

Reminders of Loss: Memorialization Beyond the Funeral

by

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Abstract

For my dissertation, I conducted thirty-one semi-structured qualitative interviews with individuals who experienced the loss of a friend or loved one, and who helped to organize a funeral. The intention of my research was to give individuals a chance to share what they found meaningful and important about their experiences during this time. Doing so led me to develop the concept of remainders. The remainders represent the everyday memorialization practices that people perform after the funeral. They are the by-products of the funeral, the types of actions people tend to perform on their own post-funeral, but they are also the emotional or social ‘leftovers’ that remain after the funeral. By examining first-hand accounts of attempts to memorialize, this dissertation contributes to a sociological study of memorialization by exploring the ongoing ways that people incorporate death or loss in their lives and the meaning that they give to the practices they perform. According to the findings of this research, the contemporary practice of memorialization is a complex and messy process that extends beyond the funeral due to the emotions that come with a loss and remain well past the funeral.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, ma-ma and ba-ba.

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Introduction: Studying Everyday Memorialization

My dissertation investigates the difficulties that people face in everyday life when they experience the loss of a loved one. Everyone will face death whether it is their own or someone they know. The emotions surrounding such a loss are complex because one often feels many different emotions simultaneously such as sorrow, confusion, shock, frustration, and maybe even relief if someone has been suffering an illness for a long time. At the same time, people have to manage the practical reality of death. They must do something to acknowledge the loss and dispose of the body. Death inevitably causes disorder and disruption for the living.

The most familiar way that people manage death is to employ the services of the funeral industry. The funeral industry confines its services to the period immediately after the death and performs services involving the body, such as the funeral or memorial service, visitation or viewing, and interment. While the completion of the funeral often marks the end of the need to manage the death, I want to explore what happens after the funeral to address the complexities that accompany the loss of a loved one. Does memorialization end with the funeral? Does anything remain after the funeral? If so, what remains?

My own story is helpful to situate my research. Seven years ago, I received the unexpected news that one of my brothers had passed away. I remember feeling stunned and confused, partly because I was in the middle of packing for a vacation the next day. I knew that I had to cancel my trip, but at the same time, this news caused such

unsettledness that I wanted to go on the trip as planned. I knew that was not possible and the practical reality was evident. I had to return to my family and help plan a funeral.

We planned the funeral in three days and had it less than a week after receiving the news. The funeral offered some order and comfort. Initially, we received support from relatives and friends since many called to offer their condolences, but after the funeral, people stopped calling. It seemed as though this loss was a blip in other people's lives, but for us, we were still sorting through the emotional and practical complexities that accompanied the loss. For instance, my family had to look after my brother's estate by closing his bank and credit card accounts; we had to organize and distribute his belongings. I found that I avoided talking about my brother because of the sadness that the experience brought to my parents and the discomfort it caused my friends. Increasingly, I became interested in this experience of avoidance, sadness, and discomfort.

The aim of this dissertation is to study the remainders, the everyday forms of memorialization that happen after the funeral. To me, the remainders represent the ongoing emotional and practical realities that come when one experiences a loss and that exceed the funeral. The remainders also structure the everyday actions that people perform after the funeral in order to memorialize their loss.

A death disrupts at an emotional and practical level. It disrupts one's life, and causes disorder. The funeral industry offers the means for people to treat the disorderliness of death in a timely and orderly fashion by offering a range of services from body disposal to memorial services. I want to suggest that the order that the funeral

industry creates is only apparent. It is, additionally, temporary because the emotional and practical complexities, specifically, the emotions, memories and experiences, that come with death, persist after the funeral. The funeral industry offers services that address the material aspects of death (e.g. body disposal) but it does not – and indeed cannot – address the emotional reality or outstanding practical realities of a death. Funeral services are, by their very nature, limited. The difficulty is that sociological studies tend to focus on the funeral industry at the expense of attending to the broader realities associated with grieving and memorializing in the long term. By and large, they tend to treat memorialization and the funeral as one. My thesis argues that a sociological account of death and dying must deepen its treatment of memorialization. It poses the following question: how do people manage the practical and emotional complexities that come with the experience of losing of a loved one? Such a study is unique because it investigates individuals' experiences beyond the funeral.

This study contributes to the existing research on death and dying by putting forward the assertion that the disorder and disruption death brings to the living is ongoing. Existing social structures, such as the funeral industry, seek to minimize the disruption that death causes. My research, however, recognizes that attending to death is much more complex. It argues that the emotional and practical realities that come with death remain beyond the services offered by the funeral industry. In short, this thesis studies memorialization as an ongoing process.

Studies of Memorialization

My investigation into existing studies about memorialization found that there is no memorialization literature as such, but that different fields study memorialization and tend to focus on specific forms of memorialization. Some of these fields include history, geography, psychology and sociology and some forms of memorialization include monuments and spontaneous memorials. Typically, discussions about monuments centre on state memorials used to commemorate a particular event or individual, such as National War Memorials or the Abraham Lincoln Memorial. Spontaneous memorials, on the other hand, generally represent those who visit the site of tragedy or related sites and leave mementoes, such as flowers, stuffed animals and notes. Some of the most familiar examples of spontaneous memorials include roadside memorials, spontaneous shrines or ghost bikes.

In this section, I will briefly outline how scholars in these diverse fields study memorialization and then illustrate how these studies often equate memorialization with remembrance, that is, as a way to commemorate or remember the loss. I suggest, however, that this is not a complete account of memorialization because there is something that always escapes memorialization, and that something is the remainders.

In the field of history, most scholars tend to emphasize the importance of remembering and investigate how memories or information of the past is retained and shared in the present through publications or monuments (see for example Cubitt, 2007; Meriwether and D'Amore, 2012; Gobel and Rossell, 2013). Historians are also interested in the methods and meaning given to specific past events, such as the Holocaust, in the

present (Mintz, 2001; Berman, 2006; Jacobs, 2010). Geographers, on the other hand, tend to explore memorialization by focusing on the use of space and the placement of monuments or cemeteries¹. The design of the space and location of the monument is interesting for geographers because its construction raises important questions about the atmosphere the space creates, the interaction people have with the space, and what people will take with them or what they will remember (Donohue, 2002; Gordon and Osborne, 2004; Klaassens et al, 2009; Foote and Girder, 2010). In this way, some geographers study the preservation of actual sites of events, and the construction of these locations as memorial sites (see for example Gough, 2004; Charlesworth and Addis, 2002). Such memorial sites have become tourist attractions, which has led to the emerging area of research called “dark tourism²” (Stone and Sharpley, 2008; Sharpley and Stone, 2009; White and Frew, 2013; Lennon and Foley, 2000).

Studies of memorialization in the field of psychology, however, examine memorials and other acts of memorialization, such as ceremonies or candlelight vigils on anniversaries, as strategies for coping with loss or trauma (see Oliner, 2006; Doka, 2003). Both state memorials and spontaneous memorials for example offer people the opportunity to express their emotions (specifically grief³) in the event of public tragedies. By recognizing the grief or emotions that remain after the loss, Klass et al (1996) developed the concept of “continuing bonds,” which suggests that rather than dissolving

¹ David Bennett of the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at Carleton University gave two talks in 2011 about the British war cemeteries. The first on February 11, “Landscape, Place and Memory. Military cemeteries in France and Belgium” and the second on November 11, “Who built “The Silent Cities”? Place, memory, and meaning on the Western Front.”

² The Institute for Dark Tourism Research (*iDTR*), a research centre dedicated to the study of dark tourism, opened at the University of Central Lancashire (UK) in 2012.

³ I define grief as the emotional response people experience after a loss (Walter, 1999:xv).

all ties and memories with the deceased to overcome the loss as traditional psychology theories have suggested, people should maintain an “inner representation” or “interactive relationship⁴” with the deceased in order to manage or resolve their grief. In this way, the psychology literature on memorialization regards memorializing as a way to resolve their grief.⁵

Some sociologists have drawn on these models of grief and bereavement in order to discuss notions of immortality. In the introduction to her edited collection, Margaret Mitchell (2007) explores the way that the living keep the “dead alive” by continuing to care for the deceased as when alive. Some examples include pursuing campaigns in honour of the deceased or maintaining the gravesite of the deceased. Mitchell terms these acts of remembrance or immortality as “continuance” (2007:6, 11, 16).⁶ Glennys Howarth (2000, 2007) also explores this notion of immortality by suggesting that the dead are not really dead because they “live on” through their belongings, photos and videos or anniversary dates.⁷ Tony Walter (1996b), on the other hand, argues for “a new model of grief” by suggesting that people should collectively draw on their grief to construct a biography of the deceased.⁸

⁴ Klass et al (1996:349-350) acknowledge that there is no clear or “common definition” of either of these concepts as researchers continue to define them in different ways, including talking or thinking about the deceased.

⁵ I have not included studies about bereavement in this discussion about memorialization because the literatures are quite distinct. Bereavement refers to being in a “objective” state of being or ‘in grief’ (Walter, 1999:xv). Corr and Corr (2013:238) further define bereavement as being “deprived, robbed, plundered, or stripped of someone or something.” The distinction between studies about bereavement and memorialization therefore is that studies about bereavement centre on those experiencing a state of grief or loss, while studies about memorialization focus on the strategies used to remember the dead.

⁶ Mitchell never defines continuance but uses the concept in relation to the examples that she gives about the types of actions people perform to remember the deceased.

⁷ For more on immortality, see Bauman, 1992.

⁸ For more on this idea, see chapters 4 and 5 in Walter (1999).

Other sociological studies about memorialization tend to emphasize the role or significance of spontaneous memorials (Santino, 2011; Haney et al, 1997; Doss, 2006). For example, roadside memorials and ghost bikes, suggest a political or educational role by raising awareness about road safety (Monger, 1997; Kennerly, 2002; Dickinson and Hoffman, 2010; Collins and Opie, 2010; Collins and Rhine, 2003; Tay, 2009; Dobler, 2011; Rulfs, 2011).

Sociological studies about memorialization also exist in the death and dying literature. To my mind, the death and dying literature is a subfield of sociology and centres on the process of dying and explores death in relation to the events that occur after someone dies, that is, with the funeral. Generally, the funeral consists of a common set of practices, including the visitation or viewing, interment and/or cremation and ceremony. A professional network of funeral directors, funeral homes and companies that make up a “funeral industry” increasingly directs such practices. The funeral industry often presents these practices as the final goodbye or last chance for people to memorialize the deceased.⁹

Recent sociological studies on funerals and body disposition have equated memorialization with remembrance and commemoration as researchers are discovering that people are moving towards personalizing funerals by including favourite songs, prayers or readings in order to represent the deceased (see Caswell, 2011; Garces-Foley

⁹ In the course of my research, I conducted a review of the web-based information of some of the main funeral associations (National Funeral Directors Association (US), Funeral Services Association of Canada, International Cemetery, Cremation and Funeral Association), funeral companies, (Dignity, a North American funeral home company that runs under Service Corporation International (SCI), and Simple Alternative (Mount Pleasant Group), one of the largest funeral companies that operate in the Greater Toronto Area, and Meaningful Funerals) and government resources (Board of Funeral Services (Ontario) and Ontario Provincial website). Please see Appendix A for details about the websites.

and Holcomb, 2006; Emke, 2002; Walter 1994, 1996a; Crouch, 2004; Garces-Foley, 2002-03). Related to this is also the movement towards developing meaningful ways to dispose of the body, especially through cremation since people can take the ashes and then determine what to do with them (see Dickinson, 2012; Kellaher et al, 2010; Prendergast et al, 2006; Hockey et al, 2007). Disposing the ashes in a way that represents the deceased is an act of remembrance because it is a way for people to do something in honour or memory of the deceased.

This connection between memorialization and remembrance or commemoration is a unifying idea in studies about memorialization. For example, Andrew Charlesworth and Michael Addis (2002) study the ecological management of two Holocaust sites in order to assess the degree that the landscapes have on the public perception of the Holocaust. Their objective is to understand how the ecological landscape of sites will influence visitors' perception of the Holocaust by studying two contrasting sites. The two sites they study are Plaszow, an abandoned and unmanaged site that has received public attention since the release of Steven Spielberg's movie, *Schindler's List* (1993), and Birkenau, a managed site at the notorious death camp Auschwitz "that stresses a formal and permanent horticultural system" (230). The use of memorialization by the authors reflects a general definition equated with remembrance, as they only use the concept twice in the article. First, in their title, 'Memorialization and the Ecological Landscapes of Holocaust Sites: The cases of Plaszow and Auschwitz-Birkenau,' and second, in the first line of their abstract, "The memorialization of Holocaust sites has been discussed so far in terms of their monuments and camp remains." The authors use memorialization in relation to its

meaning as remembrance because they refer specifically to the objects of monuments and location of the camps as methods to remember the Holocaust. In addition, they focus on examining visitor perception of memorialization through the ecological landscape of two existing Holocaust memorial sites. Memorialization in this sense works as a general category that refers to remembrance and the production of memorial sites.

Another example is Setha M. Low's (2004) ethnographic study of the process of building the memorial for September 11. She argues that political and economic stakeholders have dominated the memorial process; and she maintains that the memorialization of September 11 needs to include the voices of residents in order to expand and modify the formal memorial process governed by the media and state. She uses data collected in interviews, participant observation and existing reports to support her argument. While Low does not formally define memorialization, she cleaves to a notion of remembrance by using phrases such as, "spaces of memorialization" (328) and the "memorialization of a tragic event" (326). Having said this, she recognizes that different narratives will influence the design of the memorial. For example, Low argues that residents want to emphasize their "situated history" (327), including "their feelings of fear and security" (337), while political and economic stakeholders attempt to stress a political sentiment about the freedom of all Americans and the war against terror¹⁰ for "an imagined national and global community of visitors" (327). This example highlights the different purposes given to memorialization as a political or personal statement

¹⁰ Low (2004:337) asserts that Daniel Libeskind, architect of the 9/11 memorial, explains that his design, "which features the tallest tower in the world and a sunken memorial incorporating 30...feet of exposed Hudson River slurry wall," is symbolic of "democracy's resilience in the face of terrorist attacks" (Kamin, 2003, citing Libeskind's comments).

depending on the voices given to a memorial. What both examples demonstrate is a basic problem of equating memorialization with remembrance. In reducing the concept of memorialization to remembrance, they inadvertently obscure the complexity and range of meanings attached to memorialization.

As we will see, my understanding of memorialization is not only about remembrance. I regard memorialization as a process that people undertake in order to settle the emotional and practical complexities that come with a loss but have not been resolved with the funeral. Memorialization involves narratives, the stories that people develop and share in order to give meaning to their experiences (see Kleinman, 1988). In this case, narratives are the stories that people tell over time in order to integrate the story of the deceased and experience of loss into their lives. Memorialization is not so much about keeping the deceased alive, as the sociological studies about immortality above suggest, but is a way to recognize the significance and meaning that the deceased once played in one's life. Since the meaning that people give to the person will vary based on their interactions and memories with them, they will, of course, create multiple narratives. The narratives also develop and change over time because as people grow and experience new things, their perceptions may change as well, even including their understanding of death. Memorialization therefore is about how those most affected by a loss will experience the loss beyond the funeral.

Existing studies about memorialization do not offer a complete account of memorialization because they focus on apparent forms of memorialization and do not do enough to study what I call "remainders." Remainders capture what escapes a limited

understanding of memorialization. They represent the unsettledness that often results from the unresolved practical and emotional complexities that accompany a loss. This unsettledness is not apparent, but stays with people and appears in two ways. The first is by function, that is, remainders are the by-products of the funeral's limitation; they represent the types of actions that people tend to perform after the funeral as a way to continue memorializing. The second is by form, that is, by the type or category of remainders that exist. The two forms discussed are emotional and social.

The concept remainders gives language to that feeling of something that is lingering or has not quite gone away after experiencing a loss, and thus 'remains.' Remainders therefore are an appealing concept because it best represents the remains or 'leftovers' of the complexities that escape memorialization.

Aims and Claims

To repeat, my problem is that memorialization is often limited to the funeral in the death and dying literature, and this focus fails to explore some of the complexities of memorialization. My objective is not to study the funeral as such, but to extend studies on memorialization as well as the death and dying literature that focus on the funeral to the remainders. The literature of the funeral often treats the funeral and memorialization as one and the same and thus suggests that memorialization begins and ends with the funeral. I want to argue that memorialization does not end with the funeral but continues through the "remainders," the by-products of the funeral and the ongoing emotional and practical complexities that come with death and remain after the funeral. Therefore, my

primary aim in this dissertation is to contribute to how we understand the process of memorializing death.

According to the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA), the primary function of the funeral is to give people an opportunity to mourn the loss of a loved one.¹¹ The NFDA explains that the funeral serves a social function for people to offer their support, recognize the loss, say goodbye and offer closure. The role of the funeral however did not always offer this social function but a practical one. For example, 19th Century Anglo-American cultures performed wakes and burials as a way to ensure that death occurred and to dispose of the body (Habenstein and Lamers, 1962; Puckle, 1968 [1926]). Fears around improper declarations of death and ‘premature’ burials¹² originally prompted the wake, the washing and display of the corpse, while ground burials were a simple and affordable method to dispose of the body. Here, it is useful to draw on Max Weber’s discussion of rationalization in his lecture, ‘Science as a Vocation’ to explain how the management and rationalization of the ‘practical reality of death,’ that is the disposal of the body, has emerged.

¹¹ See <http://nfda.org/planning-a-funeral/why-a-funeral.html>. (Retrieved March 14, 2014).

¹² The notion of premature burials sounds like a myth but the introduction of contraptions to go along with coffins, such as a ‘rescue flag,’ so that if someone is buried alive they can pull a string to raise a flag and inform the living that death has not occurred, suggest genuine concerns (Prothero, 2001:72). Some individuals also specified in their wills that the living confirm their deaths before burial with surgical incisions or by applying boiling liquids or a hot iron to the skin (Mant, 1976:225). Other techniques include holding a mirror under one’s nose to ensure there was no breath or placing a glass of water on the chest (Pernick, 1988:24), placing stimulants or a feather under the nose (King, 2008:19-20) or the conclamation – loudly calling the name of the presumed dead three times (Ariès, 1981:397). Even with the introduction of medical technologies today, such as stethoscopes and heart monitors, improper declarations of death still occur. See for example the cases of Luz Milagros (Argentina, April 2012) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-17685361>, Larry Green (North Carolina, January 2005) http://www.wral.com/news/local/asset_gallery/1176820/ and Carlos Camejo (Venezuela, September 2007) <http://www.reuters.com/article/2007/09/17/us-autopsy-idUSN149975820070917> (websites retrieved June 1, 2012).

In the piece, Weber (1946) argues that the increase of scientific rationality has contributed to the disenchantment of modern society. For him, in modern society there is no longer any mystery or mythical forms of explanation, but explanation is made calculable or factual through science (139). The limitation of this process of rationalization however is that it can fail to address the meaning or ‘value’ given to facts. For example, Weber uses the example of medicine and its focus on prolonging life and minimizing pain, but remarks that few ever ask whether a life is worth saving (144). He also considers the way that the physicist may wonder about the mechanics of a streetcar while a frequent rider takes its operation for granted (139).

The separation between fact and value demonstrates the way that the funeral industry has developed memorialization practices to accompany body disposal practices as a way to ‘value’ or give greater meaning to the loss and the practical reality of death by attempting to address the emotional reality of death. The ‘fact’ or primary function of the funeral is to dispose of the body, but the addition of practices, such as the visitation, ceremony and reception, gives “value” to the funeral and suggests that the purpose of the funeral extends beyond the practical function of disposing the body. Instead, the meaning of the funeral now focuses on the social role, in which people may offer support and pay their respects to the deceased and family. The funeral also offers a sense of order and comfort because it follows the social expectation to have a funeral or event after a death occurs.¹³

¹³ One of the first things to do as directed by the Ontario provincial website is to contact the funeral home to make arrangements. See <https://www.ontario.ca/government/what-do-when-someone-dies>. (Retrieved March 10, 2015).

Given that this dissertation studies the remainders of everyday memorialization, one task is to demonstrate how the rationalization of the funeral produces remainders (see Blauner, 1966; Hockey, 2001; Walter, 1994, 1996a). The primary focus of the funeral industry is to dispose of the corpse [the ‘fact’] through either burial or cremation. A secondary aim is to address what the death represents for those who remain [e.g., loss and grief, relief, or emotional reality]. The funeral industry attempts to give ‘value’ to the fact of death through other practices, such as the visitation, because it offers a way for people to say their goodbyes or pay their final respects to the deceased (see for example Bowman, 1959: 16). I want to argue that this is limited because the funeral industry restricts the practices performed and the meaning of the practices by allocating when and how people memorialize. The funeral becomes a singular event that has a standardized set of rules that constricts the way people can memorialize and give meaning to the practices on their own.

A secondary aim of this dissertation is to study the performance of everyday memorialization practices by those who have experienced a loss. This is different from existing research in the death and dying literature on the experiences of health care workers (McNamara et al, 1995; Sudnow, 1967) and caregivers (Glaser and Strauss, 1965) dealing with the dying and death, but also studies on the experiences of the dying (Kübler-Ross, 1969; Kellehear, 1990). In these studies, researchers were able to locate participants more easily in institutions that work with the dying and manage death, such as hospitals and palliative care. These studies are important, but they also emphasize the institutionalized aspects of death and dying. My goal is to study individual experiences.

In order to achieve this goal, I conducted interviews with participants about their experiences of memorialization. I then applied the theory of cultural sociology to the interview material collected in order to understand the meaning that participants give to memorialization.

Insofar as the funeral industry limits memorialization to the funeral, the dissertation makes two claims. First, the funeral does not provide the means or the tools to address the leftover or remaining emotions after the event of the funeral. Second, memorialization is an ongoing process. People address the remainders on their own and in an informal nature, resulting in different meanings of memorialization.

In short, the purpose of this dissertation is to assess the autonomy that people who have experienced a loss have in creating their own meaning of memorialization. In order to examine this meaning making process, I draw on the theory of cultural sociology and apply it to the empirical interview material collected for this study. I will now discuss each in turn.

Theoretical Resources

In order to demonstrate the arguments that memorialization is an ongoing social process and brings forth the autonomy of individuals in making meaning of memorialization, I use theoretical tools from cultural sociology to study memorialization.

Cultural sociology is a relatively new field that has developed rapidly in the past thirty years. One of the earlier advocates in developing this field was Jeffrey Alexander. Alexander argued for a renewed focus on culture and thus applied the “strong

programme¹⁴” as a shift or change from the sociology of culture approach that looks at how institutions or structures govern culture in order to examine the role that culture plays in the construction of meaning. Cultural sociology therefore separates itself from the top-down structural approaches and examines culture as an active and flexible variable that is in action. Alexander (2003, 2006) and Alexander et al (2012) argue that people act because of “meaning” derived from codes, narratives, myths and stories rather than collective or social forces. Such meanings are internal and invisible to the actor and the intention of cultural sociology is to make this meaning visible (Alexander, 2003). I like the approach of cultural sociology because its intention is to investigate the way that people make meaning and incorporate the experiences and subjectivity of the actor. Cultural sociology offers a way to understand and explain memorialization rather than rely primarily on structural arguments.

The cultural sociology approach that I find most useful for this project is that of Ann Swidler (1986, 2001) and her concepts of the ‘cultural tool kit’ and ‘cultural repertoire.’ Swidler (1986:273, 277) defines the cultural tool kit as the “symbols, rituals, stories and world-views” that people use to solve different problems and determine their lines of action. She defines ‘cultural repertoire’ as a “set of skills” that people learn to perform at one time or another (2001:24-25, 1986: 277). One’s cultural tool kit is enhanced by the accumulation of cultural resources that help people to explain and direct their actions. She argues that people tend to have more tools available to them than they

¹⁴ The “strong programme” was an introduction to the sociology of scientific knowledge as it began as a way to examine the validity of scientific research as ‘facts’ and ‘truths’ by introducing the ‘social’ into the discoveries being made, including the way that values may influence the interpretation of data, social roles and communication (see for example Bloor, 1991, 1997)

use and that people adopt the tools most fitting for their situations. People therefore build cultural repertoires by drawing on the familiar and trusted tools or skills in order to perform certain types of actions. The two concepts are connected. For instance, Swidler argues that the cultural tool kit informs cultural repertoires by recognizing that the skills and tools people have will vary and thus explains the different way that each person performs a repertoire and gives it meaning.

Methodological Framework

The empirical portion of my study centres on Ontario, Canada. I conducted 31 qualitative interviews with 32 participants from three different cities (1) Toronto, the largest urban centre of the country, (2) Ottawa, the capital of Canada and (3) Kingston, a smaller urban centre in between these cities, between July and September 2011. The focus on Ontario, Canada makes my study unique because much of the existing research in the sociology of death and dying is from the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States. The geographical location of Canada also offers a unifying perspective to the interviews, as a few participants noted that they also travelled to their 'home' country and performed practices according to that country.

The interviews were conducted with individuals who were 18 years or older and were responsible for and/or contributed to the memorialization process. Two factors were not considered significant to this study: the relationship with the deceased or when the death occurred. My purpose was to capture a range of memorialization practices: the

relationship to the deceased would not necessarily determine the practices that were performed. Participants were also from different cultural and religious backgrounds.

After receiving ethics clearance¹⁵ from the Ethics Board at Carleton University in Ottawa, I began to locate participants through personal contacts by sending family, friends and colleagues, an email request and Letter of Information (see Appendix B) about my study. I requested their assistance by asking them to forward my letter to individuals that they knew who had experienced a loss in order to create a rapport between myself, as the researcher, and their potential participation. I employed this method because of the sensitivity of the topic. I thought that my contacts would be the best judge in determining who should receive my request by being aware and considerate of the emotional state of individuals who have experienced a loss. I also contacted support groups, such as Bereaved Families of Ontario, and asked them to post my call for participants and to inform members of my study. Organizations received my requests positively as many highlighted the benefits people receive by talking about the experiences around death, often considered a taboo topic in our society.

Participation was voluntary and participants self-identified and volunteered their time to participate in the study. I suspect that those who participated in my study were already open about their loss or that they have come to some ‘peace’ with their loss.¹⁶ Others seemed to welcome the opportunity to talk about their loss because they often do

¹⁵ Ethics clearance project number: 10230 12-0117.

¹⁶ Although this may suggest a level of resilience that participants have developed in speaking about their loss, most were not shy of expressing their emotions of sorrow or tears. In fact, there seemed to be an emotional resonance between participants, for having experienced a loss, and me, as a researcher for investigating this topic. For more on the conceptualization of emotions as social (sociology of emotions and ‘emotion work’), see Spencer et al, 2012 and Hochschild, 1983.

not receive the opportunity to discuss it, while some were simply curious about my study. Many of those who participated already seemed reflexive about the topic because of the time that has passed since the loss.¹⁷ The timeframe from time of loss to the time of the interview ranged from one month to thirty years. The issue of remembering precise details of the memorialization practices performed after the death was not a significant issue for my study because most of the participants were able to provide general information about the practices performed and detail their significance. In order to acquire as much information as possible, I rephrased questions to elicit more detail and I gave them the opportunity to maintain contact with me should any other memories come up. I have also received permission from participants to contact them again if I required more detail.

My own subjectivity about the topic as a researcher enabled me to speak with participants and address their emotions professionally and compassionately. In retrospect, I have some concern that my own experiences may at times have hindered drawing out explanations from participants. Sometimes they would say something that I understood, *or at least thought that I understood*, and interpreted it through my own experiences. I think that I was able to address this after the first few interviews by being reflexive of this tendency to assume mutual understanding, and by further inquiring about their responses.

Almost all of the participants inquired about my interest in the topic, and I informed them that I wanted to study the topic sociologically since much of the research

¹⁷ Although it is difficult to say, those who filled the requirements to participate and chose not to participate could have either offered greater insight into the meaning making process by identifying the cultural tools most significant or useful to them or found it more challenging to explain their experiences because they still needed time to reflect and recover.

on death and memorialization was in other fields, such as psychology or medicine. In some cases, I also informed them of my own personal experience with the loss of my brother. I did not intend to keep this information from participants, but found that my response depended on the question they asked. Questions such as, ‘why are you studying this topic?’ to ‘how did you come to study this topic?’, elicited different responses. *Why* is because it is sociologically relevant and unique. *How* is because of my own personal experience. Only upon reflection was I able to address the differences in my responses and I recognized the need to be consistent with respondents. I was originally concerned about sharing my own personal experience with participants before the interview because I was concerned that it may affect their responses. After completing a few interviews however, I learned that their experiences differed considerably. I determined that the wide variety of responses in my interviews demonstrated that the process of memorialization is such a subjective experience, and varies for each person. Furthermore, each participant wanted to share his or her own story. I therefore do not think that sharing my experiences had an analytically significant impact on participants' responses. In a few instances, if participants would say, “you know,” I asked them to elaborate on their own experiences and meaning. While my personal loss has affected the direction of my research, that is, the choosing of this topic, the interviews, existing literature and intellectual interests shaped my analysis.

All of the interviews took place in person, with the exception of one that I conducted over Skype¹⁸. The interviews took place in various locations. Sometimes

¹⁸ This is a telecommunications software enabling video conferencing.

people welcomed me into their homes or office spaces, or we met in public spaces such as parks, restaurants and cafés. The total meeting time for the interviews was on average an hour and half, including the time to discuss the Informed Consent form and to answer any questions before or after the interview. I transcribed all of the interviews and used pseudonyms for all of the participants in order to protect their identities. Their identities however may not be fully anonymous because of the method of recruitment.

The literature in qualitative research suggests that sample size often depends on the study in which researchers will reach theoretical saturation¹⁹. The researcher then has to be flexible and knowledgeable of the process of collecting the data in order to determine the number of interviews required (Marshall, 1996; Sandelowski, 1995; Baker and Edwards, 2012). I began to reach saturation around the twentieth interview. I however continued to conduct more interviews because I had already arranged them and to determine whether I would learn any new information that would further direct my research. I found that in these later interviews that even though I did not learn about any new practices, this information was ‘new’ because of the experiences of the participants. In the end, I completed thirty-one interviews and concluded that any interview would always elicit new meaning because everybody’s experiences were different even if the practices and the process were largely the same.

¹⁹ Researchers begin to reach saturation in qualitative research when they begin to receive the same or similar responses over the course of their interviews and discover that there is no new information to draw on in order to examine new directions in the research.

Research Contributions

One challenge that comes with studying memorialization is the convention, followed by some anthropologists and sociologists, which assumes memorialization is specific to particular groups.²⁰ For example, those interested in my project often inquired about the trajectory of my study, such as “what religious or cultural group are you studying?” To this, I would often have to explain that I was taking a sociological approach to study memorialization and emphasize the way of examining memorialization as a social process through “culture.” This of course caused great confusion because most people think about culture as referring to specific groups, customs and norms. Thus, to explain the importance of investigating memorialization sociologically, I usually had to clarify my approach and explain that I am not investigating any specific group because death is universal. The ways people experience death, the practices they perform, the beliefs they have, they may all vary but in essence, people all do the same types of things. Everyone needs to dispose of the body whether it is through burial or cremation. Some may have a service or some event to acknowledge the loss and the way they do the service may differ. Therefore, the intention of my study was to give people an opportunity to identify elements they saw as important and to explain the meaning that they gave to them.

