negative Influence on Coping

Table 4.8 (Continued)
Within-Case Analysis Assessing the Role of the Five Dominant Emotional Responses of POMC

Fear	"No thoughts other than just – just utter terror."	-
	"I don't think I've been so afraid."	-
	You're not just afraid and you've got butterflies. You're just, every part of your being is afraid."	-
	"Bone chilling fear and total disbelief."	-
	"We just couldn't stand the thought of somebody having her."	-
	"When she was missing. That was probably the worst part. Was wondering – is she cold? Is she hot? Is she being fed? Is she being kept warm? Is she being abused?"	-
	"All I kept thinking was what am I supposed to do if they don't find her?"	-
Depression	"I could literally feel my whole body just drawing itself in and just shutting down. It was physically and emotionally and spiritually the most painful moment in my life."	-
	"Sometimes you feel like you're walking that thin line. That it's finally going to happen; that you're going to have a nervous breakdown."	-
	"Every – it's not even a minute thing – it's every second you can feel a part of you die."	-
	"I felt (like) the loneliest person in the world."	-
	"All of a sudden I thought, God, it's getting harder. How am I going to be able to do this type of thing?"	-
	"What you're doing is just staring into a void!"	-
	"Everything becomes strained. It becomes more and more difficult	-

Note: User Assessment + = Positive Influence on Coping
- = Negative Influence on Coping

Emotional responses changed dramatically once the final outcome had been determined. Natalie painfully remembered the fear: "When she was missing, that was probably the worst part; was wondering. Is she cold? Is she hot? Is she being fed? Is she being kept warm? Is she being tortured?" Confusion and fear were common themes at the onset of the ordeal, yet these responses, although persistent, diminished rapidly once the child had been recovered. As one mother noted, "You just feel lost. I walked around here aimlessly." As a parent does not, and should not, prepare for such an event, confusion is an expected response.

Parental survivors stated, “You don’t know exactly what’s going on.” “I just had to plow through and pretty much, to the best of my very limited ability, make sure whatever had to be done was being done.” Even following the recovery, confusion may persist. Lynn recalled her great desire to move away from the home where the incident occurred. “That’s a quandary we’re in right now. Do we want to move? Because that is a ‘going on.’ That’s a ‘leaving stuff behind’.” In contrast, Natalie suggested that parental survivors should not make any rash decisions. In spite of her initial desire to move, Natalie recalled, “I was ready to get out of here. For the first six months I wanted to leave this house and never look back. But not now; my memories are here.” She was thankful she did not move from her home.

Anger was an emotional response felt by all the respondents for a variety of reasons. Anger was often directed at law enforcement, as the first responder, and the criminal justice system, for it’s lack of compassion and understanding during the judicial process. Anger was also directed at the suspect, before and after their identification. Lynn described the emotional response as “heightened to monumental proportions.” She added, “You feel it in every fiber. Whoever that person was at the

moment I had to give my plea, I hated them with every ounce of my being.” Another respondent inquired, with great frustration, “How could another human being do that to someone; and then proceed to help (search) for her?”

Anger was also directed at God. “At that point in time, I wasn’t really sure whether God was going to be a part of my life,” recalled one parent. Another common theme was denial. Parents of abducted, long-term missing children face the prospect of denying the incident over long periods of time. Parents of murdered children coped similarly prior to their child’s recovery. Denial was a mechanism that permitted the parent to deal with the situation moment-to-moment and day-to-day. “I had to convince myself and everyone else that, despite the bleak outlook, that she was alive.” Samuel noted simply, “You convince yourself. The mind is an amazing thing.” Several parents admitted that they were not able to accept that an abduction had occurred. Another typical response was that, perhaps, the parental survivor was making too much out of nothing. Lynn stated, “I just really thought she had gone off to see one of her friends.”

Two respondents in this group were informed of confessions from the offenders prior to their child’s body being recovered. Denial was the mechanism of choice to

preclude the inevitable. Lynn recalled, “I told the Sheriff he was a liar. He lied to me. I didn’t have to believe him until he gave me her body. And I wouldn’t believe him. It seemed quite reasonable. (Laughing) That’s the only way I can put it. It seemed quite reasonable.” Samuel was forced to endure 58 days before the offender was apprehended and another 7 days before he disclosed the location of Gina’s remains. Even following the offender’s apprehension, Samuel denied the possibility of her not returning home safe. “I thought that he probably did it (abducted her), but that he was keeping her somewhere. I didn’t believe that degree of evil really existed.”

The two remaining respondents experienced different outcomes. One was informed of the recovery and the confession simultaneously, and ultimately endured a criminal trial. The other parental survivor, despite having his daughter’s remains found, continued to face the ambiguity of not knowing the identity of the offender or offenders, as well as the possibility of a trial at some point in the future.

Depression was a significant emotional response suffered by the respondents. The phrases “staring into the void” and “a deep dark tunnel that would just be an oblivion” were described. One parent described the feeling

that “I was really just falling apart.” It was also reported that depression led to an ability to function only from moment to moment. “Life was purely reactionary.”

Upon recovery of the child’s body, it was common for the emotional depression to intensify. Lynn exclaimed, “That was the most – I couldn’t even believe what they were telling me. It was like I imploded. I could literally feel my whole body just drawing itself in and just shutting down. It was physically and emotionally and spiritually the most painful moment in my life.” The depression caused a sense of utter loneliness and would lead to fears of the possibility of a nervous breakdown. “Every – it’s not even a minute thing. It’s every second you can just feel a part of you die.” Lynn put it into four uncomplicated words: “It’s just so much!”

Frustration was identified in both pre- and post-recovery occurrences. Yet, parental survivors of murdered children reported significantly reduced levels of frustration. Maternal respondents both reported incidents of frustration. In contrast, both paternal respondents cited frustration as components of bereavement or coping. Frustration was often directed at the prospect of things getting worse. Natalie reminisced, “I just kept saying to myself things cannot get any worse. Well, I’ve learned you

don’t ever say that. Things got a lot worse. A lot worse!” A sense of frustration surfaced in having to deal with the reality of the situation. One mother remembered thinking that these things only happen to other families. As reported by parents of abducted, long-term missing children, there was a sense of a loss of control and the compromise of a parental responsibility to protect one’s children. Natalie, in great frustration, stated, “It was like, when she walked out that front door, she just disappeared.” Another mother sadly commented, “All I have of her are my memories, you know?” The recovery of her daughter, and time itself, have done little reduce the anguish. Lynn proclaimed, “It’s been five years. I’m still grieving! I still feel pain!”

Guilt and shock, although present, was felt less by parents of murdered children. One father admitted to feeling very bothered by the fact that his daughter was abducted on the only day he had been unable to be home on time. “It always kind of bothered me that here, the one day that I didn’t come home on time, this happened.” Exclusive to this group was a single respondent who admitted, “Guilt is probably the worst of all feelings.” She felt guilty for numerous reasons. Noted specifically during the pre-recovery period was that she had loved her murdered

daughter more than her surviving daughter and that she should have done something different the day of the abduction that would have changed the outcome. Post-recovery opened other channels of guilt that became difficult to deal with. Natalie confessed, “I know life for me has changed. It has changed me in such a good way, I almost feel guilty. I hate to tell you this, but I almost feel guilty for feeling good.” She then sought some form of validation by adding, “I’m wondering, when you do talk to others, if they felt good about anything.”

Hope was the dominant theme discussed by parental survivors of murdered children. Again, there were distinctions between pre- and post-recovery. Respondents in this group endured the same emotional responses as parents of abducted, long-term missing children. The symptoms of bereavement and coping mechanisms were the similar because, until the victims’ remains were recovered, they faced a similar circumstance. Hope, during the time the child was missing, was remarkably similar. There was a sustained hoped, marked by periods of fear that, the longer the situation persisted that expectations of a desirable outcome were greatly diminished. Larry admitted, “As the days continued to go by, yes, we knew that the odds of her coming back safe were less and less.” In spite of

maintaining hope, respondent's still sought the truth. "If she is dead, it's best to know; because it's kind of ridiculous to have hope when there is no hope." Hope was generally perceived as a coping mechanism that got one through each day. The recovery of the child's remains effectively dissolved all hope. Samuel conceded, "The hope was gone. That was just a moot point. It becomes academic." One father recalled the stark suddenness that his hope vanished: "On one hand, because we lived seven months with hope, and now, boom, it's gone. It was part of our life; and now it's gone!"

The Role of Work/Employment

Parents of murdered children faced significant work-related issues (see Table 4.9), both pre- and post-recovery. None of the respondents reported working during the period immediately following the abduction. But, in fact, many parental survivors, or their spouses, were financially driven to return to work regardless of their physical or emotional readiness to do so.

