

**RE-IMAGINING ANCESTOR WORSHIP:  
PRIVACY, COMMUNITY, AND THE POLICING OF HEARTACHE**

by

JOSEPH CULLEY HARRELSON

A dissertation  
submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**IN**

**PSYCHOLOGY**

MERIDIAN UNIVERSITY

2021



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## **Birdwings**

Your grief for what you've lost lifts a mirror  
up to where you are bravely working.

Expecting the worst, you look, and instead,  
here's the joyful face you've been wanting to see.

Your hand opens and closes and opens and closes.  
If it were always a fist or always stretched open,  
you would be paralyzed.

Your deepest presence is in every small contracting  
and expanding,  
the two as beautifully balanced and coordinated  
as birdwings.

- *Rumi*

## **ABSTRACT**

### **RE-IMAGINING ANCESTOR WORSHIP: PRIVACY, COMMUNITY, AND THE POLICING OF HEARTBREAK**

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Nearly everyone with a loving heart will eventually be touched by intense grief. This study investigated the ways in which encouraging the bereaved to sense the presence of a lost loved one can impact the process of grief. The proposed hypothesis to this research problem was that being allowed and encouraged to fully express and explore these presence-sensing experiences can help to diversify and animate grief. The theory-in-practice utilized for this research was Imaginal Transformation Praxis.

The Literature Review chapter explores grief as an embodied emotion and as a psychological concept. Special attention is given to the review of qualitative, phenomenological research into sense-of-presence phenomena. The literature review also considers three discussions essential to this investigation: the role that imagination plays in bereavement, the social dimension of grief, and the ways that grief is policed.

Imaginal Inquiry was used as the methodology for this research. The four phases of Imaginal Inquiry differentiated the process of evoking, expressing, interpreting, and integrating experiences of presence-sensing phenomena. This format provided additional security and structure for the study of emotional pain.

Four learnings emerged from the data. The cumulative learning for this research is that an expanded sense of time can emerge when the bereaved gather to share their longing for reconnection. Learning One states that, for newly-formed grief groups, experienced ritual leaders can greatly reduce the impact of cultural and personal blocks to grieving. Learning Two claims animals often appear in the grief narratives of people who are receptive to sensing the presence of lost loved ones. Learning Three contends that the desire to feel whole can lead the bereaved toward an authentic and integrated sense of the departed when they reassess their pre-loss understanding of problematic relationships. Learning Four claims that when presence-sensing experiences feel authentic, bereavement can lead to an expanded sense of time, into both the past and the future.

The story of Rumi and Shams is used to mythically contextualize this study, suggesting that sensing the presence of a lost loved one can be a soulful experience of transcendence.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Research Topic

Shams of Tabriz died in the year 1248, and his death had a transformative impact on the poet who would eventually be known to the English-speaking world as Rumi. The legendary story of their brief time together is often retold as a model of spiritual companionship, a union so strong that their love transcended death. Inspired by an overwhelming longing for his lost friend, Rumi's poetry uniquely touches many who read it. William Chittick calls Rumi the greatest mystical poet of Islam.<sup>1</sup> Rumi is popular in the West too, with the BBC news agency reporting that Rumi is the most popular poet in America.<sup>2</sup> Bereavement, the generalized topic for this dissertation, was central to Rumi's transformation.

The time between Shams death and Rumi's change was brief, and few of his poems are specifically about the despondency of acute loss. Initially, Shams simply disappeared for a while, leaving Rumi with a raw, ambiguous sense of separation. Susan Roos calls this kind of indeterminate loss *chronic sorrow*, and she writes it can be unending.<sup>3</sup> A glimpse of this state is seen when Rumi is in denial about Shams disappearance, calling him a radiant source of energy that cannot be extinguished, like the sun.<sup>4</sup> In another poem, Rumi describes his yearning as a type of searching behavior.<sup>5</sup>

Shams reemerged after some time, but only for a short while before disappearing again, this time rumored to be slaughtered by friends and relatives of Rumi who were jealous of the intimacy he shared with Rumi. When Shams disappeared the second time, Rumi knew that his friend would not be seen again. Rumi dedicated the remainder of his life to describing the longing that emerged once Shams was truly gone.

Jean Houston writes that a similar yearning is the central passion for all the great mystery and spiritual traditions. The term she uses for this phenomena is *The Search for the Beloved*.<sup>6</sup> Houston centers her psychological framework around this underlying passion for union, a passion that her writing indicates is the fundamental lure of human growth and development.<sup>7</sup> This dissertation looks at how the search for the Beloved manifests in bereavement.

This study specifically explores how heartache can involve sensing the presence of loved ones who have died. The word heartache was chosen because it emphasizes the ways in which sadness and loss are embodied. Embodiment can be emphasized further when the dead are perceived in sensuous ways. Anchoring this investigation in the body foregrounds the paradoxical nature of grief phenomena. Thomas Fuchs describes the phenomenological structure of grief in terms of a fundamental ambiguity between the past and the future, and between the presence and the absence of the deceased.<sup>8</sup> Grounding this research in phenomenology intentionally brings attention to the paradoxical felt sense of bereavement. David Smith conceptualizes *phenomenology* as a discipline in which structures of consciousness are explored from a first-person perspective of lived experiences.<sup>9</sup> This dissertation is about how the bereaved makes

sense of their embodied experience of a specific bereavement phenomena: a numinous sense of a lost loved one's presence.

Keen, Murray, and Payne adopted the term *sense of presence* (SOP) for their narrative review of the topic.<sup>10</sup> Following their lead, SOP is the term used in this research. Previous researchers have embedded value judgements into other terms used. Other terms seen in Chapter Two include, "hallucinations," "post-death contact," and "after-death communications." This dissertation aims to hone the psychological discussion of SOP phenomena by bracketing assumptions about their ontological status and the existence of life after death.

According to Dennis Klass, family ancestor rituals are the most common form of maintaining contact with someone who has died.<sup>11</sup> When personal identity is formed around group membership, he claims that the group membership is made up of both the living and the dead. He describes Japanese ancestor rituals as representative of this type of sociocentric ancestor veneration, in which significant deaths are viewed as an interaction among the whole group, and especially between the living and the dead. Klass writes that SOP phenomena are thus accepted and encouraged in Japanese Shinto culture. For Klass, SOP phenomena are a type of *continuing bond* (CB).<sup>12</sup> CB research is explored in Chapter Two. Used throughout this document, the terms *sociocentric* and *egocentric* are defined by Maureen O'Hara in reference to cultures that emphasize the social context or the context of the individual, respectively.<sup>13</sup> O'Hara's research is covered in detail in Chapter Five.

SOP phenomena are less accepted in individualist, egocentric cultures. In 1917, Sigmund Freud defined *grief work* as a process where the bereaved relentlessly test the

reality that the deceased are really gone.<sup>14</sup> This continues until acceptance is finally found and the mourner can carry on with their life. If this reality testing fails, he writes that the bereaved can cling to the one who was lost, “through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis.” His stance on grief and SOP phenomena has had a profound impact on the indigenous psychology of the Western world for more than a century. Popular attitudes toward grief and loss have long been in alignment with this dominant discourse. An example is the widespread use of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross’s staged theory of grief, where the goal is to let go of the deceased to make room for new relationships.<sup>15</sup>

Since Freud introduced the concept of grief work, the Western bereavement myth has been infused with medical language in which grief symptomatology is categorized tracked, and ameliorated. Writing in 1961, George Engel makes a compelling case that it is the duty of physicians to respond to all pathology, where pathology is defined as a deviation in an individual’s state of well-being.<sup>16</sup> For physicians like Engel, this includes grief.

Embedded in this pathological view of grief are values in alignment modernism. According to Kenneth Gergen, the main tenets of *modernism* are an emphasis on scientific rationality, reason, and a belief in continuous progress.<sup>17</sup> Ken Wilber further describes modernism in terms of a culture’s differentiation of art, morals, and science, a division he correlates with the separation of consciousness, ethics, and science.<sup>18</sup> Wilber writes that modernism has been a disaster because it failed to account for spirituality. He defines *postmodernism* such that nothing is a pre-given, and the world is necessarily interpreted as it is perceived. In order to transcend the modern condition, he writes the

tenets of modernity must be accounted for in the transcendence. Just as the modern era differentiated art, morals, and science, he postulates that a postmodern era must integrate art, morals, and science.<sup>19</sup> This research explored how immersive ritualization of the process of bereavement can facilitate this integration.

Margaret Stroebe et al. were among the first researchers to emphasize the problematic nature of grief in the modernist paradigm, where people are encouraged to recover from their intense emotional disequilibrium as quickly as possible.<sup>20</sup> Much of the bereavement literature in the last 25 years has been examining this situation and considering postmodern possibilities that lead to psychological health and growth.

Tony Walter writes that all societies seek to control, regulate, patrol, and police bereavement.<sup>21</sup> He lists cases in which grief is both over-regulated and under-regulated, where the bereaved feel like they have too many rules to follow or, alternatively, feel like they do not have enough guidance. He emphasizes that much of the policing of contemporary bereavement is self-policing, a self-monitoring process occasionally assisted by friends, family, councilors, and self-help media. One could say that this research explores the ways in which SOP phenomena are policed, and the impact this has on bereavement.

### Relationship to the Topic

I was fourteen years old in 1987, the year my best friend died in a car wreck one spring morning on his way to high school. The principal of the school called an all-school meeting in the gymnasium to efficiently tell the whole student body about the accident. It has been more than thirty years since the accident, and I can now barely remember my friend's face. I can, however, still feel the bleachers under me when I learnt the news, and I can still see the principal standing with a microphone in the center of the gym. Sometimes it feels like there is a fourteen-year-old part of myself still sitting on the gym bleachers, locked in that moment. Now, when I concentrate on the scene, the man with the microphone invariably fades to black and a halo of light surrounds his silhouette, like an eclipse of the sun by the moon.

Abraham Maslow defines *peak experiences* in order to represent transcendent moments where there is a dramatic shift out of ordinary, everyday life, into a disposition characterized by a sense of personal integration and oneness with the world.<sup>22</sup> Opposing this concept, Frederick Thorne defines the *nadir experience* as the, “subjective experiencing of what is subjectively recognized to be one of the lowest points of life.”<sup>23</sup> Nadir experiences are also transcendent, but in a negative way. Russell Stagg adds that, despite representing a fundamental change in quality of life, nadir experiences such as bereavement are often the source of personal transformation and growth.<sup>24</sup>

Having a nadir experience early in life infused my development with what Barle, Wortman, and Latack call *traumatic bereavement*, a situation where the enduring symptoms of trauma are layered over the symptoms of bereavement.<sup>25</sup> Their research



indicates that the impact of traumatic loss is more pervasive, intense, and prolonged than less sudden losses. To the extent that this is a dissertation about bereavement, I have a personal relationship with the topic.

More specifically, this research is focused on SOP phenomena, where the bereaved feel, in some way, the presence of the deceased. My personal connection to SOP phenomena in bereavement evolved during this research. Midway through the writing of the dissertation, I spontaneously painted a representation of my dead friend. A photograph of this painting can be found in appendix nineteen. I spent several months working with this painting in my own psychological processes, and I brought it to the data collection sessions for use in the altar exercise. The painting took on additional meaning as I came to accept that I had no photos of my lost childhood friend.

The ways in which I relate to this topic are just as personal to me as the topic itself. Methods for data collection and its analysis emphasize an essential reliance on phenomenology to provide a framework for collecting, interpreting, and writing about the data. I sensed my connection to nature and the Earth deepen throughout this research as I honed my phenomenological approach. As I changed the way I was articulating my experiences, I came to understand the relevance phenomenology had for me personally. By including phenomenology in my living, I have come to appreciate how aesthetics can guide me toward points of interest in my sensual perceptions. Phenomenology has helped infuse the language of this research with descriptive language that, hopefully, feels authentic to the reader. I am profoundly grateful that I can now adopt a phenomenological approach elsewhere in life.

## Theory-In-Practice

This research is contextualized within the discipline of psychology by means of Imaginal Transformation Praxis (ITP). ITP concepts defined in this section and in the literature review are used throughout the dissertation and are essential to understanding the research. When developing ITP, Aftab Omer drew from *Imaginal Psychology*, an orientation to psychology that reclaims soul as the primary concern.<sup>26</sup> Imaginal Psychology itself draws from multiple domains, including the creative arts, mythology, somatic perspectives, spiritual traditions, mystical philosophy, indigenous wisdom, deep ecology, and critical social theory. This respect for multiplicity is mirrored in ITP. Omer defines *psychological multiplicity* as, “the existence of many distinct and often encapsulated centers of subjectivity within the experience of the same individual.”<sup>27</sup>

Omer describes Imaginal Psychology as still coalescing out of a postmodern-indigenous conversation.<sup>28</sup> This coalescing involves recognizing psychology as a modern event and becoming fully conscious of modernity. Cultural appropriation of indigenous conversations is addressed by consciously rooting Imaginal Psychology in indigenous experience, a shift Omer mentions as necessary to come to terms with modernity. Nonverbal indigenous knowing about soul, soul loss, myth, ritual, and story are of particular interest to Omer.

ITP was chosen to guide this research because it shares Imaginal Psychology’s primary concern with soulfulness. When Omer writes that the body is “that part of the soul discernable with the five senses,” he identifies embodiment as a means of engaging with soulfulness in ITP.<sup>29</sup> Listening to the wisdom of the body is essential for Omer, because he writes that much about the soul cannot be verbalized. He uses the analogy of

an iceberg to differentiate between being, soul, and identity. In this analogy, the ocean is being, where being is life, including the inanimate. The part of the iceberg above the waterline is identity, and soul, a term Omer prefers to “unconscious,” is the parts of the iceberg below the waterline. Identity is formed out of being for Omer, just as ice is formed out of water, and soul is conceived as the individuation of being. *Initiatory threshold* is the term Omer used for transitions that cannot be integrated without a transformation of identity.<sup>30</sup> Finally, he uses the term *soul loss* for cases where there is a disconnect between the visible and the invisible parts of the iceberg. Several additional terms from ITP are defined in the final section of Chapter Two.

### **Research Problem and Hypothesis**

The research problem asks how encouraging the bereaved to sense the presence of a lost loved one can impact the process of grief. The hypothesis explored in parallel with this question is that being allowed and encouraged to fully express and explore these presence-sensing experiences can help to diversify and animate grief. On the surface, this formulation of the research problem and hypothesis take an idiographic approach, focusing the inquiry on the subjective experience of participants. That said, group patterns and dynamics also had the potential to deeply impact the learnings, because the research design collected data when the participants were gathered as a group. The research problem and hypothesis explore a subjective experience of bereavement activities in a group context. Thus, the social dimension of grief was considered throughout this research.

## **Methodology and Research Design**

Imaginal Inquiry was the methodology used for this research. As a postpositivist research methodology, Imaginal Inquiry constructs a view of reality from a variety of different perspectives.<sup>31</sup> Specifically, data in this research comes from the subjective experience of both participants and researchers. To get as close as possible to the inquiry, researchers were themselves immersed in the data collection as researcher-participants. To make this work, efforts were made throughout the project to acknowledge and bracket the biases and assumptions of the researchers.

Phenomenology served to ground this research in the sense-based data provided by participants, infusing the research with heart and embodiment that could only be sourced from the present moment. The phenomenological approach served to privilege the body's disclosures, including the intersubjective involvement of researchers and participants. In alignment with this lived experience, the dissertation's literature review reveals that a phenomenological viewpoint is particularly potent way of researching the experience of bereavement. ITP privileges the indigenous experience, and phenomenology is shown to share similarities with indigenous ways of being and knowing the world. The expansive notions of personhood available to phenomenologists further suggests that future grief researchers could productively include the dead as participants when their methodology is phenomenological.

This research takes to heart Jean Houston's emphasis on story.<sup>32</sup> Houston's sacred psychology calls for personal stories to be deepened through a recovery of the

oral traditions that have long served as the dynamic currency for human development. For Houston, the storytelling process shapes and sustains the emotional attitudes of those who speak and listen, energizing life and infusing it with meaning. Writing for a different audience, Robert Neimeyer points out that meaning reconstruction through storytelling is one of the primary tasks of bereavement.<sup>33</sup> With these researchers in mind, storytelling was chosen as the primary means of data collection. To maintain an attitude inclusive of multiple perspectives, ITP additionally seeks to not bypass the the “shadow side,” of the research topic.<sup>34</sup> To this effect, this research brackets the assumption that an inherent frailty limits affect tolerance of participants, and that compassion demands we assume the bereaved are frail. In a similar way, Diana Fosha does not start her clinical work by assuming people have a low tolerance for working with the visceral power of emotion.<sup>35</sup>

### **Learnings**

The cumulative learning for this research is that an expanded sense of time can emerge when the bereaved gather to share their longing for reconnection. Learning One states that, for newly-formed grief groups, experienced ritual leaders can greatly reduce the impact of cultural and personal blocks to grieving. This learning points to the important ways in which facilitation of the research environment contributed to the learnings. Learning Two claims animals often appear in the grief narratives of people who are receptive to sensing the presence of lost loved ones. The creative perception of this imagery energizes and sanctifies the grief process. Learning Three contends that the desire to feel whole can lead the bereaved toward an authentic and integrated sense of

the departed when they reassess their pre-loss understanding of problematic relationships. Learning Four claims that when presence-sensing experiences feel authentic, bereavement can lead to an expanded sense of time, into both the past and the future. All participants in this research identified their race as White, except for "Sofia" (pseudonym) who identified as Hispanic and Native American.

These learning emerged from an exhaustive engagement with the study data. Data collection sessions were video recorded and reviewed several times in order to incorporate participants movements, gesture, artwork, facial expressions, verbal style, and tone of voice. Transcripts were made of the audio portion of these recordings, and the transcripts were parsed repeatedly to focus on the most authentic points of interest in the participants' stories. More detail about the interpretation process that led to these learnings can be found in Chapter Three.

### **Significance and Implications of the Study**

This research suggests that sensing the presence of a lost loved one in bereavement is an experience where the soulfulness can be enhanced. Because of its emphasis on soul, this suggestion further implies that Imaginal Psychology is an orientation to psychology particularly well-suited for working with SOP phenomena. Creative ritualizing was shown to be an essential ingredient for infusing grief research with imagination. The experience of ritualizing in the context of bereavement demonstrated the power of learning communities to break through the cultural gatekeeping of SOP phenomena. This illuminates new pathways toward bereavement-

specific post-cultural development in lieu of the developmental impasses that result when grief experiences are privatized.

Cultures may block or encourage people to have SOP experiences. As is discussed in the Literature Review Chapter, contemporary grief researchers have detailed the ways in which grief is shunned in the West. Using the language of ITP, the privatization of grief is an example of cultural gatekeeping that limits the social experience of grief. This research suggests that the cultural gatekeeping of shared grief experiences is having a significant negative impact on the mental health of the bereaved.

Given the methodological focus on narrative, it is perhaps not surprising that myth and mythologizing deeply impacted the interpretation and integration of study data. Specifically, the emergence of animal imagery during the ritualizing process highlighted the animal-like qualities of bereavement and the soulful, melancholic feel that can accompany engagement with animals and with the natural world. Mythologizing the animal imagery that spontaneously emerged in the bereavement rituals emphasizes that humans are animals, ritualizing is animalistic, and that grief processes are tightly bound with humanity's animal heritage. All of this implies that humans and animals share a common fate. James Hillman takes this implication to its natural conclusion when he writes, "their extinction is ours too."<sup>36</sup>

This research implies that the social sanctioning of SOP experiences can lead to an expanded sense of time and ancestry. When SOP experiences feel authentic, bereavement can lead to an expanded sense of time, into both the past and the future. SOP experiences need to be socially validated for this expansion to happen. This research suggests that contemporary bereavement looks the way it does because people

have a diminished sense of time's continuity. Bereavement within ancestor-focused paradigms not only takes a different course; it often includes an expanded sense of the future, where the bereaved are motivated to live further for the benefit of future generations.



## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction and Overview

This research investigated spontaneously occurring phenomena where the bereaved feel the nonmaterial presence of a loved one who has died. The terms grief, *mourning*, *sadness*, *heartache*, and *loss* will be used interchangeably throughout this review. The specific research question explored in this literature review is an inquiry into the impact these phenomena have on the process of bereavement. The review also explores a starting hypothesis that being allowed and encouraged the full exploration and expression of these experiences can help to diversify and animate grief. Additional literature is included when it speaks to the research design and methodology. Literature is grouped into four sections.

The first section explores the biological portion of sadness before tracing the historical development of grief as a scientific, psychological point of interest. The literature of affect theory is reviewed in the first half of this section, highlighting the work of Sylvan Tomkins, Donald Nathanson, Paul Ekman, Diana Fosha, and Jaak Panksepp. The resources provided by these theorists are underutilized in the study of grief, and their work provides unique insights into bereavement by tightly binding this project to the lived experiences of participants' embodied sadness. Special attention is given to Fosha's unique clinical research on the transforming power of grief affect. The

latter half of this section looks at the century-long development of a medicalized approach to grief, including contemporary discussions about alternatives. Continuing bonds theory will be explored as an alternative model that encourages bereavement counselors to approach SOP phenomena as an opportunity for post-traumatic growth.

The second section takes a deep dive into the literature of phenomenology. Phenomenology will be shown to function as a binding agent throughout the research, anchoring the investigation to sensory data and providing a framework for extracting qualitatively distinct meanings from subjective reports of SOP phenomena. This section begins by reviewing concepts from four seminal voices in phenomenological philosophy: Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jean-Paul Sartre. This section next reviews literature clustered around the concept of animism. Evolution of the term will be traced through the literature of anthropology, starting with Edward Tylor's initial definition, and ending with a look at the contemporary discussion surrounding Nurit Bird-David's reformulation of the term as relational epistemology. Special attention is paid to Irving Hallowell's research in the 1930s with the Ojibwa of Beren's River in south central Canada. Hallowell's research originally inspired Bird-David's work, and is an excellent example of relational epistemology. Parallels will be drawn to the concept of ecological perception in the work of James Gibson, David Abrams, and Laura Seawall. Finally, Hillman's understanding of animism will be shown to illuminate the role imagination plays in phenomenological investigations, functioning as a bridge between phenomenology and Imaginal Psychology. The final task of this section is to review the phenomenology of grief, with an emphasis on the research of Thomas Fuchs and his typology of body memory.

The third section explores fifty years of research into SOP phenomena, with an emphasis on contemporary qualitative studies developed after continuing bonds theory was introduced in the 1990s. Special attention is given to phenomenological studies that have methodological similarities to the current inquiry. Alternative terms for SOP will be reviewed, and conceptual frameworks for understanding SOP phenomena will be explored.

The fourth and final section looks for parallels in the literature of Imaginal Psychology and the literature of grief theory. Research influencing the ITP concepts of gatekeeping, participatory consciousness, and personifying are reviewed and collated with related bereavement research. The policing of grief is shown to exist in all communities and cultures, providing structure and obstacles in the quest to grieve authentically. An exploration of participatory consciousness in bereavement defines and leverages several additional concepts, including numinosity, sacred space, *communitas*, and ritualizing. Finally, Hillman's concept of personifying will be enhanced with additional research prior to exploring the ways in which imagination can impact the grief process when the dead are personified. Research into the therapeutic use of the expressive arts in bereavement will be reviewed, revealing a gap in the literature that future researchers can explore.

## **Grief**

The first task of this section is to explore grief as an affective state and psychophysiological construct. This section next aims to review the psychological literature for inquiries into grief as a psychological concept worthy of scientific study. When

available, conceptions of grief will include the researcher's differentiation of pathological, or complicated grief.

## **Grief Affect**

Peter Freed and John Mann's research indicates that human grief and sustained depressive despair emerge out of the separation-distress mechanisms of the mammalian brain.<sup>1</sup> This section reviews the literature of affect theory, biology, psychiatry, and affective neurobiology to describe the affect system and to exhume specific references to grief affect. Several other terms for grief were seen in the literature reviewed, including sadness, sad emotion, agony, distress-anguish, and "pangs of grief."

The scientific study of grief affect began in 1872 when Charles Darwin published *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*.<sup>2</sup> Darwin described the physical expressions of grief and depression, including facial expressions and the mechanic of crying. He distinguished between a frantic, active form of grief and a more passive, depressive form, and he contended that these forms have different origins. Darwin emphasized that, like humans, animals such as apes and monkeys experience and display grief. Building upon Darwin's work, contemporary researchers have further explored and defined several emotional systems, including the grief/distress system.

Paul Ekman and Donald Nathanson both credit Silvan Tomkins as being an essential influence on their respective inquiries into affect. Rather than biological drives, Tomkins envisions the affect system as the primary system motivating behavior. In his model, biological drives such as hunger and sex are motivating when amplified by affect, or, alternatively, biological drives can be masked or inhibited by the affect system.<sup>3</sup>

Specifically regarding grief, Tomkins distinguished distress-anguish affect from fear-terror affect by analyzing distress vocalizations, as Darwin had before him. The crying response of a newborn is, according to Tomkins, distress-anguish affect responding to the excessive level of stimulation that accompanies the experience of birth.<sup>4</sup> Tomkins clarifies that distress-anguish affect can be innately activated, saying, “The unlearned activator of distress is a high-level of density of neural firing. Such neural firing itself may be produced by either internal or external sources. These include pain, hunger, cold, noise, heat, loud speech, very bright lights or overly intense or enduring affect, including excessive distress itself.”<sup>5</sup> Other activators of distress-pain affect listed include the low-grade discomfort or pain of a fatigued state, the interruption or inhibition of an action, an intended action, or another affect, repetitive rhythmic stimuli, and repetitive inner preoccupations resulting from unfinished business.<sup>6</sup> While these citations make clear that the distress vocalizations described by Tomkins potentially expresses both mental suffering and/or bodily pain, Tomkins elsewhere emphasizes that it is awareness of the feedback of the crying response that leads to the experience of suffering.<sup>7</sup>

Tomkins names four biological functions of crying: 1) to communicate that all is not well, both to the organism itself and to others; 2) to do this for several alternative distressors; 3) to motivate both self and others to do something to reduce the crying response; and 4) to negatively motivate with a degree of toxicity tolerable to both the organism and its care provider. He contrasts the comparatively mild toxicity of distress with the urgent toxicity of fear affect, an affect which, in emergency situations, is designed to rapidly minimize contact with its source. The lower toxicity of distress

permits the individual to mobilize less readily available resources, including resources that only come with time and increased freedom. In addition to describing distress-anguish affect as toxic, Tomkins describes it as both self-punishing and punishing to care providers.<sup>8</sup>

Paul Ekman considered Tomkins to be his mentor and collaborator in developing a cross-cultural study of facial expressions that lasted for more than four decades.<sup>9</sup> Ekman's systematic research using quantitative methods was responding to Margaret Mead and other cultural relativists whose theories of the cultural construction of expression, gesture, and emotion had significant purchase in the academic discourse of the 1960s. Ekman's research was scientifically rigorous, eventually replacing the popular anthropological understanding of emotion with the now more widely held view that expressions and gestures are innate and therefore universal. Ekman reconciled his psychological research with previous anthropological findings by introducing the concept of *display rules* to represent socially learned rules about the management of expression that vary from culture to culture.<sup>10</sup>

Whereas for Tomkins anguish was simply high-intensity distress, Ekman provided a more nuanced distinction between his equivalent terms, sadness, and agony. For Ekman, agony involves active protest and an attempt to deal with the source of the loss; the passive sadness he describes includes qualities of hopelessness and resignation.<sup>11</sup> He writes that emotions can come and go in minutes or even seconds, but that sadness is one of the longer lasting emotions. Ekman contrasts the brief duration of emotions with the longer duration of moods, which might last up to several days. In the case of an enduring blue mood, Ekman writes, "we are slightly sad, ready to become

very sad,” and a melancholic personality he attributes to someone prone to blue moods and feeling sad. Finally, Ekman classified clinical depression as a mental disorder in which the sadness emotion is out of control, potentially interfering with the capacity to live with others, to work, to eat, and to sleep.<sup>12</sup>

Donald Nathanson is another prominent researcher who followed Tomkins in researching affect.<sup>13</sup> Nathanson writes that affects are the human equivalent of computer “firmware,” meaning permanent software, hard-wired into the computer’s memory. Like Tomkins, Nathanson describes distress affect as completely neutral regarding its origin. Any steady-state noxious stimulus or combination of stimuli will activate the steady-state noxious affect of distress. He writes that children display distress affect more frequently than adults because they have not yet completely absorbed the social training that alters and perhaps even suppresses the expression of innate distress affect. In Nathanson’s work, “grief” is a term reserved to describe a low mood that goes on for extended periods of time following a personal loss. This mood encompasses distress but not all distress is grief. Similarly, Nathanson sees a great deal of distress in depression, even though depression is far more than distress affect.<sup>14</sup>

Jaak Panksepp was a psychobiologist who dedicated his long career to studying the mammalian brain, affects, and the neuroevolutionary origins of human emotions.<sup>15</sup> He and his colleagues claimed that all mammalian brains share the same basic biological values, built in accordance with consciousness-creating affective circuits concentrated in subcortical brain regions. Panksepp uses all capital letters to designate seven basic emotional systems that are contained in the subcortical regions of mammalian brains: SEEKING (desire), PLAY (social joy), FEAR (anxiety), CARE (nurturance), LUST

(sexual excitement), RAGE (anger), and PANIC/GRIEF (sadness). These instinctual emotional responses are considered by Panksepp to be primary-process psychological experiences, distinguished from secondary processes that emerge out of a variety of memory and learning mechanisms, and tertiary processes that emerge from the higher mental processes of the human brain. He lists empathy, trust, blame, pride, shame, and guilt as secondary processes, and the names of feelings, mentalizations, distancing skills, containment, and mindfulness as tertiary processes specific to humans. Expressed in Panksepp's terminology, this section is exploring research on the primary-process psychological experience of PANIC/GRIEF affect. For Panksepp, the PANIC/GRIEF affect, like all the basic affects, is at the very base of our psychological being. He claims that all together, primary-process affective feelings comprise the biological substrate of the core self and are perhaps the neural foundation of the soul.<sup>16</sup> This claim brings Panksepp's research into alignment with Imaginal Psychology.

Diana Fosha distinguishes herself from the other researchers discussed in this section by having used affect theory in the clinical domain to generate a substantial body of her own empirical research.<sup>17</sup> Grief affect is of particular interest to Fosha for its potential healing therapeutic efficacy. Fosha's research found that the patient's affective experience of the therapeutic process itself was key in activating the transformative qualities of therapy. In the case of such meta-therapeutic processing of grief affect, the patient's awareness of deprivations, losses, and missed opportunities trigger deep emotional pain, setting in motion a transformative healing process within the relational context of therapy.<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that when Fosha presents case material including permanent loss of an attachment figure she is working with a client with a mature loss;



she does not suggest her research is applicable to acute grief. Fosha's research plays a key role in two of the four learnings presented in Chapter Four.