My study offers a unique contribution to the death and memorialization literature because rather than focus on a particular group or experience, I gave individuals an opportunity to identify the practices and elements they saw as important and to explain

²⁰ See also Swidler, 2001:5.

the meaning that they gave to them. By applying the approach of culture to analyze the interview material, I was able to identify everyday forms of memorialization by examining each individual's remainders; or rather, the way each person continued to memorialize after the funeral. My research also fills a geographical gap in the studies on death and dying by conducting a study in Canada since most of the existing research centres in the United States and United Kingdom²¹.

This research distinguishes itself from the psychology literature on grief, mourning and bereavement because it focuses on the way people give meaning to their actions. It does not focus on strategies to manage grief. Some critics however may suggest that my research is similar to the "continuing bonds" literature because both approaches explore the things people do after the loss of a loved one. However, the difference between my research and the continuing bonds literature is that the continuing bonds research focuses on resolving grief. It argues that people do not have to cut off ties with the deceased in order to move forward as traditional psychology literature suggests, but that people have to maintain ties with the deceased in order to move forward and avoid psychological pathology (see Klass et al, 1996; Valentine, 2008). Furthermore, the research also suggests that people have to manage grief on their own rather than in relation to others (Klass and Walter, 2001). My research, on the other hand, explores the way participants understand their experiences and the way that they give meaning to their

²¹ Memorialization research in the United States usually includes specific national case examples. See for example, Doss, 2010; Santino, 2006; Margry and Sánchez-Carretero, 2011. The attention given to anthropological and sociological research on death and memorialization is most prominent in the United Kingdom with research centres such as the Centre for Death and Society, as well as the Association for the Study of Death and Society, which publishes *Mortality*, one of the three academic journals on death and dying. In the United States, research on death and dying has centred more in psychology, such as Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's (1969) infamous five stages of death and dying or Kenneth J. Doka's (1989; 2002) notion of 'disenfranchised grief.'

actions through culture and interaction. The intention of my research is to identify the repertoires or patterns of actions that people develop and draw on in certain situations rather than offer instructions or directions about how to manage grief.

In sum, this dissertation offers four major sociological contributions to the study of memorialization. The first consists in addressing the everyday memorialization structured by the remainders that persist beyond the funeral. The funeral industry suggests that memorialization ends at the completion of the funeral because it has been able to contain death but my argument is that the practical and emotional realities of death extend beyond the funeral. The second consists in using the theoretical framework of cultural sociology to examine the cultural tools and cultural repertoires that people use to understand or give meaning to the standardized memorialization practices. The third is the methodological contribution to fill a geographical gap in the studies on death and dying by conducting a study in Canada. The fourth is that a study of memorialization lends itself to a research approach that treats death sociologically because it explores the ongoing social process of the way that people incorporate the death or loss into their lives and the meaning that they give to these practices that they perform.

Structure of Thesis

This thesis includes five additional chapters to this introduction. In the following chapter, *A Cultural Sociology of Memorialization*, I introduce the conceptual tools of cultural sociology in order to explore the way people use culture to make meaning through their acts of memorialization. I begin the chapter first with a discussion of

memorialization in the funeral industry literature through two texts, *The American Way of Death* (Mitford, 1963; 1998) and *Purified by Fire: A History of Cremation in America* (Prothero, 2001). I demonstrate the limitations of this literature: it tends to focus on the immediate aftermath of death and the practical reality of death (i.e. body disposal) in order to highlight the usefulness of studying memorialization through culture.

Chapters 3 to 5 provide an analysis of the interview material collected for the study. The interview material enables me to work through the relationship between how participants experience the ongoing need to create order out of death. In chapter 3, *Memorialization and Meaning-making through Cultural Practice*, I apply the theory of cultural sociology and demonstrate the meaning that people give to the funeral practices and introduce the ‘function’ of the remainders as the by-products of the funeral. I identify four cultural repertoires, including Acknowledgement of Loss, Comfort, Celebration and Post-funeral memorialization. In chapter 4, *Forms of Remainders*, I explore the unsettledness that participants described as a consequence of their loss and the way that this emotional instability remained after the funeral. The two common forms of remainders that participants described were emotional and social. In chapter 5, *Making Sense of the Remainders*, I explore memorialization as a social process using Norbert Elias’s concept of figuration. I investigate the way participants understand their process of memorialization and expand its meaning from something that they consider terminal to something that is ongoing and continuous. I demonstrate that memorialization extends beyond the funeral industry through the remainders, the leftover emotions, memories and experiences not addressed by funerals.

Having introduced the remainders as the structuring elements of everyday memorialization, I end the dissertation with *Looking Forward with the Reminders*, a discussion about the remainders and what the future of memorialization research looks like.

Chapter 2 – A Cultural Sociology of Memorialization

This chapter introduces the conceptual tools of cultural sociology in order to extend the discussion of memorialization in the death and dying literature. It argues that this literature does not adequately attend to the remainders that individuals experience after a death. I want to demonstrate that the process of memorialization is more complex and varied than this literature suggests. I suggest that the conceptual tools provided by cultural sociology usefully highlight the unique meanings that people give to their memorialization practices. I draw specifically on Ann Swidler’s concepts of a ‘cultural tool kit’ and ‘cultural repertoire’ in order to explain the way people use cultural backgrounds to give meaning to remembering their loved ones. This chapter consists of two parts. In the first section, I demonstrate the limitations of the existing literature on memorialization in the funeral, and in the second, I explore how cultural sociology can help us to understand how individuals memorialize the dead.

Demonstrating the limitations of memorialization in the American²² funeral

One of the main limitations of the death and dying literature on the American funeral industry is that it tends to treat the process of memorialization and the funeral as one and the same. Studies tend to concentrate on the meaning that the funeral industry gives to memorializing practices, and in so doing, restrict memorialization to the

²² I use “American” here because the texts specify that they focus on American traditions. American traditions however apply to North America, and thus Canada, because Canadians perform the same funeral practices as in the United States. I therefore use the concept American in order to represent “North American,” and thus Canadian practices as well.

funeral.²³ This section seeks to demonstrate how the death and dying literature focuses on memorialization in the immediate aftermath of death, and specifically on the practical reality of disposing of the body. Here memorialization is associated with the material, and indeed commercial, aspects of the funeral, such as the casket, burial vault and gravestone or plaque. This section examines two exemplars of this tendency: *The American Way of Death* by Jessica Mitford (1963; 1998) and *Purified by Fire*, by Stephen Prothero (2001). Both texts are useful as they demonstrate the rationalization of the funeral industry, that is, the meaning or ‘value’ that the funeral industry gives to its practices. In this way, both texts represent a dominant theme that has persisted in the death and dying literature, one that focuses primarily on institutions and accounts for meaning-making from the ‘top-down’ in funerals (Mitford) and cremation (Prothero).

The American Way of Death

Jessica Mitford’s book, *The American Way of Death* is situated in the context of the rise and dominance of the funeral industry in the 20th Century. It addresses the increasing concern about the shift from the simplicity of funerals in the past to the excessiveness and exorbitant prices around funeral practices in the 1950s. Although there are many examples of work that treat the commodification of death, such as LeRoy Bowman’s (1959) work on the sublime and extravagant funeral, Ruth Harmer’s (1963), *The high cost of dying*, and more recent texts, such as Doug Smith’s (2007) *Big Death. Funeral Planning in the age of Corporate Deathcare*, the most popular commodification

²³ See for example, Hockey et al, 2010; Hockey et al, 2001; Gorer, 1965; Ariès, 1981; Farrell, 1980; Laderman, 2003; Metcalfe and Huntington, 1991; Hockey, 1996; Habenstein and Lamers, 1962; Puckle, 1968 [1926]; Pine, 1975.

of death publication is *The American Way of Death*, by writer and journalist, Jessica Mitford. The 20,000 copies of the first 1963 edition sold out on the first day of sales. The book later reached No. 1 on the New York Times best-seller list and held the position for six weeks. Mitford later “revisited” the text by publishing an updated version in 1998 in order to reflect the changes in the industry by including new chapters, such as, ‘The Federal Trade Commission’ about the introduction of regulations on the funeral industry, and ‘A Global Village of the Dead’ on the prevalence of multinational corporations in the funeral industry.²⁴

Mitford wrote the book in response to the overwhelming public interest she received in her magazine article published on the Bay City Funeral Society in 1958. This was a memorial society²⁵ established to help its members “obtain simple, cheap funerals for its members at a fraction of the going rate” (1998:xiii). From this article, she developed the notion of the “American way of death”. She defines the “American way” as “people gathering to gaze at a corpse in a coffin” (1998:11). She further goes on to explain the American funeral as containing the “beautification of the corpse, metal casket and vault, banks of store-bought flowers, the ubiquitous offices of the ‘funeral director’”

²⁴ She also removed chapters with outdated information, including ‘The Menace of P.O.,’ which explored the power of the flower industry in funeral practices. Since the flower industry’s revenue was about 65 to 70 per cent related to death, they reacted negatively when they saw newspaper obituaries include requests for donations “in lieu of flowers” or to “please omit” (P.O.) flowers altogether. The Society of American Florists, however, had an influential power over the newspaper industry and required that requests for no flowers or donations in lieu of flowers had to be straight to the point, such as “Memorial donations to X preferred.” (1963:119)

²⁵ Memorial societies usually develop locally, in which members pay a membership fee (usually for a lifetime). The society would establish a contract with local funeral directors that contracts them to offer cheaper and simpler funerals to its members. Members would then receive a list of the funeral homes that are willing to make such arrangements. Many cities have their own memorial societies, in which both versions of Mitford’s text list them in the end of the book. See also the Federation of Ontario Memorial Societies (FOOMS), www.fooms-fca.org (retrieved March 10, 2015).

(1998:141). By this, Mitford is referring to the pageantry and excess of the American funeral to embalm and display the corpse in a coffin at a ‘viewing’ or ‘visitation,’ the time allocated for colleagues, acquaintances and relatives to see the deceased for the last time. This is in contrast to the British way of death that tends to be inexpensive and limits guests to close relations, embalming and the display of the body in an open-casket.²⁶

Mitford argues that the American way of death is a recent phenomenon that the industry created in order to maximize its profits. She demonstrates this by emphasizing that funeral directors attempted to profit from their customers’ ignorance of the law²⁷ and to appeal to the emotions of the customers.²⁸ For instance, embalming is not required in any state, province or territory, unless under special circumstances such as transportation (26). Funeral directors, however, sell embalming by appealing to the emotional vulnerability of customers by arguing that it offers a “beautiful memory picture.” She also shows that the requirement for burial vaults²⁹ is a rule implemented by cemeteries to prevent the sinking of the land (1998:28), but funeral directors sell them by appealing to their aesthetic beauty and argument for “eternal preservation” (1998:36-37). The problem

²⁶ This however may be changing. Mitford reports in her revised version that one of the multinational corporations in the funeral industry, Services Corporate International (SCI), was starting to take over funeral homes in Britain and attempting to implement the American traditions through training its staff. This claim was based on an interview with a staff member of a funeral home taken over by SCI (see 1998:229). For more on the difference between American and British funerals, see Harper, 2010.

²⁷ There has been a move to prevent this as the consumer regulatory body in the United States, The Federal Trade Commission (FTC), implemented The Funeral Rule in 1984, to protect consumers from misinformation. The current regulations inform consumers that they have the rights to “[g]et an explanation in the written statement from the funeral home that describes any legal cemetery or crematory requirement” and to “[m]ake funeral arrangements without embalming.” Retrieved March 12, 2014 from <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0300-ftc-funeral-rule>.

²⁸ Some of the other factors that Mitford highlights as influential in the funeral “transaction,” but not discussed here, are the inability for customers to comparison shop and their limited awareness of the quality of products and the way that funeral directors match the cost of the funeral with the insurance claims received. See chapter 3 on *The Funeral Transaction* for more details.

²⁹ Burial vaults are the outer concrete containers that caskets go into before burial.

that Mitford addresses in the book is the way that the funeral industry developed marketing concepts, such as the “memory picture³⁰” and “eternal preservation,” to align the “American” way of death with excess and beauty. She argues that this is different from the “true” American tradition that was simple, where family and friends performed all of the necessary practices related to the funeral, including laying out the body, transporting and burying it (1998:16).

The two types of evidence that Mitford uses to illustrate her argument are primary and secondary sources. She uses secondary material collected from association and trade conferences, magazines, journals, funeral home pamphlets, textbooks on mortuary science, funeral directing and embalming, laws, case law, news stories and ‘real life’ events, such as the funerals for Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy. She also performs primary research by conducting interviews with funeral directors, association members and “experts,” such as doctors, and contacting funeral homes directly with questions and hypothetical situations.

Mitford offers a convincing argument against the funeral industry and its role in the commodification of death as she guides the reader through the different case examples, trade journals and laws. Her discussion however focuses on the meaning that the funeral industry gives to memorialization; she tells the story of the funeral director

³⁰ The concept “memory picture” here is not the same as post-mortem photography, in which photographs of the dead were taken and kept as mementos in the 19th Century. Instead, memory picture refers to the image that people can recall after viewing the body of the deceased. In this case, the funeral home attempts to create a memory picture that looks as much as like the deceased by embalming, dressing and applying make up on the corpse. Here the essential procedure is embalming because it delays decomposition and makes it easier for funeral directors to beautify. A problem Mitford has with embalming is that she recognizes that it is one of the most profitable procedures for the industry, in which she argues that developing notions such as the memory picture and eternal preservation is a way to sell the procedure and increase profits. For more on the memory picture, see also Green, 2008; Laderman, 2003, Wernick, 1995.

doing anything to sell the industry practices and maximize its profits. In this dissertation, I want to extend Mitford's analysis on the commodification of death and its relationship to memorialization because Mitford does not address the meaning that people themselves give to the funeral process. I therefore seek to complement her study by exploring the meaning that people give to the practices.

Mitford makes many interesting observations, but for my purposes, the most relevant aspects of her study are the way she presents the funeral industry's views on 'memorializing the dead.' Mitford's analysis is useful from the perspective of memorialization because she focuses on the power that the funeral industry has in directing people to memorialize through funeral practices, particularly with the visitation and burial. Such practices manage the practical reality of death as they help ease the disposal of the corpse for funeral directors. For instance, embalming is the technical practice of draining the blood from the corpse and replacing it with embalming fluid and emptying the chest cavity and replacing it with "cavity fluid." Embalming eases the role of the funeral director because it "preserves" the body and reduces any concerns about immediate decomposition (see Mitford, 1998:218 on the English funeral), allowing for a beautiful corpse or "memory picture." Funeral directors can also dress and display the body in a casket for people to view the body before burial, prompting the sale of caskets.³¹ Before burial, caskets go into burial vaults in order to prevent the sinking of cemetery grounds.

³¹ There is an art to selling caskets as Mitford describes the "Keystone approach" developed by W. M. Krieger, former managing director of the National Selected Morticians Association. In short, the method includes attempting to sell higher than average caskets by displaying the caskets in "quartiles." The objective is to sell above the median range. Customers are first shown caskets above the median range, and

Since the funeral industry does not emphasize the financial remuneration it receives from embalming or the sale of caskets and burial vaults, it instead employs strategies to promote embalming, caskets and burial by referring to a language of psychology as well as to cultural values (Mitford, 1963, 1998). In the course of my web-based research, I found that the information given by the funeral industry is consistent with Mitford's claims. For instance, while all funeral associations and companies recognized that embalming is not required by law unless the body is being transported, most organizations encouraged embalming for services or visitations in order to "enhance the deceased's appearance for a private family viewing" (IFFCA).³² The visitation as most organizations described was a time for people to offer support to the family, see the deceased for the last time and to "bring closure" (SCI).³³ In order to create the "memory picture" Mitford described, SCI especially encouraged a visitation to see the deceased at "peace" through their statement, "[i]f the person suffered before death, it is also advisable to view the body so one's memory of that person in their discomfort can be replaced by the memory of the deceased in peace." The FSAC also emphasized the need to present the body as "life-like" as possible through the application of cosmetics, "[o]nce dressed the funeral director will begin the cosmeticizing of the face and hands of the remains.... This is the true art of the funeral director. It is through the proper application of cosmetics, that a more life-like presentation will be made. Too much or too little

then shown caskets below the median range and of lower quality, in which case they are then shown the slightly above the median. (See Coriolis, 1967 for more on the art of selling caskets).

³² See also NFDA, FSAC, MPG and SCI.

³³ See also FSAC, NFDA, IFFCA, and MPG.

cosmetics have a definite affect on the appearance of the remains. Proper coloring must be determined, and the cosmetics adjusted as such.”

Similarly, organizations recognized that burial vaults were not required, but that some cemeteries have by-laws to make them a requirement to prevent the sinking of the land (IFFCA; Board of Funeral Services (Ontario)). Meaningful Funerals describes the different styles and makes of burial vaults, highlighting the availability of choice, but also enforcing the idea of preventing the casket from touching the dirt and being damaged. They write, “[b]urial vaults are lined units that enclose the casket when it is placed at the gravesite and are designed to prevent the weight of soil and heavy equipment from damaging the casket.”

Mitford therefore suggests that the funeral industry emphasized memorialization through the visitation by developing three phrases, “grief therapy,” “memory picture,” and “eternal preservation.” The relationship between these three terms is that they are all an attempt to manage the fears and grief around death and the body.

Mitford explains that “grief therapy” is a “catchall phrase” that the funeral industry has adopted from psychiatric resources and uses it to “justify” the practices of the funeral (1998:65). The funeral director takes on the role of “grief therapist” by offering products and services to manage the death and to design a ‘pleasurable’ funeral, essentially “to score an upset victory over death” (1998:51). More specifically however, Mitford explains that “grief therapy” emphasizes the “mental and emotional solace” people will achieve from the visitation, that is, in viewing the “embalmed and restored” body of the deceased for the last time before disposal (1998:64). In keeping with her

commodification argument, Mitford is quick to demonstrate that there is no psychiatric research to support the funeral industry's service of "grief therapy" (1998:65), but is a useful way for the industry to promote embalming and the purchase of a casket in order to create a "beautiful memory picture."³⁴

A memory picture refers to the last "visual remembrance"³⁵ that people will have of the deceased before burial or cremation. The funeral industry works to ensure that the last memory or picture of the deceased is positive through the practices of embalming and "restorative art" (43).³⁶ The intention is to present the corpse in as beautiful and life-like manner as possible; and to fix the image of death of the person as asleep and resting instead of dead. In order to ensure the maintenance of the "everlasting" memory picture and ease fears around images of death and decomposition, the funeral industry also developed the concept of "eternal preservation."

Eternal preservation suggests that embalming along with the provision of a casket and burial vault will prevent the body of the deceased from decomposing. The idea is to reassure loved ones that the body will always stay as they last saw it. Mitford (1998:124-130) argues that the funeral industry created the notion of eternal preservation in order to offer consumers a peace of mind that the corpse remains safe when buried. She demonstrates the falsity of this claim by drawing on the 1948 legal case in California of

³⁴ Mitford (1998:64-66) supports her argument by noting that she made inquiries among psychiatrists and also includes an excerpt of a letter from an 'expert' in the field, Professor Edmund H. Volkart of Stanford University, in which he explains that he is unaware of any research indicating that there are "therapeutic" benefits of viewing an embalmed body.

³⁵ See Tarlow, 2002:93.

³⁶ Embalming is to contribute to the life-likeness of the corpse (because it prevents decomposition and makes it easier to move/set), while restorative art refers to the application of make-up on the corpse.

Chelini v. Neieri,³⁷ in which the funeral industry had to admit in its defence that there was no such thing as ‘eternal preservation’ and that the results of embalming were always uncertain.

Mitford also demonstrates that the funeral industry preys on the emotional vulnerability of its customers by focusing on the body of the deceased, and suggesting that viewing the body can help ease the grief of death. The emphasis on the ‘everlasting memory’ may offer a way for people to memorialize beyond the funeral, as they can carry a positive image and memory with them. However, unlike Mitford’s claim that this concept of everlasting memory is a strategy to sell funeral services, my research questions this concept by asking if people actually find the memory of particular funeral practices to be a sufficient foundation to deal with the complex emotions that accompany the loss, such as the unsettledness, grief and sadness.

Funeral practitioners certainly attempt to create memory pictures in a way that focuses the emotions around death by making death seem ordered, positive and beautiful. The challenge for embalmers or “restorative artists” is to present the corpse as lifelike or “normal” as possible and often this is difficult because of the way a corpse bloats, discolours and leaks. Here, the funeral industry argues that embalming is useful because it helps with any disfigurements of the body, which might traumatize loved ones (Mitford, 1998:46-47). Since the face is the focus of the memory picture, embalmers have to ensure

³⁷ August Chelini was looking after the services for his mother and wanted to ensure that “no ants or any bugs could get to her.” He purchased a hermetically sealed bronze casket and had the body embalmed as the funeral director, Silvio Neieri, informed him that embalming would preserve her body “practically forever.” When Chelini noticed the increasing number of ants around his mother’s crypts during his visits, he eventually requested to view the body and saw that it decomposed. Chelini won his case. (see *Chelini v. Neieri*, 32 Cal. 2d 480, 196 P.2d 915 (1948).)

that mouth and eyes remain closed by applying cement on the eyes and sewing the mouth together, but they also have to sew the lips in such a way so that expression does not look stern or disapproving (Mitford, 1998:46-48). Any missing or swollen body parts further increases the challenge of restoring the body (Mitford, 1998:47-49). Mitford for example describes the way embalmers may have to replace body parts by using plaster, reconnect the head to the body with splints, wires and sutures, reduce swelling by cutting out tissue or inflate emaciated bodies by injecting them with massage cream. Embalmers further have to determine the shade of cosmetics to use on the corpse, especially in cases of jaundice where the use of embalming fluids turn the body green. The display of the body, its positioning, the clothes, the hairstyle, the use of props, such as pillows and scarves, and the lighting are also important in the presentation of the corpse.³⁸ For Mitford, these elaborate measures taken in the name of restoration and beautification function to give loved ones an illusion of peace and tranquility that the industry promotes as a counter to the fear or ‘dirtiness’ of death.³⁹

In its attempt to shape the ongoing memory of the deceased, the funeral industry attempts to prioritize the funeral experience over other memories. The memory picture attempts to preserve the dead as if they were living; it presents the deceased as how people remembered the person. The beautification of the corpse suggests that death is nothing to be afraid of and that people should be at peace or happy to see the deceased ‘resting.’ This everlasting picture however is temporary and only a part of memorializing.

³⁸ For more details about embalming, see Harris, 2007 and Laderman, 2003, or its history, see Habenstein and Lamers, 1962.

³⁹ See also Stearns and Knapps, 1996; Davies, 1996.

The language of “grief therapy” suggests that the funeral manages the grief around death, especially through the visitation. The problem is that the funeral does not fully address the sorrow and sadness people experience from the loss since it makes death a beautiful and pleasurable moment of ‘retail therapy’ through its products and services. Mitford, for her part, disapproves of funeral directors assigning themselves the role of “grief therapists” because she suggests that making death beautiful and pleasurable to be flawed and based on a commodified understanding of death. Mitford’s argument is useful and important because she offers insight into the meaning that the funeral industry gives to its practices and methods of memorializing. In order to extend the research about memorialization however, I want to explore the meanings that people give to the funeral and how memorialization extends beyond the funeral.

Purified by Fire

Let me now turn to consider Stephen Prothero’s argument in *Purified by Fire* (2001). Prothero challenges the standardized and excessive American way of death as introduced by Mitford. He argues that cremation is a new American way of death, and claims that contemporary scholars have given little attention to cremation because their attention has mainly been on burials (10-11). In the story that Prothero tells, cremation has only begun to gain momentum in the United States.⁴⁰ Prothero suggests that

⁴⁰ Cremation is much more popular in the United Kingdom than the U.S., and Canada also has higher cremation rates than the U.S., although the U.S. has been catching up more rapidly in the past few years. In 2012, the cremation rates in the UK were 74.28%, U.S. 43.17% and Canada 63.18% (retrieved March 20, 2014 from <http://www.srgw.demon.co.uk/CremSoc4/Stats/>). This shift is not merely to do with the availability the land, but also the adoption of the practice. For more on the difference in mortuary practices in Western societies, see Walter, 2005.

cremation is a new American way of death because memorialization practices are not yet routine or standardized as they are with funerals and burial practices. He explores this by highlighting the diversity or “spiritual meaning” that people give to cremation and the ways that people can accordingly “improvise” and personalize the practices (3). While Prothero considers the “spiritual” or symbolic meanings that can go beyond the burial practices discussed by Mitford, he still relies on the funeral in order to understand how memorialization happens. However, it is worth unpacking his argument to demonstrate this common limitation of memorialization in the funeral industry literature.

Prothero offers a history of cremation in America⁴¹ by drawing on historical sources, including newspapers, trade magazines and pamphlets. He identifies three phases of cremation. The first is the “birth,” in which he details the first cremation of Baron de Palm in 1876 and the negative reaction of the press and witnesses. The second is the development of modern cremation technologies and facilities in the section on “bricks and mortar,” and the third is the “boom” of cremation, in which he discusses the increasing acceptance and practice of cremation. Here he addresses the approval given by the Catholic Church in 1963 to the growth of consumer culture at end of the 20th Century.

By interweaving arguments made for and against cremation, Prothero reveals the controversy over cremation; he summarizes the arguments made by cremationists to gain support for cremation and presents the strategies used to rebut arguments against cremation. For example, some cremationists argued that cremation had greater scientific, economic and social benefits than burials. The scientific argument for cremation around

⁴¹ See Jupp, 2006 for a history of cremation in Britain.

the middle of the 19th Century was that it was more sanitary than burials because the incineration of the corpse instantly disposed of the body and ‘purified’ the corpse, allowing it to return to nature, whereas burials allowed the body to decompose and “pollute” the earth with “poisonous exhalations” (17-18, see also chapter 2 in Prothero on Sanitary reform).⁴² The notion of cremation as purifying rather than polluting also contributed to the alignment of refinement with cremation. Prothero argues that cremation became associated with a higher level of culture according to the class of “genteel elites,” which consisted of white, educated, middle-class Americans (20-21). At the same time, it included a break from the excess and pageantry associated with Victorian funerals and the desire for simplicity and thus an argument for cremation as more economical (21, 92).

Prothero argues that cremation creates the capacity for improvisation; it gives people autonomy in determining what to do with the ashes and the type of ceremony or service to perform. He explains the way cremation gave people, specifically baby boomers, a chance to break from traditional death rites that focus on the fear of death to centre on the “idiosyncratic personality of the individualized deceased”(200). The argument Prothero makes is that individuals interested in cremation wanted to perform rites, but they did not want them to be gloomy, gaudy, formal or traditional. Instead, they wanted rites to be cheerful, simple, informal and improvised (201-204). For example, Prothero (206) suggests that some individuals may choose a reading from a poet, writer or thinker and share stories of the deceased rather than perform a reading from the bible

⁴² This sanitary argument also contributed to the argument that cremation is more attractive aesthetically compared to burials. For more on sanitary reform, see Chadwick, 1842; Peterson, 1979; Rosen, 1958.

or sermon at the ceremony.⁴³ Others may also choose to scatter the ashes and perform some sort of rite, such as chanting while casting the ashes or constructing a walking pilgrimage from the place of birth to the place of death. Here, Prothero tries to illustrate the way that memorialization is simple, improvised and informal because people determine what to do. At the same time, Prothero argues that this individualization allows people “to make the experience of mourning more...ritually dense and spiritually meaningful” (11-12) because they impart their own meaning to the practices. Prothero’s ideas of improvisation and individualization intersect with my interest in how people negotiate the remainders of death. They both reflect the personalization of acts of memorialization in relation to the memories that they have about the deceased. They also reflect the different narratives that people develop as they represent the deceased with their actions.

This idea of the “spiritual” is one of the main arguments Prothero makes. He suggests that cremation allows people to focus on the spirit rather than the body, and thus, a ceremony is not only important, but also necessary in cremation.⁴⁴ Prothero understands the “spiritually meaningful” in a non-traditional sense; it reflects the way that people create ways to “honour the memory, not the remains” (152). In this way, the spiritual meaning comes from “new places,” such as the heart, nature and “New Age”

⁴³ This act is not specific to cremations since it occurs for burials as well. I will return to this again later in the chapter.

⁴⁴ He demonstrates this by describing the lack of ceremony or ritual at the first American cremation in 1876 of Baron de Palm. He relates the negative response from the press, such as the *Times*, which stated that there was “no religious services, no addresses, no music, no climax, such as would have thrown great solemnity over the occasion. There was not one iota of ceremony. Everything was as businesslike as possible” (33). Another remark was advice from an editorial writer at the *Tribune*, who noted that, “[w]hat was needed was a cremation rite as solemn and sacred as the pageantry of burial.”

practices, including yoga and meditation (205).⁴⁵ For example, Prothero describes the way that Yoko Ono wanted to focus on the spirit of John Lennon after his assassination on December 8, 1980 by planning a memorial ceremony for him for December 14. There was no specific location for the ceremony. Instead, Ono asked that people “pray for his soul wherever you are” (185). Here, Prothero asserts, the focus was not on Lennon’s body, but on his spirit as millions worldwide gathered to remember him as requested by Ono on the afternoon of December 14. The largest gathering was in Manhattan’s Central Park where a bouquet of white balloons was released as a symbol of Lennon’s departing spirit, in which Ono reported seeing “John smiling in the sky” when she looked up. The focus therefore was not on the materiality of the body but on Lennon’s spirit.

Prothero’s examples of improvisation and personalization of cremation practices may indeed suggest a new American way of death. Prothero discusses memorialization in a way that is more expansive compared to memorialization in the funeral industry discussed by Mitford. He suggests that cremation is more flexible compared to the standardized funerals because people have more choices and can personalize their actions around what to do with the ashes. Since people can choose what to do with the ashes, he suggests that the focus is less on the practical reality of disposing the body as people can do something that is more meaningful and representative of the deceased, such as what Ono did for Lennon.

Since I am interested in the types of actions people perform on their own and outside of the industry, Prothero’s concern with ‘spiritual meaning’ intersects with my

⁴⁵ Prothero notes that his view of the spiritual is not irreligious, but focuses on alternative “religious beliefs and metaphors,” including “some Asian, some New Age, and some more modern version of Christianity” (12).

own concern about remainders. It further addresses the emotional reality of death as people attempt to find and give certain meaning to the loss through their actions. Prothero does a better job than Mitford does because his intention is not to disparage the funeral industry but to engage or highlight what people do beyond the industry.