Table 4.9
Within-Case Analysis Assessing the Role of Work/Employment of POMC

Construct	Comment	Role
Work	"The military actually gave me off as much time as I wanted. I took of about two months before I started to go back to work."	+
	"I stayed home the first summer after, I didn't go back to work until the fall of the following year."	-
	"It took me a year to be able to go back to work. I used to be	-

	a problem solver. I couldn’t go back to that job. You’ve got a problem? Hah, I don’t care. Hello! I’m just trying to wake up today!”

Note: User Assessment + = Positive Influence on Coping
- = Negative Influence on Coping

The employers’ response factors very much in a parent’s ability to cope and return to a sense of normalcy. One respondent, who was able to take as much time as needed, compassionately stated, “I feel for people who have to go back to work.” There was a sense among a majority of respondents that government and corporate entities should do more for parental survivors of abduction and murder. Another parent was thankful his employer gave as much time as he needed. He felt lucky for being employed by the United States military. “If I were in some civilian job, they would give you some vacation time, maybe some family leave. But after a certain time, they would say we need you here or you’re out. I’d be in a world of trouble.” The loss itself for one respondent, created intrinsic change so significant that she was unable to return to her employment. Lynn recalled, “It took me a year to be able to go back to work, because I used to a problem solver. I couldn’t go back to that job. You’ve got a problem? Hah! I don’t care. I don’t care about your problem. Hello? I’m just trying to wake up today!”

The Role of the Media

Consistent with that reported by parents of abducted, long-term missing children, the media played a significant role in how the parent of an abducted child copes with the ambiguous loss (see Table 4.10). Although adversarial incidents did occur, the media generally maintained a supportive role.

The media needs the story; the parent needs the media. Strong media attention typically forces law enforcement to increase its investigative commitment. The undisputable issue with the media is the fact that the media has the ability to immediately reach an enormous audience in a very short period of time. This issue was critical to the investigation and, ultimately, the coping process of the parental survivor.

Table 4.10
Within-Case Analysis Assessing the Role of the Media for POMC

Construct	Comment	Role
Adversarial	“They’re always there; dependent upon the attitude that you take or the way that you respond to them.”	-
	“I remember getting this far away from her and just screaming at her. She was just trying to get away from me. I remember just following her down the road; following her like a whole block; going, who the f**k are you.”	-
	“I didn’t want to talk to them.”	-
	“They were they only ones I was afraid of.”	-
	“I wondered what they were saying about me; what they thought about me.”	-
	“I didn’t want to be attacked.”	-
	“We stayed away from them.”	-
	“I was tired of the media but I had to have the media. I told the media, once, I wish I could tell all of you people to just go away and not come back. But I can’t; I need you.”	-

Supportive	“I realized how important the media was.”	+
	“Extremely, extremely supportive. It was pretty incredible.”	+
	“She said I can get you more publicity for your child with 10 seconds on the evening news than you’ll be able to get by nailing flyers to telephone poles for the next 100 years. That opened up a roomful of opportunities.”	+
	“These people are going to be your best allies.”	+
	“These people were our friends and they were helping us.”	+

Note: User Assessment + = Positive Influence on Coping
- = Negative Influence on Coping

Adversarial incidents included the reporting of unsubstantiated rumors and the general fear of what, and how, the media might report. Fearing a personal attack, Lynn recalled, “They were the only one’s I was afraid of. I wondered what they were saying about me.” The respondents generally reported a fear of the media at the onset of the incident, possibly due to the general populations lack of contact with this powerful organization, except in an observational role. “The only time I talked to them was when I had to do my plea.”

It was not uncommon for respondents to lash out in anger at reporters. These outbursts would lead, ultimately, to an attempt to repair any damage done in reestablishing the relationship between the respondent and the media. Larry noted, “I was tired of the media, but I had to have the media. I told them once, I wish I could tell all of you to just go away and not come back. But I can’t. I need you.”

Samuel recognized immediately the power of the media. In identifying several strategies that should be used if one's child is abducted, he termed one strategy "media involvement." "If you can get the media to cover the story and you can get the various reporters on the job to become humanly invested in the subject – the child themselves – then they are going to find ways to help them to continue to come back."

Perceived Coping Strategies of POMC

The research looked at five other areas that would impact the subsequent ability to cope. These areas, addressed individually, are as follows: (1) Substance Use/Abuse, (2) entrance into advocacy, (3) resolution, (4) normalcy, and (5) faith. The implications of these areas directly impacted the direction and ability to effectively cope with the murder of one's child.

Only one of the respondents in this group admitted to using controlled substances or alcohol as a means of coping. Although the sample is too small to apply to a general population, the statistical implication should not be disregarded. The sole respondent admitted that a doctor had prescribed a mild sedative soon after the abduction occurred. After having endured a week without any knowledge concerning what happened to her daughter, Lynn defended her

position, “I have had a number of people ask me why I let them give me a mild sedative. I needed it. I don’t think anything’s wrong with that. I can say that if they hadn’t given me that during that week – no, my nerves, my body, my emotions would not have been able to stay in control.” It was noted that the use of the prescribed sedative did not move into the area of abuse. Lynn recognized early on that dependency problems might lead to denial. She stated, “I may be totally wrong with that, but to me, that’s somebody who’s not wanting to see it; who’s trying to deny it; who’s trying to hide from it.” Samuel, in supporting Lynn’s belief, by affirmed, “You can lose yourself to depression or drugs or alcohol.”

As was the case with the parents of abducted, long-term missing children, three out of four parents of murdered children, in this study, reported active entrance into some level of advocacy. The advocacy effort traversed the scale form from a local to a national effort. Larry had created a foundation in his murdered daughter’s name. The foundation, still in its infancy, was under funded and lacked a supportive staff. Larry’s goal was to create a foundation where, if funds were available, he would “be able to fly anywhere, to help people (in a similar situation) focus on what they’re going through.” He added, with frustration,

that to accomplish the plan would require extensive personal time and funding.

Natalie, two years after the abduction and murder of her daughter, also entered the advocacy arena. She divulged that helping others made her feel better. Her motivation was her daughter: “Knowing that the only way I could stay strong and give her some justice, not her, but dedicate myself to her memory and not be a disservice to what’s happened.” Natalie has made a personal commitment to advocacy. “For the rest of my life I will fight for justice of kids.”

Even years later the drive to find meaning and to do something good can drive a parental survivor. Immediately following the abduction of Gina, Samuel initiated an advocacy effort. “We ended up getting certified as a nonprofit faster than any organization had in the history of the United States – we got the certification 23 days after she was kidnapped.” Seven years after the abduction and murder of his daughter, Samuel’s drive continues. His expectation is direct and focused: “My expectation now is that my foundation, because of some of the initiatives we’ve been involved in, will become the primary missing children’s organization in the United States within the next couple of years.” He added, “It became about her death

not being in vain. It became about creating meaning out of her death and establishing a legacy that would allow her memory to endure.”

In contrast to the others, Lynn discussed no aspects of a personal commitment to advocacy. She has not chosen a path that led her away from the visible advocacy role. She has, nonetheless, provided occasional insight into the world of child abduction and murder through public speaking at events relevant to the issues of child abduction and murder.

Parents of murdered children sought resolution. Yet, resolution appeared fragmented, dependent upon where in the continuum the parent stood. Pre-recovery resolution was consistent with that of parents of abducted, long-term missing children. Three of the four parents in this group have gone through the trauma of the abduction, the recovery, the criminal trial, and the conviction of the offender. Numerous issues had to be resolved at each of these stages. “Nobody was sleeping. Nobody was eating. I was going half out of my mind with absolute and total fear, because we weren’t getting the resolution we needed.”

Despite the emotional impact of facing these stages, each of the parents solicited resolution, regardless of the outcome. When asked if there was nay comfort at all in

having resolution, Samuel stated, “There is, ultimately. Absolutely!” He continued that he knew so many parents who didn’t have resolution. After speaking with one mother of abducted, long-term missing child, Samuel avowed, “Just watching her made me realize I’m way better off. I’m way better off than she is.”

One mother worried about the possibility, in spite of the offender being convicted, of being “dragged back into the courtroom again.” She feared her anger and hate might resurface. Another mother still remembered the issues of the trial that impeded resolution: The pressure to accept a plea bargain between the State and the offender. Resolution also came from inspirational tribute to the deceased. Natalie described her desire to build a memorial to her daughter. She wanted to buy the residence where her daughter’s body was found. “I want to build a memorial there one day for Susan, or at least a little garden of some kind. I want to tear that house down. I want it gone. I will never be able to close my eyes and not see that house. I realize that. But just to walk out my front door and not have to have it stare you in the face. It is just one of my dreams.”

Larry was the sole respondent who, to date, was unable to resolve the identity of the person(s) who murdered his

daughter. Larry identified that the absence of resolution has made it impossible to move forward. “I haven’t learned to move forward yet. That’s what made it difficult. I’m stuck still here; so actually it was more difficult knowing.”