### **Grief as a Psychological Concept**

While several of his early case studies involved loss and bereavement, including the "Rat Man" and four of the five cases in *Studies in Hysteria*, Sigmund Freud did not formally introduce the concept of grief into the lexicon of contemporary psychoanalysis until the publication of his 1917 essay, *Mourning and Melancholia*.<sup>19</sup> He uses the term *love object* to refer to that which was lost, and subsequent psychoanalytic writing refers to grief phenomena as *object loss*. In examining grief and depression, the contemporary psychological terms for mourning and melancholia, Freud found them both to contain a loss of interest in the outside world, an overall painful or dejected frame of mind, and a diminished capacity to love. For Freud, the distinguishing characteristic of depression is low self-esteem, a symptom absent from cases of normal grief. Grief, which he describes as, "the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on," involves a serious departure from the normal attitude of life, but, for Freud, this is not a pathological condition requiring medical treatment. Indeed, he saw any interference with the process of grief to be useless or even harmful. A contemporary meta-analysis by Currier, Neimeyer, and Berman backs up Freud's claim, concluding that psychotherapy provides no long-term benefits for normal grief when compared to control groups who did not receive therapy.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, 2008 research from Bonaenero and Lilienfeld finds

contraindications for interventions targeting normal grief reactions, confirming Freud's early claim that grief therapy can be harmful.<sup>21</sup>

In Freud's theory, grief work is an unavoidable process in which, over a period of time, individuals work to withdraw their energy and attention from the love object. He found that, for some people, the struggle can be so intense that they turn away from reality and cling to the lost object via hallucinatory wishful psychosis. Freud describes the process of mourning as an extraordinarily painful ontological process of reality-testing each memory and expectation until the bereaved is free and uninhibited from the lost object. In psychoanalytic language, the bereaved first introjects and identifies with the lost object prior to a systematic decathexis that renders the bereaved ready for a new love object.<sup>22</sup>

Melanie Klein extended Freud's concept of object lost when she claimed that, as an adult, the loss of a love object reactivates the infantile depressive position (IDP).<sup>23</sup> Klein describes the IDP as a chaotic state of mind that first emerges in the process of weaning from the love, goodness, and security associated with the mother's breast. Just as in early development, where all the intellectual, emotional, and physical growth is responding to the IDP, she describes the bereaved as engaged in a similar task of reestablishing and integrating their inner world. For Klein, unresolved bereavement indicates the bereaved never established a secure inner world in early childhood. Above and beyond grief, Klein sees IDP reactivation wherever adults are forced to encounter and overcome adversity.

Whereas Freud and Klein only hinted at pathological cases of grief, Helene Deutsch, a contemporary of Klein, specifically claimed that chronic grief is

pathological.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, Deutsch claimed that unmanifested, absent or unexpressed grief is also pathological. If mourning is not brought to completion, Deutsch claimed that the energy of repressed grief will manifest elsewhere in life. In her opinion, an absence of grief is an indication that the survivor lacks the emotional fortitude needed for grief work.

Working as a psychiatrist during World War II, Erich Lindemann conducted the first empirical study of bereavement using scientific epistemology and his research confirms Deutsch's formulation of pathological grief.<sup>25</sup> Psychiatric interviews of 101 participants provided the data for Lindemann's study. Data was analyzed in terms of changes in mental status and reports of somatic and psychological symptoms. From this, Lindemann first described the common characteristics of a normal course of grief, and then he described distortions of this normalized grief response. He listed the specific characteristics of normal grief as including preoccupations with the image of the deceased, somatic distress, guilt, hostile reactions, and a loss of patterns of conduct. The duration of these characteristics depends on the success of the griever's engagement with the work of emancipating themselves from their bondage to the deceased. Lindemann's research showed that eight to ten interviews with a psychiatrist over a period of four to six weeks should settle most cases of uncomplicated, undistorted grief reactions.

In addition to confirming Deutsch's hypothesis, Lindemann's research uncovered a variety of grief distortions including: acquiring symptoms belonging to the last illness of the deceased, overactivity without a sense of loss, development of a recognized medical condition such as asthma, rheumatoid arthritis or ulcerative colitis, conspicuous alterations in relationships with friends and relatives, hostility against a specific person,

lasting loss of patterns of social engagement, behavior which is detrimental to his or her own social or economic existence, or an agitated depression. With proper psychiatric treatment, Lindemann's research found that these distortions can be converted to normal grief reactions which are then able to resolve.<sup>26</sup>

Writing in the domain of sociology, Allan Horwitz describes the profession of psychiatry as rapidly expanding in the time when Lindemann was writing.<sup>27</sup> Horwitz describes this period as the beginning of diagnostic psychiatry, a time when psychiatrists were developing a list of discrete diagnostic categories of mental illness they were prepared to treat. Lindemann's research is representative of the overall trends in the greater context of psychiatry described by Horwitz.

In 1961 George Engel produced a compelling article summarizing the needs and justifications for a medical response to grief.<sup>28</sup> In this article, titled *Is Grief a disease?*, Engel compared grief to a burn wound, representing them as parallel processes of biological disequilibrium. Like a burn, grief involves suffering and an impairment of functional capacity lasting from days to months. There is a consistent etiological factor for both grief and burns, and there is a relatively predictable symptomatology and course. Grief and burns are both predictable and normal responses to trauma but are "pathological" because they refer to changes in state. Engel claims it is the duty of the physician to apply scientific scrutiny to all natural phenomena involving deviations in a patient's state of well-being.

With this understanding of grief, Engel drew several important implications for the medical community. First, if grief is a disease, he saw a need for the scientific study of grief. Second, because grief so often precedes the course of other illnesses, he

concluded it must be an etiological factor as potent as microorganisms or physical agents. This second implication is aligned with the research of Stroebe, Schut, and Stroebe, who found the health outcomes of bereavement include an excess risk of mortality, decrements in physical health and diverse psychological reactions.<sup>29</sup> Third, Engel concluded physicians need to seriously consider psychological stress as a major component of human illnesses. Fourth, this implied for Engel that medical providers also need to consider the environmental context of the suffering individual, including their social life, job, home life, and goals. Finally, he concluded that the maintenance of psychological objects must be considered an important variable in sustaining health and facilitating adjustment to adversity.<sup>30</sup>

John Bowlby, like Engel, saw parallels between the process of mourning and the process of healing from a severe burn. He writes,

Just as the terms healthy and pathological are applicable to the different courses taken by physiological healing processes, so may they be applied to the different courses taken by mourning processes. Nevertheless, it must be recognized that in matters of health and pathology no clear lines can be drawn, and that what appears as restoration of function can often hide an increased sensitivity to further trauma.<sup>31</sup>

Bowlby singled out a young child's loss of a mother-figure as particularly prone to the evocation of psychological processes that are as essential for psychopathology as inflammation and scar tissue are for physiopathology.<sup>32</sup>

Bowlby, like Lindemann, saw pathological mourning as exaggerations or distortions of normal processes. For Bowlby it was thus important to identify the characteristics of normal mourning. Bowlby's conditions for normal mourning in adults and children include the need for time, space, trusted companionship, freely-flowing information, and participation in community gatherings and rituals pertaining to the

deceased. Additionally, in his formulation of normal mourning, not only must the pre-loss relationship with the deceased have been reasonably secure, there must be some sort of reasonably secure attachment relationship to steward the bereaved through the ongoing process of mourning.<sup>33</sup> Another common feature of normal mourning recognized by Bowlby was a continuing sense of the dead person's presence, either in some specific context, or as a constant companion.<sup>34</sup> Bowlby's picture of pathological mourning emerges when the conditions for supporting secure attachment are not met, before and/or after the loss. In his view, many psychiatric illnesses are tragic expressions of pathological mourning.<sup>35</sup>

Bowlby's research identified two disordered variants of mourning. He called these variants chronic mourning and prolonged absence of conscious grieving. Bowlby describes prolonged absence of conscious grieving as an abnormal extension of the numbing phase that is conceptually similar to Deutsch's concept of absent grief. Bowlby's chronic mourning is described as distorted versions of normal yearning and searching in attachment.<sup>36</sup>

Since the time when Bowlby was writing, the medical approach to grief has matured to the point that diagnostic criteria for this emotion has been included in several contemporary diagnostic manuals. Holly Prigerson and her colleagues have produced state-of-the-art psychometric validation of the diagnostic criteria for Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD), enabling them to clearly distinguish PGD from both major depressive disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>37</sup> Jordon and Litz have documented the ongoing research efforts to ascertain the prevalence and risk factors of PGD, finding, broadly, that it is primarily developmental, attachment, and environmental issues that

lead to PGD.<sup>38</sup> A systematic literature review and meta-analysis in 2017 by Lundorff et al. suggested that one out of ten bereaved adults are at risk of PGD.<sup>39</sup>

An exhaustive inquiry from Wortman and Silver found virtually no empirical research backing the many common assumptions about grief that are seen in the seminal research reviewed in this section. Originally called myths, they describe these assumptions as follows. The first myth is that, following a loss, individuals will go through a period of intense distress. Positive emotions are implicitly assumed to be absent during this period. In the second myth, it is assumed that failure to experience such distress is indicative of a problem. The third myth describes a belief that successful adjustment to the loss requires individuals to confront and work through their feelings. Fourth, they describe a myth where continued attachment to the person who died has generally been viewed as pathological, and the necessity of breaking down the attachment to the loved one is often considered to be a key component of the mourning process. In the fifth myth, it is assumed that within a year or two, people will recover from the loss and return to earlier levels of functioning.

Wortman and Silver emphasized the cultural issues with these assumptions when they cite the Arizona legal case of John Henry Knapp.<sup>40</sup> Knapp was a man sentenced to death and later exonerated for the murder of his two young daughters. Principal evidence in Knapp's case was his lack of grief symptoms immediately following the incident. This legal case demonstrates how attitudes toward grief can have far-reaching social implications.

The assumptions discredited by Wortman and Silver's research reflect a rational, goal-driven, and efficiency-focused cultural zeitgeist that researchers Stroebe et al. refer

to as the modernist approach to grief. These three researchers use the term “breaking bonds hypothesis” to refer to those academic voices advocating ties with the deceased be severed. Stroebe et al. contrast the breaking bonds hypothesis with grief in the romantic age:

Within the romanticist context the concept of grief was far different from the modern one. Because close relationships were matters of bonding in depth, the death of an intimate other constitutes a critical point of life definition. To grieve was to signal the significance of the relationship, and the depth of one’s own spirit. Dissolving bonds with the deceased would not only define the relationship as superficial, but would deny as well one’s own sense of profound self-worth. It would make a sham of a spiritual commitment and undermine one’s sense of living a meaningful life. In contrast with the breaking bonds orientation of modernism, romanticism value was found in sustaining these bonds, despite a “broken heart.”<sup>41</sup>

Against this backdrop of romanticism, Stroebe et al. draw from what they call the newly developing “postmodern” consciousness to present a view of bereavement that encourages a multiplicity of voices and perspectives on loss. This includes the possibility of building a whole life around a broken heart, a perspective that is otherwise contraindicated in modernist psychology. The postmodern orientation toward grief described by these researchers also includes an invitation toward culturally embedded practices, rather than attempting a generalized approach to grief. Finally, their approach invites an expansion of responsibility.<sup>42</sup>

Since Stroebe et al. inquired into the breaking bonds hypothesis, a large body of research has built up around an opposing term, *continuing bonds* (CB). The development of this term is widely attributed to Dennis Klass.<sup>43</sup> As an example of CB phenomena, Klass used Wilber’s ongoing sense of connection to his partner who had died a decade



earlier. Wilber described his partner living in his blood and beating in his heart, on the inside of his skin rather than exterior to him.<sup>44</sup>

Klass worked with bereaved parents, a demographic where he found complicated grief to be the norm rather than exception. In rejecting the breaking bonds hypothesis, the work of Klass and his colleagues has evolved into both a complete model of grief and a robust research paradigm. Klass, however, routinely credits sociologist Tony Walter as having simultaneously invented the term CB. When introducing the CB model of grief, Klass uses Walter's succinct summary of the function of grief when unaccompanied by motives to sever ties with the dead:

The purpose of grief is ... the construction of a durable biography that enables the living to integrate the memory of the dead into their ongoing lives; the process by which this is achieved is principally conversations with others who knew the deceased.<sup>45</sup>

Klass built on this definition to describe the multi-faceted attachment bond between the living and the dead as one that can be changed and re-shaped by the living. He writes that CB phenomena include: a sense of presence, experiences of the deceased person in any of the senses, belief in the person's continuing active influence on thoughts or events, or a conscious incorporation of the characteristics or virtues of the dead into the self. In individuals, he writes CBs include the part of the self that was actualized through the bond with the other person, characterizations and thematic memories of the deceased person, and the emotional states connected with the characterizations and memories. Klass describes a family system in which the roles people play are changed by death, but the dead can still be significant members of families and communities. CBs are described by Klass as more than intrapsychic manifestations of the thoughts and

feelings of the bereaved. In this model, CBs are conceptualized as social-cultural phenomena.<sup>46</sup>

Both the CB model and Walter's approach are postmodern orientations to grief. Commenting on the CB model, Walter points to the multiplicity of potential interpretations for the phenomena:

CB may be framed as internal or external, a psychological need of the living or a social obligation to the dead, a relationship with a real spiritual entity or a hallucination, etc. Practitioners and researchers use frames to make sense of CB, whether manifested by a contemporary client or in another society; thus we all risk imposing our own frame on another person or another culture. The chief safeguard against this is to be aware of the range of possible frames.<sup>47</sup>

Opposing this postmodern response is a medical response to grief, something Walter has elsewhere described as how grief is policed by family members and culture.<sup>48</sup> The policing of grief will be covered in the final section of this literature review.

In his survey of postmodern thought, Steinar Kvale found that, in addition to themes of multiplicity, a focus is placed on the social and linguistic construction of reality.<sup>49</sup> These postmodern trends are seen in *A Social Constructionist Account of Grief: Loss and the Narration of Meaning*, an article by Neimeyer, Klass, and Dennis.<sup>50</sup> They claim that personal narratives of loss are encased in religious, political, and cultural contexts, and personal grief narratives also draw heavily on public accounts of loss. These researchers further emphasize that meaning-making in bereavement is a narrative process that impacts both intrapsychic and interpsychic domains.

This section identified a lack of connectivity between the literatures of affect theory and grief theory. Omer has described how, in ITP, difficult affects can transmute into capacities, and specifically how grief transmutes into compassion through the

ritualization of loss.<sup>51</sup> By pointing out the lack of connectivity between these two bodies of literature, this section suggests that grief research could profitably explore the ways in which grief affect can be transmuted into a capacity for compassion. The history of grief as a psychological concept was also reviewed, illuminating the ways in which grief has come to be researched as the private pathology of an individual. This history emphasizes the ways in which grief literature could be expanded by diversifying research into the social dimensions of grief.

### **Phenomenology**

Phenomenology is a philosophical attitude toward the study of lived experience. The first task of this section is to review the relevant theories of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre. The next task of this section is to illuminate the connections between phenomenology, participatory consciousness, the imagination, and ecopsychology. This will be accomplished by reviewing how animism has been conceptualized in the literature of anthropology, archetypal psychology, and ecopsychology, with a special emphasis on contemporary indigenous writers. The third task of this section is to review literature covering the phenomenology of grief.

### **Phenomenological Philosophy**

Husserl has been called the founder of phenomenology. Dermot Moran, a contemporary historian of phenomenology, describe Husserl as a paradoxical figure who was a self-styled perpetual beginner, constantly engaged in critiquing and re-working his

philosophical ideas.<sup>52</sup> While this might be in keeping with the tenets of phenomenology, Husserl's convoluted writing style complicates a review of his literature.

Husserl's famous recommendation that philosophy "get back to the things themselves," contains the essence of his most impactful ideas.<sup>53</sup> The "thing" Husserl is referring to is the experiential contents of consciousness. Husserl's recommendation also suggests that various obstacles can bar full access to the experiential contents of consciousness. By promoting a focus on a particular thing in its own right, Husserl is suggesting that it is valuable to minimize starting biases. In the clinical domain, Husserl's focus on lived experience is seen influencing Gestalt Therapy. Sylvia Fleming Crocker has called Gestalt Therapy a fairly pure application of Husserl's methods.<sup>54</sup>

To gain access to the experiential contents of consciousness, Husserl's phenomenological method involves stepping out of what he called the "natural attitude" of everyday experience. Instead, Husserl's approach was to adopt a reflexive attitude toward his perceptions, memories, judgements, values, and thoughts. He used the mathematical concept of bracketing to describe the process of barring previous understandings from the phenomenological field and treating them separately. This replaces the absolute quality of knowing a thing with the respective meaning of that thing in the consciousness of an individual, (e.g., perceptions, memories, judgements, values, and thoughts). For Husserl, consciousness is always consciousness oriented toward something. The goal of Husserl's phenomenological method is to get at the essence of the thing underneath the subjective perceptions of it. He called this method the "eidetic reduction," and he called his work transcendental phenomenology.<sup>55</sup> Husserl thus portrayed empirical science as a second-order knowledge system dependent on first-

order subjective experiences. The remaining philosophers covered in this section built upon many of the core tenants of Husserl's phenomenology while diverging from his transcendental agenda.

Heidegger was Husserl's student. Like Husserl, Heidegger sought to describe the subjective experience of phenomena.<sup>56</sup> Unlike Husserl, however, Heidegger questioned the belief that a close examination of a phenomena could transcend the subjective vantage point and provide objective knowledge. Rather, Heidegger saw knowledge as emerging from interpretations grounded in the lived experience of the world. Heidegger conceived of human beings as "thrown into" the world of language, objects, and relationships. Human beings can only ever interpret perceptions, memories, thoughts, and feelings from their specific perspective. By making his phenomenology strictly interpretive, Heidegger bridged to hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation. Heidegger's phenomenology aimed to be scientifically sound by, as he said, "working out the fore-structures in terms of the things themselves."<sup>57</sup> In this case, the fore-structures of understanding are bracketed in a self-reflexive way, similar to Husserl. Heidegger's phenomenological interpretations are hermeneutical because they emerge from a cyclical process that inherently falls short of providing an objective understanding of the phenomena explored.

In his major work, *Being and Time*, Heidegger coined the term *Dasein* to represent the uniquely situated quality of "human being." Here the word "being" is a verb rather than a noun, referring to a mode of existence. This mode is rich in contextual meaning because *Dasein* is always already "thrown into" a pre-existing, factual world full of people, objects, culture, and language. Heidegger clarifies that the factual objects

comprising this world are engaged with in a practical way, and are not of ontological significance, saying, “Such entities are not thereby objects for knowing the ‘world’ theoretically; they are simply what gets used, what gets produced, and so forth.”<sup>58</sup>

Dasein also implies a degree of reflexivity is available in this mode of existence. He writes, “Dasein is an entity which is in each case I myself: its being is in each case mine.” Heidegger uses the experience of being alone to demonstrate how this reflexive, worldly, and contextualized experience requires the existence of others. To this extent he writes, “Dasein is essentially being-with ... Even Dasein’s being alone is being with in the world. The other can be missing only in and for a being with. Being alone is a deficient mode of being with; its very possibility is the proof of this.”<sup>59</sup> For Heidegger, subjectivity and intersubjectivity thus complement one another and are mutually interdependent.

Intersubjectivity is a theme common to all the phenomenological theorists covered in this section. When he situates the concept of intersubjectivity within the greater field of phenomenology, Dan Zahavi portrays self, other, and world reciprocally illuminating and enriching one another through their interconnections.<sup>60</sup>

Phenomenological access to intersubjectivity was key to formulating the research learnings in Chapter Four.

Stephen Levine points out that, after a troubling period during which he sympathized with the Nazi Party, Heidegger started describing Dasein understanding itself primarily through encounters with works of art.<sup>61</sup> In these encounters with art, human existence emerges with meaning through an interactive process of shaping of that which is perceived. Levine uses the Greek term *poiesis* to represent this capacity, and

claims it is the central concept in his philosophy of expressive arts therapy. More concepts from the field of expressive arts are reviewed in the last section of this literature review.

Like Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty was also influenced by Husserl's phenomenological approach. In Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology there is also an emphasis on the inescapably situated viewpoint of humanity. He writes,

I am not the outcome or the meeting-point of numerous casual agencies which determine my bodily or psychological make-up. I cannot conceive myself as nothing but a bit of the world, a mere object of biological, psychological or sociological investigation. I cannot shut myself up within the realm of science. All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless.<sup>62</sup>

Merleau-Ponty used this understanding of knowledge acquisition as a starting point for his inquiry into perception. By emphasizing the situated point of view, Merleau-Ponty came to focus on the embodied nature of a human's relationship to the world. Where Husserl focused on worldliness, Merleau-Ponty concluded from the arrangement that, "The body no longer conceived as an object in the world, but as our means of communication with it."<sup>63</sup> Merleau-Ponty thus identifies the living bodily organism as the locus of experience, and the innermost essence of the self. For Merleau-Ponty, the physical body represents the capacity to move, see, touch, etc.

In his incomplete, posthumously-published last book, Merleau-Ponty made explicit this connection between embodiment and the subjective point of view with his concept of *the flesh*. Merleau-Ponty used this term to refer to both the flesh of human beings and the flesh of the world.<sup>64</sup> By the flesh of the world he means the fluid medium

that envelopes and animates the situated human being. For Merleau-Ponty, the medium itself spontaneously gives rise to perception, both perceived and perceiver. Merleau-Ponty characterizes the Flesh as essentially reversible, such as, “the finger of the glove turned inside out,” both inwardly and outwardly sensitive.<sup>65</sup>

With this, Merleau-Ponty undermines subject-object dualism, demonstrating the interdependence of the sentient and the sensible, and the participatory nature of subjectively experienced reality. The boundaries of the living body are, for Merleau-Ponty, open and permeable membranes. Merleau-Ponty also claims that cognition emerges from the flesh of the world, where thought is conceived as “sublimation of flesh.”<sup>66</sup> This sentiment is mirrored by contemporary cognitive scientists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. Lakoff and Johnson’s research demonstrates that there is no independent faculty of reason apart from the embodied capacities of movement and perception.<sup>67</sup>

Having established the importance of embodiment for understanding a situated point of view, Merleau-Ponty focused on the phenomenology of perception. David Abrams notes that in much of his writing, Merleau-Ponty makes his points by describing the sensible world in the active voice.<sup>68</sup> Use of the active voice becomes, for Abrams, a perceptual practice of linguistically describing the world without repressing the direct experience that can emerge from the depths of an ongoing reciprocity with the environment. Linguistically, use of the active voice in this way makes it difficult to form descriptions using the verb “to be” and other linguistic devices that Marshall Rosenberg claims can make communication violent.<sup>69</sup> These practices can aid in producing phenomenological research such as this dissertation.



Merleau-Ponty's friend Jean-Paul Sartre emphasized the existential and ontological aspects of phenomenology by stressing the developmental dimension. In Sartre's phenomenology, an emerging sense of self is constantly unfurling as the human participates in her project-oriented relationships with the world.<sup>70</sup> Sartre's stance is encapsulated in his famous expression that existence comes before essence. Further, he states that, "Since consciousness is not possible before being, but since its being is the source and condition of all possibility, its existence implies its essence."<sup>71</sup> Sartre's focus on the process of human becoming stresses an experiential, action-oriented approach of human nature, and the meaning-making that naturally ensues from lived experience.

With his concept of nothingness, Sartre highlights the impact of absent things on the otherwise situated human. Sartre elucidates this concept by imagining he arrives late for an appointment to visit with a friend, only to find his friend is not at the chosen café. Without his friend present, his experience of the location is profoundly altered. He writes,

I myself expected to see Pierre and my expectation has caused the absence of Pierre to happen as a real event concerning this Café. It is an objective fact at present that I have discovered this absence, and it presents itself as a synthetic relationship between Pierre and the setting in which I am looking for him. Pierre absent haunts this café and is the condition of its self-nihilating organization and ground.<sup>72</sup>

Sartre's experience was contingent on the presence or absence of his friend.

Sartre's understanding of nothingness helps contextualize the experience of bereavement.

In another vignette, Sartre describes the experience of encountering a stranger in a park and having his experience altered such that the park can no longer be metabolized

in its own terms or for himself.<sup>73</sup> Sartre thus extends Heidegger's emphasis on worldliness to include interpersonal relationships and the presence and absence of others.

Hillman criticizes classical phenomenology for halting analysis prior to an examination of consciousness.<sup>74</sup> The essence of consciousness, for Hillman, is fantasy images. He describes how this moves the entire operation of phenomenology from the logical to the imaginal, in which phenomenological reduction becomes a process of engagement with mythical patterns and persons. The next section reviews contemporary phenomenological research that accounts for Hillman's critique.

## **Animism**

This section presents a psychological inquiry into the concept of animism as defined in indigenous, anthropological, and psychological bodies of literature. The scholarly study of animism represents an effort to construct bridges between indigenous and western epistemologies, ontologies, and ethics without reducing indigenous worldviews into positivist concepts and categories. By bypassing core assumptions of empirical science, the phenomenological approach will emerge as an essential component of contemporary animism. The first task of this section is to describe how animism was conceptualized in the nineteenth-century by Edward Tylor. The second task of this section is to look at the term in the writing of Piaget, Wilber, and Hillman. The third task of this section is to describe how Hallowell's research led contemporary indigenous and anthropological researchers to define a new animism. Descriptions of Hallowell's research will be followed by a discussion of contemporary animism and its

connection to eco-psychology. The ultimate goal of this section is to present a diverse array of concepts that enliven the following inquiry into the phenomenology of grief.

Edward Tylor was one of the first anthropologists of the nineteenth century. In 1891 he became the first president of the organization that would later be known as the Royal Anthropological Society.<sup>75</sup> Twenty years prior to this appointment, he titled his magnum opus *Primitive Culture*. In this book he defined the term *animism* as, “a belief in souls or spirits,” and he used the term as a synonym for religion.<sup>76</sup> The way Tylor uses the term underscores how he was differentiating his culture from indigenous people as a means of opposing Christian ideals. Contemporary scholar Martin Stringer adds, “... it is impossible to remove the evolutionary framework, with its associated values, from Tylor’s work. He clearly sees human development as evolutionary, from the savage to the barbarian to the civilized.”<sup>77</sup> Tylor’s conception of animism as the “primitive” starting point for the evolution of unwanted religious ideas had a profound impact on the way this term has been used in academic discourse.

Tylor’s framing of animism can be seen influencing Jung’s more psychological framing of *participation mystique*. Jerome Bernstein writes that, like Tylor before him, Jung did not seek to understand the psyche of the “primitive man” from which he derived this semi-fused and blurry type of psychological connection.<sup>78</sup> Jung writes,

Participation Mystique is a term derived from Lévy-Bruhl. It denotes a peculiar kind of psychological connection with objects, and consists in the fact that the subject cannot clearly distinguish himself from the object but is bound to it by a direct relationship which amounts to partial identity.<sup>79</sup>

The impact of Tylor’s definition can also be seen in the developmental theory of Jean Piaget when he used the word animism to describe the preoperational phase of cognitive development in children.<sup>80</sup> Piaget’s research identified the preoperational

phase as an age range where children are developing the logical capacities to combine and transform ideas. For Piaget, kids start this phase believing everything is alive and has a purpose. Out of this understanding, he observed the child coming to see that only objects that move are alive and have a purpose. From here, his research describes the preoperational child maturing to an understanding that only objects that move spontaneously are alive. Finally, Piaget described the preoperational phase ending with the child's understanding that only plants and animals are alive.

Paiget's preoperational phase emerges at the third level in Ken Wilber's understanding of ego development.<sup>81</sup> At this level, the self begins to identify with the conceptual mind, and enter into the new and wider "noosphere," or linguistic world. One of the defining characteristics of level three, according to Wilber, is that the conceptual mind can repress and dissociate from the body's biological impulses. He writes, "precisely because the noosphere transcends the biosphere, it can not only transcend and include, it can repress, distort and deny. Not just differentiate but dissociate. Both individually, and at large. Individually, neurosis; at large, ecological crisis."<sup>82</sup>

Rather than as a developmental stage, James Hillman associates the term animism with a soul-making mode of cognition. Hillman sees a common basic idea in the terms "animism," "anthropomorphism," "personification," and his preferred term *personifying*. He writes,

There exists a "mode of thought" which takes an inside event and puts it outside, at the same time making this content alive, personal, and even divine. These three [other] terms, by saying that human beings tend to imagine things into souls, are actually describing a manner of soul-making. But by calling this activity a "mode of thought" it becomes an act we perform – conscious or unconscious – rather than something we immediately *experience*. Where these three terms assume thought makes soul, personifying recognizes soul as existent prior to reflection.

Personifying is a way of being in the world and experiencing the world as a psychological field, where persons are given with events, so that events are experiences that touch us, move us, appeal to us.<sup>83</sup>

This mode offers a way of imagining things in a personal form that moves the heart. In his essay *The Thought of the Heart*, Hillman describes the organ as fundamentally interpretive, writing, “To perceive, it must imagine. It must see shapes, forms, faces—angels, daimones, creatures of every sort in things of any kind; thereby the heart’s thought personifies, ensouls, and animates the world.”<sup>84</sup> This section will now examine indigenous literatures and the literature of anthropology for references to similar ontological modes.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes that, from the indigenous perspective, anthropological research has been linked to the worst excesses of European imperialism and colonialism.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, Kenneth Morrison sees early anthropological research following an ethnocentric logic in which indigenous people were approached as culturally deficient from the beginning.<sup>86</sup> According to Morrison, the colonial confirmation bias was rooted in a deep-seated dualism that emerged from the philosophy of Rene Descartes, exemplified in his famous claim that, “I think, therefore I am.”<sup>87</sup> Descartes’ philosophy engendered powerful dualisms, such as objectivity/subjectivity, matter/spirit and science/religion, profoundly influencing the quality scientific investigations. Morrison uses the phrase *categorical slippage* to describe cases where dualistic concepts are held in binary opposition when they are mutually constituting. This slippage is accentuated, he writes, because Cartesian science tends to prioritize the first term and marginalize the second term of any pairing. Morrison further claims that Cartesian dualisms impede self-reflexivity. Morrison presents Hallowell as a seminal

researcher who began to shirk the constraints of Cartesian dualism while still struggling with categorical slippage during his work to understand the Ojibwa.<sup>88</sup>

Hallowell was unusual in his conscious attempts to drop the scientific goal of an objective, decontextualized interpretation of indigenous behavior. In his dissertation, Hallowell states his belief that indigenous practices are unintelligible without understanding the constituent's epistemology.<sup>89</sup> He brought this approach to his future work with the Cree, and eventually he dedicated his remaining academic career to understanding the Ojibwa way of living.

The Ojibwe People's Dictionary describes their language as having animate and inanimate genders.<sup>90</sup> In exploring this linguistic distinction over several decades, Hallowell came to understand that the experience of the Ojibwa way of participating in the world was necessary for comprehending the Ojibwa concept of what was, and what was not, a person. Hallowell found it necessary to coin the phrase *other-than-human persons* to accurately refer to the full range of animate beings with whom the Ojibwa were conversing. In his experience of the Ojibwa way of being in the world, Hallowell discovered communication happened intentionally and relationally between all beings.

In one vignette, Hallowell describes a moment when a conversation between an older Ojibwa couple was interrupted by a loud thunderclap. The male asked if his companion heard what was said, and she replied that she missed it. This exchange was loaded with meaning for Hallowell. He writes,

The casualness of the remark and even the trivial character of the anecdote demonstrates the psychological depth of the "social relations" with other-than-human beings that become explicit in the behavior of the Ojibwa as a consequence of the cognitive "set" introduced by their culture.<sup>91</sup>

Hallowell perceived this couple as cognitively attuned to a local community of persons, all capable of agency, communication, and relating.

Nurit Bird-David built upon Hallowell's work when she revisited the term animism in 1999.<sup>92</sup> Backed by her own research with the Nayaka people, Bird-David found it necessary to reformulate animism as a *relational epistemology*. With the people she observed, knowing emerged through relating. Bird-David saw the Nayaka personifying other entities conversationally, “*as, when, and because* we socialize with them.” When operating in this ontological mode, Bird-David describes knowledge as, “developing the skills of being-in-the-world with other things, making one's awareness of one's environment and one's self finer, broader, deeper, richer, etc.”

To make this connection, Bird-David relied on the concept of *affordances* from James's Gibson's ecological approach to visual perception.<sup>93</sup> “The affordances of an environment,” Gibson writes, “are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill.” For Gibson, these affordances exist independently of the subjectively experiencing animal, where each object, “offers what it does because of what it is.” Gibson's arrangement thus allows for different animals to co-exist in a shared environment, sharing perceptions of what it affords. Bird-David describes a process in which “knowing” is continuous with building the perceptual capacities of being-in-the-world through attending to Gibson's environmental affordances.