There are however, differences in the way Prothero defines memorialization and the way I do. He discusses memorialization in terms of improvisation and individualization. By improvisation, he means the level of autonomy or independence people have to decide how to memorialize. By individualization, he means the personalization of memorialization practices. Concretely, he restricts the improvisation and individualization of memorialization to the scattering or keeping of ashes.⁴⁶ This is a problem because Prothero still confines his study to the events surrounding the cremation of the body.

Prothero also glosses over the way that the ‘new’ memorialization he describes is an addition to existing burial and funeral practices. The “memorial idea” was an attempt to dispel the earlier perception of cremation as direct disposition⁴⁷. In order to achieve this goal, the Cremation Association of America began to define cremation as “a means to an end,” and that end was memorialization (147). Memorialization here focused on the management of cremated ashes through burial, specifically by the “inurnment of the cremated remains in an appropriate urn; the placement of that urn in a cemetery plot, columbarium niche, or mausoleum; a rite of committal at the place of memorialization;

⁴⁶ Prothero’s discussion about the scattering of ashes came out of the general writing of the book as he seemed to focus on the scattering idea because that was the funeral industry’s greatest concern since they feared the lost revenue and control over people’s actions (see pp. 148-150 on the “memorial idea”).

⁴⁷ Direct disposition refers to the absence of a funeral service or event and the direct disposal of the body by burial or cremation.

and a suitable marker at that site” (149). For example, Prothero observes that the funeral industry, specifically funeral directors, initially resisted cremation when it was first introduced because they saw cremation as a threat to their practices. They feared a reduction in their profits because they associated cremation with direct disposition and memorial societies (148, 192). In order to minimize this tension between cremationists and funeral directors, the Cremation Association of America, (now known as the Cremation Association of North America or CANA), connected cremation with “the memorial idea” in the 1930s (147).

Since cremation rates remained relatively low in the U.S. throughout most of the 20th Century, the NFDA only begin to warm to the idea of cremation in the 1980s.⁴⁸ They adopted the same argument as the memorial idea of the 1930s by referring to cremation “as a procedure or process in final disposition” (NFDA⁴⁹ in Prothero, 192). Michael Kubasak, funeral home owner and later vice-president of Service Corporation International (SCI), the largest multinational in the funeral industry, wrote, *Cremation and the Funeral Director* (1990), and argued that funeral directors had to “elevate” from cremation and not assume that cremation meant “no ceremony, no embalming, no viewing, no casket” (Prothero, 2001:193-194). The objective of funeral directors therefore was to try to sell the visitation and ceremony before cremation in order to maximize their profits.

⁴⁸ According to 2008 CANA statistics, only about 26% of Americans choose cremation in 2000. Cremation rates in 1985 were 14.90%. Retrieved March 17, 2014 from <https://cremationassociation.site-ym.com/?page=IndustryStatistics>.

⁴⁹ NFDA (1981). *Tradition in Transition: Report of the 21st Century Committee of the National Funeral Directors Association*. Milwaukee: National Funeral Directors Association, p. 16.

From my perspective, Prothero's emphasis on personalization and improvisation overlooks the way that memorialization in cremation follows the same practices as in burials. Both involve burying the body, whether in full form or ashes, performing a committal ceremony and placing a marker at the burial location. By associating cremation with funeral practices, this does not suggest that memorialization in cremation is different from burials but supplements them. Cremation often includes the same type of practices as burials but people have to make more decisions about what to do because the ashes are leftover. For instance, people can bury, scatter or keep the ashes or any combination of the above. Once they decide what to do, then they have to decide where and when.

Second, Prothero overlooks standardization by suggesting that 'personalization' has been satisfied because urn manufacturers have increased the available number of options in the design, colour, shape and size of urns (196-198). Yet, he does not recognize that these increased options do not reflect diversity or personalization as much as standardization. In other words, the availability of "options" is still directing people to perform the same type of practices, that is, to buy an urn to deposit the ashes, but perhaps only in a different colour, design, or material. To my mind, cremation is similar to the "funeral." It is not substantially different because the focus remains on the body. My view is that cremation only adds more choices to the implementation of the practices, such as the visitation and service. For example, those who decide to cremate may decide to have a visitation and funeral ceremony before cremation or have the cremation first and then a ceremony. By focusing on the body, attention centres on a single moment in

time whether it is the event of the funeral or cremation. When important texts, such as those by Mitford and Prothero, focus their attention on the funeral, they implicitly devalue forms of memorialization that occur after the event. Prothero does a better job of recognizing that people can do different things, but he continues to focus on the ‘ritualistic’ nature of the funeral.

Prothero for example emphasizes the idea of improvisation and individualization through the practice of scattering ashes by citing examples of personalization by those who decided to scatter ashes over the water, into the wind or at the roots of a rose bush (145). However, Prothero recognizes that the phenomenon of scattering ashes is not as common as it may seem. For example, he notes that most tended to bury their ashes for the first hundred years of cremation (118) and cites a 1990 study that found only a little over half of the participants scattered ashes (198).⁵⁰ Funeral directors also resisted cremation. For example, Hubert Eaton, creator of Forest Lawn, one of America’s largest extravagant cemeteries⁵¹, stated that scattering was “a menace to the memorial idea” (149). Eaton made this statement because scattering went against the selling of the “memorial idea,” which included purchasing an urn to place the ashes in, placing the urn in a cemetery plot, columbarium or mausoleum and marking that place with a marker. Eaton, along with other funeral directors regarded scattering as a threat to the memorial idea because it appeared to be less lucrative. Prothero thus demonstrates how cremation has become institutionalized. For example, companies offering scattering services (198),

⁵⁰ Research on the scattering of ashes is also recent, as David Prendergast, Jenny Hockey and Leonie Kellaheer have begun to investigate the motivations behind scattering ashes. See for example Prendergast et al, 2006; Kellaheer et al, 2010; Hockey et al, 2007; Roberts, 2010-2011; Kawano, 2004.

⁵¹ One of the most popular satirical representations of this cemetery is in Evelyn Waugh’s, *The Loved One* (1965).

such as shooting the ashes into space as Timothy Leary did (188), and the construction of devices such as scattering urns (198).⁵²

I want to suggest that scattering ashes is an extension of the funeral as burial. It is telling that the industry attempts to offer services to ‘assist’ with the practice. At the same time, as with funerals, the formal process of memorialization seems to end once the decision of what to do with the ashes is complete. Having said this, one aspect of Prothero’s understanding of memorialization that I would like to keep is the notion of the multiple narratives that come out of memorialization. The examples given by Prothero throughout the text suggest that the actions that people perform with the ashes are usually representative of a memory of the deceased or favourite activity of deceased. The different companies that offer products that incorporate ashes into objects such as bullets⁵³, coral reefs⁵⁴ and diamonds⁵⁵, also suggests this. The meaning that individuals give to their actions with the ashes is similar to the way that I regard memorialization through the stories that people tell to integrate the loss into their lives. Prothero recognizes the differences through the “spiritually charged” actions that people perform and the meaning that people give to their actions through historical texts. My research extends these insights by investigating the meaning that people give to their actions by talking with them.

⁵² There is also the movement by cemeteries to create a space, such as a scattering garden, for people to dispose of, or scatter, the ashes and to ensure a place for memorialization. See for example <http://www.cremationassociation.org/?page=BeyondTheUrn> and <https://forest-lawn.com/page/memorialization/> or <http://www.mountpleasantgroup.com/Default.aspx?404>; <http://www.mountpleasantgroup.com:443/pre-planning/cemeteries/properties/n>. (websites retrieved March 14, 2014).

⁵³ <http://www.myholysmoke.com/> (retrieved September 2, 2012).

⁵⁴ <http://eternalreefs.com/> (retrieved September 2, 2012). See also chapter 5 in Harris, 2007.

⁵⁵ <http://www.remembrancediamonds.com/> or <http://www.lifegem.com/> (retrieved September 2, 2012).

Using Cultural Sociology to Study Memorialization

So far, I have intimated that I find the existing institutional or structural analysis of the funeral industry and its dominance in the memorialization process limiting because it tends to treat the funeral and memorialization as one. This approach confines memorialization to the funeral. It implies a ‘top-down’ approach that is associated with the idea that: institutions or structures direct individual action, the funeral gives meaning to the practices, the institution is an accepted, normal and natural part of everyday life, and treats people as ‘cultural dopes,’ which assumes that they do not interrogate their actions but accept and perform the directions received from the funeral director.

I want to extend the existing memorialization literature by demonstrating that memorialization exists beyond the funeral and that it is not as contained, static, simple or straightforward as implied in the existing literature, but that it is much more messy, complicated and pervasive. I want to suggest that practices have more meaning than what the funeral industry dictates and that people are themselves the source of this meaning.⁵⁶ The most useful approach to demonstrate my argument is through the conceptual framework of cultural sociology.

My attraction to cultural sociology is due to one of its central objectives, to make “visible” the normalcy or meanings of ‘everyday life’ (see Alexander, 2003). Rarely do

⁵⁶ Take for example, the popularity and attention given to the argument that Mitford makes against the funeral industry. Even though many people are aware of the profit motive of the funeral industry, they continue to perform the practices. While some may use the same point to argue that people are cultural dopes because they still do what the funeral industry says even though they are aware of its profit-motive, I do not think that people are cultural dopes, but that the normalcy and acceptance of the funeral industry makes it difficult for people to see that they can do otherwise.

people question their everyday actions or things that they do.⁵⁷ For instance, why do we have funerals? Why do we continue the pomp surrounding funerals even if we are critical of the funeral industry? Why is it so important to view the dead? The approach of cultural sociology suggests that people act because of the meaning that they give to the practices. Alexander (2003:4), for example, suggests that people use myths, narratives and binaries (such as the sacred and the profane or good and evil), to explain collective forces.

A part of making the invisible meaning visible involves investigating the explanations that people give for their actions. Cultural sociology regards people as part of a process rather than as subjects of external forces that require some form of instruction. Just as institutions inform individuals, individuals inform institutions with their own experiences and perceptions (see Alexander, 2003:4). This approach distances itself from a top-down, or more deterministic approach by focusing on the individual; the effect is to give people more autonomy. People therefore are no longer understood to be cultural dopes but are active participants in the memorialization process.

In some ways, I find it surprising that I would take this approach because the meanings and uses of the concept are constantly under debate and I much prefer things to be simple and straightforward. Memorialization however is much more complex than the funeral industry makes it out to be, and thus, the tools of cultural sociology emphasize openness and flexibility. It helps us to address, but not repress the messiness of memorialization. By using culture as a basis to study memorialization, it can help

⁵⁷ We must keep in mind that Swidler would say that this would be debilitating if people constantly thought about what they are doing and why.

demonstrate that memorialization has multiple meanings, in contrast to the unified narrative of the funeral industry.

The concepts that I find most useful for my approach are the ‘cultural tool kit’ and ‘cultural repertoire.’ Ann Swidler developed these concepts first in her article, “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies” (1986) and then in her book, *Talk of Love. How Culture Matters* (2001). I like these concepts because they offer a useful starting point in thinking about how people use culture, and at the same time, they are flexible enough to address the nuances and complexity of memorialization.

Swidler defines culture by combining the definition of culture by two anthropologists, Ulf Hannerz and Clifford Geertz. The “classic” definition of culture by Geertz (1973:89) explores the embodiment of meaning in symbols, including beliefs, rituals, art forms, language, gossip, stories and ceremonies, while Hannerz (1969:184) focuses on the interaction of people. Swidler thus defines culture as “the set of symbolic vehicles [rituals, stories, sayings] (Geertz) through which [the] sharing and learning [of behaviours and outlooks] take place (Hannerz)” (2001:12).

Swidler suggests that culture influenced action by shaping a repertoire or tool kit. Swidler wanted to move away from Talcott Parsons’ generally accepted argument that values direct action (1986:274). By exploring studies on the culture of poverty, Swidler demonstrates that cultural values do not provide effective cultural explanations because even though each social class values education and work, there is still a disparity between the lower class and upper class (1986:275). The issue is not whether one group values education and work more than another, but that structural circumstances divides the way

that people organize their actions (see also Valentine, 1968; Liebow, 1967). She argues that people are most likely to perform the repertoire that they are familiar with because they have the styles, skills and habits, or the right “cultural tools.” In unfamiliar situations therefore, people can only refer to their cultural tools and if they do not have the right tools, it will be much more difficult to break any structural barriers because they do not have the necessary tools to draw on. People therefore develop cultural repertoires, familiar patterns of action, according to the tools that they have. Culture then, according to Swidler, is diverse as people use different tools to construct their lines of action (1986:277).

Swidler continued her search for new analytical perspectives on culture by developing the ideas she first introduced in her article in her book, *Talk of Love. How Culture Matters* (2001). In the book, Swidler wants to investigate further how people use culture. The problem, for Swidler, is that current studies of culture by sociologists and anthropologists tend to study specific cultural groups in order to identify a “unifying principle of a cultural system” and elaborate differences among cultural groups (2001:12). She identifies three variations of uses of culture. They are mobilization, appropriation and connection to experience (2001:5). That is, how people use culture (mobilization), how people decide what to accept and reject (appropriation) and what is the relationship with their life experiences or between culture and social action (connection to experience) (2001:22-23).

Swidler wants to study the differences between mobilizing culture, using culture and linking culture to action. She achieves this by conducting an empirical study of a

homogeneous group of white, middle and upper-middle class Americans (2001:23).⁵⁸ The approach that Swidler takes to study a homogeneous group has its advantages. For instance, the attention of the study is on the strategies or cultural tools that people use to direct their action. Such a model also allows for an investigation into the variability of culture and inconsistency in actions because not everyone will perform the same action even if they have the same tools. Swidler uses punk music as an example, suggesting that people may know about punk music and listen to it, but some may actually adopt a punk rock lifestyle based on their devotion to the genre⁵⁹ (2001:15). Culture therefore is not just something that exists but is something that is active, flexible and used.⁶⁰

I found her approach useful when designing my study because I was not interested in focusing on one particular group but on the actions or practices that people performed. Adopting Swidler's approach to culture allows me to interrogate this. My attraction to the concepts of cultural tool kit and cultural repertoire is that they offer an approach to thinking about the varied and open meanings of culture and to think of culture as something that people can use. For example, the cultural tool kit offers a concrete and practical way to think about culture as a set of tools. Much like a physical toolbox, people generally have more tools available to them than they can use but they have the ability to decide which tool to put into the tool kit, remove or use. What makes

⁵⁸ Swidler also seems to be making a statement against studying the exotic "to make us feel that we have accomplished something simply by making the strange familiar" (2001:23). In other words, it is not necessary to look at the 'other' or less dominant groups in society to study culture, but that it is possible to examine one that is most common.

⁵⁹ See Hebdige, 2003; Frith, 1981.

⁶⁰ While Swidler's work has attracted the attention of several scholars, two works engage with her 'culture in action' approach. One is by Stephen Vaisey (2009), who offers a "new" model of culture in action by exploring the role that cultural meanings play in people's behaviours. Another is by Nina Eliasoph and Paul Lichterman (2003), who explore the making of meaning through *interaction*, that is, through groups or "group styles."

this so interesting is that not only do people's cultural tool kits vary, but even if they have the same tools, the tools people may use will differ. This helps to explain the difference in meaning that people give to similar actions. Furthermore, an approach that uses the cultural tool kit does not view people as cultural dopes, but gives people autonomy for their actions. This means that people inform their own actions and do not rely on institutions or structures to direct them.

My study of memorialization seeks to show that it is messy, full of contradictions and variations. The idea of a cultural tool kit is a useful concept to help explain the variation between my study participants in their understanding of memorialization. I find that the analogy of culture as a tool kit offers a practical way to understand how culture works. At the same time, a cultural tool kit is not as straightforward or simple as the name implies. It seems to identify the types of tools people use as ready-made, but the reality is that it requires much more inquiry into the meaning that people give to the tools. My interest is not to identify and catalogue the types of tools that people have or use; rather I want to introduce the concept as a way to address the messiness of memorialization and explain this by recognizing that multiple tool kits exist.

Since Swidler suggests that people act according to the tools that they have available to them, she states that people will tend to act in ways and use tools that they are most familiar or comfortable with. She refers to this as cultural repertoire. Repertoires reflect a set of actions that people will perform in a given situation. People develop cultural repertoires in order to help orient their cultural attitudes, images and arguments (2001:31). People typically have more repertoires than they use, but when faced with

situations that challenge their views or when they respond to hypothetical scenarios, Swidler observed that people draw on different experiences, images, stories, cases and analogies in order to develop their positions (2001:31-40). Swidler also found that most people build repertoires according to the context of a problem or situation. She also found that people easily switched between cultural frames according to context, even contradicting other perspectives stated earlier and giving inconsistent perspectives (2001:29-30). Cultural repertoires therefore are diverse, flexible and unorganized as people draw on their repertoires and use various rationales with little concern about consistency and coherence to explain their actions.

I like the idea of cultural repertoires because it gives a sense of order and explanation to how people use culture. It suggests a way to understand how people make meaning, organize their tools and develop their positions. At the same time, cultural repertoires are not stagnant or limited but they are diverse and flexible. People develop their repertoires according to contexts and switch between them in order to explain their positions. This openness of cultural repertoires is what is necessary to investigate something as complex as memorialization. This approach also offers a useful way to organize and discuss my interview material as it offers both a strategy and explanation for examining how people understand their actions and, at the same time, accounts for the diversity of possible understandings. It accounts for why some people do the things they do, why some people have similar repertoires and why some rationales and explanations differ.

Chapter 3 – Memorialization and Meaning-making through Cultural Practice

In the last chapter, I suggested that studies of memorialization tend to concentrate on the meaning that the funeral industry gives to memorialization. I then introduced the theory of cultural sociology as an approach that allows us to see that culture is “active” and that people actively participate in cultural meaning-making. In this chapter, I will apply this theoretical approach to the interview material I collected for this study in order to interrogate the meaning that people give to the funeral.⁶¹

I conducted qualitative interviews in the summer of 2011 with thirty-two people who participated in organizing funerals for their loved ones from as early as 1981, and as recent as 2011.⁶² The study is confined to those who participated in the planning of the funeral because I assumed that they would be in a better position to offer an account of the significance or purpose of the activities performed.⁶³ I analyzed the interview transcripts by coding the interview material. In so doing, I identified four sets of repertoires. Repertoires refer to a familiar set or pattern of actions performed in a given situation.

The first three repertoires come out of the meaning that people gave to the funeral. These repertoires are ‘acknowledgement of the loss’, ‘comfort’ and ‘celebration.’ *Acknowledgement of the loss* represents the way some participants saw the funeral as an important marker to recognize the death and give people the opportunity to say goodbye,

⁶¹ Please see the Methodological Framework in the introduction for details about locating participants.

⁶² The focus on “loved ones” was to distinguish those who organize funerals in a professional capacity.

⁶³ I had some inquiries by individuals who participated in the funeral by association, for example, organizers asked them to officiate or sing. I did not include them in the study because I did not think that they would be able to speak to the purpose of certain practices and the significance for the organizers since they were not involved making decisions but only asked to participate in the event.

pay their respects and offer social support. *Comfort* reflects the way some people found solace in the funeral. *Celebration* signals the decision to honour the life of the deceased.

The fourth repertoire results from my finding that the funeral was not the only site where participants memorialized their loss. I discovered that they often memorialized their loss in other ways. I refer to these everyday acts as ‘remainders.’ Since these remainders represent the different sets of actions that participants performed after the funeral, I have placed them into a repertoire I call, *post-funeral memorialization*. In this chapter, I discuss the remainders as the specific by-products of the funeral. The remainders represent the ways people memorialize after the funeral and suggest that memorialization extends beyond the funeral. Using the material I gathered from my interviews, I want to introduce three types of remainders: living memory, connecting with others and reminders. Each remainder reflects a way to remember the deceased and to deal with the loss. For example, *living memory* represents the way people try to take on characteristics or traits of the deceased, *connecting with others* illustrates the way people contacted others associated with the deceased and *reminders* describes the way people remembered or incorporated the deceased into their everyday life.

I begin the chapter with an outline of the methodology I used to collect and code the interview material. I then illustrate the findings from the interview material in the rest of the chapter. The second section explores the meanings that people give to the funeral through the three repertoires of acknowledgement of loss, comfort and celebration, while the last section examines the repertoire of the remainders, post-funeral memorialization.

Collecting the interview material

Memorialization is an emotional topic that requires sensitivity, so I used a method that I hoped would enable participants to feel comfortable and free to talk about their loss. I decided that semi-structured interviews were the best method because it gave respondents the opportunity to answer questions in their own words and to decline any questions they did not want to answer. I designed semi-structured interviews with a range of open-ended questions and a loose structure, in which respondents had the flexibility to answer freely. In my role as interviewer, I engaged with the responses, and asked follow-up questions. Semi-structured interviews also allowed for a conversational tone that diminished the traditional power dynamic between each respondent and me as interviewer and thus fostered a more comfortable atmosphere.

My aim in the interview was to elicit the meaning that people give to the actions they performed after experiencing a loss. In order to achieve this goal, it was necessary to build a foundation with each interview participant by establishing the types of practices performed. I developed two types of open-ended questions, (1) general and (2) explanatory. I began the interview with a set of general questions to establish the types of practices that participants performed. I followed up with explanatory questions in order to explore the meaning that participants gave to their practices. I asked two kinds of explanatory questions, narrative and explicit. I used narrative questions to elicit one level of meaning that participants gave to their actions.⁶⁴ I then followed up with explicit

⁶⁴ This level of meaning was explanatory in the sense that participants narrated the process, and mentioned the points they considered in making decisions.

questions to ask directly why such practices were important in order to allow them to reflect further on their significance or meaning.

I usually began each interview by establishing the context of the loss and determined which roles and/or practices participants performed. Rather than go through a checklist of possible practices, I asked general questions in order for participants to discuss the practices they performed. By leaving the question general, I saw this as a way for them to recall their experiences more readily and indicate what they saw as important.⁶⁵ The general questions were also important in order to establish a rapport with participants, to gauge the stability or mental and emotional state of the participant, and to get a sense of how to discuss their experience sensitively during the interview.

After the participants established which practices and roles they performed, I asked participants to describe the process they went through in deciding how to go about the practices. These were explanatory in nature. Some of the questions were: “what prompted such actions?”, “how did you decide to do these things?”, or “what factors influenced your decision to do these things?” The responses to the narrative questions offered some insight into their actions, the reasons why people wanted to perform their particular practices. Although the answers offered some clues as to the meaning of the practices, I wanted to ask participants directly about the meaning they gave to their actions with explicit questions such as “what significance do these things/actions have for you” or “why was it important for you to do these things?”⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Sometimes, in acknowledging that participants were drawing on memory, I asked participants whether they included certain practices even if they did not refer to them. If participants, for example, stated that they had a service, I asked for further details such as whether there was a programme or photos.

⁶⁶ Please see Appendix C for the interview guide.

The theories associated with cultural sociology, particularly the concept of cultural repertoire, informed my decision to include different types of explanatory questions to elicit the meaning that people gave to the funeral. Since an intention of the theory is to make the invisible visible, I wanted to give participants a chance to reflect on the funeral and the meaning that they gave to a practice treated as ‘normal.’ The concept of cultural repertoires suggests that people have a “patchwork of cultural accounts” (see Swidler, 2001:28). In other words, they rely on cultural cues according to context. Here, my explanatory questions helped participants to reflect on the ways they found the funeral meaningful. Furthermore, because the idea of cultural repertoire implies that people may switch from one repertoire to another according to context, I asked about the importance of the practices repeatedly in order to flesh out the context of each practice discussed.⁶⁷

The coding process

I tape-recorded and transcribed all of the interviews before I studied each transcript in order to code the interview material. I coded the interview material by developing categories that would best represent what each participant disclosed. For instance, when participants talked about performing a certain practice, I created a category of that practice. If participants explained the reason behind performing the practice, I produced a category of that reason. If they used certain key concepts or phrases, I formed a category of that concept or phrase.

⁶⁷ This method proved successful because even though some participants used tradition, culture or family to explain the purpose of the practices, the explanatory questions deepened their reflections as this chapter will demonstrate.

There were no limits placed on how many categories I used to code the interview material because the objective was to represent the complexity of these responses as much as possible. Let me illustrate this with an example. When I asked Anne about the significance of having a funeral, she replied,

I think that if it hadn't happened there wouldn't have been closure to move on. I mean, there's also that public recognition that a person is gone and it's a way to communicate to people, and they come to the service to express their support for you, and most of them were there for me and they never had met my brother and didn't know him, but for all of his friends, it might have served a different purpose to say goodbye to him.

Since Anne offers several explanations about why it is important to have a funeral, I coded the passage into each of the following categories: closure, public recognition, social support and to say goodbye, in order to represent as many of her different reasons as possible. I used her phrases, such as 'closure,' 'public recognition' and 'say goodbye' to take on her words and meaning and created the category 'social support' to reflect the support she received. I also coded the passage under the practice of "funeral" in order to represent the practice discussed. I coded other transcripts in the same way and according to the categories already created. If someone used the phrase closure or say goodbye, I would code them under those categories.⁶⁸ I had 136 categories when I finished coding the interview material. In order to organize them, I searched for themes and relationships between categories.

⁶⁸ If the phrase a participant used was different but had the same meaning as existing categories, I would not create a new category with the new phrase, but code it in the existing one.

Overview of Participants and Practices Performed

Since one aim of my study is to explore the meaning that people give to their actions, I want to focus on the practices performed. The composition of participants is not as significant to the meaning that people give to the practices because as I will demonstrate, all participants performed some variation of the same practices. However, let me first paint a picture of the participants. All of the participants in the study described losing a family member, such as a spouse, parent, grandparent, child or sibling. While two-thirds of participants described their experience of losing one significant person, the rest of the participants shared their experiences of losing more than one person. The losses participants spoke about occurred between the 1980s and 2000s.

The age of the participants at the time of loss was wide-ranging. Some participants experienced their loss as a teenager or in their twenties, while others experienced them in their thirties or later. The age of the deceased also varied. While most participants described losing someone past their fifties, other participants experienced the loss of people much younger, including one teenager.

Almost 80% of participants were female, and identified with some religious group, the most common were Catholic and Protestant. Approximately 60% of participants were White, and the rest were of European, South Asian or East Asian descent.

Let me now offer some general observations about the practices people performed. By establishing the foundation of the practices performed using the general questions, I found that all participants performed some variation of the same practices.

With the exception of one couple, all participants held an event⁶⁹ to acknowledge the death.⁷⁰ The event typically occurred within a week or less after the death. Sometimes participants would delay the event because of weather, distance and/or scheduling difficulties. Typically, events were held in funeral homes and churches, and on a few occasions, in people's homes, with or without the presence of the body. The event may have included some or all of the following elements: music, photos, eulogy, candle lighting, hymns, prayers, stories or poems. A reception with refreshments or a meal after the event was common and occurred in either the same location or a different space such as a restaurant or community centre.

All participants managed the body through either cremation and/or burial with the assistance of a funeral home. Burial practices completed the process of body disposal quite simply and quickly because participants were required to choose a cemetery and location to bury the body. Cremation however extended the process if people had not yet decided what they wanted to do with the ashes. Some participants interred, entombed, scattered or kept the ashes. For those who had not yet decided what to do with the ashes, they usually kept the ashes in the box they received them in and placed the box in an inconsequential location⁷¹.

⁶⁹ I use the general term "event" to represent the different concepts participants used to describe the practices they performed, including service, memorial, mass, funeral, wake or party. I do however use funeral interchangeably with event in the dissertation.

⁷⁰ While the participants did not have a funeral or other formal event, they acknowledged the loss by planting a tree.

⁷¹ Jessica shared that her grandfather and father's ashes were in box in the basement under the TV, while Pamela stated that her sister's ashes were in the basement of her nephew's home. This variation in how people value certain objects is an important part of understanding the remainders as flexible and subject to change. I address these ideas later in chapter 5.

The Importance of Funerals

The commonality of the practices suggests that participants performed similar practices because this is what they know. In other words, this is what they were familiar with. These practices constitute what one ‘does.’ In this way, I want to suggest that participants have a “cultural tool kit” (see Swidler, 1986, 2001). Even if accorded an assortment of available tools, they tend to draw on the tools that they are most familiar with (see DiMaggio, 1997). Some participants described performing the practices because of tradition, family and familiarity. Amber for example described having a wake because of tradition, “I don’t think that there’s a single person I called who didn’t say, “so when’s the funeral?”” Similarly, Eric stated that there was an expectation that there would be a service, “My family is you do what you do, and you do what has to be done. You have a service for that reason.” Others suggested that having a funeral was a part of them. Some examples include,

Sue: Is it fair to say it’s just engrained in you, it just feels right?

George: I’d say it’s hardwired in who I am.

Laura: I think it’s who I am, it’s where I came from.

Here, participants did not really question the significance or meaning of the funeral but just accepted it as something that they were familiar with or something that they do. The unreflexive responses are not surprising considering the ubiquity of the funeral industry. It is important, however, not to take these responses at face-value because I seek to examine how people make meaning rather than assume that they are simply following tradition. By drawing on concepts from cultural sociology, I suggest that there is more

meaning to their actions than stated. People use their cultural tools to develop their own repertoires of meaning, and these repertoires came out in their responses to the questions I asked. In this way, the key ideas that participants repeated informed the construction of the three repertoires: (1) acknowledgement of the loss, (2) comfort, and (3) celebration. I will now discuss each in turn.

Acknowledgement of the Loss

One cultural repertoire is the theme of ‘acknowledgement of loss.’ Here, a reoccurring theme for my participants was that the funeral served a functional purpose: to recognize that a loss had occurred. Many participants stated that the funeral was an opportunity for people to say goodbye, to pay their respects, to grieve and to receive support. In some way, this acknowledgement of loss ties in with the suggestion by some participants that funerals are “for the living,” that is, the funeral is not for the deceased, but for those left behind, those who are still alive. John for example explained, “it’s a way for those whose lives [have] been touched by a person who has passed on, the service is for them, but not for the person who has passed on.” Others shared the same view, including Kelly who described the funeral as a “public thing, a display for everyone else,” suggesting that the funeral was not for her, while Frances suggested that it was important “for the community.” Similarly, some participants suggested that the funeral was important because it gave people the opportunity to mark the loss and transition in their lives.

For Luke, funerals mark the reality of the loss. He suggested that funerals are just as important as other significant occasions, such as “weddings or milestone birthdays,” because having an event made things “real.”

I think going into a funeral home, having songs, planning a wake, people staying up all night, those are how my family has celebrated birthdays, not at funeral homes, but going to halls, restaurants, [or] someone’s home. There is music, there is talking, we do the same thing that we would do for a wedding. We would go to a space, we go to a room, we have a ceremony where it makes things real. “Yes, I’m marrying you.” “Yes, [my brother] is dead.”⁷²

Similarly, Tanya regards the funeral as necessary in order to mark a transition in one’s life. She stated,

There’s a recognition, there’s an awareness that there’s been a change, a major change in some people’s lives and a minor change in some people’s lives, but a change nonetheless.