Larry perceived this inability to move forward as impeding the return to normalcy. He viewed this issue from two perspectives: Worldly and spiritual. From a worldly perspective, he desired resolution. From a spiritual perspective, he did not. Larry described his position with the following quote: “The way I look at it, if God wants the person caught, they’ll be caught. If not, then it’s not God will. There’s not much I can do about it. I can be like the people on TV who get so consumed in it that the rest of my life is to find these people and put them behind bars. There, now I taught you. There! I still don’t have my daughter. It doesn’t explain it still. It doesn’t resolve the problem. The problem is that Robin’s gone. It doesn’t resolve the issue.”

The return to normalcy was unique to the individual’s needs, dependent upon what point in the crisis they were. Normalcy was identified as fighting back. Natalie responded, “You’ve got to deal with this. You can let what’s happened – if you let him take you down, then he’s

no longer hurting you, but he's hurting me, too." Normalcy was identified as reestablishing the relationship with your family. Natalie continued, "I've got to get some kind of normalcy here again. If anybody's going to be the same, I've got to do that." Normalcy was discovering comfort and solace in signs or coincidences. It was about learning to forgive and finding meaning in a terrible occurrence.

Normalcy was recognizing that one has changed, dramatically. Lynn described with detail, "We live with the thing that we have to pick up the pieces of our lives. We all have to learn that there are no pieces to pick up. You just had a great big, huge hole torn into your life. There are no pieces. There's a great big, gaping vortex that's sucking everything in."

The final issue addressed the role that faith plays in the coping process. Three of the four respondents identified that they believed in God. Their levels of religious commitment were varied. This group identified how faith was both a source of strength and confusion. It was also noted that other people's imposition of religious beliefs was likely to become a burden to the parental survivor. Faith permitted one respondent to be angry with God. Lynn submitted, "My faith was instinctive. Even being angry with God, but not blaming Him." It was not uncommon

to question why God would let something like this to happen. The confusion and anger could also result in a questioning of one's faith, as reported by Natalie, "At this point in time I wasn't really sure whether God was going to be a part of my life."

Lynn expressed confusion when she said, "It's funny to say that my faith was one of my coping skills, when it's also produced some of the biggest questions that I've had to deal with." While reflecting for a moment on the discussion at hand, she further commented, "The choice of one brought my faith to its lowest point, but the choices of the many took it to its highest."

In a stirring example of faith, Larry disclosed, "Something happened in my life, something dramatic, that changed everything." He described the moment that he was born-again. Larry detailed how God had prepared him for the moment when his daughter's remains were discovered. He referred to the event as "God's perfect timing." Larry fervently believed that God had prepared him for the discovery. "Two months to prepare me for when Robin's remains were found. So this all tied together."

In contrast to the other parents, Samuel nonchalantly stated, "I'm not going to sit here and tell you I put my faith in God. I'm not going to sit here and tell you I put

my faith in much of anybody.” He did admit that had probably thought more about God and spirituality in the seven years since his daughter’s abduction and murder than he had in the preceding 43 years. When asked if faith played any role at all, his response was direct and succinct. “No! Not at all.”

Coping Strategies

The parents of murdered children were able to identify what they perceived as ineffective and effective coping strategies. Interestingly, parents identified more effective strategies than ineffective strategies (see Table 4.11).

Table 4.11
Within-Case Analysis of Coping Strategies Used by POMC

Construct	Comment	Role
Ineffective	Alcohol Abuse	-
	Controlled Substance Abuse or Use	-
	Failure to Seek Psychological Therapy	-
	Denial of the Incident	-
	Asking One’s Self “What If”	-
	Grieving For Things That Will Never Be	-
Effective	Participation in Bereavement Support Groups	+
	Accept That Grief and Pain Are Unique to Individuals	+
	Interact With Others in a Similar Situation	+
	Accept Emotional Responses as Normal	+
	Advocacy Effort	+
	Utilize Faith or Religious Beliefs	+
	Find Meaning	+
	Utilize the Support of Family and Friends	+
	Learn to Forgive	+
	Maintain One’s Family and Marriage Responsibilities	+
	Remain Positive	+
	Do Not Make Any Critical Decisions Without Assistance	+

Note: User Assessment + = Positive Influence on Coping
- = Negative Influence on Coping

The respondents in this group clearly articulated the belief that the use of controlled substances or alcohol was an ineffective means of coping. There was an emphasis on maintaining a sense of control and focus. Samuel recalled, “One of the things we haven’t talked about at all that I did, was make sure that my mind was very, very clear the entire time. I totally begged off any type of alcohol. It just wasn’t even an option during that time, because I knew I was making potentially life-and-death decisions on a regular basis – if that were going to be the case, I had to be as clear of mind as I could be – all the time.” Although Lynn did divulge that she was prescribed a mild sedative at the onset of the abduction, she emphasized that the use was careful monitored and controlled to permit her to make decisions when necessary.

In spite of the emotional devastation of losing a child to abduction or murder, immersing one’s self in the “What If” syndrome was recounted as clearly detrimental to the coping process. Absorbing one’s self in the guilt of a situation of this magnitude was overwhelming, both psychologically and physiologically. Natalie remembered, “The guilt; that’s probably the worst. Why didn’t I stop and pick them up? And then go vote – take them with me to

go vote that night. What if? What if?" Another respondent blamed herself: "I should have done this. I should have done that. I should have made her come in. Already, the should have, should have, should have."

It was suggested that grieving for things that will never be was unproductive. Trying to imagine what your child would look like right now; imagining what career your child would have chosen; or thinking about the possibility of their personal lives, such a marriage or children. "I mean, obviously, our thoughts are of her. There's no way I can envision, to me she's still, even though she would be 15 now I can't, I don't know her as 15. So I can't even imagine what she would be like 10 or 20 years from now what she'd be like, if she'd be 35."

Strategies essential to effective coping required processes that were both instinctive and learned. Participation in support groups or one-on-one psychological intervention, when exercised, was perceived as significantly beneficial to the development of coping skills. Although only two of the respondents in this group took advantage of this opportunity, the results were reported to be desirable. Lynn proclaimed, "Learning how to get through the self-blame. I had to learn to do that; that wasn't instinctive. I'd still be holding onto that today."

The learning took place as the result of participation in a homicide survivor's bereavement support group.

One respondent cautioned of the possibility that other issues might surface as the result of professional intervention. "What it did was bring a lot of things out in our marriage {pause}. That wasn't so helpful. I'm glad it did. I mean, you keep things inside – at least I did. Things I didn't like about him; things he didn't like about me. *I*t just got to a point where we stopped going because I knew we were going to be divorced by the next meeting. So on one end it really didn't help our marriage, but it did make me a stronger person."

It was reported that interaction with other persons who had endured a similar loss was, dependent upon the application, either beneficial or detrimental. One respondent found great comfort and solace in discovering that he was not alone in facing this type of loss. Others had endured and survived.

Yet one respondent recalled, in graphic detail, the trauma of speaking with a parent who faced a similar situation. "We talked to them. All you care about is your child missing, and you're only into this for a month, it's incredible. And then a family walks up to you that have a missing child and they how sorry they are. Then they say,

so let me tell you about my child that's missing. It's so terrible. They've been missing now for a year. It's tough what we're going through. That is the last thing we want to hear. We don't want to hear about the possibility of a year from now – get out of here! You don't – but you want to tell them I never want to see you again."

Another strategy that was reported as effective was acceptance that one's emotional responses to the situation were normal. Natalie stated, "Accepting that each step I was at was where I needed to be. And when it was time, I would go on to the next one." Respondents reported that parental survivors needed to hurt, cry and be angry. Being strong was good, but very emotionally and physically draining. Therefore, it was suggested that one must not be strong all the time.

Other areas reported to create an environment conducive to coping included entrance into the advocacy arena, utilization of one's faith or religious foundation, and consciously electing to not make critical decisions without support or assistance. Focusing on one's family and marital responsibilities was also described as beneficial to coping and permitting a return to normalcy. Talking to the deceased, or talking to God, was reported as an effective strategy in coping with the loss. Additionally, placing

one’s self in a positive environment assisted in the coping process. Finally, learning to forgive and finding meaning in the loss were reported sources effective to coping. Samuel summarized his position clearly: “I’ve said again, many times over the years, that my goal is, that in 100 years, I want people to say that Gina is the child that changed the world. But the only one that can make that happen is me.”

Cross-Case Analysis

The cross-case analysis identified the similarities and differences in mechanisms of perceptive coping between the two groups studied. Prior to identifying the specific differences of perceived coping strategies, one should note the very interesting patterns that developed through the analysis. The data for the analysis was derived directly from the interviews and were diametrically associated with the data found in Tables 4.2 through 4.11.