In his analysis of Bird-David's work, Morrison points out that her framing of relational epistemology shares similarities with psychological projection and introjection.<sup>94</sup> Laplanche and Pontalis define *projection* as an operation where a psychological element is displaced and relocated externally. In psychoanalytic theory,

they write, there is an assumption that these elements are externalized because they are being denied or rejected.<sup>95</sup> They credit Sandor Ferenczi with introducing the concept of *introjection* as the inverse of projection. In their coverage of the term, Laplanche and Pontalis say that this psychological process is similar in meaning to Freud's concepts of incorporation and identification.<sup>96</sup>

Gibson's ecological approach to visual perception undergirds Laura Seawall's practice of *ecological perception*. She uses ecological perception to address contemporary psychological concerns when she suggests that "perceptual practices can ameliorate cultural conditioning and psychic numbing by reawakening our senses and intentionally honoring subjective experience."<sup>97</sup> By honoring subjective experience in this way, Seawall emphasizes the value of participation. For Seawall, skillful perception of the environment is a devotional practice where identity boundaries are consciously softened, made permeable and flexible. Dedication to these perceptual practices also assures that the environment remains a central concern.

David Abrams makes a connection between early phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty and Imaginal Psychology when he asserts that perception is always an active interplay between the perceiving body and what is perceived.<sup>98</sup> According to Abrams, the perception of the animist or the phenomenologist is inherently participatory, and imagination is not a distinct mental faculty. He said imagination is, "rather the way the senses themselves have of throwing themselves beyond what is immediately given, in order to make tentative contact with the other side of things that we do not sense directly, with the hidden or invisible aspect of the sensible." A more detailed review of the imagination is presented in the final section of this literature review. For this



discussion, Abram's salient point is that the sensual body is a conduit for imaginative engagement with life.

Abram makes one final connection that is important in the study of grief and loss. For almost all oral cultures, he writes, the sensuous Earth is the dwelling place of both the living and the dead. Abrams writes that, in animistic cultures, all animal bodies are magical entities, and the death of the body literalizes the gradual reintegration of ancestral and elder bodies into the living landscape. Abram claims the myriad forms of ancestor worship are ontological modes of reverent attentiveness to nonhuman nature.<sup>99</sup>

Finally, this section concludes by emphasizing that animism is not a term used in indigenous cultures. Amazonian scholar Eduardo Viveiros De Castro describes Bird-David's concern with epistemology as a quintessentially modernist endeavor.<sup>100</sup> Linda Hogan writes that, for tribal people, their kinship and relationship with the alive world is simply called "tradition."<sup>101</sup>

### **The Phenomenology of Grief**

The main task of this section is to explore the phenomenology of grief. Several foundational concepts defined in articles by Thomas Fuchs will be reviewed to illuminate the direction of contemporary phenomenology. This section also reviews research from Matthew Ratcliffe, Jane Ribben McCarthy, and Raia Prokhovnik describing how connectedness can be lived out after a death through material practices, felt experiences, and social cognition.

According to Fuchs, the memory of the body can take a variety of forms: situational memory, procedural memory, intercorporeal memory, incorporative memory,

pain memory, and traumatic memory.<sup>102</sup> Pain memory and traumatic memory will not be reviewed in detail, making space for two sub-types of intercorporeal memory, dyadic body memories, and collective body memories. Fuchs reports that all types of *body memories* remain plastic for life, enable the formulation and re-formulation of habits, and rest at the core of the experience of identity and self. He describes body memories as based in the present and emerging by means of bodily effort; body memories are lived and enacted. In order to arrive at these claims, Fuchs built upon the research of Daniel Schacter.

Schacter's research differentiates between explicit/declarative memory and implicit/procedural memory.<sup>103</sup> Explicit/declarative memory is what most people think about when they consider the general idea of memory. Schacter describes research that further breaks down explicit memory into semantic/factual, and episodic/autobiographical memory. Conscious attention and awareness are needed to store these memories, and recollection includes an internal, subjective sense of the self who is remembering. Implicit/procedural memory, on the other hand, is devoid of this subjective, internal sense of time and active remembering. Daniel Siegel presents implicit memory as including emotional memory, perceptual memory, behavioral memory, and perhaps even somatosensory memory.<sup>104</sup> This review now looks more deeply at the comprehensive categories of body memory developed by Fuchs.

For Fuchs, *procedural memory* consists of kinesthetic and sensorimotor faculties, seen at play in the finger memories of typists and musicians. From this, Fuchs extrapolates that art and freedom emerge from the tacit memories of the body. When memories are tied to situations and spaces, then Fuchs uses the term *situational*

*memory*.<sup>105</sup> Fuchs extends this with his concept of *lived space*. Lived space is regarded by Fuchs as the totality of the environment and spheres of action that comprise the personal niche of a bodily subject.<sup>106</sup> In a separate article, Fuchs defines the parallel concept of *lived time* to represent a pre-reflective level of temporality.<sup>107</sup>

Memories of situations that involve other people are a special case for Fuchs, termed *intercorporeal memory*. Daniel Stern uses a similar concept to reflect the bodily knowing that emerges out of the interpersonal world of the infant and comes to structure the baby's social interactions, an imprinting process that starts with the infant's parents. He calls this type of bodily knowing *implicit relational knowing*.<sup>108</sup> Fuchs uses the phrase *embodied personality structures* to conceptualize this type of knowing as procedural fields of possibility that emerge with social contact and are suggestive of certain types of behavior. He concludes that others are always implied in the habits and dispositions of the lived body.<sup>109</sup>

*Dyadic body memory* is the term Fuchs reserves for cases where two people have bodily attuned to each other through the resonant kinesthetic patterns that enable them to interenact a shared history.<sup>110</sup> He uses the case of two people dancing together, flowing dynamically, and modulating their movements together. This definition includes an implicit sense contemporality, or living together in dyadic time. De Jaegher and Di Paolo argue that this coordination can take on a life of its own. They conclude that the problem of social cognition can thus be reframed to become an epistemological process of *participatory sense-making*.<sup>111</sup>

When bodily habits, roles, and attitudes are shaped through more conscious imitation and identification with others, Fuchs uses the term *incorporative memory*.

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* is similar.<sup>112</sup> Bourdieu uses this term to represent culture-specific and class-specific sets of skills, styles, dispositions, tastes, and demeanors that become second nature in guiding behavior. Fuchs uses the term *collective body memories* for those ensembles of behavioral and interactive dispositions developed during earlier shared experiences in groups bigger than dyads.<sup>113</sup>

In terms of the specific phenomenology of grief, Fuchs reports a core characteristic is a fundamental ambiguity between the presence and absence of the deceased, and the two worlds comprised of the past and the present. He sees the bodily experience of grief as a disruption of shared intercorporeality that is not unlike the physical trauma of amputation and accidents; the actual phenomena is understood as an experience of injury to the lived body. Merleau-Ponty, C.S. Lewis, and early bereavement researcher Colin Murray Parks are three additional writers who have used the metaphor of amputation to emphasize the physical dimension of grief. Matthew Ratcliffe has conducted a full phenomenological analysis of the relatively common comparison of grief and phantom limbs.<sup>114</sup> Shared intercorporeality has been undermined when Fuchs describes the deceased withdrawing from the shared world and shared habitualities, impacting the self-experience of the bereaved because their sense of self implied a sense of "being-with" the one who died. For Fuchs, these overlapping self-other structures in intimate relationships are the basis of grief's deep ambiguity.<sup>115</sup>

The ambiguity of grief, for Fuchs, comes to the fore in the dimension of temporality. The background cotemporality Fuchs' uses to characterize long-standing intimate relationships sustains a sharp rift in the case of bereavement. He describes the mourner as living in two worlds, where dyadic time remains frozen and dissociated from

the temporal flow of the world.<sup>116</sup> This dissociation is exemplified in Denise Riley's autobiographical essay, titled *Time lived without its flow*.<sup>117</sup>

The next quality of grief's ambiguous phenomenological structure explored by Fuchs is as an "as-if presence" of the deceased, felt and sometimes perceived by the bereaved. Fuchs describes this felt presence leading to a cognitive-affective conflict for the bereaved in which the whole environment is permeated with affordances pointing to the deceased. This as-if presence is literalized when Fuchs uses the example of a corpse of a hitherto warm and animate loved one.<sup>118</sup> Rudolf Otto also used the image of a corpse as a key example of the uncanny.<sup>119</sup> Fuchs draws an explicit connection between grief and the uncanny by emphasizing the disturbing ambiguity at the heart of grief.<sup>120</sup> For Otto, the uncanny is an inexpressible quality that eludes cognition and is the essence of religious experience.<sup>121</sup> Numinosity, the term coined by Otto for the uncanny, is covered in more detail in the last section of this literature review.

Finally, Fuchs explores the phenomena of post-loss adjustment and transformation as a fundamental reorganization of identity that is accomplished in two complimentary ways: identification and representation. *Identification* he describes in terms of a mimetic process in which the deceased is gradually incorporated, potentially manifesting as a new inner presence that does not conflict with external reality. In the case of *representation*, Fuchs describes the loss as acknowledged, marking the "as-if" quality of these phenomena. These types of representations might be realized through imaginative recollections, he writes, or they might be realized symbolically or iconically. Memorial rites are given as an example of symbolic representation that presuppose the loss. Fuchs uses the term "narration" for cases when remembering and symbolic

representation are combined as a bridge to lost persons. He describes storytelling and shared narratives serving as a coping mechanism in bereavement that extends imaginative recollections into the intersubjective and cultural spheres through symbolic representations.<sup>122</sup>

In their exploration of the phenomenology of intense grief, McCarthy and Prokhovnik describe the dominant social meanings around the death of a loved one in western contexts to be polarized binary thinking, separating mind from body.<sup>123</sup> On one side of the polarity they place the contemporary belief that nothing is left of the loved one, but the mortal remains, and on the other they place the contemporary belief that one can have a strong disembodied relationship with the deceased. McCarthy and Prokhovnik propose an additional option by drawing on feminist care ethics. In this model, caring is the norm rather than the exception, where the lived, embodied experience of reality is interwoven with close others and societies more broadly. They see this feminist understanding of human dependence and vulnerability foregrounding the materiality of relational care in such a way as to emphasize specific and personal embodied relational connections rather than abstract principles. The data for their research was sourced primarily through their personal experiences of loss. When considering the physicality of relational care for the deceased they conclude, “What is missing is the understanding that the embodied relationship with the dead person does not die with the person.” They conclude that some aspects of embodiment may persist after the death of a loved one.

Ratcliffe drew similar conclusions to McCarthy and Prokhovnik. He understands grief as a changeable and variable way of relating to the living, the dead, and the social

world as a whole.<sup>124</sup> This led him to propose the bereaved can experience a unique second-person experience of death, with sustained feelings of connections and interactions. Ratcliffe sees the potential for a sense of “us” to persist in the temporal flow shared with the deceased yet dissociated from the temporal flow of the world.

This section clarifies the potential of phenomenological methodologies for exploring the subjective meaning-making processes of grief. By drawing connections between the seminal writing of phenomenological philosophy and contemporary animism, this section points to important elements of Imaginal Inquiry, the chosen methodology. As will become clear in the next chapter, Imaginal Inquiry is a phenomenological methodology with enhanced evocation and integrating activities that provide extra support for researching grief phenomena. Rooted in ITP, Imaginal Inquiry also places a high value on the indigenous ways of being and knowing described in this section. Finally, this section emphasizes how the wisdom of the body is prioritized in this research. Linda Finlay’s research has shown that the body’s ability to disclose the world is enhanced through embodiment practices at multiple layers of experience, including embodied intersubjectivity, embodied-self-awareness, and bodily empathy.<sup>125</sup> Omer has described the body as that part of the soul that is discernable by the five senses.<sup>126</sup> This suggests that embodiment and phenomenology both potentiate soulfulness.

### **Sense of Presence of the Deceased**

This section reviews the most current published literature clustered around a specific topic: sensing the presence of the deceased. Research into SOP phenomena

directly speaks to the research problem explored in this dissertation. The first task of this section is to look at the nature of the compelling, often ongoing, experience of sensing the presence of the deceased. Variations on the term SOP will be reviewed, and conceptual frameworks for understanding SOP research will be explored. The second task of this section is to review qualitative research on SOP phenomena, with a special focus on phenomenological inquiries into the subjective meaning-making of the bereaved. A subcategory is provided for this second task. The previous section on phenomenology looked at the knowledge-generating potential of phenomenological inquiries into grief.

Terms used to describe bereavement-specific presence-sensing phenomena are as varied as the claims of the researchers who coin and use these terms. Many contemporary grief researchers use the term SOP, including those responsible for the two major literature reviews on the topic. Edith Steffen and Adrian Coyle used this term for their 2010 literature review looking at the potential for SOP experiences to be conceptualized as spiritual phenomena.<sup>127</sup> In another study, Steffen and Coyle define SOP experiences as “the nonmaterial quasi-sensory subjective but (experienced as) veridical ‘feeling of presence’ of the deceased which tends to occur unexpectedly and is generally perceived as ‘comforting,’ ‘pleasant,’ and helpful or positive.”<sup>128</sup> As mentioned in Chapter One, Keen, Murray, and Payne also used the phrase SOP for their 2013 narrative review of sensing the presence of the deceased. Their research was intended for clinicians working with bereavement.<sup>129</sup>

Two of the more prevalent alternative terms for SOP phenomena are *after death communication* (ADC) and hallucinations/illusions. Writing for an audience of holistic



nurses, Luann Daggett used the term ADC to categorize the experience, and to determine how common it is. She concludes that nurses and other health care providers play an important role in educating the public about SOP phenomena.<sup>130</sup> Allan Botkin also uses the term ADC in his research, claiming to be able to reproduce the phenomena using Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR).<sup>131</sup>

Psychiatric research, on the other hand, consistently refers to SOP phenomena as hallucinations or illusions. An important early example of this usage is quantitative research published by Dewi Rees in 1971. Rees found almost half of the 293 people interviewed for the study experienced hallucinations of their dead spouse, but the bereaved were reluctant to report these experiences to friends and family for fear of being judged as mentally unstable.<sup>132</sup> This research will be referenced again in the next section which investigates the policing of grief. Similar research by Agenta Grimby differentiates illusions from hallucinations in bereavement.<sup>133</sup> She uses the term *post-bereavement illusions* for those cases involving the felt presence of the deceased, and the term *post-bereavement hallucinations* for those cases where the bereaved are reported hearing, seeing, and talking to the deceased. Grimby found that former marital harmony increased the potential for loneliness, crying, illusions, and hallucinations.

A variety of additional terms have been used to describe SOP phenomena in the bereavement literature. In 1976, Richard Kalish and David Reynolds used the term *post-death contact* in their inquiry into the prevalence of SOP phenomena.<sup>134</sup> They concluded that it was common enough to warrant further study. Nadine Nowatzki and Ruth Kalischuk's study used a similar phrase, *post-death encounters*.<sup>135</sup> Their research found these encounters profoundly impacted the participant's belief in an afterlife and had a

healing effect on the participants by contributing to a sense of connectedness with the deceased. In 1989, Erlendur Haraldsson also emphasizes the unexpected nature of the experience by using the phrase *claimed encounters with the dead*.<sup>136</sup> His research, conducted in Iceland, was looking for contributing factors that lead to SOP phenomena. Published from the University of Bergen in Norway in 1995, Torill Lindstrom used the phrase *sensing experiences* to represent SOP phenomena in her study.<sup>137</sup> Seventy-five percent of her participants had these experiences, and her research found that intense sensing experiences and reactions, both positive and negative, were associated with poorer outcomes than more mild experiences and reactions. Finally, Julie Parker used the phrase *extraordinary experiences* in her 2005 qualitative exploration with twelve bereaved participants.<sup>138</sup> She found these experiences reinforced participant's personal mythologies regarding death and the after-life. Building on this claim, she concluded that continuing bonds with the deceased can be adaptive. Her study also indicated that spiritual or religious belief systems are associated with adaptive grief outcomes. Several conceptual frameworks are available for understanding SOP research.

Freud was the first writer to reference post-bereavement hallucinations in the psychological literature. He saw these experiences as expressions of denial, in which the bereaved is, "clinging to the object through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis."<sup>139</sup> This framework has been applied by Winston Shen and William Matchett in their work with Hopi Indians. Stroebe et al. described how, for the Hopi Indians, death brings pollution, and so the deceased are forgotten as quickly as possible.<sup>140</sup> In his case study of an alcoholic twenty-four-year-old Hopi Indian man, Shen suggests that the hallucinations experienced were "pathognomy-specific" to his

culture.<sup>141</sup> Matchett drew the opposite conclusion in his study.<sup>142</sup> Matchett proposed that the Hopi participants in his study were having a very common human experience that has been generally relegated to the unconscious realm in American culture.

The psychiatric understanding that SOP phenomena are hallucinatory is complicated by research into SOP phenomena in non-bereavement contexts. James Allen Cheyne describes psychiatric research into the SOP experiences of extreme-altitude climbers, in cases of sleep paralysis, and neurological cases associated with tumors, lesions, and epilepsy.<sup>143</sup> Cheyne writes that the dominant neuropsychological view of SOP phenomena is that the sensed presence is a doppelganger of one's own body image.

SOP phenomena have been portrayed as important experiences potentially leading to *post-traumatic growth* (PTG) in a process Neimeyer calls, "meaning reconstruction in the wake of loss."<sup>144</sup> PTG is defined by Tedeschi and Calhoun as, "the experience of positive change that occurs as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life crises."<sup>145</sup> They describe these changes manifesting as an increased sense of strength, changed priorities, more meaningful relationships, a richer spiritual and existential life, and more appreciation for life in general. In cases where bereavement involves sensing the presence of the deceased, Steffen and Coyle argue that, in some cultural contexts, the worldview of the bereaved can be challenged.<sup>146</sup> They concluded that, when explored with an open mind, SOP phenomena can serve as a catalyst for meaning making and PTG. In another important article, Tedeschi and Calhoun describe the importance of *expert companionship* for facilitating this type of PTG.<sup>147</sup> Expert companionship involves sensitive listening to the relationship stories of

the bereaved. The role ritual elders play in facilitating bereavement rites will be explored in the next section.

SOP phenomena are uniquely portrayed as socio-cultural phenomena in the seminal writing of the CB paradigm. Both Klass and Stroebe et al. cite the 1969 psychiatric research by Yamamoto, Okonogi, Iwasaki, and Yoshimura on mourning in Japan.<sup>148</sup> These Japanese researchers found the practice of ancestor worship almost universal among the 20 participants they interviewed. They suggested presence-sensing and other forms of maintaining ties with the deceased are culturally encouraged in Japan and thus serve an important adaptive function in bereavement. Hayes and Steffen have profitably contrasted this research with the previously described British research by Rees, where participants tended to keep the experience of SOP phenomena private for fear of being judged by friends and family.<sup>149</sup> Having made this comparison, Hayes and Steffen claim SOP experiences are inextricably embedded in their socio-cultural environment. In their exploration of the consequences that SOP experiences may have, Hayes and Steffen found an interdependence between the socio-cultural context and the relationship of the bereaved with the deceased.

In order to conceptualize SOP experiences as spiritual phenomena, Steffen and Coyle began with Robert Wuthnow's definition of spirituality as an awareness of, or a state of relating to, a divine, supernatural, or transcendent order of reality that goes beyond the ordinary experience of life.<sup>150</sup> Steffen and Coyle added to this starting definition when they claim that these spiritual experiences are dependent on the individual and cultural contexts in which they occur. They conclude that SOP phenomena can indeed be conceptualized as spiritual phenomena, but their psychological

integration is dependent on social sanctioning and social validation of these experiences.<sup>151</sup>

SOP experiences have been conceptualized as parapsychological phenomena in both the academic and popular literature. Craig Murray and Robin Wooffitt use the term *anomalous experiences* in their work that bridges between the medical literature and the paranormal literature.<sup>152</sup> Anomalous experiences are conceptualized as particularly approachable through qualitative methodologies. They describe anomalous experiences as fundamentally meaningful events, “symbolically mediated through language and communication, which are inextricably enmeshed in the fabric of interpersonal actions in social settings and reflect their broader historical and cultural context.”

The rich psychological history of spiritualism’s engagement with SOP phenomena is beyond the scope of this literature review. Spiritualism has been defined as a belief that it is possible to communicate with the deceased through mediums, where a medium is a person credited with the ability to make this communication happen.<sup>153</sup> According to Murray and Wooffitt, the dominant response in psychological research is a skeptical attempt to ascertain the prevalence of such phenomena, and to identify determining factors that lead people to the experience. They found a second trend in contemporary research, where the analytic goal is not to explain away the experience, but rather to understand the psychological, social and cultural significance of the event.<sup>154</sup> The first trend is seen in the previously reviewed research by Rees, where he found fifty percent of the 293 participants reported bereavement hallucinations.<sup>155</sup> This second trend is represented by Beischel, Mosher, and Boccuzzi’s research into the impact on bereavement of ADCs facilitated by psychic mediums. Their research was

intended to inform bereavement councilors.<sup>156</sup> This research is particularly important for psychologists, an academic demographic identified by James McClenon as one of the more skeptical of paranormal phenomena.<sup>157</sup>

SOP phenomena are being investigated in relation to emergent technologies, including virtual reality and advanced simulations, where sophisticated media presents users with the illusion that a mediated experience is not mediated.<sup>158</sup> Future research could explore the use of emergent technology to facilitate SOP phenomena in bereavement therapies.

## **SOP Research**

This section reviews qualitative studies on SOP phenomena that bear similarities to the present research. While quantitative studies into the prevalence of SOP phenomena and risk factors for the bereaved are referenced to bolster this discussion, qualitative studies which speak to the dissertation's research problem are prioritized. Research is presented in chronological order with the first study discussed having been published in 2002.

Using a phenomenological perspective, Patricia Hentz explored the experiences of body memory following a significant loss for 10 women.<sup>159</sup> By focusing on the time around the anniversary of the loss, her research discovered that the memory was, to a large extent, re-lived as it was originally lived. Participant stories brought to light the experience of the physical body residing in consciousness; the embodiment of participant's grieving was individual and specific. For her participants, "it was as if a piece of their own selves had been taken, and things were forever changed." In order to

stress the corporeal quality of the loss, Hentz uses the previously seen analogy of an amputated limb.

Scott Becker and Roger Knudson's case study found mourning to be derived from encounters with an ongoing imaginal presence of the deceased who existed outside the mourner's subjectivity as an autonomous image.<sup>160</sup> They use Robert Avens' non-dualistic perspective as their starting point, where the world is joined primordially with the mind in and through imagination, and imagination itself is seen as the most basic mode of being in the world.<sup>161</sup> For these researchers, the dead emerge for the bereaved through a willingness to suspend both belief and disbelief in favor of engaging with the imagination. This approach illuminates the dead as "subtle bodies" that exist in between the physical, mental, and spiritual worlds. Implicit in this approach, they write, is an ethical duty to remember the dead when mourning. They conclude that, when mourning is viewed imaginally, existence of both the living and the dead are revealed primarily as images.<sup>162</sup>

In their research intended for a psychiatric audience, Philip Thomas and Patrick Braken found that, when examining the experience of patients who hear voices, focusing on the situated and embodied dimension of their experience can help counter reductionism.<sup>163</sup> They found that meaning became available only by considering the totality of the experience. Data for their research came from a case study of a woman who was experiencing bereavement hallucinations, but they found this approach was equally meaningful when working with those diagnosed with schizophrenia. They caution against accounting for voices exclusively in terms of psychology, biology, or culture, and they caution against practices that pathologize the phenomena. Ultimately,

they conclude that choosing to understand what is said by these voices is an ethical decision.

Paul Rosenblatt and Beverly Wallace interviewed 26 African American participants.<sup>164</sup> Their research confirmed Kalish and Reynolds' report that Black participants were considerably more likely than white participants to have sensed the presence of a lost loved one. They ask if this is a corollary of the common afterlife belief among Black people that encourages them to approach death as a homecoming. These researchers also speculate that SOP phenomena are commonly perceived as helpful by Black people because, in racist societies, people and community are extremely important to the oppressed. While there were no Black people among the participants for the current research, Rosenblatt and Wallace's research points to the scarcity of research on Latina grief as a gap in the bereavement literature.

Craig Klugman's work with 15 participants reported that storytelling was a way to bring order out of the chaos of grief.<sup>165</sup> To engage with transcripts of grief narratives on the cultural level, he sought to understand the frameworks, plots, characters, and themes that ran through the personal narratives of his bereaved participants. A psychocultural perspective emerged for Klugman when he emphasized the role of culturally constructed narratives on psychological processes. Klugman also took a hermeneutic approach when he focused on the relationship between the storyteller and the researcher. Finally, he worked to see the grief narratives as methods that create relationships, and that define social identities between individuals. Klugman describes his hermeneutic-phenomenological approach to grief narratives as powerful and effective because of the way it engaged his participants in remaking their world by making sense



of their life experiences and their grief. While not explicitly about SOP experiences, Klugman's narrative phenomenology could be profitably applied to grief narratives that include SOP phenomena.

Michael Sanger's research on SOP phenomena was unique because social workers were the participants.<sup>166</sup> To represent SOP phenomena, Sanger chose to use the term *ideonecrophobic experiences*. Sanger took this term from William MacDonald's much earlier study because he felt it was less likely to result in pathologizing participants.<sup>167</sup> Grounded Theory was the chosen methodology. Of the 21 participants, nineteen reported working with clients who brought IEs into their therapy sessions. A limitation of Sanger's research is that the participants were interested enough in IEs to participate in the study. For example, none of the participants classified IEs as a pathological barrier to the resolution of grief. Another limitation of the study was that the participants were clinicians who had not personally experienced the phenomena. In keeping with common values among social workers, Sanger found that all participants began the IE work intending to respect the client's experience and dignity. His research presents participant experiences and insights around IEs as potentially useful to mental health practitioners.<sup>168</sup>

Steffen and Coyle's qualitative analysis of SOP phenomena was the source of the primary definition used at the beginning of this section.<sup>169</sup> Their goal was to explore the meaning-making potential of SOP phenomena in bereavement. They interviewed twelve participants, and analyzed the transcribed data using thematic analysis. Three central themes emerged: finding benefit in the continuation of the deceased, finding benefit in the continued relationship, and finding meaning through existential, spiritual, and

religious sense-making. Beyond functioning as a coping mechanism for acute grief, they found that enduring meanings could emerge from SOP experiences when contextualized by spiritual/religious frameworks that accommodate the experience.

Keen, Murray, and Payne's research focused on the meaning-making of people who experienced SOP phenomena through one of the sensory modalities.<sup>170</sup> They interviewed eight participants, and analyzed the transcribed data using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).<sup>171</sup> Four superordinate themes were identified. The first superordinate theme was about how participants found in the experience personally distinctive characteristics of the deceased, or aspects of the relationship. The second superordinate theme was that participants used pre-loss understandings of SOP phenomena in their meaning-making processes. The third superordinate theme identified how the emotional impact of SOP experiences changed through the meaning-making process, moving from fear to comfort or euphoria. The final superordinate theme identified the importance of SOP experiences being validated by others, including a concern about being stigmatized if they were to talk about the experience.<sup>172</sup> The policing of grief is explored in the next section.

Melissa Irwin used language from the CB model in her research into the phenomena of social networking between the living and the dead on Facebook memorial accounts.<sup>173</sup> Facebook describes memorial accounts as a way for their users to celebrate the deceased, including the creation of tribute posts where the bereaved can tell stories and share memories.<sup>174</sup> By analyzing publicly available Facebook posts, Irwin found that Facebook users had transcended the limitations of space and time in relation to traditional grief rituals and behavior. Her findings revealed three memorial wall posting

categories: guidance from beyond and reunion with the deceased, messages and visitations from the deceased, and conversations with the dead. She used the term *paranormal copresence* to represent SOP phenomena.<sup>175</sup>

Jacqueline Hayes and Ivan Leudar claim that all terms used to reference SOP phenomena invoke an interpretive framework, and thus it is not possible to be neutral.<sup>176</sup> They chose to use the phrase *experiences of continued presence* (EoCP) to emphasize the pragmatic and phenomenal characteristics of the experience. Their study had seventeen participants and used in-depth narrative biographical interviews for the methodology. They identified the function of EoCP by “paying attention to the ways in which participants contextualized their experiences thereby making them intelligible, meaningful, and consequential.” They found the impact EoCP experiences relied on relationship-dependent meanings shared with the deceased. These meanings were found to be plastic over time, by virtue of also being context-dependent. They concluded that the consequences of EoCP phenomena can be ascertained best by focusing on individual cases with specific instances of EoCP phenomena. Specifically, they recommend talking therapies as well-suited for working with bereaved clients who report these phenomena.

Steffen and Coyle used a case study framework to explore the conceptualizations and responses to SOP experiences in a family system.<sup>177</sup> The case study focused on a bereaved family where there was much disagreement between the family members about the nature and meaning of the phenomena. Social constructionist and phenomenological perspectives were applied in the data analysis. By using a pluralistic approach, these researchers showed how the subjective understandings of individual family members were supported by discursive strategies in the family dialogue. Steffen and Coyle

conceptualize these differences as indicative of a developmental shift within the family system, and of, “macro-social power differentials between dominant and minority perspectives on reality as played out at a local level.”

This section has discussed previous research on the core phenomena studied in this dissertation: a numinous sense of a lost loved one’s presence. Similar terms to SOP were reviewed, and conceptual frameworks for understanding SOP phenomena were examined. Phenomenological inquiries were prioritized because of their uniquely ontological approach to bereavement-induced epistemological development. Through this review, SOP phenomena emerged as a rich opportunity to form meaning out of the disabling chaos of bereavement.

### **Imaginal Approaches to Grief**

This section bridges between the literature of Imaginal Psychology and the literature of grief theory. Three subsections are provided to group literature around the ITP-sourced concepts of gatekeeping, participatory consciousness, and personifying. Personifying was explored in the previous section. In addition to gatekeeping and participatory consciousness, several other key concepts used to describe to the research learnings will be reviewed before exploring the literature on how these concepts function within the context of bereavement.

Omer defines *imaginal structures* as, “assemblies of sensory, affective, and cognitive aspects of experience constellated into images; they both mediate and constitute experience.”<sup>178</sup> In the course of coping with overwhelming events and environmental impingements such as bereavement, Omer writes that self-images

associated with adaptive patterns of reactivity are constellated by the developing soul. *Disidentification* is Omer's term for the process of moving away from these self-images when, in subsequent contexts, they revealed to be maladaptive barriers to the unfolding of Being.<sup>179</sup> Omer's concepts of gatekeeping, empathic imagination, cultural gatekeeping, cultural trance, reflective participation and, "the friend" are explored in the following overview of the guiding propositions of ITP.

Omer et al. describe four propositions guiding transformative learning praxis such as ITP.<sup>180</sup> First, human learning is experiential. Second, various cultural, social, and personal dynamics "gate" experience, undermining learning. Third, thoughtfully crafted activities facilitate learning by liberating and restoring experience. Finally, they proposed that liberated experience is carried forward into life as creative action. A closer look at these propositions illuminates how ITP is particularly well-suited for bereavement research.