Sarah described how she needed the funeral, but specifically an open casket funeral, to recognize the “reality of death.”

I’m a firm believer that a closed casket hinders you from understanding death, the person’s death, you can’t fully understand that they’re gone unless you see it... I have been to funerals where it was [a] closed casket and it was like a tea party, “oh yeah, they died.” I could never get over that, it just seems to not deal with the reality of death. I had a cousin that lived in Winnipeg.... He had a heart attack and died...it took me two years to grieve because I never went to his funeral...I never saw him, it never registered with me that he was gone until I met someone two years later who sounded like him...TWO YEARS before I grieved.⁷³

Michelle and Pamela expressed sentiments like Sarah’s about seeing the corpse as a way to represent the reality of death. Michelle for instance wanted to see her father’s corpse for “closure” and to verify that it was really him in the closed and sealed casket

⁷² Luke makes a similar argument by describing how it was important to his family not to hide that his brother’s death was a suicide because it was “the truth.”

⁷³ At the same time, some resisted this reality of death by avoiding certain actions. Diana explained that she did not want to make a programme for her grandmother’s funeral because it would make the death “too real.”

that she was unable to get into. Alternatively, Pamela and her sister did not want to see her mother at the funeral home because it would mean that she was really gone. Pamela explained,

We went to the funeral home and they said, “go see your mother,” and my sister and I did not want to go to that room. If we go into that room that would mean to see her body and she would be dead. Neither of us wanted to go in.

The two themes that emerged about the importance of acknowledging the loss were (1) it gave people the opportunity to receive and offer support; and (2) they were able to attain some sense of “closure” or at least “move forward.” Let me discuss each in turn.

By acknowledging the loss, many participants described the support they received from others which helped them through that difficult time. Sue, for example, described that having people come and acknowledge the loss helped, while Jessica stated that other people’s kindness gave her a “soft place to fall.” Others, such as Wendy and Rob, saw the funeral as a way to bring the community⁷⁴ together. For Lance, it allowed him to feel like a part of the community. Lance for example described the funeral as a “good coping mechanism to have people around you.” This support also enabled George to acknowledge that this was also a legitimate time for people to express their grief.

[The funeral] provide[s] a venue to grieve, bereave with our community and to receive support from my community...When my mom passed away, [one of her] best friends took it really really really really really really really hard. And you know, they needed a venue to grieve and also seek help, and they had to seek support from the community and from us. You’re linked by a bit of a bond, a bond of loss and love.

⁷⁴ Participants generally used the term community to refer to their own social networks.

In this way, participants also saw that their role was to support those who experienced loss. Jane and Sally, for example, explained how they attend funerals to offer their support and condolences to the survivors. As Jane described,

You attend funerals not for the deceased, but you attend for the living and I went for my cousins because it was their mother...I went because, well I went for his siblings, his wife and I liked the guy. That's it. So, the ritual of death should also take very much into account the survivors.

Another reason some participants stated that it was important to acknowledge the loss was because it offered "closure." The concept of closure is suggestive of finality or an ending. Some participants used the concept in this way. Michelle, for example, described the funeral as a way for some people to attain closure because it allowed them to acknowledge the loss, to give their condolences and to offer their support. Others suggested that some of the practices made the loss final, such as Nancy who described finding closure through the burial, "[b]ut the burial, it felt good, it felt like closure. Like it felt [like], 'okay, she's gone.'" Or Joy who saw the reception as a wrap up to the "whole process," "[t]he reception was good, it was a good way to sort of I guess get some closure to the whole process."⁷⁵

Many of those who expressed closure as a means of completing 'the process' seemed to refer to the funeral process. Alternatively, others suggested that it was too soon to achieve closure through the funeral (Anne, Beth and Kelly) and described closure in

⁷⁵ Lance described how he wanted to bury his dad as quickly as possible but had to wait until others could travel to attend the funeral. He did not state that it was for "closure," but that he felt anxious, like his dad was in purgatory or limbo. I want to suggest that Lance was seeking closure and that he would have found a quicker sense of closure because he would know where his dad was. It would mean that the process, the waiting, the funeral, would have ended for him.

the sense of moving forward (Anne, Sarah, George, Jessica and Margaret, Beth) or healing (Rita, Luke, George). Jessica for example explained,

I really think that it's about the processing, the processing, like okay it's really over. There's time there to go through things in your head, I think that it's the respect, the marking of the respect of that person in your life, like it's closed, it's not closed, but obviously the grieving process continues, but it's something about it being an ending that allowed me to move forward.

The participants here use closure as a process or turning point in the 'conventional' meaning of the term as a finality or ending. I want to suggest that the idea of moving forward, or what Jessica and others call 'processing' refers to thinking about having to go through a sequence of events in order to reach 'closure.' Many of my participants did not actually receive closure in the meaning of the concept as finality or ending, nor did they want to. Rather, they acknowledged that the process of memorialization extends beyond the funeral and is ongoing. I will return to this idea again later in chapter 5.

Comfort

Let us turn to the second cultural repertoire associated with the funeral experience: comfort. Comfort represents the way some participants described the relief or solace they received from performing some of these ritual practices. This came out in two ways. The first is the through the sharing of stories which had the effect of reaffirming the value they had of the deceased. The second was through the experience of the ritual itself.

Participants described stories as a way to share and reflect on the life of the deceased. A familiar and more formal method of story telling today⁷⁶ is the eulogy. The eulogy is understood conventionally to be a speech or series of reflections that someone⁷⁷ gives about the deceased at the funeral. The participants who discussed giving a eulogy often described it as a way to share not only what the deceased meant to them, but also to reflect on that person's life, character and personality. George described the themes he developed when writing the eulogy for his mom and sister.

[The eulogy for] my sister was more of short stories that reflected who I thought she was...It was sort of the attempt to capture in a few words what I loved about her... The theme for my mom was very explicit, the things I learned from my mother. So it was a commemoration of the life lessons or select life lessons that I learned from her and defining her personal strengths and characteristics.

Similarly, Diana viewed the eulogy as a way to represent her grandmother and show her personality. She wrote the eulogy with her sister and described how she included stories about her grandmother in order to reflect her character. She shared the story that her sister included,

My sister shared a story about my grandmother... [my grandparents] joined a senior citizen's club when they came to Canada...and they were a part of it for about 25 years...they would go dancing and they were in their 70s and she shared a story about how they were very lively,...[and] still enjoyed going out together... When my sister and I talked about doing the eulogies, it would become cliché if we talk about characteristics and traits, she was very loving and caring, but by telling a story it showcases the strengths without having to say it...because when you could see that my grandparents liked to go dancing, you can tell that they liked to dance, they liked to be social, the stories are saying it without having

⁷⁶ Pamela experienced the loss of her parents over thirty years ago and explained that the eulogy in the past was less personal than those we may be familiar with today. She also felt that in the past, the service was more structured and organized around the ritual of religion or life and death rather than a focus on remembering the person as it has become today.

⁷⁷ Pamela also found that in the past, the person giving the eulogy may not have any connection with the deceased. I found that most participants in the study asked someone close to or related to the deceased to give the eulogy.

to say it.

Margaret also described the eulogy as a way to achieve closure and to honour the dead because it can help others and give the dead a voice. She explained,

I had to put in a nutshell what [my sister] was to me. It's kind of bringing that person and those memories to life again, and for me to hold her in my heart. And I think it was important for the other people too....when you're the one delivering the eulogy, when you're the one, you're helping those other people too, you're speaking for them and you're helping them give voice to their memories to who was this person. Who was this person? It's a tough thing writing a eulogy, it's a real tough thing, but in all the cases I've done it, it's very meaningful to me. You know, the word honouring just seems really important to me, just honouring.

While many focused on the eulogy as a way to give the deceased a voice and connect with the guests, George explained that the eulogy was also a way for him to speak to the deceased.

[I'm] not speaking only to the congregation,... [but] it's also talking to that person right? It's sort of the two audiences and it's me talking to both, trying to express a few words.

However, both George and Diana stated that the eulogy was limited insofar as it was often frustrating to distil everything about a person into a few minutes in order to accommodate the larger event. George, for example, described his experience in this manner:

I sat up in the early hours of the morning, drinking a little too much wine.... and [I] was trying to think about how am I going to pull this thing together, how I am I going to in a span of 4 minutes, in 4 or 5 minutes, tell people what [my mom] meant to me as a person. What is the underlying story that is going pull this together, so that when people walk away it's going to resonate with people, it's not going to be disjointed images, but it's going to resonate with people. So that's what I thought of, and I spent a lot of time on it.

Outside of the eulogy, some participants allocated a part of the service for people to share stories. Laura, Margaret, Beth and Barb, for example, each organized a funeral

that included a chance for guests to share stories about the deceased. Each of them asked specific people to share stories at the funeral, but they also invited any guests who wanted to share a story to speak as well. It tended to be more informal or at least less organized than the eulogy.

Barb: [W]e had various speakers and then we had non-scheduled speakers. We invited people who just wanted to say a few words, to just come up and it ended up being a very warm....it went beyond the structure.

Beth: The part that I really loved, there was a part where we asked a close family friend...to go up and tell some stories about dad, there were some really funny stories, so there was a lot of laughing, and if people wanted to say anything, [we invited them] to come up, but we asked for it to be positive. My uncle...he gave a real incredible and touching speech that everyone remembers....my colleagues seem to remember his speech.

I asked Beth to explain what she meant by positive. She explained her family was feeling quite “fragile” at the time and they wanted to keep the mood upbeat and light and to focus more on remembering her dad than to focus on the loss. I will return to this idea in the next section on “celebration.” But for now, while celebration could be related to the idea of comfort, I found that participants did not talk about it in this manner. They did not say that they found comfort in keeping the atmosphere positive or celebratory – rather it was about controlling the environment by limiting the types of things one could and might say in order to ensure comfort.

Other participants organized events that principally involved telling stories, including Tina who organized a BBQ for her dad. Amber also organized a wake for her mom where she requested that guests share stories about her mom.

I gave a, not a eulogy, a sort of ‘thank you for coming’ speech....I said something like thank you for coming, I commented on the number of people and how that showed how many people she touched in her life, I said distinctly it wasn’t a

funeral, I wanted people to share stories... memories, tell a story of how you met my mom, to share a positive memory of her, [it] had some comedy, it was a weird time and then we had a toast.

One of the ways that telling stories gave these participants comfort was that they reaffirmed the value or life of the deceased. Margaret, for example, found the stories about her sister that people included in their sympathy cards comforting because they demonstrated how special her sister was to others as well. Similarly, Beth found the telling of stories comforting. She remembered a conversation she had with her dad once about how people became saints when they died. When her dad died and she found herself viewing her dad in a similar way, the stories helped to affirm her positive view of him, and to understand that she was not alone in her thinking. She explained,

It's something that we actually, dad and I, would joke about. When we would be watching the news and somebody had passed away for whatever reason, it would be an accident and people would always, he had a very dark sense of humour, and people you know would always say that "they were the best person, they were the nicest," and we would always say, "oh god, why is it that whenever anybody dies they become saints? Maybe this person was a terrible person," but you know. And so, and then you find yourself in this situation where someone that you love passes away, and you do, you tend to be like, "they were the best person" (chuckles). But to have it reaffirmed and to have all those really good elements brought to light in the ceremony is comforting.

Sue also described how the telling of stories helped to expand her perspective of her grandfather and see him as a "whole person."

The service, it was very comforting to hear what people had to say,...it was touching, you recognize something of the person and it's nice to hear that other people saw those things too...it brings to life that they are a whole person beyond being your grandfather, but it's the other parts of him that you didn't know...It's kind of like finding someone you didn't appreciate enough or admired and wasn't as interesting or dynamic as you thought they were or that they are more so.

For some participants, sharing stories also helped to perpetuate the memory of the deceased. George, for example, wanted the eulogy of his mother to resonate with people “let people know who they were so they were, so they’re kind of not forgotten, so they’re not forgotten.” Amber further regarded stories as a way to acquire new memories and keep her mom alive.

What I liked was that people who knew her very well but didn’t know each other to be sharing. I always kind of felt that...immortality exists as long as memory is perpetuated and as long as people are talking about someone, that’s a form of immortality, you know, so that’s the kind of spirit I wanted to embody there. And so, yeah, I went around and, I didn’t formally say, “hello, please tell me a story about my mother,” but it just kind of generated organically that I got to hear a lot of things about her youth that I certainly didn’t know before (laughs). And yeah, that was the point for me, I was very hungry for new information about her because I was starting to think about the fact that making memories was done, so it was kind of a way of making new memories with her by talking with other people about it.⁷⁸

The ritual of the funeral was another way that some participants described finding comfort. I use ritual here to represent the act of having some sort of event or the performance of practices when a death occurs. For some, it was through the ritual of having a formal event, such as a funeral (Beth, Barb, Jessica, Jason, Anne, Rita, Pamela, Tanya, John, Sue, Luke, Kelly, Sarah) or a Catholic mass (Carol, Diana, George, Jane, Lance, Eric and Michelle). For others, it was some sort of ‘informal’ or ‘non-traditional’ event that often included elements of a funeral or mass, such as prayers, speeches, music,

⁷⁸ What’s interesting however is that Amber has not done anything with the stories. The stories she defined as important and a way to get to learn more about her mom. It is interesting to think about this in relation to an idea in the next section, of people keeping photos in order to remember and not forget, that is, the way most people do not often write stories down but keep them as memories or something to share with others in conversation. The problem with that is the story will be lost if never shared or written down once that person passes, in which case it is possible to forget. This is unlike photos, the materiality of an object, the image of a person, that people have, in order to remember. One participant however, Sally, is a writer, and she talked about writing her own story for her family.

stories or photos. Tina, for example, described having a BBQ, while Amber described her experience of a wake.

Some participants described the ritual as comforting because it was familiar. Others said it gave life meaning, and still others said it acted as a distraction. Carol, for example, explained that the standardization of the mass made it easy for her to know what to do and the solemnity of the event allowed her to feel sad:

I think that sometimes that there is a lot of comfort in sticking with tradition because it's what you know. And when it's something like death when it's a real sad time, and when having something prescribed because it's a tradition, means that you can be in your grief and just be sad and not be exposed to a new situation, you know what I mean, there's a sort of comfort to know that you can grieve because you know what it entails, because you know what the ceremony entails.

Vicki also supported the ritual proposed by her in-laws because she found that it gave people an "official" time to grieve and remember her husband:

If you don't have something official, by date and time and location, then you might not take that time for someone if you don't do that.

At the same time, Lance described the mass as comforting because it gave life meaning:

There's probably no heaven and Christ never happened, but when the priest tells you convincingly that he's at the gate of heaven, that there is this thing, and there's this small thing in you, and you think "oh wow, maybe there is and I hope there is ...and maybe my dad's there...maybe life is not meaningless."

Diana expressed a similar sentiment when she selected the readings for her grandmother's service,

I think you also try to pick readings that you have some sort of connection with, that relate with what you're going through, and some of those readings also gave us a bit of relief as well because they are also talking about how the person is now gone and in heaven, so I think that we also took some comfort from those readings to guide us in how we feel.

Some participants also found the ritual of the funeral comforting because the support they received from others reaffirmed the value that they gave to the deceased. Lance for example discovered that the funeral helped him to recognize that his dad was important to others and that his “dad’s life wasn’t a complete waste, that he was a part of something bigger.” Beth and Barb also described finding comfort through the funeral because it reassured them that their families were not alone in the love they had for their fathers by witnessing that others felt the same way. Beth explained that the number of people at the funeral reaffirmed that her dad was a good person and loved.

I think that one of things that was so nice...was being aware of how many people liked and loved him, it was very comforting...because it helps you remember why this person was special. Ummm, it just reaffirms that.

Barb expressed the same sentiment:

We know what we have in terms of our memories and we wanted to share things with people that knew and loved him that we thought that they wouldn’t know and we learned a lot too and it was a really proud moment, because we all knew we loved dad, but when we found out so many other people loved dad, it gave you this warmth and it helped make the grief and that little journey easier.

Another way some participants found the ritual comforting was that it offered a brief distraction from their emotions. In other words, it allowed them to divert their attention from the loss. Lance and Sue discussed the way the service gave them some comfort because it allowed them and others to take their “mind off” the loss or to give them something else to direct their energy towards and to focus on. Beth further described that the “busy work” of funerals gives you something else to do before you have to confront your grief. She explained,

Even that day of the service when it finished, people had come back [to the funeral home] and eaten the food. We did some chit-chatting and they all left and then dad's music was still playing, and it was just us....and I think no one actually quite wanted to go home and my sister just got really upset...part of the funeral is that it's busy work and it gives you something to do...there's all this focus and you think, "oh god, what do you do?" That's why I jumped in the car to go to Chicago, you're forced to confront your grief after the funeral, after the busy work, it's an uncomfortable time.

Kelly also described the intricate method that she and her brother devised to display the photos of her dad as a method to distract them from the loss.

Honestly, we made it much more complicated than it had to be. We sorted everything into themes and cross themes and how could we best organize everything, and we just settled on five different posters....and we just basically picked our favourite ones and then we would lay the posters out...we were partially doing busy work to try and keep our minds off everything, but at the same time it was a lot of fun.

The comfort that participants described was achieved by keeping things "light" and positive – except for Carol who described that she felt like the mass permitted her to grieve and feel sad. However, another way that I want to suggest that these acts of keeping things in a positive light or taking the time to select the photos and readings gave participants comfort is that it distracted them from the reality of the loss. Participants were able to divert or postpone their grief and sadness by keeping busy and doing other things. This idea of comfort and celebration are ways people give meaning to the funeral; they help to overlook the sad emotions or to delay them until they have their own private time. I will return to this idea of distraction in the next chapter.

Celebration

Let us now consider the third cultural repertoire associated with the funeral experience. Many participants affirmed the idea of the funeral as a time to honour the deceased with a type of ‘celebration.’ However, celebration means different things to different people. I discerned three different ways that my participants understood the funeral to be celebratory. For some, celebration consisted in sharing memories. Others saw room for celebration in the informal or non-religious aspects of the funeral. Finally, some thought that a celebration was about having a good time and repressing grief. Let me discuss each in turn.

Sharing

Laura, a participant in the study and a humanist officiant, defined a celebration as a way for people to share their memories of the deceased in order for “people to go away with a much larger sense of who that person was.” She further described a celebration as an occasion to talk about the person rather than to insert simply a name into a scripted speech. She explained,

You hear that phrase [“celebration of life”] very often...I’ve been to funerals where the minister begins with a celebration of life and there’s nothing celebratory of it...I’ve been to one where they mention the person’s name twice, so it’s more about the community and about the sacraments and salvation, where to me, the celebration of life is entirely about the person’s life.

Barb’s notion of celebration is similar to Laura’s and came out of her experiences of attending funerals where the officiant inserted the name of the deceased into a script. She described leaving funerals where she did not feel as though she knew the deceased any better after the funeral. Such experiences influenced her decision to include and

request stories about her dad for his funeral. She wanted guests to remember and get a sense of his character. She explained,

My first husband's father died and it was in a church, and the priest [who] did the service injected his name into some readings that were very sterile.... You knew that he didn't know the man, and then we all went to the cemetery and said more prayers, and you came away from funerals like that; I've been to several since then, where I knew nothing about the person from the moment I arrived at the funeral home to the moment I left the cemetery and that was when I've went to a funeral for someone's parent who I never met before, and I would like to come away saying, "wow, what a wonderful person I wish I had met them or known them," and there were those instances when I came away [where] I don't know anything about that person's parent and it left me feeling, I don't know, like that was wrong, like that was really wrong, and I never wanted to see that happen to my family. 'Cause a lot of friends came to my father's funeral and they never met my dad, and afterwards they would say, "what a great man, you're made of good stock" kind of thing, and that's what I wanted, I wanted people to have the respect of the memory of him and everyone is deserving of that.

Informal and limited religious elements

Other participants regarded celebration more informally, and with limited religious influence. These participants generally viewed the funeral in a "traditional" manner, that is, as formal, religious, and sombre event that was standardized and scripted. Tanya, for example, suggested this when lamenting her father's funeral,

With the funeral arrangements and everything... I just don't get why it's so solemn, why it's such a depressing experience. I look at other cultures, death is inevitable, something that is going to happen to everybody, it's more like celebrating a birthday. It's more like celebrating a life than a mourning thing.... I would say it's important to have some kind of celebration, some kind of event, I don't necessary think that the events we have in our society help. To me, [a celebration] it would be more like, no black and grey clothes. It would be more of a remembrance... it would be more upbeat, people bring their stories, more of a wedding environment, not so sad. [It would be] less churchy, that's what I don't like about funeral services... less churchy, and more cocktail party. Not so much people sitting in pews and watching people talk, more like people mingling and a slide show and people going up and saying toasts and people saying stories.

Amber shared similar sentiments when I asked her about the service for her mother. She stated, “I say service, (laughs), but that’s rather loose, we didn’t have any religious or formal element to it.” And Laura explained that her father’s event was a celebration of life rather than a proper funeral because there were only one or two prayers.

Those participants that were adamant about having a non-traditional and/or informal event did not hold their events in either a funeral home or church. Amber for example referred to her mother’s event as a “wake,” while Tina had a “BBQ” for her dad.⁷⁹ The wake organized by Amber was a casual event for people to interact and share stories about her mother. It featured photos of her mother on a wall and her favourite music. The BBQ organized by Tina featured food, music, stories and a short ceremony that included a short prayer, readings, standing in silence and throwing roses in the water. Tina explained the tradition of throwing the roses in the water to me:

We had a dozen roses and if you throw them in the water and if they came back to shore, it meant the person would come back. I remember wanting to collect as many roses as I could, I walked all along the beach and I remember collecting 11 of them, and I kept them.

Fun and positive atmosphere

For Margaret and Barb, a celebration was about having a good time. They called their events ‘parties’. Margaret essentially had a memorial service for her sister, but called it a “party” because that is what her sister referred to it when planning the event.

⁷⁹ While Tina and Amber were quick to suggest that their events were non-traditional and informal, it seems that both events included elements of the funeral.

Margaret said that her sister called it a party because she wanted people to celebrate and have a good time. She explained:

I think her sense of celebration is that if enough people celebrated and are not having a miserable time. You know when we talked, we talked about music and food, (like really yummy, fattening food, like really decadent, chocolate, things like that...it's a time to celebrate and go all out), what people would do there, and there was definitely a note of celebration in her mind, and in mine.

Margaret also rented a venue to host the party because she wanted a "cheerful place that would denote a party." She did not see a church as the best venue because her sister was not religious, and Margaret always viewed the funeral home as "sad, dour and grim".

Barb had a funeral for her father at a funeral home, but she described it as hosting a "party." This was her dad's request and "he was not a religious man."

My dad used to say, he was a working class man and he would say, "please don't spend a lot of money on my funeral, but spend all the money on the party."... We worked with the funeral home to do a non-religious service, and we're Scottish, and my parents belonged to a Scottish community centre and we were able to book that centre for the after service party. We're Scots, so we drink, we eat and we celebrate the life rather than mourn the loss.... It's sort of like the Irish wakes, it's kind of identical in which people party and celebrate and tell funny stories about the man or the woman...it's the jolliness, the liveliness of the person's life, and we don't sit around and weep, we do that privately, it's more of laughing and being happy and supporting the loved ones.

In Barb's explanation, people do not cry at the event in order to keep the atmosphere celebratory. Other participants shared this view. For example, Joy explained that she tried to emphasize the celebration of life atmosphere by not crying for the wake or visitation. Some acknowledged that while there are bound to be some tears and sadness, the intention of creating a celebratory atmosphere was to limit such emotions (Amber) or as Sue explained, to keep them "within check."

For Tina, laughter was an important element of the celebration. She said that it is not a usual feature of funerals because she would feel guilty for laughing if it were a ‘traditional’ or typical funeral. Tina viewed the BBQ for her dad as a celebration because it gave people permission to have a good time and to laugh. She explained:

If someone did decide to tell the story of so and so when he did this and it’s hilarious, you could have some people laughing if they wanted to right? Where they wouldn’t feel like where laughing was wrong. That’s why I would focus on the celebration aspect, right? I think when I die, I don’t want people, like I said, this guilt factor, I don’t want people crying around, you know what I mean? I want people telling those stories of the stupid things that I did when I was younger, and laughing at me, that’s what I want to happen, so that’s what I would want the celebration aspect to focus on.

Rather than focus on the loss, some participants said that they celebrated the life lived by focusing on the time that they had with the deceased. Sue, for example, said that her grandfather had over eighty years of life and thus lived a full life. Rather than mourn the loss, she celebrated the long life he had and the time her family shared with him. She explained,

The focus is to talk about the happy and good times, it’s never meant to, you know, there’s no talk about ‘why did you leave?’, or ‘it’s too soon,’ ‘we’re really going miss you,’ there was a bit of that but it was within check, it was ‘we’re happy to celebrate his life’, ‘these are the things he did’...it was definitely more positive.

John also discussed how he lost his son to a hiking accident in the mountains but rather than lament his loss, he emphasized the time he had with his son.

I tend to look at the 27 years he had as a gift given as a father, and it was a tremendous gift and I wanted to celebrate it.

He further suggested that because his son was an experienced climber and loved the mountains, that people should not be sad or angry about the loss because his son “died living” and included a psalm to try to express this.

[T]o lose [my] son in the mountain [was] one of the more easier ways to see him pass on because we had celebrated together over there, in the mountains, and I saw the passion that he had...so, when I did speak at the funeral, I concluded by saying that [he] would never want us to be hurting, I concluded by saying that he died living...[T]here’s a scripture in Isaiah and it says “in the mountains, it will bring peace to the people.” I didn’t want people to be angry at the mountains or angry at him, so I was looking for themes like that.

In order to celebrate the deceased, the most common thing participants described was a desire to personalize the practices. Earlier I discussed the way that some participants found comfort in stories about the deceased. Stories are one way for people to personalize the practices and to celebrate the memory of the deceased. Some other ways to personalize the event were to include favourite things of the deceased (such as objects, music, readings or poems, displaying photos) and to draw on personal characteristics of the deceased (such as kindness, consideration and athleticism).

Some participants celebrated by playing the favourite music of the deceased or by reading a favourite poem at the funeral. Many participants selected music based on their memory of the deceased’s favourite ‘tunes’ (Jessica, Carol, Anne, Jane, Beth, Margaret, Barb, Vicki). Others such as Michelle, John and Tanya played songs that reminded them of the deceased. Tanya, for example, included the song ‘Heart and Soul’ because she remembered playing it with her dad when she was younger. Luke, however, described how his parents chose a song to represent the suicide of his brother.

The song they chose was that Sixties movement song, Bob Dylan's, Blowin' in the wind...I think that the song answered the question 'why?' for them, [in] which there is no answer, the answer is all around us, and it just is.

Another common practice to remember the deceased was to display photos. Many participants described the time it took to sort through the photos and decide which ones to include. Jessica described selecting photos that represented things her dad enjoyed:

He loved to go to Las Vegas, so we put a picture of him there, he loved different pieces of property and going to the cottage, so we just made sure that there were pictures there that were representative of him, doing the things that he loved to do.

Most participants organized the photos as a montage in order to tell a story of the deceased. While Beth arranged the photos chronologically into a slideshow, Kelly organized the photos to highlight parts of her dad's life and his passion for photography.

We had posters and they were themed, his side of the family, my mom's side of the family, the five of us, his landscape photos, his sports photos. They were a big thing, partially to show off his skills and partially to show off his life.

Participants also described how they decided on which memorialization events to hold by drawing on the characteristics of the deceased. Lance knew that his dad was very religious and that a mass would be most fitting, while Frances knew that a religious or church ceremony would be "inappropriate" for her husband since he was not a believer.

Other times, participants drew on a memory of the deceased. Pamela, for example, explained how she witnessed the importance of the Anglican Church for her mother even though her mom stopped practicing her faith after she married her father. Since her mother pre-planned her funeral and asked for an Anglican minister, Pamela shared her own memory with the minister who then performed a high Anglican service.

She was very much into the Anglican Church and when she married my father, a lot of that she gave up....I mean it was really important to her....she wanted an

Anglican minister and when I was talking to him and telling him about how I felt that she really had given up her faith for my dad... [because] when my father in law died... she went into the chapel with me and she actually knelt and prayed, it was an Anglican church and chapel, and I said 'this really means something to her' and I told him that. And my sister said to do whatever service is required. He could have done a short service, but he did the high Anglican service and I think he did it for her. He might have not done it if I hadn't said that and every one is circling me and I thought 'too bad, too sad, we can't spend another 15 minutes on mom, come on.'

Why celebrate?

The three explanations that participants gave for why it was important to view the funeral as a celebration were (1) to manage emotions, (2) to demonstrate the value of the life of the deceased, and (3) to carry on the memory of the deceased.

Some participants treated the funeral as a celebration in order to minimize or to delay their pain. Tina, for example, explained that having a celebration gave her support by being around others, and yet, it helped to take the attention away from her by focusing on the deceased. She explained:

Focusing on the celebration is more important to take the focus off the loss for me. Personally for me, when I grieve my losses I like to do it by myself and having a celebration of the life, is what wakes are supposed to be, I just think that it really lets you cope with your grief in your own way by taking that kind of really sad component out of the ceremony. If you go into a ceremony with the focus that it's supposed to be a celebration of that person's life it helps to lift that sorrow a little bit, I know it really doesn't do that, but it helps lift it a little bit, especially in such a communal setting.

Both Barb and Beth expressed that a celebration helped to lift the spirit a bit because death can be a very "dark thing" otherwise. Barb explained,

Because if you keep mourning their death, you just go into a dark place, it's not positive energy. It's not productive, it just brings you down so hard. But if you think about the positive, the good things, it's a sense of moving forward and finding happiness with the loss and it's like wow, all the good stuff.

Beth further suggested that having a celebration was a way of “keeping it together” by not stirring up too many emotions.

We were just so fragile, that we just wanted to keep a certain [positive] tone because it’s so easy for it to be a very dark thing, and yeah, I think it had more to do with uhm, keeping it together (laughs). Especially mom, she was really very nervous, because she’s already the kind who doesn’t like the centre of the attention, and as the widow of course she was the centre of attention, and she asked for things to be kept light and upbeat....I guess you can’t have a light funeral, but lighter...something to not stir up too many of the emotions.

Some participants suggested that personalizing the funeral gave meaning to both ‘life’ as such, and the deceased. As I mentioned earlier, Pamela explained that a difference between funerals today and those of thirty years ago is that people now focus on the deceased and meaning of life rather than on death and religion. She stated,

I think that now what they are doing when people actually get up and talk about the person, it probably gives that person meaning and their life meaning. I think it makes it more (pause) it makes it more the remembrance of the person rather than the ritual of the religion, and the ritual of life and death type of thing because people are on this earth and they are on this for a very short time, but their presence here has meaning and it’s not just all God’s plan, but maybe it’s all God’s plan, but still they touch people’s lives. You know we touch people’s lives at the end of the day.