The preliminary cross-case analysis will assess the role of support (see Table 4.12), emotional response (see Table 4.13), work (see Table 4.14), and the media (see Table 4.15). The analysis will explore and interpret the data, managing and synthesizing ideas, while identifying themes and patterns. This will be accomplished through the

close examination of each construct, utilizing a user's assessment of mostly beneficial (+) or mostly detrimental (-), to determine the influence on the parental survivor's ability to effectively cope. The section closes with the cross-case analysis of coping strategies (see Table 4.16) used by the groups, specifically responding to Research Question 2: How do coping strategies of parents of murdered children differ from the coping strategies of parents of abducted, long-term missing children, where the offender was non-familial?

The Role of Support Mechanisms

There were distinct differences between groups when observing the implication that support mechanisms have on influencing coping strategies (see Table 4.12).

Table 4.12
Cross-Case Analysis Assessing the Role of Support Mechanisms

Construct	PALTMC	POMC
Friends	+	-
Professional	-	+
Family	+/-	-
Other	+/-	+/-

Note: User Assessment
+ = Mostly Positive Influence on Coping
- = Mostly Negative Influence on Coping
+ / - = Both Positive and Negative Influence on Coping

The interaction with friends and professionals were in

stark contrast between parents of abducted, long-term missing children (PALTMC) and parents of murdered children (POMC). PALTMC identified friends as a strong source of support. One PALTMC noted, “I had some close friends that carried me along as well.” Another concurred, “The truth is, you really find out who your friends are.” The interviews with PALTMC revealed that very few negative comments about the support of friends existed. The single negative comment came from David, who said, “I got support from my friends. One in every 10 friends; the other nine couldn’t face me. It’s not that they weren’t my friends. If they came, they just couldn’t handle it.”

In contrast, POMC reported that friends, as a support mechanism, generally produced a negative influence on their ability to cope. Lynn recalled, “I didn’t even pay much attention to other people around me.” David, new to the neighborhood where the abduction occurred, stated, “We had very friends.” Samuel did not indicate a single episode where friends were a source of coping, either beneficial or detrimental. Natalie was the sole POMC respondent who found friends as beneficial to the coping process. “I’d much rather be with my friends. They bring me more comfort.” And yet, Natalie did divulge that contact with friends could lead to an unfortunate situation. Natalie regrettably

recalled, “He and I grew very close; a little too close. I guess my husband didn’t give me the kind of support I thought I needed and I got a little attached to my friend.”

When assessing the role of professional contact and intervention, the inverse held true. Although PALTMC perceived law enforcement as generally supportive, the majority of responses were negative, due to the belief that law enforcement was inadequately trained to handle abduction investigations. Joan testified, “I respect the effort they were putting out, and the organization,” but added her concern that if she were a police officer, she would not want to work an older case – but would prefer a more current case that might have a higher chance of being solved. David, dismally disenfranchised with the efforts of both government and law enforcement, had few kind words to say about law enforcement. “The police tried to manipulate me.” “It was like watching the Keystone Cops.” “Nobody cares because they haven’t called me in three years.” PALTMC reported consistently poor experiences with therapy and support groups.

Barbara lamented her involvement in court-ordered therapy: “The judge made us go. I didn’t help, no!” There was also an occasional commentary concerning the detrimental effects of support groups that often led to

increased depression. And yet, nationally recognized support organization received excellent evaluations. The impact of the criminal justice process was not discussed as an issue, as the ambiguous loss of one's child eliminated involvement in the judicial criminal process.

In stark dissimilarity, POMC overwhelmingly found professional contact and intervention as beneficial to coping. Each of the professional groups, by and large, provided an atmosphere conducive to coping. Law enforcement, support groups, and the criminal justice system all provided channels leading to resolution. Detrimental effects were, more often than not, generated through moments of frustration on the part of the parental survivor and typically short-term in duration.

PALTMC reported interaction with family members as both beneficial and detrimental. Whereas some respondents feared losing even more, they would anchor themselves to what remained of the family unit. Joan reasoned, "We still had a family. We still have three other children. We still had our love for each other. I didn't want to lose anything more." And yet, other respondents reported negative effects of the interaction. David recalled, "I looked around me and I feel like I was all alone on this one." One respondent identified an extreme example of dealing with family that

became an obstacle to coping. John was still visibly angered when he discussed his ex-wife having a court declare his missing daughter legally deceased. The absence of resolution, and the court decision, created great animosity and generated pronounced obstacles to coping.

Although POMC were able to identify the family as an occasional source of support, the common theme within this group was that the coping process was greatly diminished due to intrinsic barriers. A common question that was asked was how can I help someone else to cope when I cannot even cope myself, showed that the respondents were split on this issue. Two parental survivors found great support from their families. “Ultimately the family is the one. It’s not going to be a bunch of well-meaning strangers that are going to get you through this. It’s going to be your family,” said one parent. Another recalled, “Relying on others that were there to help me: My family, friends, the victim advocates; let them do their job. As long as they were in control, I was in control.”

Yet, the vast majority of responses by POMC, with reference to family, were negative. Natalie remembered that her husband “wasn’t really giving me a whole lot of support.” Larry recollected the limited interaction with his wife: “It was like we were polarized.” Larry remembered

how, in spite of a common goal of getting his daughter home safe, he and his wife were unable to adequately support each during the seven months his daughter was missing. Samuel endured a situation similar to John's in dealing with an ex-wife. In this specific instance, Samuel recalled when his ex-wife suggested, while on a national TV talk show soliciting help in recovering their daughter, that his daughter unintentionally contributed to her own abduction. Still perceptibly angered by the scene, John stated, "I could have strangled the bitch at that moment, because it seemed she was blaming Gina for her own kidnapping."

There were no identifiable differences that impacted the coping process when dealing with other people. Both groups reported detrimental effects when dealing with psychics. "Those psychics made me crazy," reported Joan. There was not a single reported incidence of valuable information obtained from this oft-used source. The support of the general public and strangers was well received, despite the occasional sense of intrusion when the parental survivor was approached unannounced. "A lot of times they would say the wrong thing; but they meant well." "People who said the least gave me the most."

The Role of Emotional Responses

There were distinct differences and similarities when assessing the role of the five dominant emotional responses (see Table 4.13). The National Organization of Parents of Murdered Children, Inc. (1998) identified the following five “thoughts on coping:” (1) Do not be surprised at the strong emotions that surface such as shock, disbelief, anger, frustration, denial, and the loss of faith in God and people. (2) Expect to feel numb, confused and depressed. It is normal to withdraw and keep your feelings internalized. (3) It is not uncommon to experience primal fear, suddenly believing the world is inherently unsafe and violent. (4) Understand that grief takes different paths for different survivors. Be easy on yourself and your expectations of yourself and others. (5) Seek out support.

Becoming involved with other survivors, who have endured a similar situation, will enhance the recovery process and channel emotions constructively. Parental survivors from each group endured an onslaught of negative

emotional responses. Respondents experienced most of the emotional responses identified as customary to the bereavement process.

Table 4.13
Cross-Case Analysis Assessing the Role of the Five Dominant Emotional Responses for Each Group

Construct	PALTMC	POMC
Ranked 1 (More Dominant)	- Frustration	+/- Hope
Ranked 2	- Depression	- Anger
Ranked 3	+/- Hope	- Denial
Ranked 4	- Anger	- Fear
Ranked 5 (Less Dominant)	- Denial	- Depression

Note: User Assessment
+ = Mostly Positive Influence on Coping
- = Mostly Negative Influence on Coping
+ / - = Both Positive and Negative Influence on Coping

Two main themes appeared in the analysis. First, the order of dominance of the emotional response differed across the groups. The PALTMC reported, from most dominant to least dominant, emotional response, frustration, depression, hope, anger and denial. In contrast, the POMC reported, from most dominant to least dominant, emotional response, hope, anger, denial, fear and depression. Secondly, the only emotional response experienced that was positive was that of hope. And yet, despite its positive attribute, hope was frequently identified as detrimental to the coping process. Samuel described how the hope influenced the coping process for him: “You convince yourself – the mind’s an amazing thing. You convince yourself that you’re right. The mind is an amazing thing.” Notwithstanding one’s desire to maintain hope, the mind is, nonetheless, logical and rational. Larry noted, “Obviously, if she is dead – it’s best to know; because it’s kind of

ridiculous to have hope when there is no hope.” This was a conflicting predicament faced by both groups, at least while searching for resolution.

The Role of Work/Employment

Respondents in both groups expressed work-related issues and employment as having a profound impact on the ability to cope (see Table 4.14). The general consensus among respondents was that it was difficult, if not impossible, to return to work following the murder or abduction of one’s child.

Table 4.14
Cross-Case Analysis Assessing the Role of Work/Employment

Construct	PALTMC	POMC
Work	-	-

Note: User Assessment - = Mostly Negative Influence on Coping

The issue of work or employment generated great stress for the respondents. The comments included the following: “I was even feeling guilty about work. I was trying to do a few hours work.” “In the back of my mind, you’re saying, cripes, if I lose my job, what am I going to do?” Being self-employed brings additional negative ramifications. David recalled, “I owned my own business, so I didn’t work. I actually did maybe one-tenth of my business in the first two years (following the abduction).” In spite of the

financial pressure to return to work, Barbara recalled her greatest fear: “I wasn’t working for like a month. I just couldn’t leave here. Being away from here, thinking I’m going to be at work and she’s going to come home.”