The experiential quality of learning necessitates an engagement with the risks and dangers that Omer et al. say are inherent in experience. All learning, they say, in one way or another deepens, diversifies, embodies, and personalizes experience, shifting and disrupting the routines of familiar identity. Imagination is an essential ingredient that amplifies and integrates the affective, somatic, and cognitive dimensions of experience, including experiences of both the self and others.<sup>181</sup> Elsewhere, Omer describes the imagination as deep and valuable when it emerges spontaneously, without policing by culture and personal identity.<sup>182</sup> Omer defines his term *empathic imagination* as, "The mode of imagination most relevant to relatedness between humans as well as human connection to the *more than human*." They say experiencing has an integrative

imperative when images are attended to.<sup>183</sup> For Omer, empathy is an act of imagination than can be used methodologically when researching lived experience.<sup>184</sup>

The second proposition of Omer et al. emphasizes the role of gatekeeping. They describe *gatekeeping* as the dynamic by which the barriers to experience are personified and externalized. Because experience can be risky and dangerous, Omer et al. say there is a natural tendency for everyone to turn away from events through these adaptive dynamics, many of which began as legacy protective measures that lost their effectiveness when circumstances changed. They say gatekeeping provides insulation from failure and having to depend on others by denying access to new experience.<sup>185</sup> Omer further defines *cultural gatekeeping* as the collective dynamics that, in a given culture, resist transformation at the family, individual, community, and cultural levels.<sup>186</sup> *Cultural trance* is a related concept used by Omer to designate a state of being enfolded in a particular culture's definitions and limits around what is knowable. Omer posits that embodiment can help overcome the cultural trances associated with consumerist economies.<sup>187</sup>

The third proposition described by these researchers points out how, in ITP, learning communities with skilled leadership help facilitate safe passage through transformative experiences. Omer and Criswell clarify that transformation can happen outside of learning communities, but that the relational context of a community can be a profound catalyst that amplifies development with social support and play.<sup>188</sup> Learning communities not only provide a safe holding environment for transformation, but they also provide favorable conditions for the emergence of what Omer calls participatory

consciousness. In ITP, *participatory consciousness* refers to the states of consciousness that are unobstructed by gatekeeping and the delusionary sense of a separate self.<sup>189</sup>

Omer et al. write that the process of transformation can often be overwhelming. Their claim is in alignment with Jack Mezirow's notion that an emotionally threatening *disorienting dilemma* initiates subjective reframing in transformation theory.<sup>190</sup> Omer et al. conceptualize this in the language of ITP when they say, "There is an underlying threat intrinsic to intense experience, which is perceived as a perilous threat to one's normative identity."<sup>191</sup> Further, they claim that radical perspective shifts of substantial magnitude are rarely accomplished without the transmutation of emotions into capacities. In regards to this specific research project, ITP envisions grief transmuting into the capacity of compassion and fear transmuting into the capacity of courage.<sup>192</sup>

For Omer, affects can be transmuted into capacities by means of ritualizing.<sup>193</sup> ITP thus recognizes how ritual functions in the affective domain of the individual. Ritualizing is also portrayed by Omer as an essential ingredient in the work of learning communities. He writes, "creative ritual engenders a context and container for principled and imaginative transgression so that the exiled, rejected, devalued, and difficult parts of our experience can express themselves in ways that have new meaning."<sup>194</sup> Properly led rituals are seen as evoking the experience of ritual trust and profound collaboration that can temporarily suspend affective barriers to experience. For Omer *reflexive participation* is an essential capacity for ritualizing effectively. *Reflexive participation* he defines as, "the practice of surrendering through creative action to the necessities, meanings, and possibilities inherent in the present moment."<sup>195</sup>

So far, this section has reviewed the ITP concepts and principles that undergird the research design. The learnings and reflections chapters additionally rely on ITP's use of myth and what Omer calls the *Friend*. For Omer, the symbolic depths of experience are engaged through story and myth.<sup>196</sup> The myth of the Friend is of particular interest in ITP because it provides a counterbalance to gatekeeping dynamics. Omer defines the friend as a mysterious archetypal force, writing that, "The friend refers to those deep potentials of the soul which guide us to act with passionate objectivity and encourage us to align with the creative will of the cosmos."<sup>197</sup> The myth of the Friend is explored in detail in chapter 5.

### **The Gatekeeping of Grief**

This section reviews literature on the gatekeeping of grief. The policing of grief and SOP phenomena will be shown to function in the affective domain of the body, in the subjective domain of the individual, and in the cultural domain of societies. This section first will describe Fosha's clinical work with affect restriction before deepening the definition of gatekeeping. Next comes a discussion of how gatekeeping happens in groups through scapegoating. The section closes by reviewing the literature of grief theory for research on the policing of grief.

Fosha's research explores the transformative power of grief affect. In her affective model of change, core affective experiences can be defended against, and grief is a core affective experience. She defines *emotional pain* as, "the feeling of grief about one's own disappointments, deprivations, lost childhood, lost opportunities, the loss of the myth of wonderful parents, the experience of which assumes a reflective self."<sup>198</sup>



Her research demonstrates how fear and anxiety can anticipate that this emotional pain will be unbearable, resulting in psychological defense against grief affect. Nathanson points out how shame most often functions in this inhibiting fashion, serving to limit the pleasurable affective states, but also limiting grief expressions.<sup>199</sup> For Fosha, adverse affects like anxiety, fear helplessness, loneliness, despair, and shame are in need of transformation, and grief is a core affect involved in transformation. In her work, grief is transforming when the patient increases awareness of the impact of whatever resulted in their suffering. In order for this expansion to happen, Fosha claims that the patient must have the interior awareness needed to reflect on their sense of self. Additionally, the therapist must emotionally participate in the emerging dyadic experience with the patient such that both people feel the resonance, the patient feels deeply understood, and the therapist feels moved.<sup>200</sup>

Fosha's work on blocked grief affect comes from a line of somatic research that first began with Wilhelm Reich and his concept of character armor.<sup>201</sup> For Reich, *character armor* is formed as bodily expressions when basic human needs are repressed in order to maintain attunement with cultural, familial, and societal expectations. For example, the BBC portrays the armoring of grief affect as part of the British national character, represented by the phrase, "stiff upper lip."<sup>202</sup> Adrian Kear and Deborah Lynn Steinberg report that this cultural phenomenon was seen changing with communal grief for the death of Princess Diana.<sup>203</sup>

The restriction of experience illuminated by Omer's concept of gatekeeping is specifically a constraint on the imaginal core of human experience that he describes bridging the exterior and interior dimensions of personal reality, and the collective and

individual levels of social reality.<sup>204</sup> The ability to let imagination lead is presented by Omer as a competency achieved by coming to terms with the individual and cultural gatekeeping which inhibits or distorts access to imagination and demands conformity and perfection. According to Omer, this is particularly challenging from within the cultural trance of consumerist economies that sell canned and formulaic imagery dominated by the imagination of others. For Omer, both trauma and cultural trance can block the spontaneous and wild flow of imagery that transforms, heals, and leads individuals and groups to broaden their understanding and values. Our culture, he writes, is a culture where violence compensates for this restricted capacity to tolerate the intensities of imagination. He describes cultural gatekeepers personifying this compensation through the scapegoating community members who do not conform to the group.<sup>205</sup> Sylvia Brinton Perera describes this process, saying,

Scapegoating, as it is currently practiced, means finding the one or ones who can be identified with evil or wrong-doing, blamed for it, and cast out from the community in order to leave the remaining members with a feeling of guiltlessness, atoned(at-one) with the collective standards of behavior. It both allocates blame and serves to “inoculate against future misery and failure” by evicting the presumed cause of misfortune.<sup>206</sup>

Scott Peck points out that scapegoating functions through the mechanism of psychological projection.<sup>207</sup> Projection was defined previously in relation to personification. Peck writes that scapegoating must be overcome for pseudo communities to engage with the tasks needed to become true communities. He describes states of true community in terms similar to what Omer uses to describe participatory consciousness, in which the emotions of grief and joy flow more freely.<sup>208</sup> The next section looks at states of participatory consciousness in which grief is not gated.

Gatekeeping-like phenomena is commonly explored in bereavement and popular literature. Barry Spector writes of all Americans as suffering from a suppressed grief that surfaces as depression, addiction, anxiety, and narcissism.<sup>209</sup> Here Spector emphasizes the psychological impact of suppressed grief. This idea of suppressed grief is conceptualized by American grief researcher, Kenneth Doka with his term *disenfranchised grief*.<sup>210</sup> He defines disenfranchised grief as, “grief that persons experience when they incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, socially sanctioned or publicly mourned.” With this, Doka is emphasizing the rights and privileges of the bereaved. He uses the example of non-kin relationships that are not recognized or appreciated by others in bereavement. Other types of disenfranchised grief might not be socially defined as significant, such as perinatal loss, and other non-death-related losses including job loss, incarceration, and divorce. He describes the ways that grief can be disenfranchised based on characteristics of the bereaved, such as their age or mental status. He also describes how survivors of suicide loss often feel stigmatized. Finally, he describes how the manner of grieving can lead to disenfranchisement when grief expressions exceed the accepted thresholds and become either too wild, or too stoic.<sup>211</sup>

Addressing the cultural dimension rather than the individual, Paul Rosenblatt writes, “I know of no society in which the emotions of bereavement are not shaped and controlled, for the sake of the deceased, the bereaved person, or other.”<sup>212</sup> This notion that all grief is culturally regulated and controlled is taken up in the research of Walter.<sup>213</sup> For Walter, grief is a performance evoked within a social context, complete with rules and expectations for the bereaved. He points out how this contradicts

contemporary social trends, in which there are no rules because individuals are given the space to grieve in their unique style.

Cultures can both over-regulate and under-regulate grief, according to Walter, and much of the policing of contemporary bereavement can be chaotic self-policing in non-traditional contexts. Because of the widespread norm that grief expressions should be private, even among family members, Walter reports that many people might not have enough guidance or knowledge about grief experiences. He also sees potential over-regulation of grief in regards to constraints on intense emotionality, reminders of other deaths, and impaired social functioning. Walter writes that many people experience overly regulated grief in gender-specific ways, with women potentially feeling regulated by men, and women feeling policed by other women who do not want to be reminded that this experience will also happen to them.<sup>214</sup>

Mythologists have represented suppressed grief in America with the youthful image of an *American Adam* and the more seasoned image of John Wayne. The image of an American Adam was first conceptualized by Richard Lewis as an wide-eyed adolescent orphan who has willfully severed his ties to the past, leaving him, “happily bereft of ancestry,” carefree to explore the vast landscapes of North America with exuberant optimism.<sup>215</sup> Grouped together, a troop of such detached youths form what Robert Bly calls a *sibling society*.<sup>216</sup> The image of an American Adam was taken up by Pamela Boker in her exploration of the grief taboo in American Literature.<sup>217</sup> When Boker incorporates into her analysis the feminist values of vulnerability, emotional expressiveness, emotional honesty and valuing personal ties, she concludes that the

concept of an American Adam cannot be separated from a gendered psychological mechanism in which grief is suppressed and ancestry effaced.

The diminished capacity for grief in grown American men is taken up by Spector with the image of John Wayne.<sup>218</sup> Spector describes the characters played by this actor as widowers, divorced or loners who reject all erotic relationships. He writes that these characters represent a failure on the part of males to find initiation into the feminine depths of their own souls. Similar to the way sexual repression results in pornography, Spector describes the repression of grief results in gratuitous violence. Wayne's mythic violence is portrayed as evoking the symbolic death and renewal. Spector writes this is needed in cultures that deny death in order to maintain their innocence. The denial of death in America is a concept first investigated in detail by Ernest Becker.<sup>219</sup> Spector points out how funeral embalming practices, popular only in North America, can literalize the denial of death and grief when they protect the bereaved from a decomposing corpse. Ronald Grimes further claims that death rites will be superficial as long as funeral directors are shielding the bereaved from the sensual experience of dead loved ones.<sup>220</sup> If death rites are to be celebratory, Grimes writes, then not only must the bereaved spend time dwelling with the dying and the dead, but there must also be cultural allowances for myths and imagery that support communication with the dead.

North American embalming practices can be contrasted with the compassionate cannibalism in the Wari people of Eastern Brazil. In his natural history of cannibalism, Bill Shut writes that, in most cultures, consuming another human is among the most reprehensible of behaviors.<sup>221</sup> And yet, according to Beth Conklin, cannibalism was normal treatment for the Wari dead, up until they came in full contact with western

cultures in the 1950s.<sup>222</sup> Conklin describes Wari cannibalism as practiced out of a sense of compassion and respect for the dead person and their family. The duty to eat the roasted, but often partially decayed corpse fell mostly on the in-laws rather than close blood relatives, and a refusal to partake was an insult to the dead.

Just as grief for a lost loved one continues long after the corpse is gone, opportunities to gate grief experiences also persist. As seen in the third section of this chapter, SOP experiences can be restricted both individually and culturally. In Rees's 1971 research, participants refrained from disclosing their experience, even to close friends and family, for fear of ridicule.<sup>223</sup> Similarly, Steffen and Coyle's research explored how experience can be gated in the complex process of a family's meaning-making around SOP phenomena.<sup>224</sup> They investigated the group dynamics by which prohibitions around SOP experiences impacted the grief process at the family level. Finally, one of the four superordinate themes identified in Keen, Murray, and Payne's research was that, in order to avoid feeling stigmatized by others, it is important to the bereaved that their SOP experiences are socially validated.<sup>225</sup> This places cultural acceptance and validation of SOP experiences in opposition to cultural formations that gate SOP experiences. Validation is addressed in Fosha's research into affects. She describes the *healing affects* in which one person moved or touched, and a second person feels gratitude, tenderness, love, and appreciation toward the first party.<sup>226</sup>

The first section of this literature review described the dominant cultural understanding of grief as a medicalized disease model that is in alignment with modernity. Leeat Granek claims that this scientific approach to grief has left the discipline of psychology dissociated from the depth and complexity of bereavement

phenomena.<sup>227</sup> She writes, “denying the normalcy, intensity, and duration of grief *is the pathology* rather than the other way around.” Elsewhere she argues that the individualist ethos that pathologizes grief can also inhibit the rage that can accompany bereavement resulting from social injustices, including poverty, imprisonment, and neglect.<sup>228</sup> During the writing of this dissertation, William Wan and Brittany Shammass described this lack of rage at the cultural level, specifically in the response to the social injustices of incarceration, poverty, and systemic racism associated with mass suffering and death in the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>229</sup>

According to Granek, grief is also politicized when individual and collective grief are manipulated in the service of nationalism and military power. The response of the Chinese government to the death of Li Wenliang, the Covid-19 pandemic whistleblower, is a contemporary example of manipulating grief in the service of nationalism.<sup>230</sup> The 2020 election meme, “make liberals cry again,” is an example where numbness to grief is the hallmark of group membership in conservative American politics.<sup>231</sup> Granek also writes that grief can be politicized when it is activated as a motivator toward social justice agendas and positive social change.<sup>232</sup> Grief for George Floyd, murdered by police during the writing of this dissertation, is an example of grief in service of social justice.<sup>233</sup> Similarly, Regina Marchi writes that, in the United States, the Day of the Dead celebration is frequently a venue of political expression, where the dead are conscripted into the condemnation of injustice toward Hispanic people.<sup>234</sup> The Day of the Dead celebrations play an important role in the final learning of Chapter Four.

## Participatory Grief

In order to explore participatory consciousness as it relates to grief, several foundational concepts are defined in this section, including numinosity, sacred space, initiation and ritual. A discussion about the social dimensions of these concepts will illuminate the ways in which they can function within a group format. While the concepts of participatory consciousness, ritual and sacred space are not directly implied by the research problem and hypothesis, this section supports the research design and learnings. The sociological research of Walter demonstrates how grief is inherently a social phenomenon.<sup>235</sup> This section addresses the social dimension of grief and its impact on subjective experience of individuals.

In ITP, the terms ecstatic experience and participatory consciousness are synonyms. Omer writes that *participatory consciousness* refers to, “states of consciousness which are unobstructed by a delusionary sense of a separate self. Non-participatory states of consciousness are adaptive to stressful and traumatic circumstances and are subsequently maintained through the gatekeeping mechanisms of adaptive identity.”<sup>236</sup> Said another way, for Omer, *ecstatic states* are mental states free from gatekeeping dynamics that support an isolated worldview of the individual. Experiences of these states comprise participatory consciousness. As mentioned previously, ITP recognizes the power of learning communities to help amplify participatory consciousness. After reviewing Rudolf Otto’s concept of numinosity, the



remainder of this section reviews literature supporting participatory consciousness in groups.

As reported in the previous section, Fuchs was the first to draw parallels between the phenomenology of grief and the phenomenology of numinous experience. Otto defines *numinosity* as an affective state of transfixion in which one is horrified, fascinated, and abased before the awful and mysterious sensed-presence of something “wholly other.”<sup>237</sup> For Otto, numinosity is the non-rational human emotion that initiates and grounds all mystical and religious experience. Melissa Raphael writes that, while some elements of Otto’s theory protects it from feminist critique, the language and concepts he used to categorize, evoke, and value numinous experience were filtered through his patriarchal and presumably celibate worldview.<sup>238</sup> Raphael further criticizes Otto for rejecting the social dimension of religious experience. Jung’s use of the term numinous will be reviewed next, before tracing how Otto’s theory led Mircea Eliade to define sacred space.

Lionell Corbett describes how Jung linked numinous experience to the healing process in a letter to a friend shortly after having a heart attack and a near-death experience.<sup>239</sup> This understanding colors Lucy Huskinson’s concise summary of Jung’s conceptualization of numinosity:

He describes the numinous as ‘inexpressible, mysterious, terrifying’; ‘holy dread’; ‘overwhelming – and admission that goes against not only our pride, but against our deep-rooted fear that consciousness may perhaps lose its ascendancy’; as having ‘thrilling power’ and ‘deeply stirring emotional effect’; ‘spiritual and magical’; ‘healing or destructive – never indifferent’; capable of ‘fateful transformations ... conversions, illuminations, emotional shocks, blows of fate’; ‘wholly outside conscious volition, for it transports the subject into the state of rapture, which is a state of will-less surrender’; ‘an experience of the subject independent of his will ... it causes a peculiar alteration of consciousness.’<sup>240</sup>

Huskinson goes on to criticize Jung for misappropriating Otto's concept of numinosity. She sees Jung's usage as being closer to Otto's concept of the holy, which he also called the sacred. For Otto, *the sacred* is a complex category developing out of irrational numinous experience to include moral and ethical content.<sup>241</sup> Otto describes the pairing of the rational with the irrational in terms of schematizations that necessarily form out of a sense of belonging. He uses the analogy of the warp and woof of interwoven fabric to describe the intimate comingling of rational and irrational that make up the sacred. In his examples, he arranges these schematizations hierarchically, with the primitive dread of the savage subjugated to the "clear clarity" seen in the "superior" schemata of Christianity.<sup>242</sup>

Eliade introduced his book, *The Sacred and the Profane* as a response to Otto's concept of the sacred.<sup>243</sup> Eliade describes how Otto emphasized the irrational component of religion, while he, on the other hand, was focused on the significant ways in which myth, ritual and symbolism contribute to the experience of sacrality. Eliade conceived of both the sacred and the profane as ontological modes, and he writes that religious people are attracted to sacrality because the sacred mode is saturated with being and power. *Sacred space* is the term Eliade uses for the sacred mode of being in the world. Lakoff and Johnson's research showed how *conceptual metaphor* emerging from the sensorimotor domain utilizes the physical logic of the body for understanding subjective experience.<sup>244</sup> Eliade's linguistic formulation of sacred space thus emphasizes the situated quality of sacrality.

For Eliade, every sacred space presents itself as an interruption that sets itself apart from the everyday world of profane space. Eliade uses the example of a church to

represent sacred space, but he writes that often all that is needed to interrupt profane space is a sign of sacrality. When no sign is available, he writes, traditional people would often use animals to indicate a suitable location for consecrating a sanctuary. According to Eliade, what is revealed by the sacred is an absolute reality that enables worldly orientation. In this model, the sacred, “*founds the world* in the sense that it fixes the limits and establishes the order of the world.”<sup>245</sup> At the center of sacred space is what Eliade calls the *axis mundi*, a cosmic pillar symbolizing a route of communication and transport between the heavens, the earth, and the chaotic underworld. Omer uniquely extends the concept of axis mundi by inverting the image of a cosmic pillar when he brings forth the image of a spacious center.<sup>246</sup> For Omer, a *spacious center*, is a region found at the heart of sacred space, where the creative potential of marginalized cultural elements can be actualized.

Resting at the boundary between Eliade’s sacred and profane spaces is a threshold, a frontier that distinguishes and opposes the two worlds. Eliade adds that, paradoxically, the threshold is also the place where communication happens between sacred and profane space. Eliade writes that numerous rites of passage exist for transgressing the threshold between the sacred and the profane.<sup>247</sup> *Initiation* is the term Eliade uses for rites of passage that facilitate dying to the profane condition, returning to source, followed by rebirth to the sacred world.<sup>248</sup> More specifically, initiation for Eliade might be initiation around life cycle events, but also initiation into a secret society or religious vocation. Finally, Eliade believes that moderns are committed to profane space and thus do not have access to sacred space.<sup>249</sup> The concepts of initiation and ritual process will be explored next in relation to the anthropological work of Arnold van

Gepp, Victor Turner, and Ronald Grimes. Turner's work on ritual and human adaptation will demonstrate Eliade's error in claiming that sacred space is not available in industrialized cultures.

Van Gennep envisioned a threefold scheme of effecting transitions of place, state, age, and social position through rites of passage.<sup>250</sup> His terms for the three zones of this schemata are preliminal, liminal, and postliminal. Alternative terms used for these three regions are separation, transition, and incorporation. He emphasized the middle zone of liminality, though he was clear that different rites emphasize different zones. Funerals emphasize separation, births, and weddings emphasize incorporation, and initiations emphasize transition. Both Eliade and Turner borrowed from Van Gennep in creating their own three-part design for conceptualizing rites of passage.

The central zone of liminality was of particular interest to Turner because of its connection to what he called *communitas*.<sup>251</sup> For Turner, liminality points to *communitas*. Turner describes *liminality* as a necessarily ambiguous state in which there is a blurring and merging of distinctions. Other characteristics listed include anonymity, sexlessness, bisexuality, silence, and submissiveness. He describes the liminal state as frequently likened to darkness, death, to being in the womb, to the wilderness and to an eclipse of the moon or sun. Finally, Turner forms the concept of *communitas* in order to account for the way that, in groups, liminal phenomena blend lowliness and sacredness, comradeship and homogeneity. Turner sets the communal state of *communitas* in opposition to the social structure seen in profane life. There is a lack of structure in *communitas* that otherwise differentiates the status of members who make up a community. *Communitas* and social structure are conceived as mutually determinative,

such that *communitas* can only manifest in relation to a social structure. For Turner, social structure has a cognitive quality that can be contrasted with the existential quality of *communitas*, which he describes empowering and potentiating those who travel through it on their way back to structure. Quite the opposite of Eliade, Turner said *communitas* was available to modern communities, using hippies as a contemporary example.<sup>252</sup>

Turner uses Martin Buber's concept of I and Thou to describe the relationship between people in a state of *communitas*. Buber was examining the sense of self that arises in a relationship.<sup>253</sup> He identified two modes of relating, one evolving from the other. In the first mode of relating, termed *I-It*, the person, animal, or object is related to as a "thing" to be used. The second mode of relating, termed *I-Thou*, is, for Buber, a transcendent mode of relating in which the habituated, protective life scripts are relinquished, revealing the other person in their true form. Buber saw most people oscillating between these two modes once a capacity for I-Thou relating has been cultivated. In the liminal state of *communitas*, Turner writes that all participants are relating to each other in this second mode.<sup>254</sup>

Robert Moore criticized both Eliade and Turner for not placing enough emphasis on ritual leadership.<sup>255</sup> Moore claims that liminal space needs to be stewarded, and that many of the categories of mental disorders in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) can be interpreted as failed initiations. Omer extends the concept of ritual leadership with the concept of *cultural leadership*. He writes, "cultural leaders are able to transmute how they are affected by culture into creative action that midwives the future."<sup>256</sup>

Van Gennep, Eliade, Turner, and Omer are all describing the transformative process of ritualizing. In 1979, Laughlin, McManus, and d'Aquili characterize *ritual* as, “an evolutionary, ancient channel of communication that operates by virtue of homologous biological functions (i.e., synchronization, integration, tuning, etc.) in man and other vertebrates.”<sup>257</sup> Ritualizing, according to this definition, is the process by which vertebrates create and enact rituals to enhance sociality. Turner offers a radically different definition of ritual as, “prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to belief in invisible beings or powers regarded as the first and final cause of all effects.”<sup>258</sup> The space between these definitions reflects the range of contexts impacted by the transformative power of ritual.

Michael Winkelman uses the striking parallels between shamanic rituals and chimpanzee behavior as a basis for claiming there is an evolutionary origin of shamanic ritual and shamanic healing.<sup>259</sup> More modestly, Erikson claims that mother-infant affirmation and attunement happens by means of ritual displays shared with animals.<sup>260</sup> Both theorists are pointing to the transformative potential of ritual. Ritual is transformative for Turner because rituals are performed and enacted in such a way that the performance transforms itself through the ingress of power from preternatural and invisible beings.<sup>261</sup> Grimes emphasizes that, while ritual processes like mother-infant attunement might emotionally move people, effective rites of passage are transformative rituals. According to Grimes, effective rites of passage, in which events are tended to fully, inscribe images into memory and generate ritual knowledge. This knowledge, he writes, “lodges in the bone, in it's very marrow.”<sup>262</sup> Importantly, Grimes notes that

ritual knowledge is always embodied and sensual.<sup>263</sup> This section will conclude with a review of how ritual has been portrayed in the literature of grief theory.

Theresa Rando defined ritual in 1985 as, “specific behavior or activity which gives symbolic expression to certain feelings and thoughts of the actor(s) individually or as a group. It may be a habitually repetitive behavior or a onetime occurrence.”<sup>264</sup> Castle and Phillips further define *grief rituals* as rituals related to the death of a loved one, and their research with fifty participants emphasized post-funeral rituals.<sup>265</sup> Their results confirmed that appropriate grief rituals can facilitate adjustment, that performing rituals can have a positive impact on the performers, and they identified some particularly important factors for the success of grief rituals. These include symbolic elements, emotional expression, a safe structure that facilitates empowerment, reminiscence, and the involvement of others in the ritual. Pamela Vale-Taylor’s research with 43 participants also emphasized remembrance.<sup>266</sup> She found that informal remembrance rituals created by the bereaved were more significant than formal funerals. She identified four categories of ritual that were particularly impactful: rituals to maintain a direct link to the one who was lost, rituals undertaken for the deceased, rituals viewed as acts of remembrance, and rituals that remember the deceased within the community. Vale-Taylor also found that bereavement rituals were personal responses by mourners, where the same ritual might have radically different meanings for two different people. Michael Norton and Francesca Gino’s research suggests that an increased feeling of control is a common psychological mechanism by which the use of ritual reduces grief after a significant loss.<sup>267</sup> Their research also found that the effectiveness of rituals was not dependent on a pre-existing bias that rituals will help.

Laura Lewis and William Hoy found that bereavement rituals were inextricably linked with the concept of legacy and the consolidation of the legacy of the one who was lost.<sup>268</sup> They define *legacy* as a term used to indicate an inheritance of high value, received from an ancestor. Lewis and Hoy claim that the effectiveness of bereavement rituals grows out of narratives depicting the dead's unique personality and character, passions, accomplishments, and contributions. Irvin Yalom defined the concept of *rippling* to describe the palliative impact of considering one's own legacy when terrorized by thoughts of death.<sup>269</sup> For Yalom, rippling refers to the way people create concentric circles of influence and impact on others for years, potentially continuing on intergenerationally. Yalom writes that good deeds allow the deceased to transcend death through the gratitude of the bereaved.

In her research, Anastasia Scrutton argued that rituals are distinctly important and powerful in bereavement because they are narritival and diachronic.<sup>270</sup> The sensorial narratives she sees emerging from grief rituals are imbued with both imagination and body memories, making them a rich source of experiential knowledge. Finally, Scrutton sees power in the relational character of ritual because it allows grief to be shared, off-loading some of the emotional-cognitive load.

### **Personification and the Dead**

This section reviews the literature of Imaginal Psychology in order to illuminate the psychological role of imagination and its impact on grief processes. The section begins with a brief review of literature describing the role of imaginary companions in the development of creativity in middle childhood. This section next moves to describe



the role of the imagination in Henri Corbin, Jung, and Hillman's work. After this, there will be a review of relevant literature from the expressive arts. The section will end by reviewing the literature of grief theory for research on imaginal dialogues with the dead.

Personification emerges out of mental processes that Hillman terms *psychologizing*. Hillman introduced the term psychologizing to represent reflection as the soul's native activity. He describes this activity of the soul as an interiorizing process, a perpetual movement inward. He uses the phrase "seeing through" to describe this process of approaching literal events with curiosity and wonder. He writes this deliteralizing type of reflection is intentional, conscious, subjective, signifying, and deep.<sup>271</sup> Rather than asking questions that start with the words, "why," and "how," psychologizing mental processes seek to ask questions that begin with the word, "what." These questions naturally lead reflection to personify what is encountered. He writes that psychologizing ideas in this way amounts to an infusion of divine energy. For Hillman, this divine energy amounts to an ontological mode, an attitude, and a set of ideas.<sup>272</sup>

Opinions differ on whether imaginary companions play a role in the development of creativity. Clara Vostrovsky's 1895 study into imaginary companions went so far as to claim they were a sign of mental illness.<sup>273</sup> Contemporary researcher Wayne Myers, on the other hand, used six case studies to show how individuals who had imaginary companionship as children continued to exercise their creative capacities as adults.<sup>274</sup> Encouraging results were also found by Dorothy and Jerome Singer, who concluded that children with imaginary companions showed more positive emotionality and were less aggressive with other children.<sup>275</sup> This research can be contrasted with the work of Paula Bouldin and Chris Pratt.<sup>276</sup> They asserted that children with imaginary companions are

less socially competent. The importance of cultivating relationships with imaginal others will now be illuminated by the seminal writing of Imaginal Psychology.

Corbin described the senses, imagination, and the intellect as three organs of perception corresponding with the body, soul, and mind respectively.<sup>277</sup> For Corbin, these organs of perception govern development. Between the sensory world of material reality and the cognitive world of abstract intellect, Corbin situated the world of the image as having equal ontological status to the other two worlds. In his paradigm, knowledge gained through the imagination is seen as bridging and mediating between the material and spiritual. Corbin's imaginal world has dimension and extension, colors, and figures, and is perceived by a faculty of imaginative power. He writes that, in the imaginal world, there are subtle body equivalents for everything existing in the sensible world. Finally, he arranges these worlds in an ontological hierarchy, with the material world as the lowest, followed by the imaginal world, followed by the purely intelligible world. It should be noted that Omer rejects Corbin's notion of an intermediary imaginal world; for Omer, all experience is imaginal.<sup>278</sup>

Corbin's understanding of the imagination is in stark contrast to Freud's understanding of imagination. For Freud, imagination is a function of the pleasure principle and phantasy, and it is placed opposite the reality principle and the task of reality-testing.<sup>279</sup> Laplanche and Pontalis point out that, in German, the word *phantasy* means imagination.<sup>280</sup> In Freud's formulation of drive theory, *the pleasure principle* and *the reality principle* are the two principles governing mental functioning. For Freud, wish-fulfillment always motivates fantasy. *Reality-testing*, shown in section one to be the primary task of grief work for Freud, is described by Laplanche and Pontalis as a

device by which the internal stimuli of the imagination are eliminated in favor of external stimuli that the motor system is able to influence.<sup>281</sup>

Jung followed Corbin in prioritizing the imagination, taking images as the primary data of the psyche.<sup>282</sup> For Jung, imagination is the generative activity of the mind, connected to the activities of intuition, sensation, thinking and feeling. Fantasy, he writes, is the direct expression of psychic life. Jung called his technique for consciously working with fantasy material *active imagination*. He defines this technique as, “a dialectical procedure, a dialogue between yourself and the unconscious figures.”<sup>283</sup> The technique involves staying close to the image in order to divine its meaning. Hillman, via Rafael Lopez-Pedraza, summarizes this technique with the phrase, “stick to the image.”<sup>284</sup> Jung conceives of this conscious dialogue with imagery as resulting in new positions that transcend the perceiver and perceived, and he calls this reconciliation of opposites the *transcendent function*.<sup>285</sup>

Jung modeled the process of active imagination in *the Red Book*.<sup>286</sup> Sonu Shamsasani writes that a major theme running throughout *the Red Book* is the return of the dead.<sup>287</sup> The figures Jung uncovered in this book were, according to Shamsasani, animating the process of active imagination, rather than the other way around. Hillman and Shamsasani say that some of the figures Jung found preceded him and were not part of the psyche. Jung called these figures *the dead*. Hillman and Shamsasani claim these figures represent the weight of human history in ancestral form. For Jung, the transcendent function did not apply to these figures, who remained unchanged and unchanging throughout the dialogue. With *The Red Book*, Hillman sees Jung calling stark attention to the realm of the dead as a critical element that is missing from Western

culture.<sup>288</sup> Shamsasani and Hillman add that many of the dead Jung encountered were pagans of non-Christian faith.<sup>289</sup> Finally, in order to address the suggestion of mental mediumship in this arrangement, Stephani Stephens introduces the term *interpsychic rapport* to represent the dynamic between Jung and the dead.<sup>290</sup> Whereas intrapsychic rapport can be applied to the figures of the unconscious Jung encountered in active imagination, interpsychic rapport manages to include the specific qualities of active imagination appropriate for *discarnate souls*, Stephen's term for those aspects of the personality that survive death.