Personalization was also a way for people to demonstrate the value that the deceased had in people’s lives. Vicki, for example, said that it was important to personalize her husband’s service to show how special he was to her. She explained,

He was so unique, and it was really important to mark how special he was. And how special we were, because he’s the love of my life you know and...he deserved the best.

In this way, the response from guests helped give meaning and value to the deceased. Beth described how personalizing her dad's funeral seemed to both touch and inspire her friends who attended.

I think that it was a really good funeral and I say that because a lot of people commented. And a lot of people, who were friends of mine, who commented, they came away really wishing that they had known him, because of the way it was said, and a couple people came away to say that they wish they could live their lives that way too. You can't ask for a better response.

Celebrating the deceased at the funeral was also important to some participants because they saw it as a way for people to remember and carry on the memory of the deceased. This explains why Barb was so determined to personalize her father's funeral because she wanted others to know more about her dad and to remember him. She explained,

I really think that there are different ways you can memorialize people and I think that the personal touch is the real human way to do it. And like I said several times, I went to too many sterile services where I didn't find out anything about the person, and it made me sad because I'd go to support someone I care about, but I can't really go up after the tea and coffee to say, "it sounds like your mom sounds like a real terrific person," and that made me so sad and it just seemed so wrong and that the person deserved better, that's all.

George also explained the way that he wanted guests to remember his mother and his sister. In response to my question about why it was important for the eulogy to resonate with people, he replied:

The people showing up, cared about me, cared about my family and cared about our grief. And part of the reason I wanted to leave with this image, for it to resonate it with them is this person, whether it was my sister, mom or my aunt, to let people know who they were so they were, so they're kind of not forgotten, so they're not forgotten.

Here George explained that he thought that sharing something about his mother or others he has lost was an important way for him to give something to the guests who were there to support him. It gave them something to take away: the memory of his loved one.

Sue made the most interesting remark about carrying the memory of the deceased.

When I inquired about the importance of having a celebration, she replied,

I have been to other funerals, the speeches and the eulogy and all of that, which were to me a lot more sad and sombre. You know, it was an end and you know, they will always be remembered and whatever. Whereas the stories that were told, like whether we were talking about either grandfathers, it was what they taught us, “remember the time when he would joke around about this?”, like that kind of, there was actually laughing at the ceremonies, you know. I mean, there were sombre moments too, but it was very much we were reminiscing on the happy parts of his life, the happy contributions he’s made to everyone else’s lives and things like that.

The phrase, “it was an end, and you know, and it always will be remembered” strikes a chord with me because it suggests that there is no reason to use the celebration to focus on the loss because people will always remember the loss. Instead, people should focus on the memories and stories about the person because they are the things that made the person and worth remembering. In a way, Sue is talking about taking on an approach that is about making it easier to go forward. Rather than dwell on the loss and focus on what she no longer has, she is embracing what she does have, which are the memories, stories and teachings of her grandfathers. She is talking about the way she can preserve her memories. This is an example of not looking backwards at what one no longer has, but looking forward and realizing that people still have the memories, stories and lessons of their loved ones. The challenge however is what to do with those memories, stories and

lessons. I explore this in the next section on the fourth repertoire of post-funeral memorialization.

Post-funeral Memorialization – Repertoire of the Reminders

Thus far, I have identified three kinds of cultural repertoires that participants used to give meaning to the funeral. These repertoires include acknowledgement of loss, comfort and celebration. Each repertoire reflects the importance of the funeral to participants, but also reveals how people have familiar patterns of actions that they can draw on whenever they experience a loss. In exploring the meaning that participants give to the funeral – whether they formally experienced one or not – it became apparent that they all regarded the funeral as an important step in memorialization. Memorialization, as some suggested, necessarily begins with the funeral. Yet, Sue’s observations are striking because they suggest that there is never really an ‘end’ as such. What can we make of those acts of memorialization, beliefs, and ideas that extend beyond the funeral?

In this section, I discuss the fourth repertoire of post-funeral memorialization. This repertoire refers to the types of actions that people perform after the funeral. I refer to these actions as reminders. Here I use this repertoire to represent the by-products of the funeral, that is, the actions that people perform in order to address the leftover emotional and practical complexities from the funeral and experience of the loss. These reminders are the leftover emotions, experiences and memories that people incorporate into their everyday lives. My participants described many different acts such as making toasts on holidays, birthdays or on the anniversary of their loved one’s death, displaying

photos, taking on the same actions of the deceased or by returning to the burial location to pay their respects.

The repertoire of post-funeral memorialization demonstrates the active making of possible sets of actions performed through the remainders. This repertoire is an example of what Swidler calls ‘culture in action,’ (1986) or ‘in the making.’ We can apply this concept to understand how participants continued to look for ways to memorialize their loved ones after the funeral. It is a way to look at what is *happening* rather than something that has *happened* (Calhoun and Sennett, 2007:7). It is a way to demonstrate that memorialization is haphazard and diverse; it shows that memorialization is active and ongoing.

In this way, remainders are highly informal and personal. Remainders are informal because people have to find a way to manage the leftover complexities using their own cultural tools. There is no script to guide the actions that people perform. Instead, people must decide on the form, nature and content of these actions on their own. Remainders are also informal in the sense that people act according to their own timeline and dates; they will perform the act as many times, or as few (or only even once) as they like.

Remainders are also personal acts because they are limited to the individual performer or a few individuals around them.⁸⁰ In this way, remainders are personal and informal because the meanings that are attributed to the actions are not always apparent. They are meaningful to the one performing the action, and maybe to those who are aware

⁸⁰ I do not use the concept ‘private’ because I find that ‘personal’ best explains the meaning people give to their actions. I also want to draw attention to the memorialization practices people engage in everyday life rather than discuss the distinction between memorializing in public and private.

of the meaning or significance of certain actions or objects, but generally, they are actions that blend in with everyday life.⁸¹

Three themes emerged from the funeral remainders that my participants spoke about. These remainders included practices of (1) living memory, (2) connecting with others and (3) reminders. *Living memory* represents the way people model their own actions on the perceived interests or will of the deceased. *Connecting with others* reflects the interaction people have with others associated with the deceased. *Reminders* consist of what people do to incorporate the loss into their everyday life.

Living memory

I use the phrase living memory to represent the way that some participants described assuming the activities of the deceased. In other words, by drawing on their memories of the deceased, my participants described how they would perform the same actions as the deceased or re-enact things that they did together in the past or imagine conversations with the deceased.

Performing the same activities often involved doing something that they recognized and appreciated about the person. For example, Sally started to vote for the Green Party because her sister did and she liked them too. Beth had some good chocolate on her dad's birthday because he enjoyed it. The relationship between the memory and the kind of activity was of utmost importance. Michelle described cranking up a song and dancing to it like crazy because it was something her dad used to do.

⁸¹ For example, everyday acts such as buying goods or eating seem like ordinary activities, but some participants such as Amber explained how she sometimes buys her mom's favourite flowers or Kelly described indulging in her dad's favourite treats.

If I hear a song that reminds me of him, I crank it up and dance like an idiot. ... That's something he would always do, he used to blow the speakers all the time and turn it up as loud as it'd go and just jump around like an idiot.

Laura shared how she and her husband now say "yummy" after each meal

because it was something that her dad used to say after every meal.

We have a ritual practice of saying 'yummy' after every meal, that's just my husband and I. (Laughs). You just remember him, it's so much of his personality in that term because he just appreciated food that much...my father told me they lived in an old house...[and] he would sit on the back stairway and cry because of the portion he got....so now he has this appreciation of food and says "yummy," so we say it now.

Interestingly, Laura used the phrase "living memory" to describe her experience. Laura defined living memory as the way that the living keep and hold on to the memory of the deceased. My emphasis is broader and refers to the ways that participants take on or act on their memories of the deceased. For example, Laura does not only maintain the memory of her dad, she also adopts her dad's action of saying "yummy" after each meal. In this way, I regard living memory as more than the living remembering the deceased but also acting on the memories.

Other participants talked about performing the same actions as the deceased or re-enacting things that they use to do together as a way to connect with them. Kelly for example described attending a U2 concert and watching "important" football games, such as the Grey Cup and Superbowl, as a way to spend time with her memory of her dad. She explained,

My dad's a huge football fan. I don't hate football, but I don't understand anything about it, but the first year he passed away, I went to all the important games, the Grey Cup, the Superbowl, because I thought that wherever he might be, he'd be watching and we'd be spending some time together. [My brother] and I felt the same thing about the U2 concert, even when we were leaving the

apartment, they have this song, 'Get on your boots,' and [my brother] would be like, "okay [dad], get on your boots, we're going to the concert"... somehow we felt he's here with us, in this moment, so yeah, it's partially an attempt to connect and to be there and also to enjoy something for him, in honour of him.

Tanya described repeating a trip that she took with her dad when she was younger on the anniversary of his death for the first few years in order to feel closer to him. She explained,

For a couple years, I would have driven to Merrickville because we use to take Sunday trips there... stuff like that just stopped [having] meaning... I found that as I got this feeling of being closer to him [in other ways] and I feel that it is less important to mark the anniversary... For the first three or four years, I would feel it, I would get hit by a wall and feel like I don't want to do much of anything, but I don't feel like that for a few years now.

Another way some participants followed in the same footsteps of the deceased was by trying to adopt some of their characteristics. Lance, Frances and Eric all described traits that they admired about their loved ones and how they try to take on those characteristics themselves. Frances for example stated,

I found myself thinking about the things I admire about my husband and take them on myself. How he handled things and dealt with people, how he entertained and tried to make people feel comfortable... lots of people liked him, he had this outgoing personality... so I found myself trying to take on the traits that I admired.

Some participants also continued living the memory of the deceased by imagining conversations with them or thinking about them. By drawing on their memories, they would try to think about things that the deceased would say in certain situations. Sally remembered that her sister would often say something unexpected:

Sometimes if I ask her a question or I am talking to her, I know exactly what she's going to say and how she's going to sound. I sometimes get a feeling that she gives me an answer that I didn't expect, I guess it's my quick thinking because I knew her very well...

Or Carol explained how she informed her brother about her actions before cleaning up his things because she knew that he was a private person.

My brother was kind of a private person and I felt like kind of guilty going through his things, well, not guilty, but I would almost ask him in my mind and tell him “okay, now I have to go through your clothes and give them away, I’m sorry.”

Often in such situations, participants do not actually expect to receive a response. But as Luke and Tina stated, pretending to talk with their loved one just helped them to feel better.

Luke: Whenever I missed him or wanted advice, I would sit and listen...and I wouldn’t hear anything. Nothing would ever come to me, there would be no deep voice or something I would have. But what would be calmed was my loneliness and I remember when I first started doing it, and actually talking at the grave, like “I need some advice”...and then thinking, “do I actually expect to hear something here?” (Laughs). Like no one is going to talk back to me, and no one ever did, but I feel better.

Tina: If I try to clear my mind and talk to my dad, it’s actually kind of reenergizing for me. It takes you away from your hectic life, it brings you down to earth, you know what I mean?... ‘Get it together, take it easy,’ that’s my dad’s motto of life, and me personally I get tied up, I get overwhelmed, I get anxious and when I have these few moments to connect with my dad, I feel refreshed, sorted out.

Other times, participants described just thinking about their loved one and thinking about the things that they would say. Nancy described sometimes hearing the voice of her grandmother, and Pamela described hearing her mother. Nancy explained,

Sometimes emotions creep up, but sometimes I just feel like grandma is there and you hear her voice of comfort, “it’s okay I’m praying for you.”

Pamela described something similar in getting “these little messages in your head,”

You still see her, hear her voice, saying certain phrases and things like that...you could be doing something and I would say something and think “oh yeah, that’s a phrase she would use.”

The memories that participants carry of their loved ones are strong and can influence their actions and thoughts. In this way, the living memory of the deceased lives through the participants. The different ways that participants create memories with the deceased represents one of the remainders that is a part of the post-memorialization repertoire of how to memorialize their loved ones after the funeral.

Connecting with others

Let me now discuss the second theme of ‘connecting with others’ to describe post-funeral remainders. I use the term ‘connecting with others’ to express how a few participants contacted people that knew the deceased but who they themselves did not know. John, Pamela and Amber, for example, all described their experiences. John found a letter from a woman that his son had met on a trip to Peru. John contacted her to meet and shared this story with me:

[My son] just came back from a hiking trip in Peru and I found a letter from a lady that was about 10 years older and it wasn’t a romantic experience, but [a bond between] people who embrace the outdoors.... she was so impacted by [the loss], she was stunned almost, she along with others in the group,... and I can remember her saying that she was so impressed by his physicality because they came across this ski lodge and it wasn’t the time of year, but there was still enough snow....and [my son] convinced them to loan him a pair of skis and he climbed up the mountains and skied down....so that was interesting.

In John’s story, it seems as though he wanted to meet this woman to see what others thought of his son and to learn more about him. In a similar way, Pamela suggested that

corresponding with a friend of her mother's from childhood was a way for her to stay in contact with her mom. She explained,

There was a man that my mother was engaged to before and they used to exchange Christmas cards and because he was like a family friend too, I called him to tell him that she was dead. And then afterwards I wrote him a letter, so we corresponded for a number of years after that. It was like, for me, almost keeping in contact with my mother through him.

Another way that participants described connecting with others was by performing a memorial on an anniversary after the loss. Lydia, for example, told me that her sister organized a memorial the first year after losing her brother as a way to close the chapter of his life in a more positive way. And Sarah described having a memorial service fifteen years after her son's death in order to gather more stories.

I just realized that it was 15 years and I had a hunger to have people over. I was looking for people to talk about him, I was looking to see what kind of life he lived when he wasn't home.

John also described trying to collect more stories about his son by sending emails to family members on the tenth and twentieth anniversaries of his son's death and sharing stories about his son with each of the members of his family. He asked them to share memories of his son for everyone to read and remember. He explained,

I think it [began] when I started to write a letter [on the 10th anniversary] to my family, and it was the same email letter to everybody, and I started to highlight as I wrote it, a memory that I remembered specifically to each one of them. When I got to the end of it I thought that this would be a much fuller expression of the family, not just through the father's eyes, if it could be seen through all the other eyes, collectively, I certainly thought it would be helpful to me and to everyone else in the family, [so] I asked them in a corresponding email, copying everybody, for some of their memories with each other, their siblings and parents.... But the second time [on the 20th anniversary, it] was more about the focus on the...experiences with him particularly, so it was one-on-one and it was a reflection of what you saw on him, you weren't seeing through his experiences

such as with a sibling or mother or father, but personal experiences and the influence it had on it you.

Once again, the craving for stories seemed to be an important way for participants to connect and remember the deceased. Connecting with others also involves connecting with the deceased and sharing or adopting new memories and in some ways, adding to the existing repertoire of comfort. Since participants described using the funeral as a way to affirm the importance of the deceased and share memories about the deceased, connecting with others contributes to the funeral remainders by creating opportunities to share and obtain memories of their loved ones through the stories and experiences that the deceased had with others.

Reminders

I use the term ‘reminders’ to represent the way participants incorporate their loss into their everyday lives. They are the remainders that prompt the participants to remember the deceased. They “trigger” memories of the deceased. My participants spoke of reminders such as displaying photos, marking significant events, dates or holidays, talking about the deceased to others, using inheritances and getting a tattoo.

The most common way that participants remembered the deceased was to display photos of them around their home, and sometimes, this practice was extended to the workplace. Some participants described intentionally making an effort to find photos to display. Anne told me:

I had all these photographs and all of these negatives, so I had the pictures made, copies of the pictures made so I could have them around the house and I bought frames so I could have them around the house.

Sarah and Rob both described photos as important markers of remembrance because without them, they worried that people would forget what their loved ones looked like. Sarah explained,

I became more interested in having ongoing pictures of my family and friends after that, because you don't realize how important pictures are until you lose someone...because when he was gone I didn't have anything. You forget what they look like, you think you're going to remember forever, but you don't. I have two pictures taken in the space of a year ... that's very sparse. Pictures are a good way to remember.

Rob shared a similar view to Sarah's. He stated that you remember stories, but it is easy to forget what people looked like: "when people die you start to lose the memory of them, you lose their faces, you remember incidents, but you forget what they look like sometimes."

Another way several participants described their memories of the deceased was to mark significant occasions whether they were holidays or dates related to the deceased, such as the birthday or death date. They tended to mark these dates by calling family members, visiting the burial location, making toasts, putting out a place setting or publishing a memorial notice.

Sometimes participants called other family members on the birthday of the deceased (Amber, Rita, Kelly) or during public holidays (Kelly). Participants who lost a parent were most likely to call the other parent on the date of the loss to "check in." They often acknowledged the reason for the call, but they did not talk about the loss for long. Eric describes his conversations with his mom on the anniversary of his dad's death as perfunctory, awkward and sensitive.

We always approach the anniversary of the death as if it's something sad, because I mean it does conjure up memories, at least for me, being woken up and going to the hospital and so on and so forth, which aren't happy thoughts... We're all a little nervous on the phone, we all know [why we're calling], but we talk around it. "Just wondering how you're doing, going to have a beer in dad's honour tonight" kind of thing. We turn it into a happy day, and we quickly move along. It's perfunctory, we move it along. We're always walking on eggshells a little bit, so I think my mom knows this too, so she tries to reassure us, "well I have darts tonight, I'm glad you called, just getting ready for darts," so it's not a longwinded conversation, no tears, it's usually two minutes.

For George and Barb, their mothers published newspaper memorials on the anniversary dates of their loss. George explained that his mother published one on the date his sister died and another on the date of her burial. Barb told me that her mom published a memorial for her father on the first anniversary after his death. In a way, Barb described how the newspaper memorial helped her mom reconnect with those who contacted her after its publication. She explained,

You know we reminded people. And I think when you do that, a lot of people do call. So it allowed her to reconnect with people who do love and care, but they all get on with their lives which is what happens, the gap which is still there for you, but the rest of us have to get on with your lives. But that reconnect is nice because she'd be like, "you'd never guess who phoned me last night, yeah, I'm going to coffee with so and so."

Other participants such as Sue treated anniversary dates, birthdays or holidays as a time to visit the cemetery or the burial location of the deceased. Carol, for example, described how she brought poinsettias to those she lost at Christmas time.

Some made toasts in honour of the deceased on their birthday, anniversary day or other holiday. For Barb, it was a time when they would have been all together and it was an important time to acknowledge the person. Several participants preferred birthdays as

a time to celebrate and make toasts rather than the date of the loss, including Amber who explained,

I had a friend whose mom passed away when she was little and they always celebrated the anniversary of her mom's death and my mom thought that was so morbid and so creepy (chuckling), so I can't help but think about it on her anniversary, but I don't want to make a big deal about it because she thought it was creepy and gross (laughs), so on her birthday we always do a toast.

On holidays or special occasions, some participants described making a place setting for the deceased in the first few years (Anne, Carol), while others described including a memorial of their loved one at their weddings (Michelle, Amber and Barb). All three participants described getting married and including a photo of the deceased at their weddings. Michelle and Amber, for example, described placing a framed photo on a table with flowers and a candle, while Barb and her fiancé placed large portraits of their fathers next to them at the ceremony.

Many participants also suggested that talking about the deceased was an important way to remember the person and share the memory. George for example suggested that he sees "memorializing on a day-to-day basis, telling a story about something my mom did," while Sally suggested that talking about them is to never forget them,

I think we can talk about them, I think we should remember people by never forgetting about them, by talking about them normally in conversation.... When talking to my sister, we often talk about [her] and what she would have thought about that...to remember what they were, what they were like, how they would see the world now.

Others wanted to promote and share the person they lost so that others could take something away. But they also did this to remember. Laura explained, "whenever I tell

someone a story or I think about it, I'm remembering her, respecting her, continuing her legacy in a way," while Luke shared, "I think if I talk about my brother...they carry a little about him as well, it's important to me that he gets spread around, not in a reincarnation way, but those memories, that's what we have."

Others remembered the deceased through things that they kept or inherited. Nancy and Margaret both received inheritances and explained how they used the money to buy things that reminded them of the deceased. Nancy remembered that her grandmother had a very nice winter jacket, and because she always wanted one as well, she decided to spend the money from the inheritance on one. Margaret, on the other hand, regularly had conversations with her sister about how much they both liked hotel bathrooms so she decided to remodel her bathroom as a tribute to her sister. She explained,

I had my bathroom redone and we use to talk about bathrooms and I hated my bathroom. We talked about hotel bathrooms and how we liked them and how big and luxurious they were...it would be a tangible thing and rather than spending on bills, and insignificant things.

Others kept things owned by the deceased that contained special meaning or memories. Beth and Kelly, for example, both described keeping and wearing tops of their dads that were much too big for them, but nonetheless held significant memories/importance to them. Kelly shared the significance of her dad's sweatshirt with me:

It's kind of funny, my family went through everything and everybody took what they wanted...my brothers took some watches, and cufflinks, and I just wanted this old ratty sweatshirt and that is all I wanted. I wear it all the time and I love it. It's huge, it goes down to my knees, but he use to wear it in the winter....It reminds me of him, because he use to wear it so often, because when I wear it, I never wore it when he was alive, it's just huge, it's big like my dad is, my dad was, I feel small again when I'm in it, you know, I feel like uhm, it's partially like

my old self, right, it's like okay I feel young, I feel little, I can be a little protected in this, you know.

One participant, Jason, got a tattoo in memory of his mother.⁸² Jason lost his mother when he was young and never got to know her except through stories from his family. He told me that he got a tattoo of his mom on his arm when he was 21 years old.

The tattoo is

a picture of my mom and the date she was born. I have a fence underneath, so I can protect her. I want to keep her close to me, and having a picture I could look at her whenever I want. Back then she didn't have any protection, so I have a fence underneath so I can protect her.

The things that people keep of the deceased, the things that they display of the deceased, and the things that people do in memory of the deceased all act as reminders for the participants. The reminders serve as remainders beyond the funeral because they represent the material objects and complexities that stay after the funeral. I noted that several participants performed similar actions. This suggests that they are acting with a common set of cultural tools that influence what they do after the funeral. It also suggests that the repertoire of remainders is still in development as participants are still trying to understand what happens after the funeral.

Conclusions

Post-funeral memorialization as expressed by the repertoire of the remainders, suggests that the emotions of loss do not really leave those most affected by the death, but stay with them. As Barb reflected on the significance of the memorial that her mom

⁸² Tina shared that she wanted to get a tattoo in memory of her father but at the time of the interview she had not yet done so because she was deciding on the design and where to place it.

published, she implied that “other people” were able to get on with their lives, but she was not. Other participants made similar observations, including Nancy who stated, “I’m either numb or I have accepted it, but I’m not sure which,” or Amber, who observed, “I don’t think you really get over it, but you heal, but I don’t know if you ever get over it” and George who similarly shared, “there is a scar, lots of scars, there is no true healing.”

The need to get back to ‘normal’ or one’s life further suggests that people need to find a way to incorporate the loss into their lives. Margaret for example shared how a colleague had inquired as to whether she had sought help because she talked openly about her sister and her loss. She explained,

After she died, I mean I had been immersed in her care and it was really the first big death in my life. I wasn’t obsessed, I was back at work and just stepped into a new job, but I would talk about it. Many people were awkward, you know they didn’t really want to hear about her. I remember one colleague said to me, “have you looked into grief counselling?” I was offended, because like ‘I can’t handle hearing you, so go get grief counselling.’ ...One of my friends said people would let you grieve for about six weeks....and that’s at best, but then they would not want to hear about it anymore.

Jessica also shared her frustration with guests who suggested that her dad would not want her or others to be sad about his death.

People would say, “he wouldn’t want us to be sad.” WHAT?! These things are soooo, the containment of emotionality by our culture is so bizarre to me. It’s almost like I notice that a lot of ministers or in their eulogies would say that in the funerals that the person wouldn’t want us to be sad, well, I bet that they would, I bet that would want people to cry for them....second of all, grief is a process that we all have to go through and we wouldn’t be human if we didn’t. And I...I just wonder what that’s about? Every time I hear that, what’s that about, this denial of grief or something?

These examples demonstrate that unlike the three repertoires of the funeral, acknowledgement of the loss, comfort and celebration, the post-funeral memorialization

repertoire is still in development. In other words, participants are still trying to determine their lines of action. In this way, there are no set actions that they perform, but a set of *possible* actions that they may perform through the remainders.

By drawing on the interview material collected for the study, I have introduced the idea of remainders as by-products of the funeral in this chapter in order to suggest that memorialization does not end with the funeral but extends beyond it. The remainders were identified by exploring the actions that participants performed after the funeral in order to memorialize their loved ones. While some participants recognized that the funeral acts as a turning point to recognize that someone has passed away, they also recognized that the absence of their loved one is not easy to accept. One reason is that there are still memories and material objects that connect them with the deceased. These are the remainders, the complex residue that stays with participants and create unsettledness that is not resolved by the funeral. They represent the ways people continue to memorialize their loss by developing ways to memorialize their loved ones. The post-funeral memorialization repertoire represents different ways that participants respond to and give meaning to their experience of unsettledness. It demonstrates that memorialization does not end with the funeral, but that people continue to sort through the complexities of memorializing after the funeral. In the following chapter, I continue to examine post-funeral remainders by elaborating their various forms.

Chapter 4 – Forms of remainders

In the last chapter, I explored the meaning participants gave to the funeral, and introduced acknowledgement, comfort and celebration as particular ‘cultural repertoires.’ I argued that the presence of ‘remainders,’ that is, the by-products of the funeral, or acts of memorialization that participants continued to perform after the funeral, demonstrates that memorialization does not end with the funeral. I demonstrated how the participants enacted these remainders by discussing the different practices that extended the memorialization process beyond the funeral, such as (1) living memory, (2) connecting with others and (3) reminders. This chapter builds on this discussion by introducing the forms of remainders, the remains or leftovers that stay with people after the funeral. In order to do this, I want to return to an idea that I introduced at the start of the dissertation, that is, the idea that death is disruptive and causes disorder.

Participants in this study tended to argue that the funeral offered an attempt to achieve a sense of order amidst disorder. However, the funeral was just a beginning. The funeral was not an end; in other words, for all of the participants the order given by the funeral was only temporary. For the people that I interviewed, the experience of disorder continued well after the funeral through the remainders. In this chapter, I want to examine how participants responded to the disorder and disruption of death. I will examine the remainders that stem from the range of feelings that cannot be addressed by the funeral, including shock, confusion, sorrow and grief and the common practical obligations – such as disposing the body, informing others about a loss and looking after the well-being of family members or friends.

I use the term “remainders” to refer to the various experiences that were not satisfied or addressed by the funeral. Two general forms of remainders that I will concentrate on are: (1) emotional and (2) social. Emotional remainders refer to the feelings that people carry after a loss, in addition to the feelings that people have for the deceased. Social remainders refer to the ways people share their memory of the deceased with others.

This chapter supports the argument in the last chapter by deepening the observation that memorialization is an ongoing process. It focuses on the disorientation that comes with a death, the illusion of order that comes with a funeral, and the emotional and social ‘leftovers’ that remain after the funeral. Participants in this study all agreed that people have a funeral in order to acknowledge a loss. But they also suggested that many fail to look or think beyond the funeral. Once the funeral is over, the loss often appears to be complete for others. But for those immediately affected by the loss, the feeling of loss and the experience of disorder remains. This chapter therefore demonstrates that memorialization extends beyond the funeral not just in individual practices, but also as forms of emotional or social unsettledness that people must work with.

The chapter consists of four sections. The first section explores the disorder that comes with death. The second returns to the meaning that people give to the funeral by focusing on the way participants described the experience of order. The third outlines the some of the limits of memorializing associated with the funeral. The fourth discusses the two forms of emotional and social remainders.

Death as disorienting

In the last chapter, I explained that I began each interview by asking participants to describe their loss in order to provide some context to their situation. Regardless of whether the loss was “expected”⁸³ or unexpected, participants described the loss as disruptive and unsettling. Each loss brought change to their lives by demanding new tasks or by prompting new emotions that challenged their regular (everyday) sphere of activities. I found that Carol provided a fitting metaphor when she described the disorienting nature of death. She said that it was as if a “fog” came over her when she learned that her brother died.

I remember really vividly that I was watching TV and it was Saturday night when I got the call. I felt like a fog descended right away, so I was in this fog and somehow managed to leave my place and flag a cab and went to my parents’ place.

This metaphor is useful for the present discussion because fog is often blinding. People typically have difficulty seeing their way through it: they can only see a short distance, yet they still have to get through it. The way Carol describes “somehow” being able to travel to her parents after receiving the news suggests that her fog was disorienting because she is unclear in retrospect about how she did it. Most participants told me that they experienced something similar to this type of “fog.”

Some participants, for example, described the shock they experienced from the loss. Here, they used the term shock either to refer to acting mindlessly or feeling

⁸³ Some described terminal illnesses as ‘expected’, and accidents as ‘unexpected’ losses. Yet my participants experienced disruption and disorder regardless of whether their loss was expected or unexpected. For example, Beth and Jessica explained that even though they expected their fathers to pass, neither of them found it any easier when it finally happened.

paralyzed. More participants described feeling debilitated by the loss, that is, motionless or unable to act. Amber, Kelly and Sarah for example described feeling “numb.”

Participants felt as though the shock was so overwhelming that it prevented them from taking on certain actions. Rob explained that because “you’ve got all this going on,” he failed to inform more people about his dad’s death. Pamela expressed a similar feeling because she was in “so much shock” that she was unable to speak about her mother at the funeral, while Sarah stated that the shock prevented her from crying after learning about her son’s death.

Other participants described acting mindlessly, that is, they acted without thinking about their actions. Lance, for example, told me that one of the first things he did when his dad died was call a friend, but there was no particular meaning to calling this friend except that it was the first name in his phone book.

The very first thing I did was call my friend A---. I wasn’t thinking, he was the first person in my phone book.

This seemed unusual because in delicate and difficult situations, I would have thought that most people would contemplate who to call, by considering who might offer the most comfort or be the most helpful, supportive or understanding, but instead Lance did not put any thought into his action and just called the first name in his phone book.⁸⁴

In other cases, participants explained that other people helped them to order their thoughts and emotions. Jane, for example, described that when her mother passed away, she believed that her sick father was going to die not too long after. She wanted to wait to

⁸⁴ It is possible that this would have been the best person for Lance to call and that is why he did not second guess his action at the time, but the point is to demonstrate that he did not really put any thought into his action.

have her mom's funeral in order to have them both together. A friend reminded her that she could not wait for her dad to pass because she did not know when that would happen. Taking her friend's advice, she had a service for her mother and her dad lived for twelve more years. She told me:

I really wanted to wait. And in retrospect, it's kind of nice that my friend told me, "Jane, you can't do that, take care of your mother, then you'll take care of your father." Sounds perfectly logical, but in my mind, I said to myself, "Oh God it's going to happen, both of them are going to go, they were married for over fifty years, when one dies, yeah [I thought the other was going too]."