Other respondents took up to one year off from work or changed careers. These career changes included entirely new fields of employment or entrance into advocacy. Lynn angrily replied, “It took me a year to be able to go back to work. I used to be a problem solver. I couldn’t go back to that job. You’ve got a problem? Hah, I don’t care. Hello! I’m just trying to wake up today!”

Larry provided the single positive image of the workplace’s role in coping. The role was situational-based, in that Larry was employed in the United States military. “The military actually gave me off as much time as I wanted.” Larry sympathized with parental survivors working in the private sector, whose jobs are inherently at higher risk of loss. One’s attitude toward employment may be negatively affected. John recalled, “I used to really enjoy what I did. I don’t much anymore. I do it so I can pay the bills.” In spite of the difficulty in returning to work, the respondents agreed that, ultimately returning to work when one was ready, was beneficial to the coping process and a return to normalcy.

The Role of the Media

The media played a significant role in how the parental survivor coped with the murder or ambiguous loss of their child (see Table 4.15). There was no disagreement from any of the respondents regarding the importance of “media investment,” a term coined by Samuel in his effort to provide assistance to parents facing a similar situation. “If you can get the media to cover the story and you can get the various reporters on the job to become humanly invested in the subject – the children themselves – then they are going to find ways to help them to continue to come back.” In spite of the aforementioned commonality, there was a distinct difference in the perception of the media. The PALTMC group identified considerably more positive contacts with the media than did the POMC group.

Table 4.15
Cross-Case Analysis Assessing the Role of the Media

Construct	PALTMC	POMC
Adversarial	+	
Supportive		-

Note: User Assessment + = Mostly Positive Influence on Coping
- = Mostly Negative Influence on Coping

The negative contacts included an inherent distrust of

the media or a general misunderstanding of the media process. As stated previously, the role of the media was occasionally portrayed as parasitic: The media needs the story; the parent needs the media. Lynn was fearful of what the media thought of her and how she would be depicted, as a grieving parent or a suspect cloaked in grief. Lynn reported, “They were the only ones I was afraid of.”

Although none of the respondents actively solicited the media at the onset of the investigations, there was little doubt that the role was critically necessary. Respondents typically refused the initial requests for interviews, but succumbed to the need to develop a relationship with this resource. The association with the media was typically described as a double-edged sword. One respondent recalled, “They’re always there; dependent upon the attitude that you take, or the way that you respond to them.” Respondents generally learned the expectations of the media and tried, diligently, to comply with those expectations. “What I learned very quickly is, if you called the press and didn’t have anything to say, they get real pissed.”

When the affiliation between the parent and media was favorable, the conduit to coping was wide. Yet, in the midst of an undesirable relationship, the conduit to coping was considerably restrictive. One respondent from the POMC

group noted, “These people are going to be your best allies.” Another respondent form the PALTMC group concurred, stating, “I looked at them as allies – you guys can help me.”

Perceived Coping Strategies of POMC

The research looked at five other areas that would impact the subsequent ability to cope. These areas, addressed individually, are as follows: (1) Substance Use/Abuse, (2) entrance into advocacy, (3) resolution, (4) normalcy, and (5) faith. The implications of these areas directly impacted the direction and ability to effectively cope with the murder or ambiguous loss of one’s child. Through exploration and interpretation of the data, clear themes and patterns emerged.

All but one respondent identified that alcohol and controlled substance abuse was detrimental to the coping process. Barbara continued to identify the benefits of marijuana use, despite the legal ramifications. Her experiences with marijuana were the exception, not the rule. The consensus among respondents was that alcohol and substance abuse could lead to dependency and an inability to maintain a sense of control and involvement.

Seventy-five percent of respondents from each group entered, at some level, the advocacy effort. The collective

reason for becoming an advocate was to find meaning. As noted earlier, some advocacy efforts were conducted at the local level and others were administered at the national level. Involvement in advocacy was reported to greatly enhance the coping process. Yet, there were also testimonials of potential detrimental effects to maintaining a close, one-on-one advocate relationship. Immersion in the area of one-on-one advisement was reported to lead to physiological and psychological deterioration.

Both POMC and PALTMC aspired to obtain resolution, regardless of the outcome. POMC described a sense of feeling significantly better off than PALTMC, in that resolution permitted a faster return to normalcy. There was no hard evidence that identified a specific time frame in the return to normalcy. There was no significant difference in reporting among the groups. Whereas PALTMC were left in an indeterminate state while seeking answers to the ambiguous loss, the recovery of a child’s remains merely closed one door to resolution, but opened others.

POMC reported that once their child’s remains were recovered, different areas of resolution surfaced. Some examples provided by respondents included the identification of an offender, the arrest of the offender, the judicial process, and the expectation of justice.

Respondents were only able to articulate normal in terms of their lives at this moment in time. Normal before the abduction or murder was reportedly very unlike normal at the time of the interview.

Faith appeared to play a conflicting role in the search for answers and a return to normalcy. Seventy-five percent of the respondents identified that they believed in a spiritual being. In all but one case where the respondent identified a belief in God, faith was both a source of comfort and distress. Two respondents, one from each group, expressed an absence of faith and rejected any connection to the incident or the outcome. In spite of conflict generated by the loss of one's child, each of the respondents who identified a connection to faith prior to the loss, ultimately sustained their belief in a spiritual being.

Coping Strategies

The PALTMC and POMC were able to identify what they perceived as ineffective and effective coping strategies (see Table 4.16). Respondents from both groups identified more effective strategies than ineffective strategies. A single, dominant theme emerged when analyzing the similarities and differences among the groups: The duration of expected coping dependent upon the likelihood of

resolution.

Table 4.16
Cross-Case Analysis of Coping Strategies: Similarities and Differences

Similarities	Maintain What You Still Have: Family, Marriage Become Involved in an Advocacy Effort Accept Emotional Responses as Normal Interact with Others in a Similar Situation Find Meaning in the Loss Avoid Alcohol and Controlled Substance Abuse	
Differences		
	PALTMC	POMC
	Discover a Sense of Control/Involvement	Participate in Bereavement Support Groups
	Stay Emotionally Level	Accept That Pain is Unique to Individuals
	Pace Yourself	Learn to Forgive
	Maintain Hope	

PALTMC identified strategies associated with effective coping with the need to stay involved in the investigation and to remain emotionally balanced for the irrefutable emotional ebb and flow. They also noted the importance of pacing one's self for the long haul and to develop the psychological and physiological capacity to maintain hope, despite diminishing odds.

POMC who, in this study, had acquired resolution, associated effective coping mechanisms with dealing directly with the loss and involvement in bereavement support groups. They also mentioned that accepting that grief and pain are unique to individuals and learning to forgive provided an avenue toward effective coping.

Respondents reported that parental survivors should attempt to maintain what still remains of family, marriage,

employment and social connections. Respondents also encouraged that a return to normalcy is incumbent upon maintaining important relationships. Association in advocacy efforts were reported to provide a means to the discovery of meaning in the loss, suggesting that advocacy provided a more purposeful function to everyday life and responsibilities.

Respondents reported that it was appropriate, and helpful, to cry, to scream, to be angry, or release whatever emotional response was attempting to emerge. Interaction with other parental survivors was typically identified as beneficial to effective coping, discovering they were not alone in dealing with the loss. It was reported to be beneficial to speak with someone who had suffered a similar loss and survived.

Alcohol and substance abuse was identified as an ineffective approach to coping that interfered with the ability to cope. Although few respondents could speak from first-hand experience, most were able to discuss contact with other parental survivors who suffered dependency due to alcohol or controlled substance abuse. The accounts graphically illustrated how alcohol and substance abuse became an obstacle to effective coping and a return to normalcy.

DISCUSSION

Discussion of the Results

The discussion of the results will address the two research questions drawn from the purpose of the study. The first research question asked what are the perceptive differences of coping among parents of murdered children (POMC) in contrast to parents of abducted, long-term missing children (PALTMC), where the offender was non-familial? The perceptive differences were identified through the actual words of each respondent. In actuality, their perceptions of coping were not only perceived, but were their bona fide methods of coping.

The second research question asked how do coping strategies of parents of murdered children differ from the

coping strategies of parents of abducted, long-term missing children, where the offender was non-familial? The analysis took into account, not only the differences, but the similarities of coping strategies used by parental survivors. Assessing the similarities permitted a more thorough analysis of the data.