While active imagination is Jung's method for working with imagery, Hillman's approach is personification. Hillman's personification was introduced in section two as a way of being in the world such that experiences are potentially moving. For Hillman, imagination is the heart's ability to see things as images, and this happens by means of personification. Succinctly and colloquially stated, Hillman claims that "you can't love anything unless it's personified."<sup>291</sup> Hillman describes personifying as soul making, a refinement that happens because it is imagery, the primary psychic data, that is personified. He writes images are,

... the basic givens of psychic life, self-originating, inventive, spontaneous, complete, and organized in archetypal patterns. Fantasy-images are both the raw materials and finished products of the psyche, and they are the privileged mode of access to knowledge of the soul.<sup>292</sup>

To reflect the autonomous quality of imagery, Hillman references Mary Watkins, who claims that, in *imaginal dialogues*, the characters speak because they want to speak.<sup>293</sup> Watkins additionally points out the dramatic quality of mind that gives rise to imaginal worlds. She values this dramatic predilection of mind because it undermines the interpretive and explanatory moves that disempower images when their personhood is

denied. Watkins' acknowledgement of the *imaginal other* and her emphasis on imaginal dialogues is a rich source of expression for representing and subsequently interpreting experience.

Use of the Expressive Arts is not well covered by bereavement researchers. Sandra Bertman uniquely penned for this audience a gentle reminder, long before the CB model was introduced, that the arts, including musical, visual, and literary, were engaged in the ongoing relationships between the living and the dead.<sup>294</sup> This section will now review the expressive arts literature supporting imaginal dialogues before concluding with a look at how communicating with the dead has been represented in the bereavement literature.

Knill et al. say the experience of art making happens in the liminal confines of sacred space.<sup>295</sup> Sally Atkins and Herbert Eberhart say that the heart and mind open to something universal when art making in sacred space is facilitated by helping relationships.<sup>296</sup> They use the concept of *the third* to refer to cases in art therapy when something new shows up suddenly and unexpectedly in the art-making process. While Atkins and Eberhart say it is not possible to clearly define the third, it shares certain similarities with the "ah ha" experience. Above and beyond the mental clarity that comes with an "ah ha" experience, Atkins and Eberhart say that the experience of the third comes with the feeling of being emotionally moved or touched by the presence of the third.

In order to define *facilitative presence* as a way of being that encourages systems and individuals to change, Atkins used Carl Rogers' understanding that three conditions are needed to create supportive holding environments with atmospheres of emotional,

physical, and cognitive safety.<sup>297</sup> Rogers' person-centered approach identifies three conditions for creating a growth-promoting climate; congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathic understanding.<sup>298</sup> Rogers uses the words congruence, genuineness, and realness interchangeably. With the word *congruence* he emphasizes the close matching between what is experienced in conscious awareness and what is experienced at a gut level. He uses the word "transparent" to represent this matching when personal facades have been dropped. *Unconditional positive regard* is, for Rogers, a function of caring for, or prizing the other. In his experience, unconditional acceptance with a positive attitude is supportive of therapeutic movement and psychological changes. Rogers' third condition, *empathic understanding*, means that the other's feelings and personal meanings have been accurately perceived, attuned to and communicated back to the other participant. He writes that this is accomplished by means of a capacity for sensitive, active listening that is rare in Western contexts.

Atkins and Eberhart extend Roger's understanding of presence by additionally describing how presence can be a personal quality and interpersonal process. They describe *invitational presence* as a quality of attraction to another, and an invitation for the other to be present as well. Other qualities of presence prized by Atkins and Eberhart are a multilevel awareness of the environment, a multifold openness to experience, and an appreciative sense of curiosity.<sup>299</sup>

Pat Allen emphasizes the process of making art when she calls art a way of knowing.<sup>300</sup> This approach of art-making to create new knowledge has been brought into the domain of research by Shaun McNiff with his concept of *art-based research*.<sup>301</sup> Knill, Levine and Levine introduced several concepts to assist in leveraging the art-

making process for knowledge generation, including decentering, intermodality, and the principle of low skill/high sensitivity.<sup>302</sup> For these expressive arts researchers, *decentering* is a method of engaging the imagination by moving away from the narrow logic of cognition that leaves the thinker feeling helplessly limited by the available options. *Intermodality* is a term used by these researchers in reference to the multiple modalities of imagination spanning across the range of available sensory data, including visual images, words, movements, sounds, rhythms, and acts. They also use this term to represent the process of transferring from one form of art-making to another.<sup>303</sup> Finally, the concept of *low skill/high sensitivity* is a reference to how, while working therapeutically with the expressive arts, artistic expertise is de-emphasized, in favor of sensitivity to the medium and the environment.<sup>304</sup>

In addition to the focus on the generation of knowledge in art-based research, McNiff's writing emphasizes the palliative function of art and imaginal dialogues. McNiff suggests that, by approaching images as angels, imaginal persons appear and converge in a process of the soul, "ministering to itself."<sup>305</sup> He claims that there is a divine influx of angelic energy wherever there is a responsiveness to the emanation of imagination, wherever it flourishes.<sup>306</sup>

This section will now conclude with a review of how imaginal dialogues with deceased loved ones is represented in the bereavement literature. Walters and Klass say talking with the dead is a common and essential bereavement activity, seen in cemetery behavior and in therapeutic work.<sup>307</sup> This review is focused on bereavement research into imaginal dialogues in therapeutic contexts.

Imagined interactions with family members outside of a bereavement context was researched by Rosenblatt and Meyer, revealing that these interactions can help clarify thinking, help in dealing with unfinished and emergent relationship business, help prepare for difficult interactions, and help in dealing with opposing aspects of the self.<sup>308</sup> More specifically in relation to lost loved ones, Sheer Boelen and Neimeyer frame imaginal conversations as a type of exposure therapy for the treatment of complicated grief.<sup>309</sup> Richard and Lauterbach say the term *exposure* means exposure to a feared stimuli of some sort.<sup>310</sup> In the case of imaginal dialogues with the dead, the feared stimuli is approached imaginally, but Sheer et al. caution that grief is complicated and involves more than fear. They say that accessing the relationship in such a vividly experiential way presents opportunities for the bereaved to integrate the death into implicit memory systems through visualization, to foster cognitive changes through the development of more comfortable narratives, and to re-evaluate challenging beliefs and emotions.<sup>311</sup>

Chair work is another imagination-based technique seen in bereavement research. Chair work was developed by Fritz Perls.<sup>312</sup> It involves sitting with a witness before an empty chair and having a dialogue with an imagined person who is sitting in the opposite chair. Perls describes the empty chair as one of six essential components of Gestalt Therapy. The task of the empty chair, for Perls, is to take up roles which have been disowned, including other people we need to understand our life scripts. In bereavement work, Neimeyer writes that the goal of imaginal dialogues like chair work is to reanimate the relationship between the bereaved and the lost figure, both affirming lasting love and potentially addressing unfinished business.<sup>313</sup> Neimeyer uses the term *positioning* to



refer to the ways in which the deceased is projected into the various chairs, and *choreography* to refer to the artful sequencing of the encounter. Chair work was an essential technique in the Field et al. research in 1999 with 70 participants into the adaptiveness of continued attachment in conjugal bereavement.<sup>315</sup>

Sandra Dannenbaum and Richard Kinnier researched the possible therapeutic benefits from imaginal relationships with lost loved ones using grounded theory methodology.<sup>316</sup> Reported benefits include feeling loved and cared for, experiencing resolution of relationship conflicts and grief, and experiencing more confidence in decision making and problem solving. Kathryn Norlock used psychological research like this to provide philosophical reasons to reject the impossibility of relationships between the dead and the living.<sup>317</sup> She argues that, because relationships between the living contain imaginal content that infuse connections with meaning and moral import, relationships can continue after one person dies when the survivor continues to relate to the dead in imaginal ways. Norlock's development of moral arguments guiding relationships between the living and the dead was influenced by Virginia Held's ethical theory of care, in which a fundamental social embeddedness situates care as fundamental to humanity, like breathing and the imagination. In this model, care is often pre-reflective and instinctual, and thus a metaethical aspect of human behaviors like bereavement.<sup>318</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Soulfulness was the primary concern of this literature review, bringing the selection into alignment with ITP, the theory-in-practice. Omer's claim that the body is

that portion of the soul discernable by the senses helped drive the selection of literature that authentically resonated with the research problem.<sup>296</sup> Research involving the body was prioritized whenever possible. Drawing from the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, the body was prioritized because the body is the means by which the bereaved engage with their grief, numinosity, SOP phenomena and the world. To this end, phenomenology served a bridging function throughout the review. The boundary of the living body emerged as the lone threshold through which emanations can be received from the more-than-human world. Corbin revealed imagination to be an organ of perception specifically associated with soulfulness, so imagination was also privileged in this review. Jung's claim that images are the primary data of the psyche suggests a respectful approach to the animal imagery that emerged from the data, as potential points of soulful interest.

The first section of the literature review investigates grief as a physical affect and psychological concept worthy of scientific attention. Panksepp's research showed grief to be part of the biological substrate of the core self, and possibly part of the neural foundations of the soul. Despite this, the dominant psychological view was shown to pathologize and privatize grief, an arrangement that contemporary bereavement researchers seek to address.

The second section explores the core theories of phenomenology. Writings from Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty modeled how to bracket the core assumptions of empirical science in order to make the space demanded by a qualitative exploration of bereavement phenomena. Hillman provided a bridge between phenomenology and Imaginal Psychology. Parallels were drawn between phenomenology and sociocentric ways of being and knowing that honor and include the

dead, pointing out ontological and epistemological frameworks that support bereavement more fully. Finally, literature covering the phenomenology of grief brought this review's focus back to the body. Fuch's research revealed two subtypes of body memory of particular interest in bereavement: dyadic body memories and collective body memories.

The third section reviews literature clustered around SOP phenomena. Variations on the term SOP were described and paired with the conceptual frameworks used by authors to understand these phenomena. Building upon the previous section, studies with phenomenological methodologies were prioritized for inclusion. Research into SOP phenomena has blossomed recently, making this section representative of the most current research in the field. Most of the studies selected were published after the turn of the century.

The fourth and final section of this literature review bridge the literature of Imaginal Psychology and the literature of grief theory. Bereavement research into the politics and policing of grief were paired with an enhanced look at scapegoating and the mechanics of gatekeeping. Using the ITP definition of participatory consciousness, this section also envisioned ecstatic grief states devoid of policing and politics. Finally, this section reviewed concepts from the literature of the Expressive Arts for insights into personification and imaginal dialogues. This cluster was also made up of bereavement research involving image work and imaginal dialogues with the dead.

The primary goal of this literature review has been to explore the research problem, which posed the question, "how does encouraging the bereaved to sense the presence of a lost loved one impact the process of grief?" The hypothesis explored was a hunch that being allowed and encouraged to fully express and explore these presence-

sensing experiences can help to diversify and animate grief. The phenomena explored, like the entire subject matter of grief itself, was shown to be inseparable from Houston's concept of the search for the beloved, which is the title of her book on the point. The myth of Rumi and Shams was identified as a rich lens for reflecting on the research problem, recasting grief itself as the affective correlate of spiritual longing.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction and Overview**

Imaginal Inquiry was the methodology used in this research. Situated within the participatory paradigm, Imaginal Inquiry was chosen for this study because it recognizes participatory consciousness as the true nature of humanity.<sup>1</sup> Cargo and Mercer reviewed more than 300 peer-reviewed publications, books, and government reports in order to define participatory research in public health as, “a systematic inquiry, with the collaboration of those affected by the issue being studied, for the purposes of education and taking action or effecting change.”<sup>2</sup> This applies to Imaginal Inquiry. Imaginal Inquiry has the expanded goal of catalyzing cultural and personal transformations that emancipate experience from the restrictions of personal and collective ideologies characterized by domination, oppression, and exploitation. Ben Agger emphasizes that, in critical social theory, not only is domination embedded in the social structures, but it is also protected and promoted by constituent ideology, hegemony, reification, one dimensional thinking, and the metaphysics of presence.<sup>2</sup> Imaginal Inquiry seeks to facilitate personal and cultural liberation from these structures by leveraging its lineage of phenomenological, active, heuristic, art-based, and naturalistic research methodologies. Specifically, this research was seeking liberation from oppressive formulations of grief.

Imaginal Inquiry is a suitable choice for research into numinous experiences in grief because it is a methodology that mandates researchers not bypass the shadowy side of lived experiences. Imaginal Inquiry is a phenomenological methodology with the potential to additionally illuminate the embodied dimensions of numinous grief through art-based and heuristic amplifications. The research design sought to expose participants to evocative, expressive, interpretive, and integrative qualities of the core experience: a numinous sense of a lost loved one's presence. The research design also called for ritual leadership and ritualizing processes intending to provide safety, containment, and reverence for the multifaceted experiences of grief explored by participants. ITP, the theory from which Imaginal Inquiry originates, provides the theoretical grounding for the benefits of ritualizing.

Despite initial concerns that the phenomena would not be evoked, the qualities of playfulness and spontaneity inherent in ritualizing helped to manifest the core experience sought. In order to address this initial concern, participants were required to have had a significant SOP experience prior to the data collection. The storytelling expression sequence was designed to respond to these previous sense-of-presence experiences.

Data was collected and preserved using digital technology. While there was some concern that gatekeeping would increase due to the presence of the recording equipment, care was taken to ensure that participants' focus was redirected from the technology to the powerful experiences being evoked.

The four phases of imaginal inquiry are Evoking Experience, Expressing Experience, Interpreting Experience, and Integrating Experience. Both participant-sourced and researcher-sourced data collected during these phases was used in

interpreting the research problem: in what ways does encouraging the bereaved to sense the presence of a lost loved one impact the process of grief? The hypothesis offered for this inquiry was that being allowed and encouraged to fully express and explore these presence-sensing experiences can help to diversify and animate grief. The four phases of Imaginal Inquiry were designed to illuminate the research question and hypothesis.

In the evocation phase, researchers and participants sought to evoke the core experience. Participants and researchers brought linking objects to this phase of the research, and researchers strove to maintain a holding environment. *Linking objects* and linking phenomena were originally defined by Vladimir Volkan as external objects or experiences that connect a person to the deceased and were indicative of pathological grieving.<sup>4</sup> The complex emotional impact of linking objects is addressed by early Covid-19 victim, John Prine, in his song *Souvenirs*. Klass's research emphasized the importance of linking objects in providing solace in parental grief.<sup>5</sup> Finally, Dyana Reisen investigated the ways in which linking objects can help the body grieve by triggering body memories of the deceased.<sup>6</sup> The phenomena of body memories is described in Chapter Two.

Throughout the evocation phase, researchers maintained awareness of the potential for some degree of interembodied experience shared with the participant. This does not mean that researchers shared in participant memories; rather, it represents a dedication on the part of the researchers to later psychologizing the experiences in pursuit of the common dimensions of participants' and researchers' experiences.

To assess the success of evoking a numinous sense of a lost loved one's presence, participants expressed themselves in movement, storytelling, drawing, and

writing activities designed to capture a bodily understanding of their lived experience of loss. In the event that the core phenomena did not materialize in the altar sequence, the storytelling sequence was designed to direct participants toward memories of the phenomena sought with the hope of evoking the desired phenomena a second time. The use of multiple modalities in the expression phase emphasized the aesthetic dimensions of the participants' sense-making. Participants were encouraged to draw and journal as part of their expression, and art materials were provided. Journaled responses were the source of several data points.

In describing the phenomena studied, the learnings focused on language that accentuated aesthetics and the primacy of the living body. This emphasis on linguistics and poetics naturally invited an unfolding curiosity for, and intimacy with, the unsaid qualities of the participants' experiences. Les Todres writes that this type of participatory involvement indicates a flavor of radical openness and a continuity of self with the world.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, David Abrams describes this quality of reciprocation in perception as an improvised duet between an animal body and the fluid, breathing landscape in which it is embedded.<sup>8</sup> In asking participants to reflect on what they shared throughout the research, one aim was to have their bodily-mediated intimacy with their lost attachment figure(s) creatively and responsively filtered through their own aesthetic sensibilities and ways of knowing. As an art-based methodology, Imaginal Inquiry allowed this research to leverage participants' creative imagination as a methodological instrument, enlightening the aesthetic qualities of their memories, and carving out a place of honor for artistic ways of knowing and learning about grief.



Through the interpretation phase, researchers occupied themselves with identifying key moments, responding to those moments, exploring differences and parallels between them, and ultimately contextualizing their interpretations with theory and myth. Key moments also emerged out of analysis of the data transcripts. Transcripts were analyzed using intuitive and narrative condensation techniques, with a specific effort placed on distinguishing between subjective, idiographic phenomena, and group patterns and dynamics. As a phenomenological inquiry, this inquiry was investigating the subjective experience of sensing the presence of a loved one who had died. That said, because Imaginal Inquiry recognizes participatory consciousness as the true nature of humanity, the learnings also drew heavily from the intersubjective domain of the research environment. Learning One and Learning Four are specifically looking at the impact of the intersubjective domain on the subjective experience of grief. Learning Three is more specifically about the subjective experience of grief. Finally, Learning Two is addressing the archetypal and mythic dimensions of bereavement.

Participants were invited to identify key moments in an attempt to recruit their help in evaluating the trustworthiness of researcher-led analysis, and to deepen the investigation. Participants were instructed that key moments are those junctures in time when they sense something significant and meaningful has occurred, and they were asked to identify these moments. To this end, the ITP definition of reflexive participation describes a capacity that was essential in the recruited participants. Participant reflexivity was sought whenever interpretations were being integrated into the research. Specifically, this happened when participants were reflecting on what was shared in the

group, and on what artwork was created by participants. Reflexivity was also a critical capacity for identifying key moments when journaling.

The integration phase of this research was directed at both the participants and to the wider communities of grief and psychology researchers. Participant integration data was generated through ritualizing processes that were integral to all the research activities. Ritualizing in the integration phase unleashed the potential of Imaginal Inquiry for exploring the transformative range of this delicate and emotionally-rich topic.

### **Co-Researchers**

Ursula Kremer and Dr. Victoria Bloom assisted as co-researchers for this project. Both are graduates of Meridian University and both are versed in Imaginal Inquiry. Ursula and I shared the same cohort, and attended one year of coursework together, while Victoria and I trained together for one year as psychological assistants. She was nearly done with her training, and during this time she obtained a license to practice psychology.

Ursula initially intended to assist with both days of data collection, but she was sick and unable to participate completely. She provided essential items for the altar sequence, including candles and cloths, which were key in setting the emotional tone for the altar sequence. She arrived before the first data collection session to bring these items, but she was not able to stay much longer.

Victoria took a leadership role in creating the emotional tenor of the research environment, freeing me up to focus on details of the data collection and research. She

attended both data collection sessions and helped to manifest and identify key moments in the research with her keen capacity for reflexive participation and insightful interpretation. Her contributions to the research are particularly evident in Learning One.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

As discussed in the literature review, both numinous experiences and SOP experiences are known to resist evocation. Playfulness, reverence, and spontaneity were encouraged in the research environment in order to evoke the elusive phenomena under investigation. This was accomplished by means of ritualizing. The literature review clarified that SOP experiences can refer to a wide range of phenomena, from a full sensory experience of a fleshy presence to a vague sense of an uncanny presence. In order to allow for this range of phenomena, these participants were chosen who had previously experienced the numinous sense of a lost loved one. Additionally, the storytelling sequence was specifically focused on earlier SOP experience(s), and the meaning-making that resulted. Despite all these preparations, the evocative potential of the core experience was a significant limitation on this inquiry.

The intense nature of grief placed an additional limit on the research. There was a legitimate concern about participants becoming dysregulated during the data collection process. Selection criteria for recruiting participants, therefore, were designed to address this limitation. That said, participants had to be willing to talk about their bereavement experiences with a group of strangers. It turned out that there were many potential participants who were not willing or able to do this, and so there were additional social

limitations placed on the research. Cultural practices giving preference to private grief expressions limited the pool of those who would agree to join this group.

Because there were no male participants, this dissertation was limited in its ability to research male grief outside of my perspective as the lead researcher. In detailing the gendered experience of grief, Kenneth Doka's research found a disparity in the way society regulates the expressions of grief by women and men.<sup>9</sup>

### **Participants**

The original research proposal called for eight to ten participants meeting as a single group over the course of two consecutive Saturday meetings. This number of participants was chosen in order to address concerns over the possibility of attrition, as well as concerns over the possibility of participants becoming dysregulated and needing to withdraw from the data collection. As it turned out, attrition was a substantial problem. Four potential participants withdrew in the week preceding the first data collection session. Two other potential participants who wanted to attend but were unable to commit to attending the first session, also officially withdrew.

Four participants made it to the first data collection session, which ended up being the main source of data. Unfortunately, none of these participants were able to attend the second data collection session. Two people who could not attend the first meeting were able to attend the second meeting. The research design was altered to have these two people go through the full research sequence. All total, my study ended up including data from six participants. Data from the first session was the primary source

for the learnings presented in Chapter Four, even though these participants missed the two research activities planned for the second day.

The time structure of the research activities in the first data collection session was adjusted to accommodate fewer participants. This was accomplished by loosening the time restrictions on participant sharing and inter-participant appreciation. The need for participants to journal their responses decreased, as there was enough time for everyone to speak completely. The result of this change was an exploration of the subjective accounts of the six participants that would not have been as deep if there had been ten participants. Breadth was exchanged for depth. When I mentioned to the participants at the end of the first day that originally there were supposed to be ten people attending, Peggy (pseudonym) said that she did not think the research would have worked as well with that many people. Using the language of ITP, participants were exposed to greater reflexivity and focused attention in the smaller group. Learning One in Chapter Four specifically looks at the elements of the research container that facilitated this exposure to reflexivity.

Because the loss of a loved one is a ubiquitous experience, and because the literature review showed that SOP experiences are common among the bereaved, participants were recruited exclusively by word-of-mouth. It was thought that people would be motivated to participate in order to have a venue to talk about their loss. Additionally, it was thought that people would want to join because, as the literature review showed, SOP experiences are often positive moments in bereavement. Regardless of their motivation for attending, the research proposal expected only modest psychological shifts for participants. Because the literature review showed the

importance of having SOP experiences validated, it was proposed that some shift could happen for people who had not otherwise experienced interpersonal validation of their experience.<sup>10</sup>

Initial contact was made with participants via text message or email. After that, all participant screening conversations were conducted as audio phone calls. Acceptance or exclusion of potential participants was handled at the conclusion of the screening interview. There was widespread interest in joining the research, but the majority of people screened could not make the chosen dates for data collection. Additionally, there were three participants who were interested in attending but were not comfortable sharing about their loss in the group format. One of these additional people was exceptionally motivated to participate; see appendix fifteen for a transcript excerpt from a supplemental telephone interview with just her.

The time and place chosen for the data collection sessions impacted who participated in the research. The Finnish Hall in Berkeley, CA was booked more than six weeks before the chosen dates of February 29 and March 7, 2020. Setting dates for the research prior to having secured participants both helped and hindered the recruitment process. While many interested people were busy on the chosen dates, having rented a venue lent recruitment a beneficial urgency.

Another factor impacting participant recruitment was the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Concerns over contracting this contagious virus were just beginning in early March, and this concern was mentioned several times in the screening interviews. Also, two people who participated in the first data collection session were not able to attend the second session because of illness. Fear over the pandemic inhibited their

willingness to expose other participants to what might have been a deadly medical situation.

The main inclusion criteria for selecting participants was that they had had at least one prior SOP experience, and that they would want to repeat this experience. As seen in the literature review, SOP phenomena are defined so broadly that this criteria is more representative of how they relate to the phenomena than to any specific qualities of the phenomena itself. A second inclusion criteria was that participants had to be adults who have experienced a significant loss no less than six months ago. I made it clear when sharing the flier that the newly bereaved were not appropriate candidates for my research, so this limitation did not need to be directly addressed in the recruitment conversation.

All participants identified as white females in their fifties and sixties, with the exception of Sofia who, though in the same age group, identified as Hispanic and Native American. Her impact on the research is the focus of Learning Four. Race played an important role in this research. The importance of race in this dissertation is in alignment with the findings of Roberts et al. that race impacts how people behave, think, and develop.<sup>11</sup>

### **Four Phases of Imaginal Inquiry**

Imaginal Inquiry separates the research process into four phases: evoking experience, expressing experience, interpreting experience, and integrating experience. Traditional qualitative interviewing includes the first two of these phases, with interpretative and integrative activities being optional components of most interviews.

Imaginal Inquiry is unique in separating integrative and interpretive activities from evocative and expressive activities. All four phases are essential steps in Imaginal Inquiry. This section of the methodology chapter details how the four phases of Imaginal Inquiry manifested in the research.

### **Evoking Experience**

The evocation phase of this research sought to manifest the core phenomena investigated: a numinous sense of a lost loved one's presence. Sensing the presence of a lost loved one is, in many cases, a numinous experience; as such, this phenomena is known to resist evocation. SOP experiences are reported in the literature as pleasant and awe-inspiring by some researchers and other researchers have pointed to externalized sensory experiences of a lost loved one as being associated with more complicated grief, fear, and distress. The evocation phase was informed by this earlier research. While both internalized and externalized SOP experiences are potentially numinous and were considered desirable for this research, it was anticipated that internalized SOP feeling states would be more readily evoked than externalized SOP experiences that include data emerging from the five senses. Additionally, because the numinous qualities of grief affect are indicative of loss intensity, the evocation needed to account for the possibility of a dysregulated response from participants. These concerns made the evocation phase of this research particularly delicate.

The opening ritual was an essential evocation that impacted all four research learnings. Led by Victoria, this ritual encouraged participants to strive for psychological reflexivity by welcoming in a variety of images and energies that would foster the



desired conditions for the research environment. Additionally, this ritual was essential in the formulation of Learning One. Learning One details participant reactions to the opening ritual and describes how it ended up being so important to the research. The full transcript of the opening ritual is available in appendix seventeen.

After the opening ceremony, ritualization continued to be a primary means of evocation for both the altar sequence and the storytelling sequence. See Appendix 9 and Appendix 10 for more details. Ritualized evocations are employed in ITP, the guiding theory in which Imaginal Inquiry is grounded. Omer writes, “when we ritualize, we imaginatively deepen our participation in the necessities, meanings, and possibilities inherent in the present moment.”<sup>12</sup> In order to honor the bereavement process, the evocations for the altar sequence and the storytelling sequence were uniquely ritualized with each participant. In these two research activities, the evocation-expression sequences emerged organically and were co-constructed by researchers and participants allowing for spontaneity. While it is somewhat unusual to not have a more specifically scripted evocation, allowing for spontaneous emergence in this phase elicited the environmental and emotional conditions needed to access the phenomena.

Participants were asked in the screening interviews to bring linking objects to the data collection sessions, and these linking objects were used as props in the altar sequence. They were described to the participants in everyday language during the screening interview. In fact, part of the intent of the screening interview was to brainstorm potential linking objects. All participants except Sofia (pseudonym) brought linking objects to the data collection sessions.

It was anticipated that linking objects would serve to foreground the affective dimension of the evocation phase. Reisen wrote that activities that incorporate the five senses recruit the bodies of the bereaved into the recollection process.<sup>13</sup> She described several examples of potentially evocative linking objects that incorporate the five senses, including: the taste of food that was cherished by the lost loved one, meaningful imagery to view, music to listen to, and scents to smell. In this way, participants' embodiment can impact what gets evoked through their affective participation.

In addition to evocation activities for the altar and storytelling sequence, participants during the second data collection session joined in an intensive evocation based on a guided imagery script by Courtney Armstrong.<sup>14</sup> They were instructed to lie prone on the floor, or to simply close their eyes and get comfortable in their chair for a ten minute evocation aiming to elicit a sense of their lost loved one's presence. This activity included dialoguing with the emergent imagery. After this, participants transitioned into constructing a collage to represent what emerged during the guided imagery exercise. The collage activity itself had a brief evocation in the form of a prompt for working with the collage materials.

### **Expressing Experience**

This research sought to evoke a numinous sense of a lost loved one's presence. Several researchers have emphasized that this is an exceptionally difficult phenomena to evoke. For example, in his essay, *Interpreting Numinous Experience*, Dan Mekur bluntly claimed that numinous experience is subjective, and, like aesthetic experience, cannot be

evoked on demand.<sup>15</sup> Specifically regarding the numinous SOP phenomena, grief researcher Roberta Conant found that it tended to occur unexpectedly.<sup>16</sup> This research was designed to engage with these evocation difficulties.

In Imaginal Inquiry, the expression phase responds to what was evoked in the evocation phase in such a way as to make up evocation-expression sequences. Participant expressions can themselves be evocative. When this happens, a new sequence begins with the potential for responding to whatever was newly evoked. The research design provided participants with multiple modalities for expressing their responses to the numinous sense of a lost loved one, including movement, verbal responses, art-based responses, and journaling. Verbal responses could include an imaginal dialogue with the deceased. There is a precedent for this type of expression in Field's research.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Walter indicates that talking to the dead is one of the ways in which relationships are maintained after a death.<sup>18</sup>

Participants were provided with a basic structure of how to respond when the phenomena were evoked, however this structure was intentionally kept minimal in order to allow for reflexivity to guide their expression toward participatory consciousness shared with the group. While participants were not led to believe that joining in the research would be transformative, it was hoped that the experience of reflectivity shared in a group would manifest what Fosha calls the Healing Affects. The Healing Affects were detailed in Chapter Two.

The expression phase was guided by the Imaginal Inquiry principle of, "exploration before explanation." Hillman's suggestion to, "stick with the image," was also followed throughout the research.<sup>19</sup> These principles helped to maximize reflexivity

and to capture what was most emergent for participants. To this effect, researchers used open-ended questions that allowed participant storytelling to develop organically with little leading and shaping of what they expressed.