Beth also described the way that the shock made her feel that she could "handle anything." She explained how she and her sister thought about preparing their father's body for burial. They wanted to bathe his body in rosewater and wrap it in silk, but the funeral directors talked them out of it.

For some reason, we thought that it would be a great idea. We were in shock and we wanted to be close...they talked us out of it, we gave them the instructions and they did it and they negotiated us down to, we'll do it, but before the visitation you can come in and do whatever you'd like, prayers or whatever, before the visitation, the day before, or maybe even a few days, but my sister, her husband and I, basically, we said prayers and put certain things in the casket with him. That was very nice and I'm very glad that we did that. I just think back and think what if they haven't stopped us, because that would have been very traumatic. I think part of it, again, you're in shock and you get the sense you can handle anything right now.

Along with the shock, others described feeling uncertain or confused about what to do. Tina, for example, was responsible for looking after her grandmother when she passed away. But when she died, she explained that she did not know what to do.

She had literally taken her last breath when I walked in. So, she was still warm, she looked alive...I was in shock...I was sitting on the edge of her bed and she was lying behind me and I thought "what do I do?" And I asked the nurse, I said, "what do I do now?"..."Well you have to make a funeral," she said to me. "And you have to,..." and then she could just tell like I was a deer in the headlights, I

had no idea, I was like “well who do I call?” (Laughs) So she came back with a phone book, so I sat in the office in the nursing home, and I opened the phone book and I called the first funeral home [in the phone book].

Amber, alternatively, was able to help plan the event for her mom with her dad, but she described being uncertain about her role afterwards.

I was confused, because there’s a girl I vaguely knew that took a year off when her mom passed away when she was in university and I was like, “is that what you do?” I didn’t want to because my mom was so proud of me that I got there.

Two participants experienced anxiety about the corpse not having a proper place between the time of death and burial. Both Beth and Lance explained that they did not like the idea of having the corpse “sitting somewhere” (Beth) or “in purgatory” (Lance). Both of them wanted to have the funeral sooner than was possible. Beth was unable to because of the lack of availability at the funeral home, and Lance needed to accommodate those travelling to the funeral. They each shared the following with me:

Beth: The funeral was 6 days [after he passed away], which felt very long to me. (Laughs) I actually was really trying to get it sooner, and I became all intense actually. It’s funny, we were all in such shock, I mean it doesn’t matter that we knew you know, we were all in such shock. And it’s now funny now when I think back, why was I so, that I was almost upset that it was going to take 6 days, and I think that a part of it was that I didn’t like the idea of him sitting somewhere, I think that’s all it was.

Lance: I just wanted it done, the longer it took, there’s this anxiety that kept building, it felt like a very unfinished business... I felt like if he’s under the ground, if he’s buried...it was like “okay, my dad’s in this place.” It felt like he was in purgatory, like in limbo, did he belong to this place or that place?

Some participants also experienced disruption because of financial concerns that arose from the death of their loved one. Participants who lost a parent were especially concerned about the financial well-being of their living parent. Kelly recalled wondering whether her mom would be able to manage financially because she had not worked for

over twenty years since her youngest son was born. Others were also concerned about how to pay for the cost of a funeral. Lance had just purchased a house, Tina was in university at the time working on her undergraduate degree and Anne relied on social assistance since her brother was on welfare at the time of his death. Such worries added to the daily concerns of these participants.

Other participants discovered that the loss disrupted their lives in unforeseeable ways. Kelly remembered having difficulties concentrating after her dad's death and did not attribute it to the loss until months later. Pamela recalls acting "crazy" on one occasion when she mowed the lawn with tears streaming down her face. Vicki, Carol and Diana also discussed feeling less interested in socializing after their respective losses. Carol stated that after experiencing her loss she did not feel like going out, or as Diana also explained,

You also feel like going out with friends and having a good time, but for me personally because it's a bit of an odd time, I'm visiting [my hometown] but it's not for social reasons, and as much as my friends wanted to get together and hang out, I'm not sure I was ready, you're not really in the frame of mind to go out and have so much fun.

The disruption that participants described is akin to a jolt, such that death jolts them from their everyday life. The disorientation is a function of the emotional and practical realities they have to face. These include emotions of shock, confusion and anxiety or worries about money and the well-being of others. Such realities are disruptive because they force people to face new challenges that must be overcome; and yet, they may not have the necessary tools or know what tools to use. Naturally, the discomfort and unsettledness that death brings makes people want to settle this disorder by turning to

places, such as the funeral home⁸⁵, to acquire information that enables them to deploy their ‘tool kits.’ By analyzing the meanings that participants gave to the funeral in the last chapter, I now want to explore the ways that the funeral helps them find a sense of order, however temporary, in this chapter.

Funeral as order

The kind of ‘order’ my participants sought was accompanied by a desire for stability or calmness. For many, the funeral gave a welcome sense of order. The feeling of stability sometimes derived from the support provided by family and friends in the funeral planning and the practical obligations associated with organizing the funeral. The funeral was often understood to be a distraction from the emotions of sadness and grief that come with their loss.

For participants, the funeral allowed them to share their loss with others. This gave a sense of order and relative stability because the funeral marked a transition in their lives and gave friends and family the opportunity to say goodbye, to pay their respects and to offer their condolences and support. Vicki described it as an “official” way to fit death into her everyday life because it was a time allocated to grieve and to remember the deceased. The funeral offered a context for my participants to feel a sense of belonging, or as Jessica said, “other people’s kindness helped [to give her]...a soft place to fall.” The funeral helped to give meaning to the life of the deceased and to show loved ones the value that the deceased had to others. Beth explained,

⁸⁵ More often people are turning to the internet for information, which often directs people to the funeral home.

Because the funeral is a gathering of people...and to begin that with other people who you more or less know is a very nice way to do that.... It's nice to have, to sort of be surrounded by these people to remember dad and to remember the person.

Some participants also described the funeral as important because it gave them comfort. In the previous chapter, I discussed comfort as a common repertoire that people draw on when organizing a funeral, but I also want to suggest that comfort is more than just a reason to adopt certain funeral practices. According to some participants, the funeral represented a sense of temporary emotional and social order. Participants' accounts suggest that the funeral helped give them something else to focus on and distracted them from the loss, particularly the emotions they felt, and thus offered some sense of order during an emotional time. Beth for example described the funeral as "busy work" that gave her something else to do. She, like other participants, described the funeral as a place where they could contain their emotions. For some of these participants, the funeral forced them to "keep it together" (Beth) and to avoid the "dark place" (Barb). Many participants felt that they needed to manage their emotions because our society is not set up to handle negative emotions in a public manner. Jessica expressed her frustration about how people tend to contain their emotions. She commented on society's inability to manage emotions. She suggested that people are much more familiar with how to act in a positive and celebratory atmosphere in contrast to a situation where people are crying and grieving openly. Frances discovered this at the funeral for her husband:

It's not acceptable to cry at a funeral I found out, I think you are supposed to behave as IF nothing untoward happened that week, you know, stiff upper lip and composure. Which I don't agree with, but that's very much I think to this day

really, they say, look how dignified some of the family are, the late family are, and yes they need to be there in a public situation...[and not exhibit] any real shine of emotion.

Others suggested that they had to contain their emotions and put on a 'face' at the funeral for others. Anne explained that keeping face is about keeping her emotions in check in order to be "respectful" and "appropriate" at the funeral.⁸⁶

I was just trying to get through the service and put on a face, [that is], not completely fall apart or go crazy. Otherwise, I mean to hold it together...[I was] just trying to manage my emotions...I was the one who had to do things to get things done, so I had to do these things and I just sort of had to keep it together and also be respectful...I was holding it together and trying to hold it together to be appropriate for people at the funeral.

Diana also described having to put on a face. The immediacy and social atmosphere of the funeral limited her ability to process the loss in order to talk about it.

The viewing, for instance, having to greet people and talk to people and almost having to hash it over and over and over was a very tiring process. There was a point when I was in the viewing where I had to go outside for a moment just to take a breather with one of my cousins... because it was just an overwhelming process to constantly have people express their condolences and talk about things, and it being a very social atmosphere. That's something that's a bit difficult when at such a tough time, to have to put on that face to talk about it when you're still not ready, when you're still processing all of that emotion. So that was very difficult. I would say that the whole thing was just very draining, very draining.

Neither Diana nor Anne saw the funeral as a time where they could express or share their emotions because of the social role they had to perform. They interpreted their hostessing in terms of providing a role model that demanded that they not 'break down' and affect others. As Frances noted, she felt that she needed to hide her emotions because "people can't bear" them:

⁸⁶ Anne did not clarify exactly who she had to be respectful or appropriate for, but I am assuming she meant the guests when she says that she had to be "appropriate for people." At the same time, Anne discussed her "tumultuous" relationship with her mother which suggests she may have wanted to refrain from expressing her emotions in order to avoid any further conflict with her.

It's like it's a negative thing to be emotional about anything in our culture, it's a very sad thing, because it's hard for people to keep their emotions in check, and it's unnecessary too, we should be able to talk about people, and about our pain, should we not? Without having people uncomfortable.

In sum, the funeral provided order for participants because it gave them the opportunity to share their loss with others but also to receive support from others. This gave participants a sense of stability because it demonstrated the love and care that others had for them and the deceased. Participants also said that the busy work of the funeral, along with the social roles they had to fulfil, distracted them from their emotions of grief and sadness. Such emotions can be quite unsettling because they do not tend to be emotions people experience frequently and it can be difficult to (1) know how to manage them if you are experiencing them and (2) know how to help someone who is experiencing them. The funeral therefore helped participants to have a sense of order because they were able to either avoid or limit such emotions. A problem that my participants described after the funeral however was that the support lessened and the emotions they managed to avoid or limit remained. In the next section, I explore the way the order from the funeral is only temporary and what "remains" or stays with people after the funeral.

Order is temporary

For my participants, the sense of order and stability that they achieved at the funeral was temporary. The funeral simply postponed the full experience of grief. Beth explains this well:

Part of the funeral is that it's busy work and it gives you something to do...there's all this focus and [then] you think, "oh god, what do you do?"...you're forced to confront your grief after the funeral, after the busy work, it's an uncomfortable time.

She further explained that the time after the funeral was uncomfortable because the funeral was a time where people were present to share in the love and memory of her dad, but afterwards, there was a silence or "quiet."

It's very quiet after you know, there's all, there's a lot of attention, there's a lot of work, you know and then there's a lot of quiet.⁸⁷ Especially I'm sure for my mother, she's the one who has to go back to the house. It's nice to have, to sort of be surrounded by these people to remember dad and to remember the person.

She attributed the quiet as others giving her time to be alone and grieve.

The support while there is less. I think it's less because people know this is when you break down. It's almost like everybody understands that, it's almost like everyone acknowledges and knows that this is where you're going through some really rough times, so it's also giving you space, I think it's where it's both needed and expected and all of that.

But even though Beth described receiving the space and time to grieve after the funeral, it does not seem to be what she really wanted or needed. She described accompanying a friend on a trip after the funeral:

What I did actually was kind of odd, so the day after my dad's funeral I got in the car and went with my friend to Chicago. He happened to be going to Chicago for a conference and had a bunch of hotels lined up and said "if you need to come and just stay in the hotels," so that's what I did.

Beth's account is useful to think about the disorder that comes or remains after the funeral. The funeral gave Beth a sense of order because she found comfort by talking about her dad and recognizing that other people loved him as much as she and her family did. She found that this, along with the preparations for the funeral, distracted her from

⁸⁷ Frances also commented on this quiet since she remembers that her telephone did not ring for two weeks after the funeral.

the loss, at least for the duration of the funeral. After the funeral however, Beth discovered that things got quiet and experienced a sense of disorder or unrest. People were no longer talking about her dad and she no longer had the comfort of the stories or the distraction of the funeral to keep her busy. Instead, she had to face the quiet, the grief and reality that her dad was gone. This was unsettling for Beth because as she explained, she did not know what to do. Another way to explain this disorder is that she did not have the cultural tools or repertoires to know what to do with the feelings of unrest. Thus, she continued to distract herself from the loss and went on a trip with her friend after the funeral.

Similar to Beth, other participants who repressed their emotions during the funeral said that doing so did not make the emotions any less real. Jessica, Frances, Anne and Diana all suggested that their emotions resurfaced after the funeral. For these participants, the order given by the funeral was also temporary.

Other participants also found that the support of family and friends also lessened after the funeral. Anne, Barb, Beth, Vicki, Frances and Michelle recognized that people needed to get on with their own lives. But for those who experienced profound grief, once the funeral is over, there was no longer an obvious course or path of 'things to do'. Even so, some participants described having to settle the estate after the funeral, to cancel services and to pay bills. They found this act often frustrating. It was challenging and time consuming because of legal and bureaucratic obstacles that made it difficult for them to navigate these tasks efficiently. Pamela described the emotional and practical challenges faced by her sister when she looked after their mom's estate:

When my mom died we had to get the phone cut off and different things. I can remember, we went into the phone company, and my sister was really upset because she went up, she said “my mother died and we have to have the phone cut off.” And they said, “oh there’s a phone over there,” they had a special phone right, and we couldn’t get through or something, and then the woman says, “oh, I’m sorry did you say that your mother died?” and then she was sort of much better and she helped her out with different things, and then the thing was the phone had still been in my dad’s name and we had to deal with that. And I remember that she just came out, since that was about the third office we had been to and she said that “if I have to say that my mother died again,” she said, “I don’t think that I could handle it”...and you just don’t realize how...the thing is that people expect you to come out, they pre-anticipate what you’re saying so they didn’t really hear her, you know, and that was very difficult, especially more for her right. And of course we had to go up to the lawyer and have the will read and then we had to go back about 3 or 4 months later because it was probated and just to get the banking finished.

Pamela’s account is an example of disorder because Pamela and her sister did not know what to do and relied on others for assistance. The problem is that the help they received from the telephone representative was insensitive because it followed a standard protocol and did not take into consideration the information that they just experienced a loss. This was disorienting for Pamela and her sister because the loss was so apparent to them. Another reason that this is an example of disorder is because of their emotions in the process. Pamela described how her sister felt that she would not be able to handle telling another person that her mother has passed away, most likely because people treated her situations as any other by following standard protocols and rules. Pamela stated, “they pre-anticipate what you’re saying so they didn’t really hear her.” In this way, Pamela and her sister had to follow the bureaucratic rules of the organization and were unable to simplify their tasks. But also, by having to repeat that her mother has passed could have been a way of making the loss more real and unbearable. Lastly, Pamela’s statement that it took three or four months before settling the estate further

exemplifies the disorder that remains after the funeral because of the time it took to resolve the practical realities associated with a loss.⁸⁸

The order from the funeral is only temporary because the funeral cannot address the full range of emotional and practical realities that accompany a loss. The grief and sadness people experience from the loss, along with the need to look after the material goods, are put on hold temporarily during the planning of the funeral. But once the funeral is complete, participants described feeling unsettled and uncomfortable because they no longer had the distraction of the funeral or support from others. Furthermore, participants also described that after the funeral they had to look after the practical realities of the loss, such as settling estates and distributing assets. This caused disorder for participants because not only was it an emotional experience, but it was also time-consuming and an unfamiliar experience. In the following section, I want to explore further this sense of disorder by examining the post-funeral remainders.

The Forms of Remainders

Looking at the complexities that stem from the experiences, memories and emotions people encounter in relation to a loss is a useful way to characterize, and contextualize, the types of remainders discussed in Chapter 3. In one sense, they are the “triggers” that cause people to remember the loss or deceased. Such triggers can include certain memories, experiences, emotions, scents, dates or objects. There is no advance indication of what the remainders or triggers might be for any given person because they

⁸⁸ Some participants described that they were either still going through the process of settling the estate or going through the belongings of the deceased (Jessica, Carol, Tina, Beth, Tanya)

come out of each person's unique experiences, memories and emotions. The remainders are also random because they are unplanned. They are often unexpected. For example, certain songs, events or people may bring out unexpected emotions that people have buried. At the same time, these remainders are ongoing and continuous; they can become visible or apparent at any time, including days to years after the loss. There is no telling when they will show up. The remainders are flexible and variable because they vary in intensity or significance over time. Sometimes certain dates seem important and can significantly affect people, other times the dates are not as significant and they do not have much of an effect. There are no rules or norms about how to manage the remainders. People have to find their own ways to deal with the remainders since they rely on their own cultural tools and develop their own repertoires, as discussed in the last chapter.

The randomness, variability and continued nature of the remainders can manifest as different forms of unsettledness. In other words, the remainders can trigger or create disorder for people because they are forced to confront situations or feelings that are uncomfortable. The two forms that I explore from the interview material are 'emotional' and 'social'. Emotional remainders refer to the way some participants described having to confront certain emotions, such as grief or sadness. Social remainders refer to the unsettledness that participants experienced in their interaction with others.

Emotional Remainders

One of the key ideas that participants described is that the experience of the loss stays with a person. Such remainders include the emotions and experiences that come with the loss, but also the memories that people have of the deceased. Frances for

example recognized that even though someone is gone physically, the emotional connection or memories that people have of their loved one remains:

...just because the person has died physically doesn't mean the emotional bonds are cut off for a long time.

Some participants further suggested that one never quite gets over a loss. Barb cited her mother who described the loss as always being there, "it's always there, the loss is always there." Vicki also observed that things change, but do not necessarily get better, "in the beginning everybody's like 'it'll get better.' It doesn't get better, it just gets different." Luke also described the pain he continues to carry from losing his brother despite more than fifteen years having passed since his suicide,

I know you can't get rid of it, you actually have to put it in your knapsack and get on with your day. And that I think is the challenge, that's the painful part with me, how do I go forward with my life with this stake in my heart?

All of these participants said that the experience of the loss, particularly the pain and sadness, does not quite leave. I want to suggest that the loss may never go away because people must learn to live their lives without the deceased. They have to break certain rituals or routines they may have shared together. Take the examples of Joy who could no longer call her mom when she wanted to share good news and Nancy who could no longer enter her grandmother's phone number whenever she entered the calling card number. They must fill a hole or emptiness in their lives with something else and they do not necessarily want to do this, know how to do this or what to do it with. This helps explain why people liked the distraction or order of the funeral. The distraction kept people from having to think about the loss or realize the long-term changes in their life.

But the funeral also kept people from returning to their everyday routine or life and by doing something that helped them delay the unsettledness.

Two participants, Barb and Jessica, discussed how the first year after the loss was the most difficult for them. Barb for example explained that it was the year of “firsts” without the deceased,

I think that it's the hardest for anyone because, my goodness, you are going through everything for the first time with them not being there and you're wondering how are we going to get through this Christmas, Father's day, birthday, the anniversary. And the first of all of those are probably the most emotional because you're really experiencing that lost for the first time and the years after that, it gets easier, but I think the first year is the most painful.

Barb explained that the first year was the probably the most emotional and painful because it was the first time she had to experience the holidays without her dad and to face the anniversary of his death. Barb described having to learn to be without her dad for the first time during occasions that she would normally spend with him, but also having to confront a new occasion, the anniversary of his death.

The first year may also seem to be the most challenging because it involves confronting the remainders. It is about experiencing the sorrow and pain from the loss for the first time. It is about being able to make new memories and holding onto existing memories. It is about learning what to do or what to say, but also what not to do and what not to say because there are no obvious norms, codes or rules to follow. In this way, the nature and intensity of the remainders can change over time as some participants recognized. Jessica for example described how the first anniversary of her father's death was a horrible day but she did not even acknowledge the date in the second year. She explained,

I remember the first anniversary of his death. I didn't expect it to be a bad day, but it was. It was just a bad day. My boyfriend at the time was visiting and we had to drive past the hospital where he died on that day, just by fluke and I just did not like it. I was very upset, acted badly, just sort of acted out and I didn't have a good day... The year after, my best friend called me on that day and she said, "I just wanted to see how you're doing today." And I was like, "what are you talking about?" And she's like "it's the anniversary of your dad's death" and I was like, "oh, I can't believe it," and I now have to think of when he died.

Jessica explained the way that the anniversary date had an effect on her in the first year after her dad passed away. Not only was the date a reminder for her, but another trigger was going by the hospital where he died. What is interesting however is that Jessica demonstrates that people can remember and forget their loss as she noted that she did not remember the date the following year and was prompted to think about it. This is important because it shows the way that the intensity of the emotions can shift and change how something, such as a date, can be so significant and apparent but then ignored. It demonstrates that one cannot quite prepare for the experience of reminders because of their variability and unexpected quality.

Anne and Lydia also described the pain and sorrow they felt during the first year after their brother's death. What is interesting about their experiences is that they both described feeling guilty about not feeling the same pain the following year. Anne, for example, explained that she was afraid that she was forgetting her brother by not feeling the same "pain of grief" and would try to bring that pain back in order to feel closer to him. Lydia remembered the first time she felt happy after the first year and then felt guilty because she realized that she did not allow herself "to feel good" the first year after her brother's death. She described,

I was coming out of [work], it was winter, and it was night. But when I came out, it was foggy, so it was sooooo beautiful and impressive. Like when I came out, I sort of went speechless and I thought ‘oh my goodness, I’m walking on the clouds.’...And then immediately, [because] last year it seemed that I didn’t allow myself to feel good, [I immediately thought], ‘you shouldn’t feel good at all, so at the peak of that good feeling I felt horrible.

A part of the challenge for Anne and Lydia is that they each gave certain meaning to the emotions and experiences in the first year and saw it as a way to connect and show that they cared about their brother. Anne felt that “wallowing in grief” was a way to remember and be close to her brother, while Lydia thought that she should not experience any happiness to show her care and grief for her brother. The complexity or difficulty here is that because Anne and Lydia were experiencing grief for the first time, they seemed to connect feelings of grief with love; they both felt that they had to experience the pain of grief in order to demonstrate their love. This is unlike Jessica who had a difficult time on the first anniversary of her father’s death, but forgot on the second and now has to think about the date.

The purpose of these examples is to illustrate that there are no rules or norms in how to manage the emotional remainders but it is about the meaning people give to them. There is no rule or norm that people should cry on the anniversary of the death or that people should remember the anniversary date. Instead, the remainders are informal and internal, that is, people experience the remainders on their own and the way that the remainders shift and change are not the same for everyone, or even for the same person. People are constantly learning about what the remainders are and they learn over time about how to deal with them. In this way, the remainders are disorienting because it is difficult to know what the triggers are, when they will come up. Because remainders do

not always carry the same intensity, the emotions and dates do not always have the same meaning. Sometimes people will remember the date and feel bad (Lydia, Jessica), sometimes they will remember the date and it will have no affect on them (Sarah), other times they might feel bad and not remember the date (Pamela, Anne). It is difficult to predict what emotions remain, how they come about or what people will do since there are no instructions about how to manage or deal with the emotional remainders.

Social remainders

Social remainders come about through interactions with others. They refer to the unsettledness that people experience about their loss around others. Many participants expressed their desire to talk about their loved ones after the funeral in order to share and continue the memory of their loved ones (Beth, Vicki, George, Luke, George, Sally, Laura, Margaret). The challenge that most participants experienced however was that bringing up the loss or their loved ones often made others feel uncomfortable, and in turn, them as well. As Beth explained,

Once someone has passed away, there's very little opportunity to talk about somebody without it being awkward.

Sarah for example remembered a time when she mentioned her son and made the whole room go silent. She explained,

I remember being at a gathering with women and we were talking about throws and I made some comment about [my son] giving me one and the place when silent...no one knew what to say.

The silence Sarah described reflects a remainder because she did not anticipate that bringing up her son would make others feel awkward and uncomfortable. The loss is

something that Sarah lives with each day but others do not. Bringing up her son reminded other people about her loss and as Sarah described, it left them stunned and speechless. It illustrates that people do not know what to do when someone talks about a loss, but it also suggests that there are no norms or rules about when to talk about a loss or when not to. Sarah however learned quickly that talking about her son made other people feel uncomfortable, in which case she learned to avoid bringing him up.

Other participants also described applying a censoring strategy in order to avoid making others feel uncomfortable (Beth, Margaret, Amber, Michelle) or being a “downer” (Tina) or “buzz kill” (Michelle). The problem is that participants described trying to avoid disturbing others and awkward situations even though they wanted to talk about the deceased. This is an example of a social remainder because they realized that they had to repress their own desire in relation to others. They are beginning to negotiate the tacit rules and informal norms around what they must do in order to avoid awkward or uncomfortable situations.

Some of the explanations participants used to account for the discomfort of others included the idea that people often just did not know what to say or do when they learned about their loss (Margaret, Vicki) or that people seemed afraid of upsetting them (Sarah) or assumed that it was painful for them (Beth). The discomfort however put participants in an awkward position of having to comfort others by reassuring them that they were okay with expressions such as, “it’s been a long time.” As Michelle observed, taking care of the person she was informing about the loss was “backwards” because it was her, the

person who has experienced the loss, who should technically be feeling bad or sad and would need comforting. She shared:

You know usually because I know I'm fine, but they don't seem like they are. (Laughs). So, it's like I've had years to mourn, and now all of a sudden they need to. I think it's like being confronted with reality, because some people don't know how to deal with it, because people aren't confronted with death, they don't know what to say or how to respond. I feel like I have to explain to them that it's okay for them to feel whatever they feel, which is kind of backwards cause you're taking care of the person who hasn't lost someone, and it's because people feel uncomfortable, right? So you start to change the topic or shift a little bit. Like I said, I usually try to take the moment to educate and say "it's okay, it shouldn't be this taboo" and say "it's okay, that just because someone died, I'm not going to start crying and that they're not gonna have to carry me out of here," to let them know that there are different aspects to mourning and that talking about it isn't going to make me an instant basketcase, or that you can't talk about it, because I think that's what people worry about that is the minute I say that, you can't talk about it.

Michelle identified three reasons that others would feel uncomfortable about learning about her loss. The first is that they are afraid that they made the participant feel bad or uncomfortable. The second is that people do not know how to deal with or talk about death or memorialization because their experiences are limited. The third is that they seem afraid that she would be emotional, therefore further exacerbating the discomfort of not knowing what to do. Drawing on these ideas, Michelle has learned to reassure and inform others that it is okay to talk about death and her loss.

What Michelle demonstrates is that there is an implicit social norm to avoid talking about death. Death, dying and memorialization has been limited to institutions, experts and professionals and people do not know how to talk about it or manage it.⁸⁹ There are no rules or norms about what to say or not to say. In a way, it is like a dance,

⁸⁹ For more on the institutionalization of death and dying, see for example Aries, 1981; Blauner, 1966; Glaser and Strauss, 1965; Sudnow, 1967; and memorialization, see Gorer, 1955;1965.

where people move with each other's steps and try to avoid stepping on one another's toes.

The desire to talk about the deceased is a social remainder because most participants were unable to fulfil their desire to talk about the deceased. Instead, participants learned to work around the silence or awkwardness by not talking about the loss or by learning to be discrete or selective about when and who to discuss their loss with (Kelly, Sue, Diana, Amber, Joy). One of the most interesting examples is from Kelly who talked about ritually changing her facebook photo on holidays and the anniversary of her dad's death as a way to remember him. She explained,

I am not one to post statuses such as "My dad has been dead for a year"- that, to me, is faaaar too personal and I think it has the potential of making you look like you want attention or sympathy, etc. However, I always put a picture of him up on the day of his death. It's a little something I feel that I can do to honour him in a public way. People will always comment things like "what a great photo" or "I remember that day" and it sparks stories, etc. It's a fun way to honour/remember him without drawing attention to what has happened. People who don't know my dad has passed away just think that I have changed my pic for no apparent reason, and I'm fine with that. I don't like having to explain things to people so it's the perfect venue: those who know can share in it, and those who don't know don't get it so I don't have to engage with them at all!

What makes Kelly's account so interesting is that she has found a way to "talk" about her dad without having to create an awkward or uncomfortable situation. Some people may acknowledge the change in the photo and depending on their relationship with Kelly, they may comment on the occasion the photo was taken or just think that she has changed her picture. In this way, Kelly has learned to memorialize her dad by addressing the social remainder of wanting to talk about her dad.

Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter was to demonstrate that the order that comes with the funeral is only temporary, and that the disorder that comes with death remains after the funeral. Drawing on the interview material, I suggested that death is disorienting and it causes disruption and disorder. I then suggested that one of the reasons participants gave meanings of acknowledgement, comfort and celebration to the funeral in the last chapter is because it gave them a sense of order. The problem, I argue, is that such order is only temporary because once the funeral is over, the emotional and social realities that accompany the loss remain. I referred to these leftovers by introducing two general forms of remainders.

The remainders made participants feel uncomfortable because they did not know how to manage their emotions or their desire to continue memorializing the deceased. In this way, I showed that participants experienced emotional and social remainders. I explored the emotional remainders by describing how participants continued to carry the loss with them. I discussed the social remainders by exploring how participants learned that they were unable to talk about their loss or their loved ones without making other people uncomfortable. This remainder was social because it emerged through their interactions with others, but also because they were unable to fulfil their desire to talk about the deceased.

There is a relationship between emotional and social remainders and the by-products of the funeral, as discussed in the last chapter. The emotional remainders influenced the types of actions that participants performed in memory of their loved ones

after the funeral. The way that people want to carry the memory of the deceased, to learn more about them or to keep artefacts or objects about them came from the love that they have for the deceased. Since the social remainders are about the way people want to share and learn more about their loved ones, participants were able to do this by finding new stories in their attempts to ‘connect with others,’ and by checking in with families on special days, such as the anniversary of the death. The social remainders also come out of the living memory because of the way participants sometimes try to take on characteristics of the deceased since they are sharing the memories of their loved ones even if others are not aware of it.

There is a lack of norms about how to manage the remainders; this is unsettling. Part of the inability to create rules or norms around the remainders is because they are random and ongoing; there are many different, unexpected and emotional ‘triggers’ that remind people about the loss or deceased that can happen anytime and anywhere. At the same time, they are also variable and flexible. The way people react to or experience remainders will vary, sometimes it will affect people significantly, other times not as much. They are not predictable in the way to suggest that people will know when they occur. The way remainders affect people will vary depending on several factors, such as the individual, their lives and the world around them. I examine this relationship in the next chapter by exploring memorialization as an ongoing process.

Chapter 5 – Making sense of the Reminders

My study concludes with a consideration of the reminders that I have defined as the everyday forms of memorialization. They include the ‘leftovers,’ the emotions, experiences and memories that stay with people after they experience a loss and extend beyond the funeral. The last two chapters demonstrated that memorialization does not end with the funeral. In chapter four, I showed that social and emotional reminders are by-products of the funeral. I argued that my participants engaged in various activities to manage these reminders such as living memory, connecting with others and reminders in chapter three.

By introducing the reminders, I want to suggest that memorialization is not as simple or static as existing research suggests. In the introduction, I explained the tendency of scholars to equate memorialization with acts of remembrance and commemoration. I then explored how sociological research on memorialization tends to conflate the funeral and memorialization in chapter two. Since I found that participants in my study each had their own unique experience of memorialization, I want to suggest that this multiplicity of experiences gives a messiness and complexity to memorialization. Despite this complexity however, my research found that there were patterned similarities between their experiences. This chapter explores the social implications of the reminders by investigating how these similarities come about through a broader understanding of social process and how these similarities are often overlooked.