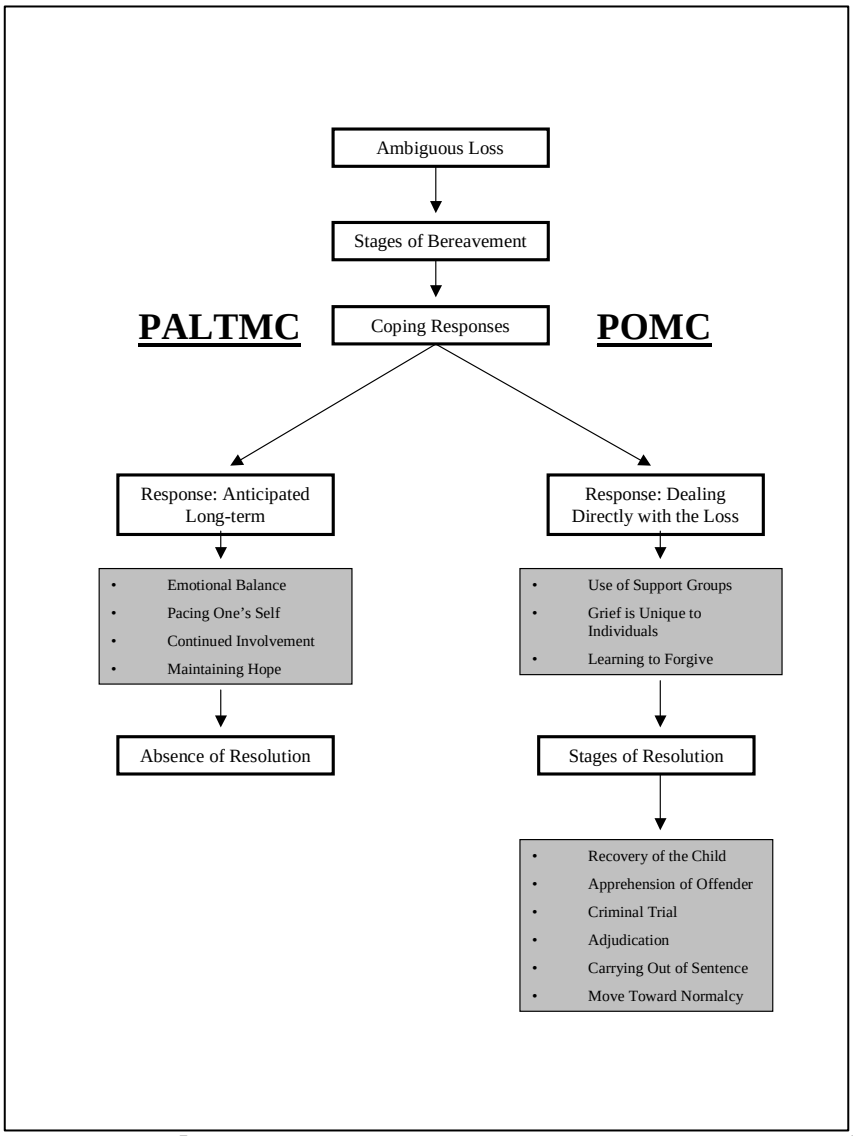
A single, dominant theme emerged when analyzing the similarities and differences among the groups: The duration of expected coping was dependent upon the likelihood of resolution (see Figure 5.1). PALTMC identified coping mechanisms devised to sustain the parental survivor through long-term circumstances. Respondents in this group identified the need to stay involved in the investigation, to remain emotionally stable for the undeniable emotional ebb and flow, to pace one’s self for the long haul and to develop the psychological and physiological capacity to maintain hope, despite diminishing odds. These strategies were associated with effective coping.

In contrast, POMC, who, in this study, had acquired resolution, responded with coping mechanisms to deal directly with the loss. Respondents in this group associated involvement in bereavement support groups, acceptance that grief and pain are unique to individuals, and learning to forgive, with effective coping.

Similarities among the respondents also emerged. In spite of the acquired resolution, respondents reported that parental survivors should attempt to maintain what still remains: Family, marriage, employment and socialization. These matters are at great risk during periods of ambiguity and loss. Respondents resoundingly encouraged that a return to normalcy is dependent upon maintaining these important relationships. Involvement in advocacy was reported to provide a means to the discovery of meaning in the loss. Respondents sought to eliminate randomness, and suggested that advocacy provided a more purposeful function to everyday life and responsibilities.

Figure 5.1

The Impact of Resolution on Coping Mechanisms



Another commonality was the acceptance of emotional responses as normal. Respondents reported that it was appropriate, and beneficial, to cry, to scream, to be angry, or release whatever emotional response was attempting to emerge. Each group also conveyed that interaction with other parental survivors was typically

beneficial to effective coping. More than one respondent articulated the great relief in discovering they were not the only one's enduring this loss – that they were not alone. Respondents also noted how important it was to speak with someone who truly understood the situation, and that strength could be derived from seeing that others had suffered a similar loss and survived.

Consensus among respondents was that alcohol and substance abuse could lead to dependency and an inability to maintain a sense of control and involvement. Even if unable to speak of the detrimental effects from first-hand experience, most respondents were able to knowledgeably discuss contact with other parental survivors who suffered emotional and physical dependency due to alcohol or controlled substance abuse. The accounts clearly depicted individuals who faced tremendous obstacles to effective coping and a return to normalcy.

Respondents, in this study, characteristically sought the answer to two questions: Am I normal? Have I coped? The answer to these questions requires a redefinition of common terms. General definitions, when applied to parents of murdered or abducted, long-term missing children, provide a distorted insight into the emotional, physiological and psychological impact actually endured as a result of the

event. Normal must be redefined. Respondents do live a normal life, yet it is one that is vastly different from parents who have not endured the loss of a child to abduction or murder. The traditional definition of normal does not apply. Joan illustrated the point with frustration, stating, “It isn’t normal. That is all I can say. I don’t know what normal is, but what I live is not normal.”

In assessing whether parental survivors have coped, the answer is obtained directly from the source: John noted, with directness, “I’m coping because I’m here. Am I where I ought to be? I don’t know.” The mere fact that a parental survivor is able to function, at whatever level, in everyday life and participate in a study such as this, is descriptive of the ability to cope. When one respondent was asked what was the most effective coping strategy that they used, the reply was, “Your assumption is that there was one – and I don’t know that there is.” Effective or ineffective, coping takes place. Even ineffective coping is enough to get a parental survivor through a single day, or a single moment.

Finally, the analysis identified that both groups suffered comparable bereavement symptoms, and utilized similar coping strategies, during times of ambiguous loss.

The two groups mirrored each other emotionally until the time that parents of murdered children attained the first stage of resolution: clarification of the ambiguous loss through outcome determination. At this point, parents of murdered children were then able to embark on the different emotional and physiological track toward the identifiable stages of resolution.

Resolution, absent for parents of abducted, long-term missing children, occurs in stages for parents of murdered children. One typically associates resolution with a final determination. Yet parents of murdered children go through identifiable stages of resolution. Being unprepared for these stages can have serious emotional and psychological implications.

The initial desire for resolution is to find out what happened to one’s child. In this study, parents of murdered children endured ambiguity for as little as one week, and as long as seven months. There was a presumption by parental survivors that resolution occurred once the physical recovery of the child victim was made. Yet, parents of murdered children identified several stages that followed the recovery. These stages typically included identification of the offender, the criminal trial and adjudication, the carrying out of the judicial sentence,

and the struggle to move forward to normalcy.

Limitations of the Study

The present study is not without numerous limitations. Sample size was a key limitation. This research was limited to eight parental survivors, a small sample, yet still within qualitative standards. This researcher identified, at the inception of the study, the difficulty in acquiring a sample meeting the operational requirements of the research. It was not only necessary to find a referral base for recruitment, but it was also essential to identify parental survivors who were willing to share the intimate experience of their losses.

The next limitation pertains to this researcher's decision to conduct open-ended interviews. All analysis was conducted via self-reporting. Self-reporting is clearly problematic, and the potential for bias in responses should not be overlooked. It is plausible that respondents understated, over emphasized, or failed to recognize coping mechanisms during times of bereavement and recovery. It is reasonable to believe that response bias may appear in measuring life events. Cohen (1988) supports this belief, suggesting that the respondent's emotional positioning at the time of the interview may influence life event measurements. It was intended that thorough analysis of the

interviews controlled for this limitation as much as possible. In an effort to further minimize the potential discrepancies that may result from self-reporting, this researcher closely monitored non-verbal communications: proxemics (use of interpersonal space); kinesics (use of postures); paralinguistics (volume, pitch and tone of voice); and chronemics (pace of speech and duration of silence).

Another limitation is found in the subjects themselves. The respondents who agreed to participate in the research wanted to discuss their experiences. In spite of their desire to cooperate, the responses were limited to the respondents' ability to articulate their feelings and actively create a narrative of events. The research was based upon data that inquired about parental perceptions. "Perceptions, particularly self-perception, are difficult to replicate and limit the generalizability of results" (Graham, 1999). Although most respondents were detailed and comfortable in discussing their experience, one respondent, in particular, was less expressive. This participant spoke in very soft tones; so much so that it was necessary to listen intently to the conversation. The perceptions, motivations, religious convictions, cultural and historical experiences are each sources of bias that might influence

the findings.