For the altar sequence, participants expressed themselves in movement when they put their linking objects on the altar, and verbally introduced their lost loved one, and shared some details about their relationship and the death. Movement expression was minimal and subtle but served to emphasize and highlight what was being shared verbally. Participants were informed that storytelling was the primary expressive modality for both the altar sequence and the storytelling sequence. During the research, Sofia reflected that the format taken was a conversational style similar to what is called “talk story” in Hawaiian culture. Victoria responded that the format was also similar to what is called “council” in Native American culture. The small group size allowed for this approach to be taken. This format also allowed Victoria and I to leverage our experience facilitating therapy groups in order to manage the group dynamics and processes. The intent was to direct participant expressions toward the desired research goals and away from providing therapeutic support for grief.

After the imaginal dialogue sequence, participants were given instructions for the collage activity. Each participant was handed a large piece of paper. Two large folding tables had been arranged with art supplies, and a selection of used picture books were provided for collage imagery. Art supplies included glue, scrapers, scissors, razor knives, pastels, colored pencils, and tape. Music was played from the *Musical Therapy* Spotify playlist.<sup>20</sup> Participants were engrossed and silently worked in this expression sequence

for more than twenty minutes. Because they were keenly focused, this activity required a firm time constraint.

Participant expressions were video recorded, and a written transcript was made of the audio portion of these recordings. Victoria and I both closely observed participant movement and gestures throughout data collection, and the video recordings were reviewed whenever more movement data was needed.

Anticipating ten participants, the research design placed a strong emphasis on journaling. However, because all participants had enough time to speak, journaling was less important than originally anticipated. Journaling did, however, allow for participants to include content in the research that they did not want to actively talk about in the conversation. Michelle's contribution to Learning Three included private musings that were revealed to the group later.

### **Interpreting Experience**

The primary task in the third phase of Imaginal Inquiry is to engage with and analyze the data accumulated in the evocation and expression phases. The interpretation phase entails four steps: identifying key moments in the research, responding to these moments, collaborating with others to explore parallels and differences in the responses, and finally contextualizing what emerges with theory and myth. Omer defines key moments in this way: "A moment may be imagined as the soul's punctuation of time... as the soul's experience of a unit of time. Moments make time meaningful, the way grammar makes speech meaningful."<sup>21</sup> This definition was shared with participants

early in the research so it could impact their journaling and the inter-participant appreciation.

Both participants and researchers identified key moments intuitively throughout the data collection sessions in their journals. Additionally, Victoria and I spent time brainstorming key moments at the end of each day of research, after participants had left the venue. The original research design called for recruiting participants into the identification of key moments in the second meeting, after they had had a week to metabolize experiences from the first meeting. Because no participants from the first meeting attended the second meeting, the video recordings of the first meeting were closely reviewed in order to identify moments that generated significant amounts of energy, excitement, and compassion during the inter-participant appreciation.

In addition to the intuitive identification of key moments, transcripts were professionally produced from the video recordings, and these transcripts were subjected to a systematic data analysis. With the exception of the supplemental interview conducted with Lisa (pseudonym), all transcripts were generated by Averbach Transcriptions, an online company operating out of New York, NY. The supplemental interview was transcribed by the lead researcher.

Kvale lists five steps for the empirical phenomenological method of textual analysis taken by this research. These are: 1) Get a sense of the interview text as a whole. 2) Generate natural meaning units. 3) Develop simple themes out of these meaning units. 4) Interrogate the meaning units in relation to the research problem, and 5) Developing a cumulative learning for the research.<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Smith, the author of *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*, points out a significant issue when conducting this type of

formal data condensation on transcripts from a group meeting such as seen in this research. Smith describes data from group meetings as potentially representative of subjective, idiographic accounts. He writes it can be, alternatively, more representative of group patterns and dynamics. Smith cautions researchers to carefully parse out the subjective, experiential narratives of participants from those narratives that emerge from the group as a whole.<sup>23</sup> Of the four learnings produced in Chapter Four, Learning Three is more idiographic than the other three learnings which have more of a group focus. This arrangement, however, is in keeping with the chosen methodology. Learning communities are emphasized in Imaginal Inquiry in order to leverage group patterns and dynamics as key components of psychological transformation.

All total, the 186 pages of transcripts were parsed seven times. For the first two passes through the data, the researcher worked to maintain an open mind, noting moments of interest, and striving to enter the participant's world. The goal for these early readings was to model an overall structure of the data, and to ascertain how certain narratives bound key data elements into cohesion. The third time the transcripts were parsed, the initial comments were further elaborated on in such a way so as to emphasize their descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual qualities; this approach originated in Smith's book.<sup>24</sup> Finally, the transcripts were parsed four more times to excerpt segments that spoke to the four individual learnings. Separate documents were created for each learning, and these derived documents were reviewed and referenced when the learning chapter was constructed.

ITP was the primary theory guiding the interpretation. The practical result of using ITP as the primary lens in the interpretation phase was to highlight the reflexivity

of the researchers. This emphasis was made explicit in Chapter Four, with sections for each learning investigating the subjective disposition of the lead researcher.

The primary myth guiding the research proposal is the story of Rumi and his response to the loss of his dear friend, Shams. This myth is most easily seen reflected in Learning Three. The proposal did not anticipate the impact of indigenous animal mythologies on this research. Learning Two is dedicated to contextualizing the research through an exploration of the animal imagery.

### **Integrating Experience**

Transformation is emphasized in the final phase of Imaginal Inquiry. In addition to considering how the research might be transformative for participants on a personal level, in the fourth phase, the researchers are tasked with considering how the implications of this research could be integrated into the wider academic communities. Phase four strives to communicate newly emerged knowledge in such a way that it is empowering and lasting. This is of particular importance for the participants, as those most personally impacted by the research.

Due to the evocative nature of grief, the research design used ritualizing to facilitate integrative activities throughout the day, and to close both data collection sessions. Ritualizing was a key ingredient of this research, precisely because of its integrative function. One benefit of the smaller group size was an increase in the time available for ritualizing during this phase. Participants were recruited into the ritualizing process in order to deepen their experience.



Just as she led the opening rituals, Victoria also led the closing rituals for both data collection sessions. Participants were invited to ritualistically remove their linking objects from the altar, and the prompts given by researchers were weighted toward integration. The altar integration script is available in appendix eleven. Given the ample amount of time available, we were able to dedicate 25 percent of the time available for data collection activities to integration.

Dennis Klass's research found that, while there is a powerful urge to resolve grief in western contexts, the grief of a parent for a lost child might not match traditional expectations.<sup>25</sup> His research points to a tendency to strive for culturally known formulations of grief integration. Efforts were made in the integration phase of this research to reflexively engage with our pre-existing beliefs about how loss should be integrated. This was in keeping with Imaginal Inquiry's stated goal of not bypassing the shadow-side of the topic under inquiry.

The original research proposal called for sharing preliminary learnings with participants at the second data collection meeting, in the expectation that integrative experiences would emerge from this discussion. Not only was this not an option due to attendance, but preliminary learnings were also not ready at this time. However, the Summary of Learnings was shared with participants with the publication of the document, providing them with additional opportunities for integrative experiences. See Appendix 20.

This research will be integrated into the greater academic community with the publication of the dissertation. The document will be made publicly available online for future researchers to review.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **LEARNINGS**

#### **Introduction and Overview**

The research findings presented in this chapter are represented as learnings in order to emphasize the variety of data considered. Data sources include participant stories, movements and art, theoretical concepts and principles, and the experiences, insights, and perceptions of the researchers. This study looks at the experiences of six participants in relation to the following research problem: how does encouraging the bereaved to sense the presence of a lost loved one impact the process of grief? It was hypothesized that being allowed and encouraged to fully express and explore these presence-sensing experiences can help to diversify and animate grief. This research explores phenomena where the presence of the deceased has been sensed. As such, the topic of grief was central to this inquiry. An emphasis was placed on phenomenology throughout the research endeavor. Phenomenology emerged as a tool particularly well-suited for the generation of new knowledge and meaning in bereavement.

The following pseudonyms were used throughout this document to protect participants' privacy: Becca, Sofia, Michelle, Peggy, Mary, Lisa, and Tina. Additionally, personal details that could be used to identify a participant have been altered or removed from the transcripts.

Six components of each learning are presented. The first component is a description of what happened during the data collection sessions that led to this learning. Second, the affective impact of these experiences on researchers are described. The third component is an exploration of the researcher's personal biases and preconceptions. The fourth component of each learning is a description of the theoretical concepts undergirding the interpretations. Researcher and participant interpretation comprise the fifth component. Validity considerations for each learning make up the sixth and final component.

The third component frames the starting biases of researchers using the ITP concept of imaginal structures. Imaginal structures were defined in the literature review. During the individuation process, imaginal structures are transmuted into enhanced capacities and a transformed identity. Participants work with their imaginal structures is particularly evident in Learning Three, and researcher work with imaginal structures is seen in the third component of all four learnings.

### **Cumulative Learning: Participatory Heartache and the Felt Sense of Eternity**

The cumulative learning for this research is that an expanded sense of time can emerge when the bereaved gather to share their longing for reconnection. This cumulative learning aligns with the research hypothesis and represents the convergence of four distinct learnings.

An understanding of the cumulative learning is deepened when it is contextualized as research produced in the United States, a country famously characterized by former president John Kennedy as a nation of immigrants.<sup>1</sup> The United

States Census Bureau defines ancestry as, “a person’s ethnic origin, heritage, descent, or ‘roots,’ which may reflect their place of birth, place of birth of parents or ancestors, and ethnic identities that have evolved within the United States.” In the 2000 reporting period, census respondents often listed one or possibly two ancestries, including, “American.”<sup>2</sup> This context brings complexity and diversity to the ancestral ties that can emerge when participating in grief rituals.

All four learnings are expressed using the language of ITP, the guiding theory in which this research is situated. ITP concepts essential to the learnings include cultural gatekeeping, participatory consciousness, psychological multiplicity, imaginal structures, ritual leadership, ritual trust, and creative ritual.

This chapter relies on three concepts from Hillman: pothos, personifying and psychologizing. All these concepts promote ITP’s agenda to support soulful living. *Pothos* is Hillman’s term for archetypal longing. Houston’s phrase for archetypal longing is the *Search for the Beloved*. Learning Three is specifically about the Search for the Beloved. Hillman’s concepts of personifying and psychologizing were discussed at length in the literature review. Personifying is particularly important to Learning Two, and it is practiced in the Imaginal Structures sections.

This chapter also relies on Jean Houston’s concept of mythologizing. As seen in the literature review, for Hillman, different types of divine energy or, “gods,” represent different attitudes and subjective visions.<sup>3</sup> Houston’s concept of mythologizing brings consciousness to which “gods” get embodied when psychologizing. Mythologizing represents an effort to connect with what she calls, “the Greater Story,” of life.<sup>4</sup> Feeling connected to this Greater Story brings a sense of high play for Houston. She writes that,

when connected to the Greater Story, patterns of healing and justice emerge among the symbols and metaphors that help people contain and make sense of existence. Learnings Two and Four are specifically about mythologizing and connecting to the Greater Story.

Finally, Houston's idea that the death of a loved one is a sacred wound permeates all the learnings in this chapter. She writes,

...soulmaking begins with the wounding of the psyche by the Larger Story. Soulmaking requires that you die to one story to be reborn to a larger one. A renaissance, a rebirth, occurs not just because there is a rising of ancient and archetypal symbols. A renaissance happens because *the soul is breached*. In this wounding, the psyche is opened up and new questions begin to be asked about who we are in our depths. These powerful questions need not lead to alienation and withdrawal, but can lead to the seeding of the world with the newly released powers of the psyche.<sup>5</sup>

To this effect, the cumulative learning for this research emerged from the soulmaking efforts of participants as they engaged in the storytelling activities.

Each of the learnings emerged from an analysis of the video recordings, the journals, and the transcribed data. After multiple readings of the raw transcripts, choice excerpts presented themselves, and each was paired with a descriptive sentence. Co-researchers were invited to collaboratively comment on these pairings, further enriching the interpretive sieve. Learning One states that, for newly-formed grief groups, experienced ritual leaders can greatly reduce the impact of cultural and personal blocks to grieving. The concepts of participatory consciousness, ritual leaders and initiation were all discussed in the literature review. Learning Two claims animals often appear in the grief narratives of people who are receptive to sensing the presence of lost loved ones. Learning Two further claims that the creative perception of this imagery energizes and sanctifies the grief process. Participants personified animal imagery as autonomous sources of knowledge about their grief, making the second learning a potential indicator

of participation in the greater story of life. Mythologizing and personifying are critical concepts in Learning Two. Learning Three contends that the desire to feel whole can lead the bereaved toward an authentic and integrated sense of the departed when they reassess their pre-loss understanding of problematic relationships. A longing for wholeness also led to the final learning. Houston's concept of the Search for the Beloved is a key component of these learnings. Learning Four claims that when presence-sensing experiences feel authentic, bereavement can lead to an expanded sense of time, into both the past and the future. Learning Four rests at the heart of the cumulative learning of this research. The titles for these learnings are as follows: Grief Potentiates Sacred Space, Welcoming in the Animals, Longing for Wholeness, and Encountering a Sense of Ancestry.

### **Learning One: Grief Potentiates Sacred Space**

Learning One states that, for newly-formed grief groups, experienced ritual leaders can greatly reduce the impact of cultural and personal blocks to grieving. Participants' comments about the quality of the research environment revealed that the environment itself was an essential component of the research. Specifically, Victoria's management of the environment was identified as an essential ingredient. This learning further suggests that bereavement itself potentiated the emergence of participatory consciousness for participants because the encapsulating culture did not otherwise address grief. Skilled ritual leadership helped participants navigate this cultural awkwardness. The sacral quality of the emergent consciousness was intensified for

participants by the subject matter, by our capacity as a group for presence, and by the researcher's combined capacity to holding space for the group.

### **What Happened**

This learning emerged from the opening ceremony, where Victoria ritualistically guided participants into what she called sacred space. She used Tibetan chimes to mark the beginning of the ceremony, then led participants through several embodiment practices, including a body scan and breathing exercises. Immediately after the ceremony, she encouraged participants to tend to their interiors by saying, “before we start, I'd like to say something so I don't forget; there is something special about sacred space. Even when we meet for lunch, there's a way to keep sacred space. Because it does... it does something to your awareness. And so just notice that.” Victoria suggested a specific participatory attitude when she said, “we are going to kind of go with the flow, and really pay attention to what occurs in the group and how it needs to be attended to.” Finally, she urged self-care at the closing ceremony when she said,

don't forget as you leave here that you have been in some ways an altered state. [group laughter] so be with that. And to make sure that you are grounded and you get some good sleep tonight and take care of yourself in a really physical way and just be aware, because it can be easy when you are in this kind of ceremonial space to be spaced out – so just take real care.

Everyone in the room attended the opening ceremony with rapt reverence, and Michelle (pseudonym) made a comment which highlighted Victoria's leadership role afterwards when she said, “... I do hold teachers to a different echelon sometime.” This was in reference to Victoria's invitation for participants to add to the opening ceremony.

Michelle's journaling also reflected her appreciation of the opening ceremony when she wrote, "I felt special to be included in the sacred space: wanted, included, welcomed."

This learning depends on the appreciation of the opening ceremony. Peggy was eager to share her comments, saying, "I might jump in and say that the opening ceremony was amazing. And I don't know what other people... how they feel. But I kind of feel like my cup is running over." Michelle also used a water metaphor to describe her reawakened internal state: "I'm really excited to swim in it. ... Once I got in here, once I got here though, it's great to sink into the processes that we'd already gone through. And I don't get that in my daily life. Well, not anymore." In her journal, Peggy (pseudonym) wrote that she was struck by Michelle's readiness to swim in it.

Next comes a comment from Becca (pseudonym), who had been quite apprehensive about joining the research:

I'm [Becca]. And I was — I didn't expect to feel this way when I got here. I'm going through a lot of — I'm going through a lot. And the last three, four months I've decided to just really be with it, with the pain. It has been the hardest thing I've ever done in my life. And constantly in... I am... my daughter died; she was 23. She committed suicide in 2009.

Peggy journaled about Becca's surprise at how she was feeling upon arrival in sacred space. Becca's surprise affect shows her focus shifting from her daughter's death to the feelings that surprised her upon her arrival.

The participants' ongoing processing of what emerged during the research further demonstrates the particulars of this learning. For example, after she had gone through a long list of people, she honors each year during Día de Muertos, the Mexican Day of the Dead, Sofia (pseudonym) said with a relieved tone, "Well, thank you for that. I needed it. I didn't realize I needed to get that out." Similarly, Michelle reported feeling lighter



after her experience during the altar exercise. After her experience with the altar exercise, Becca emphasized the spatial and social aspects of her experience, saying, “Thank you. Thank you, all. Thanks for absolutely the perfect place to do that personal [unintelligible], and all of you, too, because you’re part of it. Thank you so much. Thank you, all.” Later, after the storytelling sequence, Michelle’s reflections on her own sharing are indicative of her affective state: “So that is the [unintelligible] that I’m noticing in myself, I feel different now. So, thank you all for a great space, for talking and questioning, and with the feedback afterwards, like the closure. So, there’s this whole part in the process.” Finally, Peggy agreed with Michelle that the mesmerizing quality of the stories being told was both more powerful than the extensive amount of ambient noise seeping in from other groups in the building when she said, “I agree, it makes me laugh, both. Like, obviously we need to have a sacred space with lots of noise.”

### **How I was Affected**

I was relieved when the opening ceremony began. I had been planning the data collection sessions for several months and as much as I wanted data, I wanted to be done with the entire process. I was excited that it was finally happening, and I had a sharp focus on what I could observe with my senses, including my sense of the group.

The comments I made after the personal introductions reflect some of the affective qualities of my experience upon entering sacred space: “It feels great. I haven’t done any group work in a long time. It feels really good to be here, you guys. Thank you so much for doing all this.” Introductions made up the first activity following the

opening ceremony. Throughout the day I felt warmth and gratitude toward the whole group for participating, and especially toward Victoria for all that she brought to the meetings. The gratitude toward Victoria increased through the day as I took in her contributions to the group and her impact on the project.

My mind was sent racing when Victoria invited other group members to participate in the opening ceremony. I felt like it was important for someone else to contribute, and I felt a degree of mild panic and anxiety as I failed to come up with something to say. I was relieved when Peggy contributed.

### **Imaginal Structures in Use**

When reflecting on the role I played in this learning, I consistently hear an interior voice assert that I should have been the one performing the opening ritual. I did not have an opening ritual of my own to perform, and I did not know exactly what Victoria was going to do for the ceremony. Nevertheless, there is a part of me who feels as if because I did not adopt this essential opening role, I have not lived up to my full potential as a researcher.

In ITP parlance, this self-critical part of myself is associated with gatekeeping. One productive task when an interior gatekeeping voice is identified is to find the voice of the Friend who will respond to the gatekeeper. As such, the Friend informs me that, during the opening ceremony I was focused on the research, the primary task at hand. The opening ceremony allowed me to reflect on the function of ritual leadership in the ceremony from a third person point of view. If I had led the ritual, my reflections would have been a more personal first person account. In this way the authenticity of this

learning was enhanced by our combined leadership. Victoria and I worked in synergy to produce high quality data that was tightly bound to the specific phenomena we were researching.

The young fourteen-year-old part of myself who is still, at times, bereaved, was longing for initiation in the same way as the participants. He was envious of Becca, who seemed much more serious and intent on her goal. This structure includes gratitude for Victoria, for being there for me and the other participants. This structure was more interested in participating than leading or researching, and he was excited for the activities to come. At that time, I had been thinking about these data collection sessions for months, and I wanted to share my stories with the group too.

### **Theoretical Concepts Upon Which Interpretations are Based**

The research design called for participants to be screened for inclusion based on their capacity for reflexive participation. Omer defines reflexive participation as, “the practice of surrendering through creative action to the necessities, meanings, and possibilities inherent in the present moment.”<sup>6</sup> Ritual and ritualizing are techniques that groups frequently employ for making this happen. Victoria’s execution of the opening ceremony demonstrated her capacity for facilitating this type of group work, cultivating ritual trust at the outset of the data collection sessions.

Victoria used the phrase “sacred space” to refer to the open mode of being that she enacted and manifested on behalf of the group when she performed the opening ceremony. First seen in the literature review, Eliade introduced this concept to reflect a specific mode of being in the world that empowers people to assign meaning to life’s

experiences. When he writes that the establishment of sacred space found the world he is speaking to this ontological shift. In Eliade's sacred space, understanding emerges through group processes that serve as a containing environment, including the skillful facilitation of the process.<sup>7</sup> Participatory consciousness is a parallel term in ITP that emphasizes the participatory nature of reality. This learning claims that participants eased into the research setting because they were, as bereaved, reflexively responding to the welcoming invitation presented by this research opportunity.

Robert Moore alternatively uses the phrases “ritual leader,” and “ritual elder” for the role we researchers played in transforming the research environment into a sacred space. He writes that truly liminal and transformative spaces are always stewarded by ritual elders. What is more, he describes the difficult process of initiation as one that must be “submitted” to.<sup>8</sup> The prototype he gives for ritual leadership is Winnicott’s concept of the “good-enough mother.” For Winnicott, the good-enough mother is a care provider who actively adapts to the child’s needs. This adaptation lessens over time as the child learns new skills and develops a tolerance for failure in the learning process.<sup>9</sup>

Moore claims that a failure of ritual leadership manifests as inadequate initiatory processes.<sup>10</sup> This claim is starkly suggestive in cultural contexts that privatize grief to such an extent that leadership of any kind is not available to the bereaved. Moore’s use of the word “elder” also points to a type of social structure that is not valued in modern times. Robert Bly introduced the concept of the sibling society to represent social structures formulated around peer relationships, where elders and authorities are discounted.<sup>11</sup> Bereft of ritual elders, access to truly initiatory grief rituals is limited in sibling societies.

In ITP, participatory consciousness is a state of consciousness devoid of gatekeeping dynamics. Cultural trends that police and privatize grief directly oppose the states of consciousness that, for Moore, facilitate initiation.<sup>12</sup> Omer calls this cultural gatekeeping which was previously discussed in chapter two.<sup>13</sup>

For Fosha, change is brought about through three meta-therapeutic processes, each characterized by distinct affective markers.<sup>14</sup> Participants' reflections on the opening ceremony were such a meta-process, where they described their experience of the research. When engaged in this type of meta-processing, Fosha watches for specific affective markers that indicate the transformative potential of the moment. One marker seen throughout this research was what Fosha simply calls the experience of emotional pain for deprivations and losses. Another marker important for this learning comes in two basic types: the experience of feeling touched, moved or strongly emotional within oneself, and the experience of tenderness, love, gratitude, and appreciation toward an affirming other. Inspired by Fosha's work, this dissertation was designed to include meta-processing at each step of the process, for each participant.

Embedded in this learning is a claim that participants were longing for initiation. This longing is a manifestation of Houston's concept of the Search for the Beloved.<sup>15</sup> Her concept also plays a major role in Learning Three. In this case, Learning One suggests that participants were longing for an initiation into a deeper relationship with their grief. Initiation can function in many contexts. In this case, initiation refers to the major life cycle transition of the loss of a beloved, fleshy, embodied relationship. Van Gennep calls this process a rite of passage.<sup>16</sup> While Victoria and I facilitated their initiation, the participant's hunger for the experience was also a key ingredient.

## **Interpretations**

Learning One states that, for newly-formed grief groups, experienced ritual leaders can greatly reduce the impact of cultural and personal blocks to grieving.

Victoria provided ritual leadership for the opening ceremony: a creative ritual designed to cultivate ritual trust among the participants. As the lead researcher, I also provided ritual leadership, but Victoria led the opening ceremony and actively maintained the boundaries of sacred space throughout the sessions, freeing me up to focus on data collection and other research activities.

This learning implies that, upon arrival at the venue, participants were already motivated to share about their SOP experiences. As researchers, we had an easy time engaging the modes of consciousness needed to collect this data because the numinous nature of the material explored lent itself to participatory consciousness. When modernity undermines legitimacy of personal experience, SOP phenomena are gated at the cultural level, such that the emotionally-dense meanings emerging from these experiences are rarely shared. This research provided an opportunity to validate experiences that might otherwise be judged as hallucinatory and out of alignment with shared reality. The psychological necessity of this kind of validation primed attendants for participating as active ritualizers and mourners who were not only open to the full experience of their grief but were also open to sharing about it with others. The hunger to participate outweighed their apprehensions about what the data collection sessions might involve. The opening ceremony thus served a community-building function, binding together a group of people who were thereafter united in an adventure into the unknown.

Victoria's skillful evocation helped contain the emotional risk inherent in the group's task, while also filling participants with excitement and wonder. This intersubjective energy informed the research and enhanced the impact of the affective and sensorimotor domains of experience.

By their very attendance, participants who made it to the data collection sessions had already demonstrated resistance to the cultural trends that privatize grief. This effort is reflected in the ease with which Victoria and I drew the group into a place of curious receptivity. Becca's commitment to the group was palpable as she described the obstacles she faced to make it to the meeting, and her commitment to the topic was also clear. For several months prior to data collection, Becca had been reflecting on her emotional pain in new ways, and she brought with her to the research this enhanced capacity for self-reflection. The research presented her with an opportunity to not only be reflexive, but to additionally have this reflexivity strengthened as it was mirrored and validated by the group.

The process of sharing appreciation for the opening ritual started a second conversation in the group, in which we began reflecting on the nature of our interactions in addition to the content of the activities. This began the process of giving and sharing the healing affects among the group members. The participants' excitement showed a willingness to continue under our guidance as researchers. Through the opening ceremony, not only had we called into existence a certain way of being in the world and in the group, but we had also transformed the environment into a safe and welcoming place for painful emotions. With the opening ceremony appreciations, we saw Victoria's

role in the group expanding beyond co-researcher into a position traditionally held by shamans and ritual elders.

### **Validity Considerations**

There are three parts to this learning. The first part is a claim that a sacred space was created by Victoria and me for the research container. The second part is dependent on the first part, claiming that participants' grief made the process easier. The third part of this claim is that Victoria and I were functioning as the group's ritual leaders. The validity of this learning could be questioned with concerns for any of these parts, or with their connection.

In addition to our similar educational experiences, Victoria and I also worked together during my training as a psychological assistant at Woods Creek Psychological Group. While working together, we co-facilitated a therapy group, and we participated in a three-and-a-half hour weekly group supervision meeting. All these meetings contained components of creative ritualization. These experiences prepared us for quickly creating the conditions of sacred space during the brief time we met for data collection. We were prepared, we had worked together in the past, and from the beginning we were confident in our ability to create a healthy and safe environment.

One potential criticism of this learning is that we were engaged in the appropriation of indigenous grief practices. But, because the chosen methodology is participatory and experiential, the research was, rather, grounded in the indigenous experience of sacred space. This includes the radical presence of reflexive participation and the relational epistemology of the indigenous shaman.



A final potential criticism of this learning is that this learning does not directly address the SOP phenomena, an essential component of the research problem. Participants were, however, informed that SOP phenomena would be the focus of the inquiry. Their motivation for attending the research is central to this learning. This learning claims that participants were longing for initiation and that part of their hunger was for validation of their previous SOP experiences.

### **Learning Two: Welcoming in the Animals**

Learning Two claims animals often appear in the grief narratives of people who are receptive to sensing the presence of lost loved ones. The creative perception of this imagery energizes and sanctifies the grief process. This learning strives to live up to the mythic potential of the animal forms, and to honor their dignity.

### **What Happened**

During the opening ceremony, Victoria invited several energetic forces into the group. She said the aim was to, "...let in the mystery, the unknown, the place that is both empty and full. And to call in what we usually think of as unseen." After this invitation, Victoria encouraged participants to make invitations of their own. When participants had completed their personal invitations, she spontaneously continued, saying: "And I'm also going to invite in not just the human beings. But also the animal world, the Earth. Because it is also our source, our ancestor, and there's love there. And so, we invite you into our circle. So, thank you. Aho."

Becca was the first participant to bring animal imagery into the conversation when she referred to her daughter's love of animals in the altar sequence. One of the animal forms most cherished by Becca's daughter was "My Little Pony," so Becca brought in two small unicorns to put on the altar. She placed them on either edge facing inward toward the center at a slight angle. Both Peggy and Michelle journaled about the unicorns: Michelle saw them covered in prisms and deepening in color depending on the angle, while Peggy commented on an association between animals and magic. Another item Becca put on the altar was a photo of her daughter at a young age, hugging a big fluffy white dog. Finally, Becca put a pair of handmade earrings on the altar. These earrings were a rare gift from her daughter. She said, "One's a lion, and one's a cat or something." Her daughter, Monica (pseudonym), consciously chose to wear socks that did not match. These earrings held significance for Becca because she felt her daughter had taught her to be more accepting.

A black Rottweiler made an appearance during Peggy's sharing in the altar activity. Peggy said, "I just felt like it came out of me." She said this happened when it saw something that needed to be destroyed. She was horrified that she had a killer dog inside of her, and it was a long process of talking with her husband before she could accept the savage animal beauty and protective qualities of the dog.

The image of a monarch butterfly entered the research setting when Sofia told a story of spending time in the garden she had created as a tribute to her mother. She said,

Anyway, so one day, I had a screen door, and the dogs, they come in and out, and this monarch butterfly comes and lands on my door. I mean, I see butterflies, but not a monarch butterfly. And it comes and lands there, and I'm looking at it and I'm going, 'Mom, is that you?' So I'm like, oh, well the door's open, and I go inside the house and I come back out, and the butterfly's still there. So, then I go

downstairs and I wash some clothes, and I come back and the butterfly's still there.

A lightness overcame Sofia, and she felt like her mother had come to say, “it’s ok, honey.” Sofia’s experience with the butterfly contains remarkable parallels with Lisa’s (pseudonym) experience of feeling greeted by her husband in the image of a falcon. See appendix fifteen for details on the supplemental data collection interview with Lisa.

The gentleness of the butterfly story can be contrasted with Sofia’s story of leaving her kids with their grandmother for several days when she was a young mother. Sofia, now sober for nearly two decades, had been out partying with friends. When they were reunited as a family, the kids said, “Grandma turned the [goat] upside-down and slit the throat, and the blood’s coming down, and they cut it up and cooked it, and we had [unintelligible].”

After this dark image, Sofia later described her relationship with crows: “The crows, I have a lot of crows where I live, and they come on the telephone, on the phone line. I talk to them. ‘Hey brother, I see you. I see you.’ You know, because that’s just my thing.” Victoria mentioned that she spoke with crows too, and then Sofia continued:

See? Because they’ll come and they’ll sit right there. There’s a couple of them in particular that come in on [unintelligible]. I’ll walk outside and I’ll hear “Caw, caw!” I’ll go, “I’m going to the store. I’ll be back. I’ll see you when I get back, okay?” Or else like, “I see you, brother. I see you.”

Crows were cawing outside throughout the data collection sessions.

Mary (pseudonym) contributed to this learning when she put on the altar a framed image of a disembodied large male lion head looking down at a small boy sitting on a boulder. Later in the day, the image of a cougar loomed large in Mary’s paper collage. The synergy between these two images was striking to the whole group.

Tina contributed to this learning when she mentioned what she called a “water skipper,” an insect known for walking on water and cannibalism. The delicate biology of this creature was mirrored in Tina’s tone of voice and the words used for its evocation when sharing about her collage:

... the river is just such a special place for me. It always has been since a child. And I have this one place in my mind where I spent just a lot of time as a child and so much – I felt like even though it’s so familiar, the landscape, I had this new sense of total expansion and the fragileness of, like, a teeny, tiny life and how a teeny tiny creature – and you find where they are, like that’s a whole world. And I could see that in this place where I go. Like, for example, like the water skipper, that’s at the river. And watching the water skipper and then the ring it makes and just that creep – like, it’s so much beauty just in that, right?

Tina’s presentation was delicate, and she continued by telling the group how she and her daughter shared a special connection with owls. She told the story of a tiny newborn owlet and a mama owl, and mentioned she once rescued a baby owl long ago. I was stunned to learn that Tina’s daughter committed suicide approximately one month after the data collection sessions.