In the first part of the chapter, I explore how these similarities come about through a broader social process. Here, I draw on Norbert Elias and his concept of

figuration to examine the interdependent relationship between individuals and society. I want to suggest that it is through the interweaving of these interactions that these similarities or patterns emerge. The problem however is that most people, including my participants, view 'process' as individualized; they tend to regard a process as a series of steps in order to reach an end goal. By viewing their process as separate from others and the rest of society, they often do not recognize the way that their experiences interact with the broader social world. Instead, they create narratives to shape their experience and because each narrative is different, it is difficult for them to identify the patterns. I explore the way participants use narratives to shape the complexity of memorialization and discuss this tendency in terms of remainders in the second part of the chapter.

Memorialization and Process

It is useful to explain the similarities between my participants as part of a broader social process of how people manage a loss. I borrow the language of 'process' from the work of Elias and his book, *The Civilizing Process* (2000 [1939]). Elias's conception of process relies on the concept of 'figuration.' He defines figuration in terms of the interdependence of individuals and society working in relation to one another; that is, each influences the other. I want to suggest that people do not come to perform specific practices on their own but that their actions are rooted in a larger web of interdependent relationships between social institutions, social forces and individuals. In order to demonstrate this, I will first explain Elias's understanding of process and then discuss it in relation to my study of memorialization and the remainders.

In *The Civilizing Process* (2000 [1939]), Elias demonstrates how society and people adjust their actions through processes of sociogenesis and psychogenesis. Psychogenesis refers to the way people adapt and change their behaviour in relation to others by observing others or adopting and applying their own unique ideas. Sociogenesis refers to the way social changes and transformations occur through social interaction. One of the ways Elias explains this is through the evolution of basic manners such as using a fork or blowing one's nose, people learned these behaviours through a gradual "process" in which interactions turned into social expectations and eventually rules of etiquette.

The main argument that Elias makes is that people do not act independently, but that actions are interdependent, and people relate to one another to direct their action. The key contribution of his work was to overcome the demarcation between individuals and society (or agency and structure) and to explain social life through "a network of interdependencies formed by individuals" or what he calls figurations (2000[1939]:482). His objective was to demonstrate that people did not just act on their own; or that things did not just happen in "society," but that there is an interdependent relationship between people and society. He examined the concept of "civilization" in order to make this argument because he suggested that people treat civilizations as already made or in existence, and that there is little regard or question about how civilizations came about (2000 [1939]:51). Elias thus used a socio-historical analysis and examined old etiquette texts from the Middle Ages to the end of the 19th Century to trace the shift in civilizing human behaviour in European societies. He argues sociogenesis and psychogenesis

facilitates this shift. In this way, Elias described civilization as a process⁹⁰, that is, there is no end to the civilizing process because civilization is in constant motion, and is always moving forward (2000[1939]:6). He argues that people will never see themselves in a true state of civilization because people are constantly civilizing themselves and others (2000[1939]:447).⁹¹

By suggesting that processes are never-ending, or always in perpetual motion⁹², Elias also suggested that processes are always fluctuating and non-linear. Here he described the “chains of actions” that grow and become more complex because people have to attune their actions to the actions of others (2000[1939]:379-380). Chains of action refer to the interaction between sociogenesis and psychogenesis. For example, the emergence of distaste influenced practices of serving meat from presenting and carving the whole animal at the table in the Middle Ages to carving portions of the animal in the kitchen before serving in the 17th Century (2000[1939]:99-103). The relationship between notions of distaste and the way people present themselves in relation to others also informs changes regarding the use of utensils such as the fork and knife, and the presence of bodily fluids, such as nose blowing and spitting. In this way, people act in relation to one another and their place in society that creates a chain of action. Relationships develop, grow and change, and then people adapt to their new situations by controlling their actions or developing self-restraint according to the circumstances, relationships and

⁹⁰ Robert van Krieken (2001:354) notes that Elias turned to calling figurations, process sociology.

⁹¹ Elias (2000[1939]:447) also ends *The Civilizing Process* with a line from Holbach, “la civilisation....n'est pas encore terminée.”

⁹² In this way, he argued that there is no beginning or end to a process but that we are always in the middle because regardless of where you start, there will always have been something before. Elias explains this by suggesting that wherever he would begin the study of civilization, there would always be those who will see themselves as more civilized than others.

presence of other individuals. Since processes fluctuate, Elias also noted that processes are non-linear, they do not move in a “straight line” but they shift and “criss-cross” (2000[1939]:157).

In terms of the civilizing process, people began to control their actions and develop self-restraint in relation to the behaviour, cues and reaction from others. An analogy that Elias (1978[1970]:130-133; see also Layder, 1986) uses to explain a figuration is a game, such as cards or football. The complexity of a game increases with the number of players. If there are too many players involved it is difficult to anticipate their moves, and the interweaving of each player’s actions leads to unplanned actions.

The “process” that Elias describes is useful to explain how my participants came to memorialize their loved ones in similar ways. Instead of learning to use a fork, people learned to participate in funeral events, but also to continue memorializing beyond the funeral. While the point of my research is not to track down where each person learned what they know about memorializing their loved one, Elias’s concept is useful because it suggests that ‘figurations’ emerge from a patterned relation between individuals and society. In this case, the remainders represent the basic elements that allow us to understand the broader process that made memorialization what it is today. Let me explain.

All participants, with the exception of two, described having a funeral or similar event after they experienced their loss. When I inquired further about their decision to have a funeral, most participants explained that they did it because it was a part of their own experiences, that is, it was a part of their “tradition” or “culture.” In other words, it

was what their family or community did, or they decided to have a funeral because they previously attended funerals (see chapter 3, p. 63). Some participants also described learning to perform specific practices, or receiving direction or assistance from professionals in the funeral home or health care facility (Rita, George, Vicki, Tina, Diana, Jessica, Anne, Frances, Eric, Beth, Sarah, Lance). While participants offered a specific explanation for their actions, it is useful to understand that each action is not separate from others but that each experience is connected to another's. In other words, there is a relationship between all of these activities involving the loss of a loved one even though the connection is not apparent. For instance, the funeral industry has influenced the type of practices people perform after experiencing a loss. People attending the funeral may take some of the ideas from that funeral and apply them to one they have to plan or even anticipate their own. Essentially this process continues such that one's experience of attending a funeral influences other peoples' experiences of attending other funerals and interacting with the funeral industry. These ideas are not a result of an independent act or idea, but of an interaction within and between social institutions, social groups and people. This "process" is what Elias termed a figuration, "a network of interdependencies formed by individuals" (2000[1939]:482).

The same type of explanation also applies to Wendy and Rob who explained that they decided not to have a funeral for their daughter because they did not think anyone would attend. Their daughter had addiction problems and they felt as though she tarnished the relationships she had. They also had "no good memories" of their daughter and decided against having an event to mark her passing. By examining their daughter's

relationship to themselves and others in the context of their understanding of funerals, they decided not to have a funeral for their daughter. At the same time, they did memorialize their daughter in other ways by planting a tree (an idea given by a friend). So, in the same way as people decided to have a funeral and perform certain actions in relation to others, Wendy and Rob also explained their actions in relation to others.

Another example comes from Diana who explained that her family followed the advice of the funeral director to omit the reception in the obituary because strangers might crash the funeral. They advised limiting the number of venues for the funeral because guests tend to “drop off” through each change of venue. In this way, the experience of the funeral director influenced this family’s decision not to list the reception and, correspondingly to limit the number of venues. The cultural tools and cultural repertoires of Diana and her family also influenced their decision; that is, there was an interaction between the advice of the funeral director and their own experiences. This demonstrates that people do not act independently, but that there is always an interplay between the multiple social and individual forces. This process continues because people who learn about Diana’s experience may take this advice and apply it when having to plan a funeral; and so the interaction continues. I think of it as a ‘chain reaction,’ or what Elias calls “chains of action,” where the action continues or extends through the connections and relationships with others. It is in this way that the process is ongoing and continues.

Although it may already be apparent, I want to clarify that I am not using the concept of ‘process’ in the conventional sense as a series of steps or sequence of events to

reach an end goal even though some participants in the study used the term this way. In chapter 3, I discussed the way some participants explained how the funeral helped them achieve a sense of closure, while others talked about the funeral as the start of “the process.” By using process in this way, the participants seemed to be suggesting that there was one process and that there was an end to the process and that they just had to get through it (see chapter 3, p. 68). Rita for example explained that she had better understood her grief through the five stages of grieving⁹³. She explained,

I remember [learning] about the grieving process, the denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. When I heard that, in that simplicity, I remember experiencing the denial when I got the phone call, I immediately accepted the acceptance because I knew it was coming, and I saw the peace in this picture⁹⁴, which is crazy, but I did. There wasn't any bargaining, because it was over. I don't think I was particularly depressed about it. And of course, there was, well, there was the acceptance of it right away, so I probably went through most of it but in a different order.

Rita's situation was that her dad pre-planned his funeral and he requested that they cremate and bury him directly without any service. Although Rita explained that she fully respected her dad's wishes, she would have liked a funeral service for her dad because “it just would have been a slower process.” She seems to lament that she was not able to get the stories about her dad and learn more about him without having a funeral service, but at the same time, she was adamant that she would have had it no other way because that is what her dad wanted. She explained that by learning about the “five stages of grieving”

⁹³ The five stages of grieving include denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross first identified these stages in her study of the terminally ill in, *On Death and Dying* (1969), in which she extended the stages to grief in a publication with David Kessler, *On Grief and Grieving. Finding Meaning of Grief through the Five Stages of Loss* (2005).

⁹⁴ Rita explained earlier that there was a photo of her dad that she often looked at and would see his pain, but when she received the call that he had passed away, she no longer saw the pain.

and connecting those stages to her experiences, she was able to better understand and explain her feelings.

The benefit of viewing one's "process" as a series of stages or steps is that it helps give a sense of order to the disorder of remainders. It suggests that there is an end goal or result and that people only have to follow a few steps in order to achieve that goal. By seeing process in this way, it directs and simplifies actions. However, while this kind of simplification is useful for people in their everyday lives, this concept of an orderly memorialization process is inconsistent with what most people (including Rita) described.

All participants' experiences are a result of their cultural tools, cultural repertoires and interactions with others. In this way, those experiences and interactions might seem independent and specific to each individual, but in actuality, they are a part of a larger social process – that is, people learn to do things on their own, and in relation to others and society at large. People observe, see and develop their own ideas. This influences their behaviour and others; their activities interact with the broader social world and facilitate changes. Here I am referring to the interaction of psychogenesis (individual change and development) and sociogenesis (social change and development). In other words, the way that the two processes interact suggests that people do not act independently but that there is an interdependent network between individual experiences and societal expectations.

In this way, the remainders or similarities shared by participants are not random because their experiences are interwoven with one another. As people develop their tools

and cultural repertoires, they also share and impart this culture with others so that others adopt ideas and actions that they will use and share. Since this interaction keeps happening between different people and societies, processes fluctuate and are ongoing; patterns also emerge because of the interrelationship between society (sociogenesis) and individuals (psychogenesis).

But it is also in this way that people tend to think about themselves as independent from others because they understand their experiences as their own; in other words, they fail to see the connection between their experiences and the rest of the social world. It is this gap between the individual and the social Elias wanted to overcome with his notion of process or figuration. He wanted to bring attention to the interaction between what people intend to do and “unplanned actions,” that is actions not related to individuals specifically but the actions of others, institutions or events in society.

George and Sarah, for example, explained that they altered their response to my interview questions based on context. George discussed losing his one sibling, his sister. During the interview, I found that George referred to himself as an “only child” a few times and I asked him how he came to give himself this status. He explained that he recognizes that he has a sister if ever asked directly, but sometimes he thinks about himself as an only child according to the context of the situation. He said:

It depends on the circumstance, it's contextual. It really does vary, it depends, you know. Sometimes, I refer to myself as an only child when dealing with the practicalities of what life is right now, you know, in terms of the nature of the decision of looking after an ageing parent or ageing parents and not having a sibling, you know, those sort of practicalities. But it comes up all the time, so like you know “do you have a sister?” “Yeah, I had one, she passed away when I was...” and that usually starts down like “I'm sorry,” you know, the usual thing,

“thank you very much, I appreciate the sympathy” and it’s like okay and we move on.

Similarly, Sarah explained that her response to the question “how many children do you have?” has evolved; it now varies depending on the situation. She explained,

When people used to say to me, “how many children did you have?,” I would stumble and often say that I have three. Now I don’t. I use to worry about making people feel uncomfortable, I don’t now. I always say, “I had four children, I have three living children.” And some people react, most don’t, but it’s almost like a betrayal if you don’t mention them. It’s like they just never existed. Just because they’re gone, it doesn’t mean you didn’t have them.

Here Sarah described learning to develop her response over time. Some of her life changes that she described going through, such as leaving the evangelical church and “growing up,” might explain her initial response to the question about the number of her children. The important idea here, however, is she learned to formulate a response in relation to the others. Sarah talks about the social remainders of the loss making other people feel uncomfortable and in order to prevent that discomfort for others and her, Sarah develops a cultural repertoire of altering her response to the question. She explained,

I don’t know, cause, well sometimes I don’t. It depends what mood I’m in. Because then it makes it more uncomfortable for people when they ask you about your four children, right? Where if you put it right out there, they know one’s gone. I think it’s sort of easier down the line....But if I say I have four children and they ask me later, they’re stricken. “oh I’m, so sorry.” So again, it depends, like the doctor or gynaecologist, “yeah, I had four children,” or if it’s like someone I’m never going to see again or someone I’m not going to have a lasting relationship with. Like at work, “yeah, I had four, like it’s crazy,” so we talk like that, so I don’t put in that caveat. So I put that caveat in on the type of relationship I think it’s going to be....It’s only if you have connected with somebody, that’s when it matters.... I’m still uncomfortable with making people uncomfortable, because I know death upsets them especially if I say that I lost a child, so I try to be as casual as I can.

The way Sarah directs her response according to the person and/or context is interesting because it is an example of shifts that also occur in a broader social process. Sarah shifts her response in relation to others; this decision coincides with a social taboo about talking about death or loss. Similarly, George tried to simplify things by not sharing his loss and to avoid explaining his situation, and thereby having to elicit sympathy and comfort others. Both Sarah and George direct their response in relation to the situation rather than act one way all the time. They are both aware of who is listening and conscious of determining how to identify their status or situation. What is interesting and important about their accounts is that they demonstrate how people build their repertoires, and easily switch tactics by building flexible repertoires. That is, people do not act in the same way all the time but they draw on the situation, their experiences and cultural tools in order to determine what they perceive to be a desirable line of action. Sarah for example suggested that she would offer more information if she thought the relationship would develop; but that she would also act in a way that made her feel comfortable as well. This also reflects a broader social process because Sarah appears to base her response on the social environment in which she finds herself; for example, professional, work or social. In this way, Sarah develops a cultural repertoire that can accommodate different approaches according to each situation so that she can easily shift between them. This offers a brief glimpse of the complexity of the way broader social processes can shift and fluctuate; and how people can easily move and switch between strategies within their cultural repertoires.

The way Sarah and George both adjusted their responses also demonstrates that their responses are not random because both interact with broader social process, (such as avoiding making other people feel uncomfortable, making things easier for themselves by not having to explain their situation or comfort others, as well as their own understanding of their loss and situation or status). The manner in which they have come to their answers however is not linear. Now this may seem counter-intuitive to suggest that the non-linearity of a broader social process explains the patterns or similarities among participant's actions, but the idea is that broader social processes consist of interdependent relationships or multiple strands of experiences that connect with one another but that connection does not come about in any particular order or way. The broader social process consists of the entangled strands that connect and cross over one another in random ways. That is, some people will encounter similar situations or interact with similar people, and in this way the entanglement of those interactions will influence people to act in similar ways. This is what I think Elias means by unplanned actions influencing intentional actions. By thinking about actions as a part of a larger social network and not independent, people can recognize that their actions are not independent but a part of a larger social network.

By explaining process through the interactions between society and people, Elias also suggests that processes are ongoing and fluid. That is, the interactions are always in motion and moving. In the last two chapters, I showed how some participants described the remainders associated with their loss. George, Barb, Amber, Luke and Vicki, for

example, all recognized that the loss was still there and always will be.⁹⁵ While these participants seem to be going against the conventional idea of “the process” as having an end by suggesting that “the process” was ongoing, they were still referencing process in the conventional sense of having an end by referring to “*the process*,” as if there is only one. This is understandable because by thinking about process as having an end or as a series of steps to complete offers a comfort in its own way. It provides a sense of order and control because it suggests that there is only one process or one series of steps to perform. Although the participants are not using process in the same way as Elias or me, it is useful to discuss the ways participants explain their understanding of process as ongoing, fluid, and as something that persists or remains in order to demonstrate the way people regard process in relation to their own situations.

Nancy and Sarah provided some useful analogies to describe the ongoing nature of their memorialization process. Nancy for example shared an anecdote about her father, “it’s like the story of the person who is always telling lies, when you lie, even when you remove the lie, the hole is still there.” I find this account useful because it demonstrates that even though a person may acknowledge that she has told a lie, the repercussions of the lie remain, just as a loss always stays after it happens. This ties back to the discussion of remainders and memorialization because the loss does not go away. Similarly, Sarah described learning in therapy that grief is like an onion, “you just keep peeling back layers and whenever you think you’re done, you’re just peeling off layers.” This to me also illustrates how the participants understood the continuous nature of memorialization,

⁹⁵ See chapter 3, p. 101 and chapter 4, p. 120.

because even though one assumes that it is possible to come to the end, to overcome the grief, there is still always something there to face. There is no end to the process.

In her experience, Kelly demonstrated the never-ending process of memorialization by suggesting that she repeatedly has to learn the meaning of her father's death. She stated,

It's like you learn over and over what that death means and you learn in your life. And you learn at various different times how that's going to impact you.

Kelly used two examples to explain this statement. The first was that in situations when she would have normally called her dad, she was now unable to do so. For example, one time she had a clogged drain and she got "really upset" because she was unable to call him for help. The second is that she feels the absence of her dad in routine family events, such as when her mom stopped asking her if she wanted to talk with her dad when they chatted on the phone or how she felt angry when her mom, and not her dad, picked her up from train station after his death. In such instances, Kelly was reminded about her dad's absence and that each situation she faced was now going to be different without her dad. Kelly therefore explained how she had to develop new tools and repertoires because she has to learn how to do things without her dad.

You know that that person is gone, but you can't imagine the ways in which your life is going to change because of that. And in different areas of your life, you don't actually acknowledge, you don't know what that death means to you, until you experience the situation where something has changed because of it. So it would be things like okay, now I'm learning my life without him, so you learn (a) that person is gone, because as much as you acknowledge it, you have to experience it, then you learn how your life is going to change and how it's going to impact you, and your new circumstances as life as lived. You can't just sit there and think about it. I would have never been able to sit there and imagine things like, you know if I was to break up with somebody, you know, it would be

learning what a break up is like without my dad, you know, so you're learning, it really felt like learning...to be without that person and to be without that support.

Similarly, Eric noted that his particular form of memorialization consists in perpetually thinking about his dad by stating, "I can't forget my dad and I think about him all the time. To me, that's the process." In this way, Eric, Kelly, and the other participants talk about memorialization as an ongoing process because they always remember the deceased or the way that the loss has not left them. They limit process to their experiences and regard it as ongoing because the absence of the deceased remains.

While many participants regarded their process as ongoing and continuous by limiting the language of process to their experiences and tended to regard it as a sequence of events that they had to go through, I also want to note that some participants thought about memorialization in broader social terms. For example, both Eric and Jessica explained that they wanted to memorialize their fathers but they were both unsure how to do so because they did not know what other people did. Each explained that they did not know the socially prescribed practices:

Jessica: I think that it would be a good idea to do something, to remember him, but I'm not sure what because there's not a culturally prescribed thing to do, that I'm aware of.

Eric: It would be interesting what other people do or what suggestions they would give, so I would know better how to respond. It's more at this point when I think of my dad certain images pop into my head. I can't necessarily sort those images as I'd want, I just pull them out. So, it's like when I smell some things and ah, I can be, I can be walking down the street and I'm in [another city]. It's that sort of thing, so I don't know.

Even though both Jessica and Eric explained that they understand their individual processes in relation to others and the rest of society, they do not seem to recognize that

they use the language of process in broad social terms because they both wonder what others do and whether there are any socially or culturally prescribed norms. Eric also elaborated on the complexity of memorialization by explaining that the triggers or remainders he faces are not independent of other things, but related to the larger social world, such as scents or the environment. Now that I have discussed the way similarities occur through the complexity of the broader social process, in the next section I want to explore the complexity of memorialization and the way people see themselves as individuals going through their own process, and in so doing, they often overlook the similarities between their experiences and others.

Narratives and the messiness of the memorialization process

In order to manage the complexity of memorialization, I want to explore the way some participants developed their own cultural repertoires and the narratives they used to give meaning to them. Narratives are the stories or meaning that people give to their experiences over time. Essentially, participants used narratives to make sense of or to create order to the complexity of memorialization. These narratives come out of the multiplicity of experiences and randomness of the broader social process of memorialization as discussed in the first part of the chapter.

I use narrative in the way Arthur Kleinman does in his book, *The Illness Narratives* (1988). Kleinman, a medical doctor, observed during his time as a medical student that medicine focuses on the biological functions of the body rather than patient experiences. He discovered this when he was assigned the role of trying to calm and

reassure a seven-year old girl with severe burns who had to undergo a daily routine of a whirlpool bath that caused her significant pain. At first, he tried to talk with her about her family and school, but this did not calm her or stop her screams. One day however he asked her how she tolerated the pain, the daily routine and what it felt like to be burned so badly, in which case she stopped her screams and began to talk with him about her experience. Since then, Kleinman began to conduct ethnographic and clinical studies about the experiences of illness. He defines illness as the innate human experience of symptoms and suffering. He thus defined the illness narrative as the story that people tell to give meaning to or to make sense of their chronic suffering (1988:49). The objective for Kleinman was to offer insight to other patients, family members and practitioners about the experiences people had with illness and to learn more about the human condition (1988:xiii). The intention of the illness narrative is to help make sense of, or to understand more about the way the illness relates to and connects to the self, others and the rest of the social world (1988:xiii).⁹⁶ In this way, this is much like Elias and figurations insofar as it addresses the interdependencies of human relations. For Kleinman, he does not see pain as something that is just happening to the individual, but that pain is something that extends to others and society. Similarly, figurations are about a network of interdependent relationships, and narratives are about making meaning from

⁹⁶ It is important to clarify that Kleinman's use of narrative is not a "medical model" of narrative inquiry and analysis but a concept he uses to explore the meaning that people give to their experiences, in this case, illnesses. Similarly, I use narrative in the same way, but instead of illness, I am interested in exploring the meaning that people give to their experiences of loss over time. Studies about narratives or narrative analysis tend to explore narrative as being a challenging concept to define (Polletta et al, 2011; Bal, 2009; Rudrum, 2006) or as a sequential order of events with a beginning and end (Berger and Quinney, 2005:4; Rudrum, 2005; Labov and Waletzky, 1967), in which case, the latter applies a certain structure that is not present in my current analysis of memorialization as process. I am using the concept narrative as a concept to explain how people give meaning to their experiences of loss, not as a method of inquiry. For work on the use of narrative for inquiry and analysis, see Denzin and Lincoln, 2011.

individual experiences in relation to others and society. In my study, the way that participants came to form their narratives about memorialization was by taking in different ideas and experiences and creating a story that gave them meaning and order to their loss.

Since participants described the quiet and the silence they experienced after the funeral, they also discussed the way they drew on and developed the cultural tools and repertoires to help them make their way through their ‘process.’ Again, cultural tools represent the things, such as the objects, skills or knowledge, people acquire through their experiences. My participants drew on their tools in order to direct their actions. As they develop cultural repertoires, familiar patterns of actions emerge that people may draw on or perform in a given situation. Just like broader social processes, the cultural tools people acquire and the cultural repertoires people develop are flexible and diverse. In other words, they will draw on their existing cultural tools and repertoires but they will also begin to develop new ones that they can draw on in the future. Therefore, not everyone will draw on the same tools or develop the same repertoires. Or some may draw on the same tools but develop different repertoires. They may also draw on different tools and perform the same repertoire.

I tried to illustrate these different types of repertoires in chapter three when I introduced the remainders and discussed their functions as ‘living memory,’ ‘connecting with others’ and ‘reminders,’ were ways that people went through the memorialization process. Living memory was the way that people tried to take on actions of the deceased and perform them themselves. Connecting with others was a way to learn more about the

deceased through others. Reminders were the objects or things that people kept of the deceased in order to remember the deceased. All of these functioned as particular strategies people used to go through their memorialization process. Participants were then able to explain these strategies in the form of narratives that made sense of the messiness of memorialization.

Some participants tried to overcome the messiness of memorialization by developing specific cultural repertoires in order to simplify their individual process. George for example suggested that there are three different routes available when people experience a loss:

you can try to fold it into who and what you are, you can bottle it up and ignore it, or you can allow it take over you and define your total existence.

What I find interesting about George's statement is the way that he simplifies his process to three options when there are in fact many more ways for people to memorialize a loss. However, George can only draw on his experiences with death, and therefore identify repertoires from his experience. He treats these options as a fact, as the only things people can do when they experience a loss. I found that he did this a few times during the interview; he listed the options available to questions I asked, such as, "how did you know to have a funeral?" I also remember a time when he responded "that's easy," to my question. This suggested that in his mind there are specific actions to perform in certain circumstances. Here George simplifies his process into a set of steps or rules in order to overcome its messiness. In respect to his cultural repertoire, George develops a common set of actions that he can draw on and easily switch between.

Another example is Luke. Unlike George and Sarah who I described earlier as adjusting their answers according to context, Luke approached the loss of his brother much more practically or head-on by developing a factual and concise response about his siblings. This is indicative of a cultural repertoire in action because Luke has developed a certain attitude and performs the same set of actions in a given situation.

I still sometimes struggle when people say, “how many brothers and sisters do you have?” And I’m like, “well, it’s like this, it use be five, but now there is four.” And they’re like, “oh, what happened?” “My oldest brother killed himself” “Oh, I’m sorry.” which is so nice to hear...they say they’re sorry and then they’re like, I would say that maybe half of them go, “so how did he do it?” (Laughs). And I tell them.

I asked Luke about why he detailed the loss of his brother this way and he explained because his brother was dead and that he is no longer the youngest of five siblings but four. He explained,

Well, because he’s dead. And because he’s not here and I am the youngest of five, but now I am the youngest of four. So, it is that. It’s that simple and complicated at the same time. Because I think life is like that. I think life is simple and complicated. I think to say I’m the youngest of five, two oldest sisters, two oldest brothers, and one killed himself when he was in his twenties, I think that’s also love to talk about it.

What is interesting about Luke is that he treats his brother’s suicide as a fact of his life. This is his reality, in which he embraces the loss into his own life and does not hesitate to share it with others. Unlike George and Sarah who described locating their responses as depending on the context, Luke was unwavering about sharing his loss with others.

It is my intention to let people know about [my brother] and I believe that it’s always the appropriate time. So, if I’m at a wine opening or something and someone asks me about my family, I tell them. I don’t withhold that, I carry him with me, so that I say his name. So you know, a very casual question like, “do you have any brothers or sisters,” I always answer truthfully.

Just as Luke suggests that life is at various points both simple and complicated, I want to suggest that he views memorialization similarly. There is the reality of the loss, in which he has developed a position. He treats it as a “simple” fact of his life that is easy to explain, but there is also the “complexity” of explaining the loss to others because others are often less candid and limit their discussions about it. For Luke however he explained that it is important for him to talk about his brother as a manner of “lifting” him up, which he described as a way of keeping the spirit of his brother alive by sharing his story and memories about him.⁹⁷

Both George and Luke seem to be trying to order their memorialization processes by developing a specific repertoire to use in certain situations. In this way, I think they are trying to overcome the messiness of memorialization by developing a narrative that is straightforward and consistent. In this way, I want to suggest that these narratives make it difficult to see the remainders because of the desire to order the complexity of memorialization. That is, people do not actually look at the cause or problem because they just want the unsettledness, the remainder, such as the emotional or social, to go away.

Since the complexity of memorialization creates a feeling of unrest and unsettledness, I want to suggest that people settle this discomfort by developing narratives to give meaning to their situations or creating repertoires to direct their action

⁹⁷ I also want to suggest that by taking his brother’s death head-on, Luke has found new tools to think and talk about suicide when he described attending a presentation on suicide prevention and confronting the presenter who stated that it is always about preventing suicides. He inquired whether there are any situations in which suicide is an option, in which the presenter stated there was not and refused to engage in a discussion with him. By making this inquiry, Luke was finding a way to talk about his brother, to remember him or even maybe to honour him. This is important because it demonstrates the way Luke has developed a repertoire of being able to talk about his brother and suicide.

in specific situations. People can therefore easily overlook the remainders because they are much more interested in settling the unrest than exploring its cause. Some participants did this by describing the funeral as offering closure or as the start of “the process” in the conventional way of completing a series of steps in order for the mixture of emotions and experiences associated with the loss to end.

One reason I think that existing scholarship does not deal with the everyday type of memorialization characterized by the remainders also comes from the way that it seems as though everyone experiences memorialization differently. In this way, it is difficult to recognize the common themes. By studying the actual experiences people had after they experienced a loss and examining the broader social process by which memorialization has become meaningful to people today, I was able to locate some of the themes that highlighted the presence of remainders. Let me explain with some examples of participants who used their experiences to help others.

After encountering their first significant loss, some participants described acquiring new tools, such as certain skills and knowledge around dying. Margaret, Frances and Vicki for example all shared their stories of being the main caregiver for their loved ones who were each dying from some form of cancer. All of them took their experience and volunteered with an organization to work with others who are going through the same situation that they have. In this way, they are trying to impart their tools and at the same time are developing a new repertoire around death. By developing a new repertoire around death, I am suggesting that their experience now will influence how they go through the same type of experience again in the future. Margaret for example

explained that she used to be afraid of death before her sister fell ill but she took that experience and began to volunteer with a hospice in order to help others.

When my sister was dying she said, “you know you’re going to be an expert in this by the time you’re done with me.” And it was noteworthy because I was so frightened of death before she got sick, and four years after she died I took the training at a hospice to be a volunteer and I started volunteering. And my work there, I never would have been doing that if it hadn’t been for [her]. Especially at the beginning, I use to feel like there was a way in which I knew what to do when I was with patients. I use to say [my sister] works through me in a way. I don’t feel that as much anymore, I mean I’ve been doing it for 10 years now. I mean it was definitely intuitive, in the way that it was intuitive when I cared for her. But I also had a feeling of [her]. I would know to do something because I remember doing that with [her]. And I would always pause before I did something because I would sometimes be confronted with a new situation with them. I felt like the work was honouring [my sister] in a way, that she had taught me and now I could honour that teaching by caring for people when they are dying and for their families, and I had learned how to be a family member of someone who was dying.