Also limiting was that each participant was initially contacted by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children/Florida Branch to identify participative interest. Responses may have been biased due to familiarity, and a willingness to cooperate, with the organization in its solicitation.

Another limitation of this study was selection bias. The sample was non-random, and is not necessarily representative of the national representation of parents of murdered or abducted, long-term missing children. The study did not secure a sample that was ethnically representative, in that all respondents were Caucasian. The small pool of available respondents negated any attempt to include a diverse group based on ethnicity, marital, age, and socio-economic status.

The final limitation was researcher subjectivity. The presence of the researcher has an inevitable impact from a phenomenological perspective. Bias can occur in the two important stages of the research: (1) data collection and (2) data analysis. Efforts were made to minimize researcher subjectivity through the recognition and reexamination of assumptions and the refinement of conclusive findings, through repeated examination and analysis of the data.

The degree to which these findings can be generalized to the population is uncertain. These limitations hinder the generalizability of this research's findings. Yet, these limitations can appreciably influence the identification and execution of future research.

Validity

Maxwell writes that validity refers to the "correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account" (1996, p. 87). Maxwell further establishes three distinct threats to validity: description, interpretation and theory. Using these three typologies, this researcher describes the process used in this study to reinforce validity.

Qualitative research is descriptive dependent. Inaccuracy and incompleteness of data are chief threats to valid description. Maxwell (1996) writes, "The audio or video recording of observations and interviews, and verbatim transcription of these recordings, largely solves this problem." Maxwell adds that if video recording is not conducted, observational notes, chronologically detailing observations, are necessary. The researcher, in this study, personally conducted one-on-one audio taped interviews of each of the respondents. The researcher also transcribed each of the interviews. Each interview was reviewed on four

separate occasions and the transcriptions were reviewed several times in preparation for coding. The researcher personally coded each interview for the within-case and cross-case analyses. Detailed, hand-written field notes were prepared during the interview and organized for inclusion in the analytical coding and findings. Additional field notes were audio taped immediately following each interview. The field notes were then transcribed and organized for inclusion in the analytical coding and findings.

Maxwell (1996) identifies “the main threat to valid interpretation is imposing one’s own framework or meaning, rather than understanding the perspective of the people studied.” Threats to valid interpretation include two primary issues: (1) Failing to take note of respondents’ meanings and (2) asking closed, leading, or short-answer interview questions that significantly impair the respondents’ ability to divulge their perspective. This research employed interview techniques designed to address both issues. The researcher utilized open-ended questions (see Appendix E) to eliminate the deficiency of leading, closed-ended, or short-answer questions. Using data-rich field notes, in conjunction with audio taped and transcribed interviews, permitted the researcher to seek

meaning in the words of the respondents.

This researcher also used member checks, described as “systematically soliciting feedback about one’s data and conclusions from the people you are studying,” and reported as “the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpretation of the meaning of what they say and the perspective they have on what is going on” (Maxwell, 1996; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Maxwell (1996) cautioned, “It is important not to assume that the participants’ pronouncements are necessarily valid; their responses should be taken simply as evidence regarding the validity of your account.” The findings of this research included the use of member checks, conducted at the conclusion of the within-case and cross-case analysis. The researcher personally contacted each respondent by telephone and systematically sought clarity to major themes developed from the interview. To further minimize threats to validity, the researcher solicited feedback from sources familiar with the area of study, as well as individuals who were unfamiliar with the area of study. It is important to note that member checks were not conducted until all interviews were obtained, transcribed, coded, and analyzed. Maxwell (1996) notes, “The delicate issue here, of course, is that of introducing bias. Feeding things back in the

course of a study may change informants' behaviors and perspectives." The researcher was cautious to not ask leading or closed-ended questions during the member checks. A brief outline was created, specifically identifying areas that required clarification. The responses were then documented for later review and inclusion.

Maxwell's third, and final, typology is identified as theoretical validity, described as failing to collect or pay attention to discrepant data or failing to consider alternative explanations to the phenomena. The researcher utilized all data gathered (audio recordings, transcriptions, and data-rich field notes) to come to the findings. Discrepant data is noted, and can be found, in the findings of this study.

Miles and Huberman (1994) cite paradigms to eliminating or minimizing researcher bias. The area of researcher bias notes two key components: (1) researcher effects on the site and (2) effects of the site on the researcher. This study avoided biases stemming from researcher effects on the site by clearly establishing, with each respondent, the intentions of the study. This was accomplished through the study's methodology. A clear understanding on the area of research was described in the first informal contact made by the Executive Director of the National Center for

Missing and Exploited Children/Florida Branch, followed with a detailed initial contact letter (see Appendix B), further supported by informed consent (see Appendix C and Appendix D), and fully discussed and reinforced prior to the actual interview.

This study avoided bias stemming from the effects of the site on the researcher in that respondents were drawn from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and were included in the study despite, or because of, the uniqueness of their experiences. The researcher used triangulation to come to the findings. The several data sources include the use of audio-recorded interviews, transcriptions, data-rich field notes and member checks. Also, minimizing the effects of the site on the researcher was the use of firmly established open-ended interview questions. Respondents were asked each of the 14 questions found in Appendix E, allowing for flexibility in the questions while maintaining a focus.

Miles and Huberman (1994) identified qualitative components of reliability as confirmability and dependability. Validity was then addressed as credibility and transferability. The researcher used these components in an attempt to strengthen reliability and validity. The issues of credibility and transferability were discussed at

the beginning of this section.

In response to reliability, confirmability addresses the issue of neutrality, and the recognition that researcher biases exist. The researcher, in this study, provided explicit methodological and procedural detail sufficient to establish a sequential audit trail. All data was retained for reanalysis by other researchers. Dependability was derived through the use of clearly designed interview questions focused directly toward answering the research questions. The findings did exhibit patterns and themes within and across groups.

Suggestions for Future Research

Three areas of future research were identified as a result of this study. An undeniable link exists between the loss of a child to abduction or murder and divorce, lending itself well to further study. Respondents in this study spoke of a sense of polarization between one's self and a spouse (or significant other). Important to the likelihood of maintaining a marital relationship through such a loss was reported as dependent upon the understanding that grief and pain are unique to individuals. The study of the coping mechanisms of both parental survivors in dealing with ambiguous loss or murder could provide profound insight into the dynamics of the loss and its impact on the marital

relationship.

Another area to be studied, pointed out directly by one respondent in this study, is the coping strategies of surviving siblings. The familial relationships and interactions that subsist among, and between, all family members will affect how surviving siblings cope. Just as a mother or father interacts differently with each child in the home, the interactions among, and between, siblings are just as diverse and dynamic. Future research should investigate how these interactions impact coping strategies, in returning a functional youth to the family, the schools, and the community.

A final recommendation for future research is to evaluate the implications of ethnicity, marital, age, and socio-economic status on the coping process. The loss of a child to abduction or murder is blind to these typologies. Non-familial offenders are opportunistic, and rarely, if ever, target a child victim based upon these typologies. Therefore, additional research in using these extraneous variables would more narrowly focus the impact on coping mechanisms used by parental survivors.