Victoria’s collage included the image of a polar ice snake. During the research, Victoria told stories of her many years of participation in a learning community she originally formed with a friend who had recently died. Early on, they found a dead snake on the road which, properly preserved, joined their altar, and became the totem and medicine for their group. Victoria also told several stories about feeling connected to hummingbirds.

### **How I was Affected**

I have a long-established habit of slowing down my activities and consciously acknowledging the arrival of animals around me. For many years I worked from home in a remote town in the Sierra Nevada mountains of Northern California. This arrangement facilitated regular solitary excursions into the National Forest. My habit of consciously acknowledging the animals I encountered on these trips grew over the years, until my time in graduate school, when I started making trips into natural spaces specifically to engage my curiosity about what animals I might meet. Eventually I began to psychologize their appearance, and research their meanings in the psychological and indigenous literature.

My tendency to acknowledge animals in this way means I have a host of automatic thoughts and association with animals I have previously encountered. When Becca put the unicorns on the altar, based on their placement, my first impulse was to think of them as guardians of the altar, as if it were a gate, or a threshold. My first impulsive thought when Peggy mentioned the black Rottweiler inside of her was to speculate that this dog represented her inner animal nature. When I envisioned this creature, I saw it as a menacing outline of a dark, black-and-brown dog without a face. Sofia's description of interacting with a monarch butterfly evoked a similar memory of my own, in which I was completely transfixed by a hovering bumblebee when sitting perfectly still and quiet in the garden. I was stunned by Sofia's story of her children watching a goat be slaughtered; the story immediately brought to mind the notions of sacrifice and parental guilt. One of my automatic thoughts about goats is to reflect on

scapegoating as a common group dynamic, and I reminded myself to stay sensitive to scapegoating.

Like Sofia and Victoria, I too regularly notice and connect with the crows in my daily life. When the group was speaking of crows, I imagined joining the conversation and sharing that I save all the crow feathers I find when walking around town. When Mary introduced the images of a lion and a cougar, I was filled with surprise, remembering Becca's special earrings given to her by her daughter, where one was a lion, and one was a cat. I was deeply touched by Tina's description of a water skipper, and I remember noticing that while this animal was not in her collage, there was a spider web image that reminded me of the concentric rings left by a water skipper. Finally, whenever Victoria referenced the medicine of her learning community's snake totem, I was both apprehensive and appreciative.

Several animal images emerged through my sharing as a participant-researcher, and each contained a significant meaning for me. When reading the poem "Birdwings" by Rumi, the image of birds and wings was colored by my melancholia and acceptance of the ongoing and complicated experience of grief for a lost loved one. I put a bird's nest on the altar, saying it represented my hopes for the research. The bird's nest was, for me, a home for animals, and a place where eggs mature. Finally, there were several animal forms in my collage, including a pair of loris monkeys and a pair of dolphins. I liked the way the monkeys were clinging together, and the image of the dolphins inspired a sadness in me for having lost my playmate so long ago.

The animals that Tina brought to the group came to have a special meaning for me after I learned about her daughter's suicide. Water skippers and owls invariably fill

me with concern for Tina and make me think of grief that entered her life after this research.

### **Imaginal Structures in Use**

I cannot remember a time when I was not tending to one or more active collections. I have collected many things over the course of my life, including books, CDs, MP3s, movies, psychology books, website traffic, academic citations, shirts with snaps, colorful socks, and musical instruments. Imaginal structures have formed around my tendency to gather and collect. During the research, a part of me was covertly collecting animals. Without the participants knowing that I was biased toward this type of data, my attention focused when animals were mentioned by the participants.

These imaginal structures led me to objectify the animals encountered during data collection, despite my intentions not to do so. I arrived with pre-existing ideas and interpretations for some animals, having previously considered common metaphorical associations for different animals in books like *Animal Speak* by Ted Andrews, and *Medicine Cards* by Sams, Carson, and Wernecke. Furthermore, I tend to psychologize and search for meaning in most of my experiences, and I can be reflexively suspicious of stories that devalue that which seems to have come about through happenstance and coincidence.

My tendency to care for others is voiced strongly when I am able to act as a guardian or protector of someone or something who does not seem to be in a position to protect themselves. Given their need to be vulnerable when engaging in research activities, I was protective of the participants. In granting animals their voice, I also see

myself in a protective role, a move that serves to compensate for my experience of anger and sadness at the mass death of animal life.

### **Theoretical Concepts Upon Which Interpretations are Based**

James Hillman provides the primary theoretical base for this learning's exploration of animal forms. Described previously, his concepts of personifying and psychologizing are key to understanding how, both for Hillman and for this research, engagement with animal forms potentially encourages a heightened sensibility for soulfulness and beauty. The imaginal structures sections in this chapter contain several examples of personifying, wherein the structures are named, allowed expressive voice, and consideration given to their meanings. This learning examines the construct validity of Hillman's postmodern anthropomorphism as a source of grief knowledge. Steinar Kvale defined *construct validity* as, "an open process in which to validate is to investigate."<sup>17</sup>

For Hillman, the ambiguous meanings inherent in animal imagery can only be approached via imagination, by means of archetypal psychologizing. This amounts to a "...radical phenomenology: a leopard is a leopard wherever it appears, utterly phenomenal."<sup>18</sup> For Hillman, a radical phenomenological approach to animal imagery will naturally engage the imagination. The radical phenomenology empowering this learning is an example of David Abrams's theory of perception as participation. In describing the participatory nature of perception, Abrams noted that Maurice Merleau-Ponty routinely described the sensible world using the active voice:



Merleau-Ponty writes of the perceived things as entities, of sensible qualities as powers, and of the sensible itself as a field of animate presences, in order to acknowledge and underscore their active, dynamic contributions to the perceptual experience. To describe the animate life of particular things is simply the most precise and parsimonious way to articulate the things as we spontaneously experience them, prior to all our conceptualizations and definitions.<sup>19</sup>

Accordingly, animal imagery in this learning is often described using an active voice.

The purpose of this learning is to psychologize the emergence of animal forms in the data. Psychologizing in this chapter is accomplished by examining the animal imagery found in participant stories. These moments are then mythologized, accentuating participants' animal inheritance. Connections between animals, the ecosystem and grief are described in the phenomenology section of the literature review.

### **Interpretations**

Learning Two claims animals often appear in the grief narratives of people who are receptive to sensing the presence of lost loved ones. These animals add sanctity and energy to the grief process. Several participants expressed themselves with a heightened aesthetic perceptiveness for the animal imagery that was seen in the data collection sessions. Their perceptions were augmented by the beauty of the animals themselves, by the animal bodies, and by the affective tone of the participants. This sensitivity was seen in the way Tina's tone of voice and word choice mirrored the water skipper's anatomy and movement. Similarly, Peggy's description of a black Rottweiler was dense with affect, linguistically mirroring the sharp danger and fear associated with this animal. Animal forms presented themselves throughout the data collection sessions, punctuating time with their passionate and beautiful emergence. Experienced repeatedly by

participants, this dynamism represented a mutual sensuality and attraction that impacted both the animals and the participants.

For both Sofia and Lisa, this channel additionally served as a bridge to their lost loved ones. Their experiences emphasized the innate kinship between animal imagery and humans who have died and are remembered as beloved. This connection marks the role of animal inheritance in human psychological development, something that can be seen in Peggy's experience of her inner dog as a source of new knowledge.

Victoria's references to hummingbirds and snakes are examples of how she draws power and energy from these animals. Her animal empowerment strengthened the sacred quality of the research space, sanctifying the affective and sensorimotor domains of experience for both days of data collection.

For Tina, spending time at the river was qualitatively different from her normal life. This made the river her "special place." Her attention was drawn to a water skipper in this qualitatively different space, noticing the beautiful circular ripples the insect leaves in the water when it moves. Finding the water skipper at the river founded a world for Tina, an event that allowed her to orient herself and recognize the beauty around her as meaningful. This is in alignment with Eliade's claims that "settling in a territory is equivalent to founding a world."<sup>20</sup> Eliade also points out how animals often signal the emergence of sacred space.<sup>21</sup>

### **Validity Considerations**

Because both Victoria and I began with a predilection for attending to animal imagery, one potential criticism of this dissertation is that it includes a confirmation bias

affirming the researcher's pre-existing beliefs around animals. Imaginal Inquiry is, however, a post-positivists methodology that not only accepts the researchers' influence on the learnings, but also specifically draws on the indigenous wisdom inherent in the mythologies explored. In this case, Native American myths lent their beauty and authenticity to this learning.

By focusing on animal forms, this learning draws from pools of knowledge that cannot be separated from aesthetic and embodied participation. Those moments in the research that included animals were full of descriptive texture, tonal beauty, and poignant affect, making them key moments in the search for authenticity. The link between beauty, and authenticity is provided by Abrams when he writes, "the experience of beauty is the epitome of intimate perceptual reciprocity."<sup>22</sup>

This learning becomes valuable when the soul is emphasized, as is the case in imaginal psychology. Those operating from within psychological traditions that question or deny the soul's existence might not resonate with the knowledge that emerged. For example, Harold Bechtoldt claims that construct validity is non-empirical, nonscientific, and inappropriate for psychological research.<sup>23</sup>

### **Learning Three: Longing for Wholeness**

Learning Three contends that the desire to feel whole can lead the bereaved toward an authentic and integrated sense of the departed when they reassess their pre-loss understanding of problematic relationships. Working with the frozen images of their lost loved ones ended up being a complexity challenge undertaken by participants in

response to their powerful yearning to feel whole. In this case, the challenge was one of cultivating greater multiplicity around the memories of the deceased.

### **What Happened**

This section highlights participant expressions that had qualities of archetypal longing, followed by multiplicity work. The longing manifested by Becca, Peggy, and Michelle will be described first, followed by descriptions of their engagement with multiplicity. Both Becca and Michelle described their multiplicity work in terms of confronting perfectionism, and Peggy described her multiplicity work as an approach to wholeness.

In Becca's introduction, she declared she was attending the research in order to deal with the intense emotional pain she had felt since her daughter's suicide more than a decade earlier. She said, "I mean I know it's not gonna go away. I'm not looking for it to go away. I'm looking for me to be able to handle it as a part of who I am." Her hunger emerged again later when she was describing a memory of her daughter as a toddler: "One time she said to me when she was three or four, 'Mom, I am really angry at Dad. I still love him, but I'm very angry at him.' I looked at her and went, 'Where did you learn that? God, why can't I learn that?' You know?" And, while Becca clearly stated that she was not feeling grief for her dead parents, she said she needed to hold the complexity of her mother's situation. She saw that her mother was drinking to deal with her challenging relationship with Becca's father, but this did not change her experience of neglect and emotional abandonment by Becca's mother.

Peggy sensed her mom's presence in a new way several times in the extreme heat of a sauna. She said, "And in the sauna, she's that woman I really loved with all my heart [because] now she's whole, she's a whole person, and it always makes it worse because I'm like, 'Why couldn't *you* have been there?'" She had a hunch that she would have been more assertive and confident if she had been raised by the mom she was sensing. Peggy shared an urgency to stay with this vision of her mom as whole, so that she might provide her own daughter with a different experience than she herself had.

Michelle arrived at the data collection with a desire to describe her grandmother and their relationship in a dignified way. Her initial journal entries indicate that she was conflicted about how to fully honor the memory of her grandmother while respecting her as an elder. Her writing indicates she was apprehensive about the experience but was dedicated to doing the work.

The rest of this section looks at the way Michelle, Peggy, and Becca responded to their longing by confronting static imaginal structures associated with their lost loved one. Throughout the day, Becca alternated between describing her family of origin as a "perfectionist family," and as a family where, "everything's black and white." During the storytelling sequence, she discussed how her family's tendency for dichotomous thinking clashed with what she had learned from her daughter. She said, "[S]he taught me ways to look at things, because she'd say something, and it'd be totally different from... . It wasn't wrong, it just wasn't the way I took it. They see things so differently, and not incorrectly, just differently. It was really amazing. Just very unique." Similarly, Becca cherished the earrings her daughter gave her. They did not match, but a gift from her daughter that was rare and precious. Becca's daughter was also known for wearing

socks that did not match, and for ripping holes in her shirts. Becca learned to accept these behaviors over time.

Finally, Becca mentioned perfectionism one last time during the storytelling sequence, when describing her guilt for having lived longer than her daughter. This expression was punctuated by Becca's tears as she shared a vivid dream where she embraced her two-year-old daughter. She said wanted this dream all the time.

During her storytelling, Peggy said that if she could not come to accept the controlling, difficult part of her mother, she was not owning the young part of herself who was hurt by her mother. She said,

I've really been resisting the wholeness piece about my mom because it brings up the grief about why weren't you the person, right? So I am grateful to know in the end, I'll be able to carry her and love her unconditionally, which is my favorite way to love, and I haven't yet gotten to that with her. So, you've made it crystal clear, and I can't thank you enough.

Michelle's multiplicity work began during the altar sequence when she was talking about her grandmother. When she was done with this story, Victoria asked her if she wanted to share any of the difficult things about her grandmother. With care to honor the spirit of her grandmother, who she said seemed to be right there listening, Michelle described some of the, "early moments of mismatching," when she had felt hurt by her grandmother. Immediately after the ten-minute break between the altar sequence and the storytelling sequence Michelle reflected on her experience:

Well, I felt like there's X-ray vision in this group. I hadn't realized how much I was suppressing, and then you said, "I think there's something else there in the story." And then, bleh, it comes out. I mean not bleh, it was good, because that part that came out. I felt so light since that moment. I have felt so much less guilt, and guilt about even... I experienced guilt

ahead of time thinking, "Okay, I'm going to try to not talk about certain things." I was conflicted in that from the beginning. And then as I was talking, through the process of each of you helping me get through it, I just felt, "It's okay. We're whole people." Who was it that said we're human beings, not... Something, yeah, and everyone's a mixture. So, it has allowed me to get an appreciation for the mixture, the combination that was my grandmother, grandma, and all of us.

### **How I was Affected**

I began the day with concern for Becca's ability to tolerate the research activities because of her experience of intense parental grief. I was, thus pleasantly surprised when, at the onset of our meeting, she described her commitment to working with her grief. She seemed energized. I felt a sense of solidarity with the raw quality I heard in Becca's description of her loss. And I felt compassion for her as she described her perfectionist family and her struggle to accept her daughter. As she spoke, I developed a sense that her relationship with her daughter was deeply impacted by her formative experiences with her perfectionist parents. I imagined that we shared a mistrust of authority figures who promote their own viewpoint and at the expense of diversity. Finally, when Becca mentioned that her daughter had been adopted, I wondered if her daughter had had any pre-adoption experiences of trauma that might have impacted the way their relationship formed.

Prior to the storytelling sequence, Becca seemed unclear about the definition of SOP. Once the task was clarified, Becca spontaneously launched into the story of meeting a two-year-old version of her daughter in a dream. I was deeply moved by the intense way she told this story, and, as I listened, I made note of what I felt was a key

moment in the research. I felt her anguish resonate deep inside me, and I felt the closeness of her daughter in that moment.

As Michelle described her conflicted relationship, I also felt shame for my judgmental assessments of her grandmother. It seemed harsh that I did not like her. My shame worsened when Victoria, who was closely attending to Michelle's process, prompted her for more information about the difficult parts of their relationship. As I sensed a key research moment in the making, I was thankful for Victoria's way of contributing to the group. I was critically assessing myself as less attuned than Victoria, mixed with gratitude for her attunement.

During my participation in the storytelling sequence, I described how sometimes it feels like a fourteen-year-old part of myself is still frozen in that high school gym. When I shared this, I felt a familiar ambient loneliness I had known since the beginning of my loss. I described my memory in the gym as a type of dead spot in my psyche that drains me of life force, and yet at the same time empowers me with a perspective and a raw sense of divinity I would not otherwise have access to. Whenever I revisit these memories, I feel some of the qualities of the original experience.

### **Imaginal Structures in Use**

I had a strong reaction to the exploration of perfectionism both during data collection and while writing this learning. Specifically, during data collection, I was reactive when I sensed that participants were telling stories in which they were striving to enact or maintain a perfect solution. For example, I was reactive when learning about Becca's perfectionist parents. The protective part of me was angry about the way she



was treated as a child, and I wanted to help her. I was also reactive toward the powerful image of Michelle's grandmother. She seemed to me like an authority figure who, in her efforts to be protective, ultimately limited the freedom and individuality of the children in her charge.

In these examples, the part of me who was reactive places a high value on acceptance. These imaginal structures disavow perfect solutions to my problems, and they convince me that any route taken will involve compromise and sacrifice. When I find myself striving to enact my ideals, I imagine that my ego has taken control, my reflexivity has been compromised, and I have lost touch with reality in some way. This arrangement can lead into problematic homeostasis, where I am unable or unwilling to take the steps needed to spur myself into creative action. This arrangement also highlights my social privilege, where I have the sense of safety, time and resources needed to distance myself from my surroundings and reflect on my position and behavior.

In this imaginal structure, reflexivity and acceptance are tightly bound. This is a structure where it is reflexive to be accepting, and a lack of acceptance is equivalent to a lack of reflexivity. I thus question my reflexivity when I sense myself behaving idealistically. Similarly, I take pride in my ability to find acceptance in adverse conditions. These imaginal structures tend to include projecting themselves onto others when I have the sense that the other person is idealistically motivated. These structures have caused me harm in times when reflexivity otherwise calls for me to willfully confront an adverse situation, rather than be accepting of it.

My early experience of loss contributed to the generation of imaginal structures that promote a type of longing and nostalgia similar to what is described in this learning. My tendency toward acceptance has often led me to wallow in nostalgia when I might benefit from addressing my pain more creatively. It has taken me a long time to find appreciation for the archetypal dimensions of longing. The poem *Love Dogs* by Rumi has come to represent this paradoxical situation. In this poem, Rumi uses the image of a dog howling for the return of its master to represent the painful, animal quality of longing. This poem is included in Appendix 18.

This learning also gives voice to a subjectivity of mine with whom I am very familiar who gets frozen and stuck, transfixed by grief and despair. There is a helpless, victim quality to this part of the imaginal structure. When I am frozen, this structure can even provide comfort in the familiarity of the pain and longing.

### **Theoretical Concepts Upon Which Interpretations are Based**

The concepts of individuation, and multiplicity are key to understanding this learning. In ITP, individuation is conceived as a process in which imaginal structures are transmuted into emergent capacities and a transformed sense of identity. The transmutation of imaginal structures requires a conscious engagement with the passionate, affective nature of the soul. As was demonstrated in the literature review, this arrangement establishes soul as the primary concern in ITP. This learning relies on the ITP concept of psychological multiplicity to describe the participants' striving toward wholeness. Defined in Chapter One, psychological multiplicity refers to the phenomena of multiple, often distinct, centers of subjectivity within an individual psyche. These

terms help contextualize the participant's word choices of "perfectionism," and, "wholeness," in the language of ITP.

The transcendent function is a concept from the Jungian literature that bolsters this learning. Individuation and multiplicity both address the subjective, interior processes of psychological transformation. Jung's transcendent function specifically represents the process of engaging with the tension of opposition. This process fosters psychological multiplicity. When suffered with patience, Jung writes that the tension of opposites can be transcended when the mutual confrontation of opposites unveils new aspects of the psyche.<sup>24</sup>

This learning benefits from a diverse understanding of otherness. Otto's research found the experience of otherness to be a key characteristic of numinosity, and he used the phrase "wholly other" to describe the mysterious quality of a numinous experience that is simultaneously both terrifying and fascinating.<sup>25</sup> Becca's witch and Peggy's black dog are both examples of numinous experiences imbued with this wholly other quality. "Otherness" also points to the cultural categories of race, gender and class, and the power dynamics that restrict or grant access to privilege. This type of othering was seen in the research by Sophia when she described the inter-racial marriage of her grandmother to a Chinese man, and how they had to be buried in separate parts of the cemetery.

Concepts from Sacred and Archetypal psychologies are used to describe the yearning of participants in this learning. Jean Houston describes the Search for the Beloved as a concept central theme of all the great mystery and spiritual traditions. She writes, "This yearning for union with the Beloved lies at the heart of sacred psychology,

for it is this profound longing, which transcends the desire for romantic love, the nourishment of parental love, and all the multiple and marvelous varieties of human loving, that calls us to the Source.”<sup>26</sup>

Finally, this learning includes reference to one of Diana Fosha’s four healing affects. Fosha’s concepts, referenced repeatedly in this dissertation, are essential for describing the participants’ affective experience of the research.

### **Interpretations**

Learning Three contends that the desire to feel whole can lead the bereaved toward an authentic and integrated sense of the departed when they reassess their pre-loss understanding of problematic relationships. The yearning for wholeness that was seen in Becca, Peggy, and Michelle is an example of what Jean Houston calls the Search for the Beloved.<sup>27</sup> With grief as the theme of this inquiry, the tension of otherness that Houston writes about is seen when their searching behavior is overlaid with the participants’ love for those who had died. This combination accentuated both the otherness and the connection to the deceased.

An example of this amplification came forth when Becca described her morning practice of acknowledging her daughter in the image of a witch hanging by her coffee pot. Becca’s daily ritual can be interpreted as her greeting the Beloved. The intensity of her yearning for the Beloved is indicated by her habit of performing this ritual at the beginning of each day.

The story of Becca’s daughter describing how she loved her father and yet was still mad at him is an example of psychological multiplicity work, where two conflicted

subjectivities were striving to coexist simultaneously. Additional multiplicity work was seen when Becca's longing drove her to apply her daughter's lessons about matching socks and earrings to the memory of her mother. This insight allowed her to see how her mother's drinking was self-protective while also recognizing that it left her feeling abandoned. These lessons from her daughter were constant reminders from the Beloved that Becca could examine the black and white style of thinking that was prevalent in her family-of-origin. Becca's descriptions can be seen in a new light when considering the ways in which they include the tension of opposition described by Jung's transcendent function. Multiplicity work often involves the tension of opposites.

This learning presents the multiplicity work undertaken by Michelle and Peggy as an important change in their approach to grief, and in their opening to the Beloved. For example, Michelle's impulse to preserve the perfect image of her grandmother was blocking the whole image of her grandmother that she longed for. Peggy's response to the perfect image of her mother, on the other hand, was full of emotional pain and longing for the person she could have been, had she been parented differently. Peggy's experience of emotional pain in response to this memory is an example of the healing affective marker Diana Fosha calls "mourning the self."<sup>28</sup>

The word "disidentify" was used intentionally in this learning to emphasize how participants were working with the persistent imagery of their adaptive identities. In the transformation of identity, Omer describes a spacious awareness emerging when freedom is found from frozen images of the self.<sup>29</sup> This learning explores cases where the persistent image of a lost loved one has been incorporated into the adaptive identities of participants. The potential for adaptive identity work with the SOP of a lost loved one

is high when the relationship with the deceased involves a blurring of the self-other ego boundary.

Of the four learnings that emerged from analysis, the guiding myth for this research speaks most to Learning Three. The guiding myth is the story of Rumi's grief for his lost friend, Shams. Rumi succinctly described the grief, emptiness, and his longing for Shams using earth and body imagery when he writes, "...my chest is a cave where Shams of Tabriz is resting."<sup>30</sup>

### **Validity Considerations**

Erik Erikson described a connection between the infant and the numinous, a linking he claims is the first and dimmest hunger for "mutual affirmation."<sup>31</sup> Through such a developmental lens, a case can be made that Peggy and Michelle's hunger was of developmental origin, re-triggered in the expression of their grief. This interpretation suggests that, rather than an archetypal longing, participants could have been motivated to explore multiplicity due to a biological imperative to form new relationships, a motivation that Erikson claims first evolved in infancy. This contrary view is in alignment with Freud's original concept of grief as a process of cathexis and re-cathexis to a new object.<sup>32</sup> This view is also seen in Bowlby's take on loss, described in Chapter Two, in which the primary task of the bereaved is to form new attachments. Informed by these theories, arguments could be made that Becca, Peggy, and Michelle were simply doing traditional grief work rather than responding to the archetypal longing claimed by this learning. Along these lines, behavior resulting from a longing for wholeness could be recast as Freudian wish fulfillment.

Contemporary grief researcher Robert Neimeyer has emphasized the existential dimension of bereavement and the prominent role of meaning reconstruction when grieving.<sup>33</sup> When framed by Neimeyer's research, this learning suggests that multiplicity work is critical to meaning reconstruction in the wake of a loss. The connections between multiplicity work, existential concerns and spirituality could be developed in the literature of Imaginal Psychology.

Becca and Michelle both specifically used the term perfectionism when describing their struggles, and yet this learning frames their work as being primarily about psychological multiplicity. There is a considerable body of psychological literature on perfectionism that provide alternative frameworks for understanding this learning. One example is from David Burns, a seminal writer of cognitive-behavior psychology. For Burns, perfectionism is a type of cognitive distortion, and he provides specific techniques for overcoming it.<sup>34</sup> This differs from the ITP understanding of perfectionism taken by this learning. For Omer, perfectionism, like conformity, is seen to be restricting experience and imagination through the social and individual dynamics of gatekeeping.<sup>35</sup>

#### **Learning Four: Encountering a Sense of Ancestry**

Learning Four claims that when presence-sensing experiences feel authentic, bereavement can lead to an expanded sense of time, into both the past and the future. Sofia, the only person of color of the participants (identifying as Hispanic and Native American) was the only participant whose extended family maintained a grief altar. This learning is built around what she shared during the altar exercise and from the other participants' appreciation for what she said.

## What Happened

In the opening ceremony, Victoria introduced the word “ancestor” into the research when she said, “Then I call in the ancestors, our ancestors from each of our lineages. We invite you in, we welcome you. Ancestors ancient and ancestors recent. We invite you into our circle today.” This part of the opening ceremony directly addressed Sofia’s contributions to this learning.

Sofia was the second person to share in the altar exercise. She had forgotten to bring items for the altar, so she began by making a long list of the people who she normally honors on the altar she creates every year for the Dia de los Muertos celebration. Sofia systematically went through her list and told the group a little bit about each person, the relationship they shared, and meaningful moments in their passing. After she was done with the list, she described how she had learned the altar tradition from her grandmother and her in-laws:

It wasn't as much with my mom, but my grandma, she's the one who really, when I got in trouble for smoking dope, they sent me to Texas. So, my grandmother was there, and she would do that. And then I have friends, as I've grown up, I married a Filipino American Indian man, and his family, we're just primarily Hispanic through there. So, beginning with those people, I would go into their homes and I would see [their altars]. And I knew that we had that background, but I never really had done it. And starting like maybe about 20 years ago, I started doing that, and it worked out good.

The group responded next. Peggy began by contrasting her culture with Sofia’s culture. She then shared her appreciation for the way Sofia was honoring death without prioritizing what Peggy called the “letting go” response to loss. She said,

I just want to thank you for sharing at the altars, because one of the things [we were looking at] is our cultural background, and where I grew up, my



culture, I don't [know] if I have like a culture, but, you know, mixture of German, Norwegian, and whatever, I don't recall ever having a way of [unintelligible] you describe in your altars, so the pictures, and I don't know, [I love it], and it evoked in me a thought that [you two] [unintelligible] talk about [create an] altar, [unintelligible] [there should be an altar for] [unintelligible], so thank you for that and thank you for sharing.

Michelle's response was similar to Peggy's:

I just want to say how [touching] it was for me, because I came from a family that really, we never even had cousins that we saw, even though they lived two hours, three hours away. We never, ever saw them. I never, ever met them. [They're] everybody on my dad's side. My mother's from Denmark, so [unintelligible], but we just didn't have relatives. I mean, nobody. I mean, I can't even think of all these people that died. I mean, I'm just so amazed how much [unintelligible]. I appreciate you sharing.

Becca contributed to this learning with a reflection on what Michelle said about her grandmother in the altar exercise. While Becca was quite motivated to work with her grief for her daughter, she said she did not feel like working this hard for her parents. She said she wanted to simply be more accepting of what had happened with her parents.

### **How I was Affected**

I was disappointed to learn that Sofía had forgotten to bring items for the altar because I knew from the screening interview that she celebrated Dia de los Muertos. She realized her oversight when she arrived at the venue, and she immediately began working on the list of people she normally honors. This led to another oversight where we failed to take her sandwich order for our shared lunch. I felt guilty about this, as if I had failed to properly provide for her.

I felt a sense of envy as Sofia described her altar and the people it honors. When it was my turn to voice an appreciation, I reported that the single word, “abundance” came to mind, even though it seemed strange in the context of grief. Given how important all these people seemed to her, my own remembrances seemed noticeably scarce in comparison. That said, my sense was that Sofia went through her list so quickly that the people she described did not seem to be dead. It was hard for me to stay present with the fact that all those mentioned were no longer living. Talking with Victoria at the end of the day, we agreed that it would have been beneficial to have Sofia slow her expression at this point.

That said, I was particularly struck by several of the people she described, and the details of her story burned into my memory. The story of her motorcycle mentor nicknamed “Heart Attack” was so striking I later used his image in some artwork. Heart Attack rode his motorcycle with a medical device for pumping medications directly into his heart tucked into his shirt pocket. I was also struck by the story of driving her nephew’s body home from Oregon.

I was the last person to share in the altar exercise. I started by placing on the altar the fifth tarot card from the Wildwood Tarot deck. Titled *the Ancestor*, this card is more traditionally called the Hierophant. This was the central card drawn the previous night when I was imagining the coming data collection session. While this card seemed uncannily appropriate for my research, the word “ancestor” felt abstract to me, and not personally meaningful. Participants seemed surprised by the addition of a tarot card, and they were keenly interested to learn more about the cards and my process with them. I was concerned that their interest in the card was distracting from the research, so I

limited how much I said about it. More details about the use of the Wildwood Tarot deck can be found in appendix sixteen.

### **Imaginal Structures in Use**

As I grew into adulthood and slowly integrated my early experience of loss, negative and pessimistic imaginal structures crystalized in my psyche. Within my family-of-origin, I developed a reputation for being petulant and reclusive. I was privileged to have my own room, and I spent most of my time secluded in this space when not at school. When I did join the family group, I would use my growing intellect to focus on what I thought were the logical flaws in whatever we were discussing.

When these imaginal structures are guiding me, they can lead me to reject positive experiences. These structures come with an expectation that things are going to turn out badly. I envision these imaginal structures emerging phylogenetically from older, more infantile imaginal structures that reject nourishment from those closest to me, preferring to self-soothe in isolation. These imaginal structures leave a stubborn residue of doubt for me around the notion of ancestry. I believe this quality of doubt points to the unmet need that would be filled if I had grown up with a greater sense of ancestry in my own life.

My pessimistic and negative imaginal structures overlap with other imaginal structures relating to being a self-sufficient individual, and my deep-seated conviction that my needs for community will never be met. This learning was composed from the perspective of an upper-middle-class, White, American, middle-aged male. I have a hunch that this cultural context imparts to me a sizable amount of inherited imaginal

structure around what it means to be an individual, what rights and expectations I have as an individual, and the type of support I should expect from the people around me.

These structures impacted my ability to feel into Sofia's sense of ancestry, and they led me to be dismissive of the importance of the synchronicity with the tarot card.