Margaret’s statement is interesting because of her initial fear of death and the way that she had to confront her fear of death with her sister. The things that Margaret learned through her sister’s death are things that Margaret wanted to apply or use in her everyday life. In this way, Margaret demonstrated how she drew on the cultural tools she acquired from that experience in order to help others. She has developed a repertoire of helping others with death and dying by having a more familiar set of actions available to perform when dealing with death.

Vicki also shared her experiences by giving a speech at a fundraiser for the hospital her husband was admitted to. She talked about how she wanted to inform others about the available resources that many often do not have the time to seek.

I did a speech at [the hospital] for their fundraiser for their gala and they wanted somebody to tell their story about their journey at [the hospital], so it was basically about his year of illness....So I did that and I had that written up and it

was published in their gala magazine. It was still kind of early [when they asked], but I really felt like it was the right thing to do because I know that not everybody could do that or talk about their situation, and for us, they were such a good resource. But I really went out of my way to make sure I got access to ALL that they had to offer. Like anything that they suggested, we tried to do. So I know not everybody gets a chance to do that or be able to do that, so that kind of stuff I felt was important to kind of share with people, because, you know if you're in that situation, you have so much going on that unless you manage to hear a few tips here and there, you're not going to have the time to research all of this yourself.

Vicki here shared the way that she actively had to seek information and support and having uncovered the information and finding it useful, she wanted to share it with others. What makes Vicki's experience interesting is that by sharing her experience she was able to reflect on her situation and acquire new tools to develop her narrative. She explained that she began to realize exactly how difficult and challenging her experience was.

And it really helped me I think...it was nice to kind of have it out there, what our experience was. And it did also show me that some my memories of what happened are not what actually happened. (Laughs)...Like the last part. I wrote that it was getting worse, but we didn't know why. But we did know why. We received results that it had spread and it was getting worse, so it's kind of like pieces of information you keep aside to keep on going....or I guess that's what I had done, and so when I look back at it now, there's more information that keeps coming but you can only take in so much at a time. [The speech also] kind of validated that it was *that* hard for me. It really was. It's easy to forget when you're in the mode of 'suck it up, keep going' because you have to get through everyday, but to know that it really is very tragic. You know, I'm my worse enemy, like I don't give myself as much compassion as I would to other people. If I heard this story from someone else, I would be really sad. So when I forget that it's that sad, I go, okay, I can be a little easier on myself. Like, it's big, not everybody could make it through so well.

Here, Vicki explains how her narrative changed upon reflection and the way that context and time can influence the different narratives that people develop. Vicki describes how she can now recognize that the experience she went through was difficult and

challenging, whereas when she was going through it, she did not recognize it. At the time, she did not feel as though there was the opportunity to reflect because she needed to survive the situation and get through it. This is interesting because of the way her narrative changed because of the re-interpretation or recognition of the information presented at the time. But it is also interesting because of the different narratives that emerge about the same situation over time. This goes to illustrate the role that time plays in shifting and changing meanings creating different narratives. In this way, Vicki was able to shift easily between repertoires based on different experiences.

Another way that the experience of these various remainders led other participants to apply their new cultural tools is by helping friends through a loss. Michelle described feeling angry once when her sister's friend implied that her sister should be over the loss of their father a week after his death. This upset Michelle because she recognized that the experience that comes with a loss does not immediately end; and then, she discovered that memorialization never really ends. This realization has led Michelle to make it a point to check in with friends who experience a loss. She explained,

People are always there in the immediate aftermath, the funeral, the cemetery, people want to be there for you, people don't realize the mourning process doesn't stop there...people forget that, so a lot of my friends are grateful that I touch base. So my friend who lost her father, I wanted to touch base with her on Father's day and I'm the only friend who did that.

Similarly, Jessica explained the way she wants to use her experience and to draw on her tools in order to help others in the future.

Certainly, it's important to be there for other people in this process, it's important to bring people food (laughs). I've learned about what people need, someone may have wanted something different from what I wanted, but I think that the human experience of loss is somewhat universal. Certainly, people could feel like other

people will catch them when they are falling and I will do that more for people. And I will make more of an effort to attend services. You know call them on a death anniversary or something like that just to make them know that this day was important and know that it's important to them.

Here, I also want to suggest that Michelle and Jessica developed a new repertoire or a particular set of actions by using tools that they acquired from their own losses as a way to help others deal with death and memorialization. I refer to this repertoire as “lessons learned” because they are drawing on their own experiences and tools in order to help others.

Conclusions

Although all of these repertoires and narratives are different, when I analyzed the interview material, I saw a pattern unite these experiences, and it is this pattern that I call ‘remainders’. Margaret’s fear of death, Vicki having all this information about the resources available, Michelle experiencing the loneliness after her loss and Jessica learning from others are all examples of remainders because they are the emotions, experiences and memories that continue to stay with people. None of the respondents talked about “remainders” in the way that I use the term, but at the same time, their narratives about experiencing the leftover or residual realities of death beyond the funeral expressed these remainders. Listening to people’s narratives about their individual memorialization process suggested a clear pattern based on the presence and persistence of these remainders.

By exploring these similarities or patterns through the concept of “process,” I came across two understandings of process. First, there are the individual processes that

participants described. Some of my participants used the language of process to refer to something that has an end or has stages. While this may have been a useful way for participants to understand their own experiences, I used Elias's notion of process or figurations in order to demonstrate the existence of an interdependent relationship between society and individuals. Elias's concept was useful to me because it demonstrated the existence of a broader social process that explained how my participants came to memorialize their loved ones in similar ways. Since people will always have to adjust their actions in relation to others because actions and situations fluctuate, the interweaving of society and individuals can result in similar experiences. In this study, the similarities I identified are the presence of remainders that help us expand our understanding of memorialization today.

Conclusions: Looking forward with the Reminders

The experience of losing a loved one brings chaos and disruption to those closest to the deceased as they face the emotional and practical complexities that come with death. As demonstrated in the introduction and chapter 2, scholars often connect memorialization with remembrance and the meaning given by the funeral industry. For reasons associated with the social disruptions caused by death, the funeral industry has not only taken on the role of looking after the corpse and its disposal, but has also adopted the role of creating suitable ‘memories’ for the bereaved. In this way, the funeral industry has attempted to confine memorialization to the funeral, as it has become the common and expected practice for people to manage a loss.⁹⁸

The disruption that comes with death suggests that it is not possible for the funeral to manage the personal experience disorder in full. Furthermore, the complexities that come with death are difficult to see, especially after the funeral, because they tend to be ignored by others over time, and become absorbed into everyday life. My study therefore sought to open up the study of memorialization by examining the complexities that come with a loss beyond the funeral. Since the funeral is a temporally limited event, my research examined memorialization as a process. My research explored how people managed the emotional and practical complexities that accompany the experience of losing a loved one.

⁹⁸ The Canada Labour Code limits bereavement leave to three days and only for the death of immediate family members. The three days begin from the date of death, in which the leave includes regular days off, such as Saturday and Sunday, so if the death occurs on a Friday, bereavement leave only applies to the Monday. The limited number of days and immediacy of the days after the loss further demonstrate the significance of the funeral and containment of memorialization to the funeral. (Retrieved February 5, 2014 from http://www.labour.gc.ca/eng/standards_equity/st/pubs_st/bereavement.shtml).

My study was based on semi-structured qualitative interviews with people who experienced a loss and organized a funeral in order to learn about their experiences. Since I wanted to learn more about the complexities that come with a loss beyond the funeral, I drew on the theoretical resources of cultural sociology. My intention to study memorialization through culture was to examine the way people explain and give meaning to their experiences. Drawing on the theoretical concepts outlined by Ann Swidler (1986, 2001), I investigated how people use their “cultural tools,” that is their experiences, traits and demographics, in order to develop “cultural repertoires,” or, familiar patterns of action. The way people explain the meaning of their loss is through their narratives, the stories that people develop over time to talk about their loss. The benefit of using a cultural sociology approach is that it offered me the flexibility to study memorialization as an ongoing process and to make some of these complexities more visible.

By focusing on the meaning people give to their actions, one of the most striking findings of the interview material was the way the loss seemed to remain with participants. This was evident through the sorrow that was visible in their responses, posture, eyes and voice, the way some participants cried and just the way participants paused to think about their responses before sharing their understanding of the loss. In this way, I wanted to give a name to the way the loss seemed to stay with participants and adopted the language of “remainders.” I defined remainders as the leftover emotions, experiences and memories that stay with people after they experience a loss, even after the funeral.

I explained the remainders in two ways. The first was by simply looking at the things people did to memorialize a loved one after the funeral. In chapter 3, I identified the cultural repertoire of post-funeral memorialization in order to discuss the types of actions that participants performed after the funeral and identified three types of remainders: *living memory*, *connecting with others* and *reminders*. I used living memory to refer to the way that people try to take on characteristics of the deceased in order to continue their memory of them. Connecting with others refers to the way people tried to learn more about the deceased or create new memories by connecting with other people who knew the deceased. Reminders refers to the objects or things that participants kept of the deceased as a way to remember them.

The second way I used the language of remainders was to signal different forms of emotional unsettledness. Here, remainders refer to the way people continued to experience emotional unsettledness from the loss, as well as the things that they did to remember the deceased. In chapter 4, I identified two forms of remainders: emotional and social. Emotional remainders are the feelings that people continue to carry after the loss. Social remainders are the way that people want to continue to talk about and remember their loss.

I suggested that the remainders are an informal and personal form of memorialization. They are personal because they are the things that people experience on their own or share with a limited number of people. They are also informal because every person will perform their own activity or action. That is, there is no script available, people act according to their emotions, experiences and memories.

By attending to these remainders, my research sought to make the memorialization process more visible and to demonstrate that memorialization extends beyond the funeral. In chapter 5, I discussed memorialization as a process, insofar as it is never-ending, constantly fluctuating and ultimately non-linear. These remainders linger; they do not disappear. They continued to affect my participants well after the funeral of their loved one, and certainly the way each experiences these remainders will shift and change as they encounter new situations and relationships.

A Social History of Contemporary Memorialization

My study extends the study of memorialization in the death and dying literature through the remainders. The finding of the remainders in this study suggests that memorialization is a topic that requires further attention and investigation, specifically into the history of memorialization. The current investigation into the meaning that people give to everyday memorialization practices does not address the socio-history of contemporary memorialization practices. One way to extend such a study is to explore the history of memorialization and the shifts in memorialization practices.

Around the end of the 19th Century, the funeral home became a dominant way of managing death. With advancements in medical and sanitation practices, life expectancy rates gradually increased and death became less commonplace (Gallop, 2006; Volo and Volo, 1999). Some scholars argued that death became “hidden” as families began to relinquish the responsibility to institutions such as hospitals (e.g. Ariès, 1981; Sudnow, 1967; Glaser and Strauss, 1965) and funeral homes (Blauner, 1966:384).

Arguably, with the shift from families and communities to experts and institutions and decline in mourning customs, people began to lose their cultural tools to deal with death and memorialization. Death was no longer a part of everyday life but limited to specific individuals and groups, generally those closest to the deceased. By introducing the remainders, I want to suggest that future research on the topic should investigate this shift in relation to the remainders. While communities once looked after the dead and had the resources and time to mourn, today, people turn to experts to help them look after the dead and direct them. The performance of mourning customs is less frequent. Instead, people seem to be left on their own to direct their memorialization process. I think that the shift of the responsibilities of death from communities to experts has contributed to the remainders – the informal and personal way of memorializing a loss. By informal, I mean the way that people have to draw on their own resources and experiences in order to act on the remainders; by personal, I mean by the way that people deal with the emotions, experiences and memories (the remainders) on their own.

By approaching the study of these remainders using a historical sociological approach, it would be possible to examine how the remainders came about. Such a study would be useful in order to offer some insight into the way death and memorialization has become a taboo or uncomfortable topic of discussion for people.

Perceptions of Memorialization

Since I approached the study of memorialization through culture, participants in my study only had to fill the few requirements of experiencing a loss and organizing a

funeral. Religion, gender or class are a part of their cultural tool kit that they could draw on. In this way, people could draw on a combination of these tools, their experiences as a man or woman, financial position and religious beliefs, in order to explain the meaning they give to their experiences. By focusing on meaning therefore, I was able to inquire further about how they understand their actions or specific tools. For example, someone who suggests that they acted because of their religious beliefs is not solely acting on their belief, but the way that they understand that belief, the way that others have influenced their understanding of it, and so forth. In this way then, I think that I am able to generalize the remainders to the general population of those who experience a loss.

Another important element about investigating memorialization through culture is the way it demonstrates that memorialization is itself social. The tools that people draw on, the cultural repertoires they develop, the narratives they share, all of these are a part of a social process of memorialization in which everything is interdependent. People do not act independently or come to their actions because of one thing or another, but because of a combination of factors.

Memorialization as Public Engagement

The remainders offer the tools to talk about memorialization after the funeral. It is a way to make death and memorialization more open and visible. At the same time, it suggests that there should be more resources available for people to talk about the remainders. Bereaved Families of Ontario (BFO)⁹⁹ is a good start. The mission of BFO is to offer support to people who have experienced a loss. They work from the principle that

⁹⁹ I never used the services of BFO but I did contact them for assistance in locating participants for my study.

those who have been through a loss can help others; they offer support through small group meetings run by individuals who have also experienced a loss. In this way, the meetings are set up so that each group focuses on a specific type of loss, including parents who lose children, adults who lose parents/spouse/sibling, and children/youth who lose a parent/friend/sibling.¹⁰⁰

At least four participants talked about going to Bereaved Families and working with them. Anne for example shared her experience with them and offered more insight into the process.

They have monthly meetings, like support chair nights where people can just drop in and they have a speaker and then it breaks into small groups for the particular kind of loss, so there would be a prenatal loss, people who lost a parent, people who lost a sibling, people who lost a child. So I would go to those monthly chair nights, probably for, I think I went for at least six months, it could have been a year. And then they have these closed groups and it was with the same people, about a dozen people and you meet every week for eight weeks where you work through things more deeply, like it's for two hours.... And then I ended up a couple of years later volunteering as a facilitator on their support chair nights and then becoming a facilitator and doing their closed groups. And myself and another woman I had met through the organization, we ran several of those closed groups. And this was you know, years later right? After dealing with everything. So I was involved with [them] for quite a long time. And I use to volunteer and help in the office too.

Being a part of BFO and volunteering illustrates the presence of remainders because Anne's participation shows how she was trying to deal with the leftovers of her loss. Not only did she find that these activities helped her, but they also gave her the tools to help others. Volunteering is also a form of memorialization for her because it provides

¹⁰⁰ This may bring up the question of whether the type of death affects the remainders. Since I developed my project to explore the meaning that people give to their experiences of loss and to identify the themes that exist across people's experiences, future research on remainders might examine whether there are different degrees of remainders or a comparison study about the remainders and relationship to deceased.

a concrete way for her to remember her brother; and it gives her the chance to continue to work through the remainders.

BFO has eleven affiliate or chapter organizations across Ontario, in which each chapter has its own mission and board. In addition to offering a space for those who have experienced a loss to one another, the mission or “values” of some of the individual affiliates, including Ottawa, Toronto, Halton/Peel and the Midwestern region, are to educate and “sensitize”¹⁰¹ the public¹⁰² about the needs of the bereaved¹⁰³ and “issues”¹⁰⁴ or the “stigma”¹⁰⁵ around grief and bereavement. The existence of such a mission suggests there is a lack of visibility or understanding about death and memorialization, especially among those who have never experienced a loss.

Charitable organizations also give people an outlet to memorialize by creating ‘tribute’ programs such as ‘in memoriam’ donations. Such programs offer people the opportunity to donate to a specific organization ‘in memory’ of a loved one. For example, people may donate to a cause or organization that the deceased was passionate about. Some organizations also develop special programs or events as another way to memorialize the loss of a loved one. Some participants for example described participating in annual fundraising memorial events, such as a walk (Margaret, Vicki), Christmas tree lighting (Vicki), and Christmas angels (George). In events, such as the annual memorial walks, participants would seek donations from others to raise money for

¹⁰¹ Ottawa affiliate, see <http://www.bfo-ottawa.org/mission.shtml>. (Retrieved December 19, 2014)

¹⁰² I use “public” to refer to the examples listed on the Ottawa affiliate website. This includes, “the business community, health care workers, clergy, funeral directors, the general public, and referral sources.”

¹⁰³ Ottawa affiliate, see <http://www.bfo-ottawa.org/mission.shtml>. (Retrieved December 19, 2014)

¹⁰⁴ Toronto affiliate, see <https://sites.google.com/site/bfortoronto/about-us/mission-values-and-goals-1>. (Retrieved December 19, 2014)

¹⁰⁵ Halton/Peel affiliate, see <http://bereavedfamilies.ca/about-us/>. (Retrieved December 19, 2014)

a specific cause, while at these Christmas events, participants would purchase a set of lights or angels to put on a Christmas tree at the organization.

What is interesting here is how these programs differ. Participating in a walk requires asking people for donations and reminding others about their loss, while acts such as buying a string of lights or an angel are much more passive; it is almost as if the interaction exists between the participant and the organization. The active asking for donations in order to participate in an event reminds others about the loss and can offer the opportunity to memorialize the deceased. At the same time, as noted throughout this dissertation, talking about the deceased can make others feel uncomfortable in which case, people may not always get the chance to talk about the deceased with friends or family. Even so, it is possible to do so with other people participating in the event.

Similarly, sometimes people can participate in an event not explicitly for the purpose of memorialization but under the auspices to help a cause. For example, annual fundraising events, such as the Ride for Heart or Run for the Cure, suggest that donations are to prevent heart or cancer related deaths, but there seems to be a connection between participating in such events and the remainders. Here, I think of a friend who lost his father last year because of a stroke and then participated in the Heart and Stroke Foundation's Ride for Heart. Never having participated in the ride before, his participation in this event was a way for him to memorialize him and act on the remainders.

Eric shared an interesting story about deciding where to request donations when writing the obituary for his dad. Since his dad died of a heart attack, his mom suggested

that they should request donations be made to the Heart and Stroke Foundation, which Eric thought was “kind of stupid”. He thought it gave attention to the cause of his father’s death rather than something that his dad liked. He explained,

One was the Heart and Stroke, which I always thought was kind of stupid (laughs). You know, the person, this is what happened, so you give the money, and of course when you’re reading the newspaper, that is the only way you know what happened to the person, because it says, “passed suddenly,” and then you know ‘ah, suddenly,’ you know it’s either a stroke, accident or heart attack, and when you see donations to da-da-dah, you know okay, that’s how they died. So I remember piping up and saying that we should make donations to Make a Wish Foundation. I don’t know why, but I mean my dad liked kids. (Laughs). So I thought that was, you know, appropriate.

Here Eric identifies the difficulties in choosing how to memorialize a loved one – the tension in choosing to memorialize by the cause of death or something that the person liked or valued. Eric also talks about the way that some obituaries do not offer details about the cause of death, but depending on the choice of adjective, readers are able to make assumptions about whether the death was a surprise, accident or expected. This is interesting because the request to a specific organization indicates some relationship to the deceased. For example, a request to an organization or institution that does medical research, may suggest the cause of death, but to another organization, such as an arts institution, may suggest that that this was an interest or passion of the deceased.

Neither BFO or in memoriam programmes offered by charitable organizations suggest that they are addressing specifically the remainders, but both programs offer services for people to memorialize their loss. The mission and objective of BFO recognizes that people will continue to experience a loss over a lifetime. What makes this organization unique is that unlike grief counselling or therapy, its intention is to offer a

space for people to share their experiences and attempt to integrate the loss into their lives. In this way, BFO seems to help people deal with the remainders by giving them a space to talk about their experiences. Charitable organizations on the other hand offer a way for people to memorialize their loss by trying to honour and share the memory of a loved one.

Maybe most importantly, the remainders are about time. They are about how things change over time. Just as memorialization never ends, so too are the remainders always ongoing. Sometimes they stabilize, but they can also hit without warning; in other words, they shift and change with time. The presence of remainders indicates that memorialization does not end with the funeral – they demonstrate that a loss does not leave any one. They are about learning to be sensitive, how to talk with others about their loss. They are about not avoiding the topic, but about bringing it to light. The remainders are about making death and memorialization visible.

Appendices

*Appendix A – Funeral Web Sources*¹⁰⁶

	Name	Description	Website
Funeral Companies	Service Corporation International (SCI)	Multinational corporation operates under Dignity Memorial Brand	http://www.dignitymemorial.com/dm20/en_US/main/dm/index.page?
	The Mount Pleasant Group (MPG)	Operates under brand, The Simple Alternative	http://www.mountpleasantgroup.com/
	Meaningful Funerals	Sponsored by Batesville, a funeral products manufacturer.	http://www.meaningfulfunerals.com/
Funeral Associations	Funeral Services Association of Canada (FSAC)	Canadian Association of funeral professionals, including suppliers.	http://www.fsac.ca/home.html
	National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA)	“World’s leading funeral service association”...that “informs, educates and advocates to help members enhance the quality of service they provide to families.”	http://www.nfda.org/
	International Cemetery, Cremation and Funeral Association (ICCFA)	International trade association in all aspects of the memorialization industry	http://www.iccfa.com/
Government Resources	Board of Funeral Services (Ontario)	Ontario’s regulatory board for funeral services	http://www.funeralboard.com/public/
	Ontario Provincial website	Ontario service information about what to do when a death occurs	http://www.ontario.ca/en/life_events/death/004448

¹⁰⁶ Retrieved between April 21 and December 9, 2012.

Appendix B – Letter of Information

Title of Research Project: “The Memorialization Process.”

Researcher: Catherine Tuey

Date of Ethics Clearance: June 9, 2011

Ethics Clearance for the collection of Data Expires: May 31, 2012.

Dear Sir or Madame:

My name is Catherine Tuey and I am a student in the PhD programme in the Department of Sociology at Carleton University. I am currently working on my dissertation project, ‘The Memorialization Process,’ under the supervision of Chancellor’s Professor Alan Hunt, also in the Sociology department at Carleton.

I am seeking research participants for my study and I have asked my colleagues, friends and family to forward this message to people who they think may be interested in participating. The purpose of my study is to learn about how people make meaning around death. I am interested in talking with people who are 18 years old and older, live in Canada and have participated at any time in taking on the organizational responsibilities associated with the loss of a loved one, such as organizing a memorial service. Since death is often seen as a taboo subject to discuss, this research project will give you the opportunity to share your experiences on the topic. There will be no remuneration for your participation, however by sharing your experiences, your interview and results will contribute to a greater understanding in the process of memorialization and loss.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to answer some questions about your experiences during an interview that will be approximately an hour in duration and conducted in-person at a location and time of your choice. The interview will be audio recorded to allow for transcription and analysis of the data. The audio recording will be deleted after I transcribe the interview. The transcribed interviews and computer files of the transcriptions will be kept on a flash drive and password protected and will be securely stored in a locked cabinet, to which, only I will have access to this information, with the exception of sharing information as necessary with my Supervisor, Dr. Alan Hunt. The research results will become a part of my PhD dissertation and may also be used in related publications, including journal articles, book chapters or conference presentations. I will be pleased to share any of these with you upon your request. The

information you provide may also be used for future studies, unless you request that the interview be destroyed after the completion of the dissertation, at which point, they will be shredded and any computer files of the transcriptions on the flash drive will be deleted.

Your participation is voluntary and you may choose to skip any questions. You may also withdraw from the study, without explanation and any negative consequence, during the course of the interview, or within two months from the date of the interview. If you decide to withdraw from the study, all of the information you provided will be destroyed by deleting all audio and computer files from the flash drive and shredding any paper transcripts or documents. Since you will only be asked to answer interview questions, there are no anticipated physical risks, discomforts and/or inconveniences. It is possible that some questions may evoke some emotional memories, however, this should be no greater than what you may encounter in your everyday engagement with the topic. This emotional risk may arise depending on your relationship with who you have lost, how long ago the loss has happened and the level of bereavement.

Your decision to participate (or not) in this research is voluntary and will remain anonymous and any information you provide during the research will be held in confidence. It is possible that your anonymity may be reduced if someone referred you to this research project, however, no real names or identifying characteristics will be used in the final study.

If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact me, Catherine Tuey, either by e-mail or by telephone. Alternatively, you may contact my supervisor, Dr. Alan Hunt in the Department of Sociology by email at alan_hunt@carleton.ca or by telephone at 613-520-2600, x2591.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Carleton University's Research Ethics Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact Professor Antonio Gualtieri, Research Ethics Board Chair, 510B Tory Building, Carleton University, 1125 Colonel By Drive, Ottawa, Ontario, K1S 5B6 (telephone at 613-520-2517 or email ethics@carleton.ca).

Participant's Consent to take part in the research project.

I, _____, have read and understood the nature of this project as described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily consent to participate in this dissertation study on the "The Memorialization Process," by Catherine Tuey. My signature below indicates my consent.

By checking here, I agree that the information given in this interview may be used beyond the dissertation and immediate publications in future studies on this topic.

By checking here, I request that the information I provide for this study be destroyed after the thesis is completed.

Signature (Participant) _____ Date _____

Signature (Researcher) _____ Date _____
Catherine Tuey, PhD Candidate, Department of Sociology, Carleton University

Appendix C – Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Memorialization Study

1. I would like to begin by providing some context for the rest of the interview by asking some questions about your loss, for instance, could you tell me
 - i. who you lost,
 - ii. when you experienced the loss,
 - iii. how you learned about it and
 - iv. whether it was a sudden/expected loss.

You mentioned that you lost your X, could you help provide some background information by briefly discussing

- ◆ when the loss occurred,
- ◆ how you learned about it,
- ◆ whether it was a sudden/expected loss.

2. After losing your X, can you think back to that time and describe the types of
 - ◆ roles you played
 - ◆ things you did?

*****What prompted such actions? (Why did you do these things?)*****

3. Did you have a funeral/memorial service/ceremony/mass for X? (If no, go to question 4).
4. **How did you decide to do these things? What factors influenced your decision to do these things?**

If yes, can you describe the elements of the service? (Visitation, ceremony, mass, interment, wake/food).

If yes, how did you go about making arrangements for the service?

For example:

- ◆ How long after your X's passing did you have the service? **Why did you decide to have it then?**
- ◆ Where was the service held? **What made you decide to have it at this location? What significance does this location have?**
- ◆ What cultural or religious elements existed, if any? **What influenced your decision to practice these traditions/elements?**
- ◆ Was there music? If so, what? **How did you decide what music to play?**
- ◆ Who was responsible for organizing the service? **Why?**
- ◆ What types of things did you do for the service? (e.g. photos, programme, obituary, others). **Why do them, how decide to, etc.**
- ◆ How did you inform people about the service? **Why these methods?**
- ◆ Who attended the service?

- ◆ How did people dress for the occasion? (Colours, style?)
- ◆ What was the attendance like (large/small, friends/family, strangers, etc)?
- ◆ Were any refreshments or meals provided? **How did you decide to do this?**
- ◆ Was the body/cremains at the service? **Why? Was it open-casket if casket? How did you decide what container to use?**

4. What factors contributed to your decision in having or not having a service?

5. Did you decide to bury or cremate X?
- ◆ **What factors contributed to this decision?**
 - ◆ How did you go about making arrangements for the burial/cremation?

If buried, where did you decide to bury X? **How did you decide where to bury X? Did you place any objects into the container to be buried with your X?**

If cremated, what did you decide to do with the cremains? **Why did you decide to do this?** If cremated and not buried, go to question 8.

6. Was a tombstone/gravemarker placed at the location of where your X is buried?
- ◆ What does it look like? (colour, size, shape)
 - ◆ what kind of information is on it? (symbols/photos)
 - ◆ **How did you decide to put that information on it?**

Do you have any other objects placed at the location? (e.g. flowers, other objects?) **Why/How did you choose those objects?**

7. What significance does the location of where your X is buried have for you?

- ◆ Do you visit X?
- ◆ When?
- ◆ Do you bring anything when you visit?
- ◆ What types of things do you do when you visit?

8. Are there any other types of things you have done or created in memory of your X? If yes, can you please describe them? For example, where they are located and what they are?

9. Are there any things that you have kept anything in memory of your X?
- ◆ What types of things did you keep?
 - ◆ Why did you decide to keep these things?
 - ◆ What do you do with these things?
 - ◆ Where are they kept?

What happened to your X's other things after s/he passed away?

- ◆ How was the decision to keep or donate or discard things made?
- ◆ How was the decisions to distribute things to certain people made?
- ◆ Who looked after X's things?
- ◆ Did X have a will?
- ◆ How long after his/her passing did someone begin to organize/manage X's things?
- ◆ What type of things had to be done?

10. Are there any things that you find that trigger the memory of X? If so, what are they?

Are there any things that you have acquired in memory of your X?

How do these things remind you of X?

11. Are there any things or actions that you do to remember X?

- ◆ For example, do you celebrate/acknowledge certain dates, such as anniversaries, birthdays, date of death? If yes, how? What types of things do you do? Has your action changed as the years pass by?

What prompted your actions? How did you decide to do those things? Keep those things? What significance to do these things/actions have for you?

The internet/technology is becoming a means for people to memorialize their loss, have you used the internet/technology to memorialize the loss of your X?

12. Can you describe what type of things people did for you after X passed away? (e.g. checking in, providing food, helping clean, etc).

- ◆ Who provided such support?
- ◆ How long did you continue to receive support?

After your X passed away, did you find yourself doing the same things before the loss or did you find new activities or do different things, etc?

- ◆ Are you able to talk about your loss with others? How have you found your talking about your experiences in public? What reactions do you receive? What do you do?

13. Experiencing a loss is often a difficult and emotional time. It's been X time since you've lost your X, and I'm wondering if you could describe some of the emotions you've felt from the time of loss to now...

14. Sometimes people have their own traditions that they perform sometime after the

service/mass/ceremony, did you perform any such activities?

- (a) Are there any other types of things you did after or before the burial/cremation/service that may not be necessarily a tradition but something you found yourself performing? **If yes, what and why?**
- (b) At any point, were there things that you felt like you had to do but didn't want to? If yes, what are these things and why didn't you want to do them?
- (c) At any point, were there things that you wanted to do but didn't do?

15. You've described...

- a. How did you learn to perform these actions/do these activities?
- b. What purpose did these activities/actions have for you?
- c. What makes it important for you to adhere to/perform such activities/traditions?
- d. Are there any traditions that influenced your actions? What traditions if so?
- e. What types of things do you think you have learned after performing these activities?

16. Is there anything that you would like to add that hasn't been discussed?

17. There is the chance that I may want to follow-up with you after this interview to get more details, would it be okay to contact you again?

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