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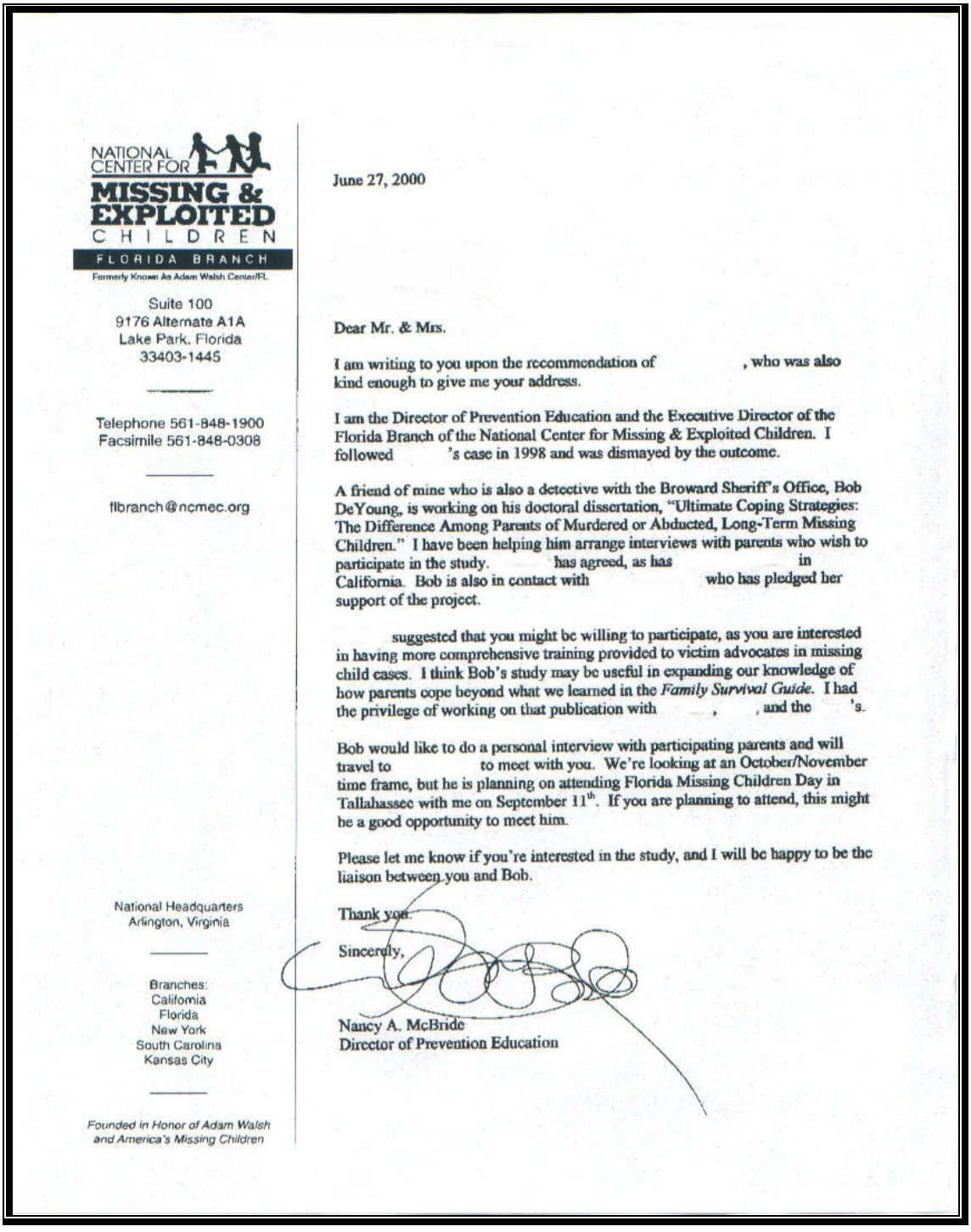
APPENDIX A



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Founded in Honor of Adam Walsh and America's Missing Children

June 27, 2000

Dear Mr. & Mrs.

I am writing to you upon the recommendation of , who was also kind enough to give me your address.

I am the Director of Prevention Education and the Executive Director of the Florida Branch of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. I followed 's case in 1998 and was dismayed by the outcome.

A friend of mine who is also a detective with the Broward Sheriff's Office, Bob DeYoung, is working on his doctoral dissertation, "Ultimate Coping Strategies: The Difference Among Parents of Murdered or Abducted, Long-Term Missing Children." I have been helping him arrange interviews with parents who wish to participate in the study. has agreed, as has in California. Bob is also in contact with who has pledged her support of the project.

suggested that you might be willing to participate, as you are interested in having more comprehensive training provided to victim advocates in missing child cases. I think Bob's study may be useful in expanding our knowledge of how parents cope beyond what we learned in the *Family Survival Guide*. I had the privilege of working on that publication with , , and the 's.

Bob would like to do a personal interview with participating parents and will travel to to meet with you. We're looking at an October/November time frame, but he is planning on attending Florida Missing Children Day in Tallahassee with me on September 11th. If you are planning to attend, this might be a good opportunity to meet him.

Please let me know if you're interested in the study, and I will be happy to be the liaison between you and Bob.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Nancy A. McBride
Director of Prevention Education

APPENDIX B

{Date}

{Recipient's Address}

Dear {Respondent}:

I am writing to you on the recommendation of Nancy McBride, Director of Prevention Education and the Executive Director of the Florida Branch of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. I am a doctoral candidate at Lynn University in Boca Raton, Florida. The purpose of this letter is to invite you to participate in a research project. My dissertation topic is "Ultimate Coping Strategies: The Differences Among Parents of Murdered or Abducted Long-Term Missing Children." A short time ago, Nancy contacted you about this study and informed me that you expressed an interest in participating.

The study involves a one-on-one interview and a follow up interview. The one-on-one interview will consist of open-ended questions about your personal experience of grieving and coping for your missing or murdered child. The interview will be tape recorded for a later analysis. Once the analysis has been completed, you will be contacted again for a follow up interview to review the analysis for accuracy. The total time involved in participation will be approximately three to four hours. The information you provide will be kept strictly confidential!

The goal of this study is to capture the essence of bereavement and identify coping strategies in the form of a description. The description can then be used to help other survivors and their families better understand their experience. You have been selected because you meet the criteria of being a parental survivor and have indicated an interest in participating in this research project.

You will find enclosed two copies of the following forms: (1) "Informed Consent " and (2) "Informed Consent to Audio-Record." Please review the forms carefully. I would request that you sign and date each of the forms. Also, please provide a telephone number in the space provided so I may contact you to set up the interview. Please maintain one copy of each form for yourself and return one copy of each form in the provided return envelope. Once I receive the forms, I will then contact you to set up a time convenient for you to conduct the interview. I look forward to meeting with you.

If you have any questions about this study, please do not hesitate to contact me. If you have concerns about the research that you do not want to address with me, you may call Dr. Carole Warshaw, Dissertation Committee Chairperson, at (561) 237-7088.
Sincerely,

Robert DeYoung

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT

You have been asked to participate in a research study conducted by Robert DeYoung, a doctoral student in the College of Education program at Lynn University, Boca Raton, Florida. This research involves obtaining a description of the experience of bereavement and coping strategies used by parental survivors who have experienced the loss of a child to murder or abduction. The goal of this study is to capture the essence of bereavement and identify coping strategies in the form of a description. The description can then be used to help other survivors and their families better understand their experience. You have been selected because you meet the criteria of being a parental survivor and have indicated an interest in participating in this research project.

The study involves a one-on-one interview and a follow up interview. The one-on-one interview will consist of open-ended questions about your personal experience of grieving and coping with your missing or murdered child. The interview will be tape recorded for a later analysis. Once the analysis has been completed, you will be contacted again for a follow up interview to review the analysis for accuracy. The total time involved in participation will be approximately three to four hours.

The information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. The transcription of the interview will be coded with a number and an alias to protect your identity. Reports of this research will not include any identifiable data. The overall results of the research will be published in a doctoral dissertation as well as other possible venues (e.g. professional journal). Lynn University's Institutional review Board has authorized access to all materials related to this research.

It is hoped this research will benefit other survivors and their families better understand the experience of bereavement and identify available coping strategies. The risk to you is considered medium on a scale of low, medium, and high. There is a chance you will experience some emotional pain and sorrow discussing your experiences of bereavement and coping. Should you experience such discomfort, the researcher will provide a list of counselors and support groups to you. The researcher is available by phone (954) 370-3778 for contact any time during this research. In addition, you may withdraw from this study at any time without negative consequences if it becomes too uncomfortable. Should you withdraw, your data will be eliminated from the study and will be destroyed. If you do participate, your data will be coded to protect your identity and confidentiality, and kept in a locked security box for a period of five years. After five years, the data will be destroyed. There is no financial remuneration for participating in this study.

Upon request, a copy of the final research analysis will be provided to you at the conclusion of the research. If you have any questions about any aspect of this study or your involvement, feel free to ask at any time. If you have concerns about this project that you do not want to address with Robert DeYoung, you may call Dr. Carole Warshaw, Dissertation Committee Chairperson, Lynn University, at (561) 237-7088.

Two copies of this informed consent have been provided. Please sign both indicating you have read, understood, and agree to participate in this research. Please return one copy to the researcher and keep the other for your files.

Name of Participant (please print)	Telephone Number
Signature of Participant	Date
Robert DeYoung, Researcher	Date

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT TO AUDIO-RECORD

I, _____, give permission to have this interview recorded by means of an audio recording device. I understand the interview will be taped for data collection purposes specific to this research project only. The recording will be transcribed and coded. The recording and transcription will be maintained for a period of five years. At that time the recording and transcription will be destroyed. I understand that these tapes, as well as all written materials, are completely confidential.

Name of Participant (please print)	Date
Signature of Participant	Date
Robert DeYoung, Researcher	Date

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about (child’s name).
2. Identify how you felt immediately after the incident.
3. What were your expectations following the incident?
4. What do you believe other people expected from you?
5. How have your feelings changed over time?
6. Were there any identifiable occurrences that led to these changes in your feelings?
7. What are your expectations now?
8. How have you coped with the situation?
9. Which of these coping strategies were instinctive?
10. Which were learned?
11. How were they learned?
12. What has been most helpful in coping?
13. What has been least helpful in coping?
14. What would you tell a parent who was suddenly faced with a similar situation?