### **Theoretical Concepts Upon Which Interpretations are Based**

Several concepts pertaining to the experience of time are important to this learning. Psychiatrist Robert J. Lifton coined the phrase *the broken connection* to represent a diminished capacity to sense the continuity of time. For Lifton, this temporal contraction was an emotional defense responding to the development of nuclear weapons.<sup>36</sup> Joanna Macy used the phrase *deep time* to represent a corresponding enhanced connection to time, something Macy writes is common in indigenous cultures. For Macy, deep time extends both into the past and the future.<sup>37</sup> This concept of deep time is taken further by the indigenous research of Fritz Detwiler. He explores the Tlingit word "tlakw," translated as *eternal time*. According to Detwiler, tlakw is spatial rather than linear, tying events to specific places such that, "the events of these places continue to occur through personal encounters, narratives and ceremonies."<sup>38</sup>

Houston associates this transtemporal perspective with her concept of the Greater Story, and she writes that this perspective is found through a sustained partnership with the Beloved. It has already been related how, for Houston, the loss of a loved one is a sacred wound. Physical wounds, acts of violation and endured losses become sacred for Houston when, "we are willing to release our old stories and to become the vehicles through which the new story may emerge into time."<sup>39</sup> The influx of eternal, archetypal

patterns is particularly potent in bereavement. She writes, “The more deeply we encounter the Divine Beloved, the more sensitively we feel the agony of the world, the more we are called to creative action.”<sup>40</sup> This learning describes sustained connections to Eternal Time in terms of a sense of ancestry, strengthened through the participant’s experience of bereavement.

In addition to an expanded sense of time, this learning revealed an expanded sense of empathy accompanying ancestral awareness. Maureen O’Hara’s research undergirds this claim. She writes that, in sociocentric cultures, empathy can be framed in terms of contextual awareness.<sup>41</sup> O’Hara writes that this awareness amounts to a way of perceiving, knowing and being connected to other consciousnesses, including the sense of participation in something greater than the self. For those in egocentric cultures, she describes these holistic states of mind emerging into prominence only when the familiar ego boundaries encasing the individual are loosened. O’Hara writes that myth and ritual are common sociocentric tools for accomplishing this shift. First seen in the literature review section on animism, O’Hara also uses the phrase relational epistemology to describe this relational way of perceiving, knowing, and being connected to the more-than-human world.

Jung’s concept of synchronicity and his concept of the dead are used in this learning. His concept of the Dead is described in the literature review chapter. Jung describes synchronicity as taking, “the coincidence of events in space and time as meaning something more than mere chance, namely, a peculiar interdependence of objective events among themselves as well as within the subjective (psychic) states of

the observer or observers.”<sup>42</sup> The death of Tina’s daughter right after data collection is a haunting and numinous example of synchronicity.

Two theories help frame the moment when Peggy referred to the “letting go” response to loss. First is Freud’s concept of grief work, the original Western theory to champion the letting go response to loss as psychologically desirable. Many theorists have built upon Freud’s work, including Bowlby, for whom lost connections must be psychologically released before new attachments can form. Second is the constructive-developmental theory of Robert Kegan. In his theory, Kegan relied on Winnicott’s notion that a mother has a special ability to create a psychosocial holding environment for her baby, and this is intrinsic to the infant’s evolution.<sup>43</sup> For Kegan, life consists of a succession of these holding environments, in such a way that there is a culture of embeddedness.<sup>44</sup> For Kegan, a culture of embeddedness must provide the functions of holding on, remaining in place, and letting go. In this view, the letting go function points to the psychological processes of differentiation and separation that bolster a sense of individual identity. In his theory, there are two great longings that motivate humanity. The first is a yearning to be included, to be close to, a part of, joined with, or to be held. The second is a yearning to be autonomous or independent, to experience one’s distinctness, to choose one’s direction, a yearning for one’s individual integrity.

This learning presents ancestral awareness as a marginalized way of being for participants from egocentric cultures. Omer introduced the concept of a *spacious center* to describe cultural arrangements that allow for marginalized views to be brought into a culture’s center.<sup>45</sup> When the data that makes up this learning is interpreted to reveal the expansion of time and empathy, Victoria is seen guiding participants into a spacious

center at the heart of our research efforts, into the arms of their ancestors. In ITP, post-cultural development implies that local cultures and habits have been deeply integrated by an individual, freeing them from their bedrock epistemic prejudices, premises, conventions, and assumptions.<sup>46</sup> Learning Four is an example of bereavement-specific, post-cultural development.

### **Interpretations**

Learning Four claims that when presence-sensing experiences feel authentic, bereavement can lead to an expanded sense of time, into both the past and the future. This learning suggests that the regular execution of Sofia's Dia de los Muertos rituals imparted to her an expanded sense of time and empathy. With our reflections on her altar practice, we (Peggy, Michelle, and I) all demonstrated Lifton's concept of the broken connection, with its diminished sense of time's continuity. Our broken connection to the dead triggered a yearning for the expanded sense of time experienced by Sofia, and this experience also granted us a taste of sociocentric empathy. In these cases, the yearning was an example of Houston's *Search for the Beloved*, expressed in terms of gratitude and appreciation for Sofia's gift to the group.

Presented ritualistically to the group, the story of Sofia's regular, familial approach to remembrance granted the remaining participants a brief access to a temporal flow starkly bereft of the everyday existential concerns. The people she mentioned in the altar exercise emerged from this flow with a palpable authenticity sourced from the dyadic memories she created with the dead.

This learning shows that Sofia's process was driven by empathic attunement to the more-than-human world. When understood as an example of O'Hara's relational epistemology, her contribution to this learning suggests that empathy extends beyond the domain of the living. This is more involved than suggesting that empathy extends to the trees and rocks of the landscape. Rather, this learning suggests that empathic awareness extends into the dimensions of both time and space.

Involvement of, "The Ancestor" tarot card in this research is an example of Jung's concept of synchronicity. By allowing these phenomena to be interpreted as more than a haphazard coincidence, the story of the research data collection is seen connecting to Houston's concept of the Greater Story. The interpretation of this learning was expanded by the temporal proximity of the tarot experience and the data collection sessions designed to explore grief.

This learning describes participants connecting to Jean Houston's Greater Story when they encountered Sofia's sense of ancestry. In this way, Learning Four, like Learning Two, points to the importance of mythologizing and psychologizing the process of grief. Houston's concept of mythologizing runs parallel to Hillman's concept of psychologizing, both of which are detailed in the literature review chapter and previous learnings.

### **Validity Considerations**

In ITP, learning communities like the one formed for this research provide a relational context that functions as a catalyst for transformation.<sup>47</sup> What is more, Dennis Klass has described intersubjectivity as a major theme of contemporary grief writing,



where grieving is seen as, “a relationship between the bereaved and the dead who are now, in varying degrees, both absent and present.”<sup>48</sup> The literature review showed that embodiment influences access to the intersubjective field and relational knowledge. The impact of embodiment and intersubjectivity on grief represents a gap in the literature of grief theory. Future researchers would need to perform qualitative inquiries into this topic, as quantitative methodologies are insufficient for addressing the material.

One potential criticism of this learning is that participants and researchers were engaged in a type of group think that undermined the values and sovereignty of the individual participants. Such a modernist criticism might caution against what is perceived as dangerous collective thinking that could potentially prioritize community needs at the expense of important individual rights and needs of the bereaved.

This learning looks at how bereavement practices are stratified along racial and cultural divides. Bereavement researchers, in their hope to study universal phenomena, have rarely emphasized race in their findings. Bereavement researchers themselves are overwhelmingly white. In this study, the researchers were all white, and all the participants, with the exception of Sofia, were culturally white as well. Future researchers in this area could achieve greater authenticity by including more people of color as both researchers and participants. The hypothesis for this inquiry was that SOP phenomena diversify and animate the process of grief. With a focus on race, this learning brings additional diversity to the study of bereavement.

## **Conclusion**

The research problem of this study asked how encouraging the bereaved to sense the presence of a lost loved one can impact the process of grief. The study's hypothesis anticipated that being allowed and encouraged to fully express and explore these presence-sensing experiences can help to diversify and animate grief. The cumulative learning for this research is that an expanded sense of time can emerge when the bereaved gather to share their longing for reconnection. While the hypothesis did not anticipate the importance of ritual leadership to the cumulative learning, it does point toward diversification and animation of the grief process through the infusion of myth, archetypal longing, and imagination. The cumulative learning represents a convergence of four distinct individual learnings that emerged from the collected data.

Learning One states that, for newly-formed grief groups, experienced ritual leaders can greatly reduce the impact of cultural and personal blocks to grieving. While this inquiry as a whole was looking at the phenomena of individuals sensing the presence of a lost loved one, this specific learning points to important elements of the research environment that were key components for understanding the data. Learning One is specifically about the impact of ritualization and ritual leadership when sensing the presence of lost loved ones.

Learning Two explored animal mythologies and their impact on grief. This learning claims that animals often appear in the grief narratives of people who are receptive to sensing the presence of lost loved ones. Learning Two further claims that the creative perception of this imagery energizes and sanctifies the grief process. The impact

of myth in the grief process was unanticipated by the guiding hypothesis of this research. The next chapter explores how animal imagery is central to the angel archetype.

Learning Three contends that the desire to feel whole can lead the bereaved toward an authentic and integrated sense of the departed when they reassess their pre-loss understanding of problematic relationships. Learning Three is about multiplicity and diversity. Exploration of multiplicity and diversity was not anticipated by the research problem, but it was anticipated by the hypothesis. In ITP, an understanding and acceptance of diversity is found through multiplicity work. Multiplicity was shown to be a complexity problem faced by participants in the process of grieving, and participants were described as working to cultivate greater multiplicity through their participation in this research. The next chapter reflects on the connection between the longing for wholeness and the sense of belonging by looking at the archetype of the beloved in relation to grief and SOP phenomena.

Learning Four claims that when presence-sensing experiences feel authentic, bereavement can lead to an expanded sense of time, into both the past and the future. The hypothesis did not anticipate that participants would glimpse the expanded sense of time's continuity that accompanied Sofia's storytelling. The hypothesis also did not anticipate the impact of Sofia's more sociocentric empathy on the more egocentric grief processes of the other participants. Learning Four presents an example of Omer's concept of post-cultural development.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **REFLECTIONS**

#### **Introduction and Overview**

This chapter explores the significance and implication of this dissertation's learnings in three sections. The first section examines the research problem and research hypothesis considering the collected data. The proposed hypothesis did, in general, point toward the cumulative learning and the four individual learnings. This section assesses the accuracy of this hypothesis. This first section will also look at the ways in which the initial understanding of the research problem could be revised considering the learnings. The second section explores archetypal and mythic sources for fresh perspectives on the research. The archetypes of the angel, friend, lover, and beloved will be explored. The mythic story of Rumi and Shams will be used in this exploration to deepen the implications for bereavement. The final section considers the general implications of the study through a wide spectrum of domains. These domains include the bereaved, me as the researcher, the orientation of Imaginal Psychology, grief theory, contemporary pandemic culture, and cultural transformation.

#### **Significance of the Learnings**

The research problem for this dissertation asked how encouraging the bereaved to sense the presence of a lost loved one can impact the process of grief? The hypothesis

proposed prior to data collection was that being allowed and encouraged to fully express and explore these presence-sensing experiences can help to diversify and animate grief. The remainder of this section looks at the ways in which this problem statement and hypothesis were impacted by the data, leading to the formulation of the learnings. The discrepancies between what was hypothesized and what emerged in the data will be teased apart, leading to a new understanding of the research problem.

The cumulative learning for this research is that an expanded sense of time can emerge when the bereaved gather to share their longing for reconnection. This cumulative learning emerged from four individual learnings. Learning One states that, for newly-formed grief groups, experienced ritual leaders can greatly reduce the impact of cultural and personal blocks to grieving. Learning Two claims animals often appear in the grief narratives of people who are receptive to sensing the presence of lost loved ones. The creative perception of this imagery energizes and sanctifies the grief process. Learning Three contends that the desire to feel whole can lead the bereaved toward an authentic and integrated sense of the departed when they reassess their pre-loss understanding of problematic relationships. Learning Four claims that when presence-sensing experiences feel authentic, bereavement can lead to an expanded sense of time, into both the past and the future.

For Omer, individual development is classified as post-cultural when people are aware of their cultural embeddedness and thus able to act on and shape the culture itself.<sup>1</sup> The cumulative learning for this research points toward the potential for the bereaved to consciously move beyond privatized grief practices that restrict their experience of loss and ancestry. The data revealed participants had thoroughly internalized Western grief

practices and they were not constrained by the assumptions, premises, conventions, and prejudices that are often guiding the grief process. By joining in this research, participants availed themselves of the opportunity to experience a shared version of grief that was potentially nourishing. Their shared experience also highlighted the maladaptive qualities of many culturally-sanctioned grief experiences.

The cumulative learning emphasizes the ways in which Imaginal Inquiry brought imagination to the evocation, expression, interpretation, and integration of participant's grief in all four learnings. Omer provides the connection between creative ritual and imagination succinctly, saying, "Creative ritual is imagination in action, allowing us to tap into our indigenous knowing thereby releasing the transformative potentials of our collective life."<sup>2</sup> This connection was visible throughout the research efforts, but is particularly visible in the ways in which animal imagery was woven into Learning Two.

The research proposal made liberal use of ritual in hope of encapsulating the research environment in a healthy, safe, and creative energy. So, while the research hypothesis did anticipate the use of creative ritual, it did not completely anticipate the importance of ritual leadership. The research found that ritual leadership empowered participants to freely respond to the evocations in imaginative ways. This was not surprising, given the chosen methodology of Imaginal Inquiry. The research also saw ritual leadership guiding participants toward Jean Houston's concept of the Greater Story through myth and the facilitation of mythologizing. While mythologizing was found to animate and diversify the process of grief, the hypothesis did not anticipate that myth would be the vehicle through which participant grief would be diversified and animated.

Learning One states that, for newly-formed grief groups, experienced ritual leaders can greatly reduce the impact of cultural and personal blocks to grieving. As mentioned, the research hypothesis does not support this learning because the hypothesis does not point to the importance of ritual leadership. While creative ritual was intrinsic to the research design, the hypothesis did not anticipate the importance of being led through the remembrance rituals by an experienced leader. Robert Moore claims that ritual leadership is always present when sacred space is truly transformational. What is more, he writes that while the need for ritualizing has not diminished, in contemporary culture, there is a diminished availability of ritual leadership.<sup>3</sup> Learning One confirms this assessment. The importance participants placed on their experience of competent ritual leadership highlights how the experience of being led through sacred space was both surprising and nourishing to the participants. Not only does Learning One emphasize the importance of ritual leadership, but it also points to the dangers of enduring bereavement without ritual guidance.

The idiographic nature of the research problem could be reexamined considering Learning One. The research problem is idiographic in the sense that it is focused on the subjective experience of the individual participants. Given that only one of the four learnings is idiographic, the research problem could be changed to explicitly consider the ways in which the intersubjective domain affected the participants' experiences.

Learning Two is that animals often appear in the grief narratives of people who are receptive to sensing the presence of lost loved ones, and that the creative perception of this imagery energizes and sanctifies the grief process. The word "animate" in the hypothesis points to the animal bodies of Learning Two. For James Hillman, the terms

animism, anthropomorphism, and personifying all contain the basic idea that there is a mode of thought in which internal events come alive and are made sacred through a process of externalization. Hillman simplifies this further when he claims human beings imagine things into souls.<sup>4</sup> Participants were in this special mode of soul-making when they were working with the sense of presence of a lost loved one. Learning Two focuses on points of aesthetic richness in the data when it attends to the animal forms that emerged while participants were in this mode of experiencing. It is not surprising that animal forms were found in these moments. Hillman describes humanity's animal inheritance when he writes, "The idea that we know ourselves through animals appears again and again in theories of the origins of consciousness. Some peoples say the animals once had all the knowledge and transmitted it to us."<sup>5</sup> The significance of this learning is enhanced when considering the contemporary loss of animal habitat, and the global extinctions of so many species.

Learning Three contends that the desire to feel whole can lead the bereaved toward an authentic and integrated sense of the departed when they reassess their pre-loss understanding of problematic relationships. The research hypothesis did not anticipate that longing was going to play a significant role in one of the learnings. The hypothesis did anticipate that participants would be working with multiplicity when it predicted that sensing the presence of a lost loved one could diversify the grief process. In ITP, diversifying refers to the type of transformative experiences that involve working with multiple nodes of identity.<sup>6</sup> Omer defines psychological multiplicity as "the existence of many distinct and often encapsulated centers of subjectivity within the experience of the same individual."<sup>7</sup> Learning Three explores how multiplicity work and



grief work can overlap. Learning Three also points out how multiplicity work can extend into the spiritual domain when having imaginal dialogues with lost loved ones.

Of the four learnings, Learning Three was the only one to focus exclusively on the subjective qualities of participant experiences. So, while the idiographic nature of Learning Three is intrinsic to its construction, this learning could benefit from a research problem statement that paid additional attention to the intersubjective and transpersonal domains. Longing and wholeness are key concepts in the individuation process. Learning Three envisioned participants transmuting their mournful longing for the deceased into the numinous lament that Jean Houston has described as, “calling us to Source.”<sup>8</sup> Future research on this topic would benefit from a more explicit investigation of participants’ longing.

Learning Four claims that when presence-sensing experiences feel authentic, bereavement can lead to an expanded sense of time, into both the past and the future. The social reality of Learning Four highlights the stark condition of community support in general, and specifically points to a deficiency of community support for the process of permanently losing access to the bodies of those who were deeply loved. Learning Four fully supports the research hypothesis when participants are seen cultivating an expanded sense of time’s continuity, empathy, and a renewed sense of ancestry. At the same time, the impact of Sophia’s storytelling about her altar traditions was unanticipated. The other participants’ appreciation for her sense of ancestry was also unanticipated. In regards to the altar items she had brought, Becca said that she had always wanted to have an altar at home but had never set it up. Experience of Sophia’s

sense of ancestry potentially inspired Becca to incorporate a grief altar into her home life.

Learning Four emphasizes the fundamentally intersubjective nature of grief, a principle Dennis Klass describes as common throughout contemporary grief research and practice.<sup>9</sup> The research methodology was thus a key component in extracting this learning from the data. In striving to account for all aspects of the intersubjective field, Imaginal Inquiry richly illuminated the detailed social texture of bereavement.

Myth was a theme common to Learnings Two and Four. While the importance and function of myth is recognized by ITP and Imaginal Psychology, the impact of myth and mythologizing on grief practices represents a gap in the literature of contemporary grief theory.

### **Mythic and Archetypal Reflections**

Defined as, “invariant universal fantasies and patterns of behavior,” Murray Stein writes that the *archetype* is the signature concept of Jung’s work.<sup>10</sup> This section amplifies the research implications by reflecting on several archetypes in relation to sensing the presence of a lost loved one in bereavement. The following archetypes are considered in turn: angel, friend, lover, and beloved. First seen in Chapter One, the story of Rumi and Shams will be used as an example of how these archetypal energies deepen the ecstatic and poetic qualities of the grief process. The spiritual and relational dimensions of these archetypes will be teased apart. As a lost loved one might have been a literal friend or lover prior to their death, the bereaved are challenged to reassess the archetypal qualities of their relationship with the dead. The archetypes of the angel and

the beloved are revealed as potentially rich sources of new meaning within the context of bereavement. Appendix 18 contains complete versions of the poems referenced in this section.

Many cultural traditions reference spiritual beings, but not all cultural representations of spiritual beings exhibit the specific characteristics of the angel archetype. In his introduction to angels, David Jones points out that the spiritual beings of ancient Zoroastrianism (Fravashi), the spiritual beings of Hinduism (Devas and Mahadevas) and the pagan spiritual beings (Fairies) are similar yet distinct from the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic angels.<sup>11</sup> The archetypal qualities of Angels described in this section are drawn from depictions of angels in these three Abrahamic faiths. Jones stresses that these angels are not “little gods.” Sourced from religions with one God, Jones writes that angels are spiritual creatures who serve God as soldiers, guardians, musicians, courtiers, and messengers. Jones speculates that Angels remain popular in contemporary culture because they are nondenominational, they seem non-threatening and almost child-like, and because they appeal to the imagination and to personal experiences. Angel imagery is understandably common in bereavement.

As divine messengers, Jones says Angels are often depicted in winged human form. When depicted in human form, the gender of Angels can vary, but Jones cautions that angelic gender is deeply impacted by the gender politics of the encapsulating culture.<sup>12</sup> The winged nature of angels is noteworthy in this research that strove to emphasize the role that animal imagery can play in bereavement. In particular, bird imagery was prominent in the data.

Walter has researched contemporary cases where bereaved individuals describe the deceased becoming angels.<sup>13</sup> He uses the term *once-human angels* to describe a way that mourners remained in contact with their lost loved ones. He describes this phenomenon as more common in younger mourners. He writes that this folk practice is not taught by churches or popular culture. Rather, once-human angels are creatively developed in the bereavement process. In the learnings, Becca's morning ritual of greeting her daughter was interpreted as her greeting the Beloved, but her descriptions could just as easily be interpreted to be a regular visitation by an angel.

Becca's morning ritual is enhanced by Shaun McNiff's suggestion that art becomes medicinal when all imagery is approached as angelic.<sup>14</sup> Recognizing the angelic nature of imagery became a key technique in the methodology of this dissertation as McNiff's research increasingly came to inform my own processes for working with my paintings. His philosophical view emerged through his art therapy work, where he and his clients engaged in the technique of dialoguing with paintings. Similar to Gestalt chair work, in his tradition, the imagery from paintings is given voice, as if the images themselves were sitting down in the empty chair for a dialogue. McNiff found that the experience of imaginal dialogues affirmed the living, expressive existence of paintings. He found paintings were capable of spontaneously surprising and emotionally moving those who listened. He writes that thinking of images as angels was a natural extension of this sustained dialogue with an internal otherness. Thinking of images in this way brought compassion, reverence, and safety to the therapy. When, in my own processes, I came to approach the painting of my childhood friend with appreciation and reverence, the experience was notably more impactful and positive. I believe this approach has

tremendous potential to impact the course of bereavement and bereavement counseling. Cultivating a familiarity with angel archetype has the potential to change the way people mourn and relate to the dead. Rumi's poem *The Guesthouse* exemplifies an attitude receptive to angelic visitation through imagery when he writes, "Be grateful for whoever comes, because each has been sent as a guide from beyond."<sup>15</sup>

Rumi understood the angelic function of imagery, and this understanding was emphasized by Corbin. According to Tom Cheetham, Corbin held individual personhood to be the first and final reality.<sup>16</sup> This includes non-human persons. Cheetham writes that, with this understanding, personhood can only be amplified, not reduced by analysis. He describes the locus of this amplification as toward, "the celestial, eternal counterpart, the partner in heaven, the archetype of each of us that guarantees the possibility of our eternal individuality – the locus, the telos of that spiritual motion is the Angel." For Cheetham, a chief characteristic of Corbin's angels is that they are created by the imagination, and this imagination is their form of life. Whatever they imagine, flows into reality. He stresses the importance of acknowledging the celestial twin's personhood by equating this psychic movement with the maturation process Jung calls individuation.<sup>17</sup> In bereavement, it is as if these angels forcibly enter the psychology of the bereaved, and the process of grief is one of coming to recognize love in this new angelic form.

The compassion inherent in the angel archetype is a defining characteristic in the archetype of the friend. Omer defines the friend as a mysterious archetypal force, saying, "The friend refers to those deep potentials of the soul which guide us to act with passionate objectivity and encourage us to align with the creative will of the cosmos."<sup>18</sup> For Omer, this archetypal energy is seen personified through a mode of experiencing in

which the discipline of the father archetype, oneness of the mother archetype and imagination of the peer archetype congeal in such a way as to radically expand an individual's engagement with the present moment. This disempowers the imaginal structures that inhibit an individual's capacity for reflexive participation. The impact of the friend archetype was profound when participants encountered this energetic quality in the sense of their lost loved ones.

I imagine my personal version of the friend archetype evoked with a poem by Rudolf Steiner. Steiner evokes the friend archetype for me when he writes, "May Wisdom shine through me, May love glow within me, May strength permeate me, That in me may arise, A helper of humankind, A servant of holy things, Selfless and true."<sup>19</sup> My children went to a Waldorf middle school, and this poem was the closing verse for any group meetings among parents and faculty. A key concept in this community was the idea that we were to strive to be "servant leaders" and Steiner's poem exemplified this approach toward leadership. Seen in this way, access to the friend archetype is a leadership capacity that guided Victoria and I in constructing the research setting.

SOP experiences are often key moments in bereavement. When the energy of the friend archetype is layered over these experiences, they can serve as a powerful motivation to live further. Rumi writes, "Remember there's only one reason to do anything: a meeting with the Friend is the only real payment."<sup>20</sup> Rumi's advice to stay connected to the Friend is particularly difficult in bereavement when the loved one is permanently lost in body. He suggests that freedom is found by being true to the friend when he writes, "Forget your figuring. Forget yourself. Listen to your Friend. When you become totally obedient to that one, you'll be free."<sup>21</sup> Rumi's poem *Birdwings* was my

first and strongest reminder of how the friend archetype responds to grief and loss.

Birdwings was chosen as the epigraph for this dissertation because it can be read as a personal message to the bereaved. The inclusion of bird imagery in this poem also serves to manifest the angel archetype.

Rumi's poetry includes other suggestions for how the friend archetype could impact bereavement counselors. He writes, "One day I was going along looking to see in people the shining of the Friend, so I would recognize the ocean in a drop, the sun in a bright speck."<sup>22</sup> This poem points out how post-traumatic growth can emerge from something as horrendous as bereavement. Bereavement counselors can be prepared to facilitate these types of transformative experiences.

According to Barks, when Rumi used the word "friend" he was referring to the divine energy also known as the Beloved.<sup>23</sup> The archetype of the lover and its connections with the archetype of the beloved will be explored next. The relationship between these two archetypes is revealed to be conjoined similar to the celestial twinship seen in angelology.

The Lover archetype in women is manifested in the Greek Goddess Aphrodite. Aphrodite represents more than the lover archetype, but, according to Jean Shinoda Bolen, when she is in lover mode, she is known for her sex appeal and enhanced sexual awareness.<sup>24</sup> Bolen emphasizes the sensual, creative element of the lover archetype when she writes, "Through her flow attraction, union, fertilization, incubation, and birth of new life." This generative capacity comes by way of a heightened sensorium and being receptive to a wide range of perceptual channels that come online with the lover archetype. Aphroditic lover consciousness is thus enhanced by phenomenological

approach of Laura Seawall's ecological perception.<sup>25</sup> Aphrodite's sensual style of loving can enhance the bereavement process by encouraging a phenomenological approach to grief.

Robert Moore describes the energy of the Lover archetype in men as a source of spirituality and mysticism.<sup>26</sup> With this understanding, the Lover archetype becomes relevant in bereavement in additional ways. An essential quality of this archetype is the Lover's passionate sensitivity to the inner and outer worlds. Moore uses the phrase "aesthetic consciousness" to describe this acute sensitivity. Similarly, David Abrams attributes a heightened sensitivity to the indigenous shaman when she connects with love to the living, breathing landscape of her environment. Abrams deepens the relevance of this archetype for bereavement by acknowledging the living, sensuous landscapes as the dwelling places of both the living and the dead. For Abrams, "ancestor worship" is a type of heart-based attentiveness to the non-human world.<sup>27</sup> The indigenous shaman manifests the energy of the Lover through her sensitivity to the inner realms of the psyche, the living, breathing landscape, and the intersubjective qualities of the sensorimotor and affective domains of experience. She uses this lover's energy to act as a bridge between the living and the dead. Victoria's incorporation of this energy is seen in the way she attended to the animal forms that emerged from the sacred space of our research container.

When Rumi writes about lovers, he frequently pairs them with the Beloved. For Rumi, it is the lover who is searching for the beloved. In the previous chapter, the longing of the lover archetype was the focus of Learning Three. According to Houston, one of the core assumptions of the Search for the Beloved is that everything and



everyone belongs somewhere to someone.<sup>28</sup> The lover belongs to the beloved, and Houston writes that the acute yearning of the lover is an indication that the barriers into the archetypal world have been broken. This openness is characteristic of bereavement. In this paradigm, the relationship between the lover and the beloved is as an unequal pair, split between existential time and space and an essential, archetypal realm where time and space are transcended. The endless, terrestrial longing for the beloved is, according to Houston, “an impetus to all our evolutionary striving.” Houston paints a picture in which humans love, mature, and individuate in response to this deep memory of a unified wholeness. The earthly loving of lovers prepares them for their spiritual union with the beloved. To this end, Rumi uses marriage as a metaphor for transcendence through death, a final unification of the lover and beloved through the literal, earthly death of the lover. In bereavement, when a terrestrial lover is already gone, this metaphor takes on additional meaning.

When the pangs of grief are re-cast as longings for the Beloved, kernels of advice emerge for grief therapists from Rumi’s musings about lovers. He writes, “Let the lover be disgraceful, crazy, absentminded. Someone sober will worry about things going badly. Let the lover be.”<sup>29</sup> A therapy informed by Rumi’s ecstatic poetry thus makes room for sober-eyed therapists to attend to bereaved clients who are finding their way through grief. I first encountered Rumi as a therapy client. My therapist gave me his poem *Love Dogs*. This poem had a tremendous impact on my therapy and has come to represent for me the pangs of grief as a fierce image of animal love.

The spiritual connection between Rumi and Shams emerged out of the soulful melancholy of Rumi’s loss. His poetic recounting of ecstatic love is full of spiritual

wisdom that paints an image of transcended suffering. For Rumi, suffering the loss of Shams was a process through which his soul was refined. In his poem *Chickpea to Cook*, Rumi uses the analogy of cooking a chickpea to describe this process. This analogy also contains bereavement wisdom. The divine cook, in this example, demonstrates a harsh love that points toward fiery transformation rather than growth through maternal nourishment. This poem represents the transformative potential of bereavement.

### **Implications of the Study**

This research changed my appreciation of bereavement. The cultural currents that push grief into private spaces are strong, impacting both the bereaved and those around them. Now, I resist these currents with more courage. When I am around bereavement, it feels like an honor and an intimate glimpse into an inner world shared between the bereaved and those they love. I find the poignant weight of bereavement to be curiously alluring, as if time spent with the bereaved has been potentiated by this research. Somatic proximity to another's bereavement invariably contextualizes my own struggles and challenges and leads me to consider the larger story of my life. When I am struggling with my own postmodern search for life's meaning, encountering another's search for their Beloved can serve as a strong reminder of what matters most to me.

The personal loss I brought to this research has impacted me for decades. This research honors my lost friend in a way that I was not able to manage when I was a teenager. I like to hope that my loss will rest more easily in the future, making new mental space for all the grief and loss that is inevitably coming. I like to imagine that, through this research, I am now more prepared to grieve my future losses. These hopes

demonstrate an openness toward grief that was not previously available to me. At the same time, I also fear that I have become more porous to grief, and that this project will increase the intensity of my future experiences.

My written language skills and my confidence as a writer have grown considerably during the production of this document. I have long enjoyed crafting sentences and searching for poetic and economic words that have a sense of place and belonging in their sentences. The study of phenomenology was essential to my development as a writer and a researcher. Through this work, I began attending more consciously to the aesthetic dimensions of my writing. I was influenced by Les Todres when he encouraged his readers to focus on the aesthetic textures observed in their perceptual field.<sup>30</sup> With such a focus, Todres shows how written language can elicit participation and empathy from the reader, can richly communicate the mood of an experience, and can communicate a bodily sense of being there. This project has helped me understand that beautiful writing effectively broadens the meaning inherent in a sentence. By writing this dissertation, I have cultivated greater skill as a writer and a desire to write well in my future career.

I have honed my clinical interest through this research. After several years of study, my interest in working with bereavement and trauma remains strong. My appreciation for group therapy and learning communities has also increased, and I look forward to gathering more experience facilitating groups. Additionally, I am now highly motivated to integrate ritualizing and imagination work into my clinical practice.

Expressive Arts therapists have been using imagery in the treatment of bereavement for many years, and yet the efficacy of image work is not widely

acknowledged by grief researchers and grief therapists. This dissertation joins the chorus of expressive arts therapists who emphasize the imagination in their approach to grief therapy. This research points to the combined use of ritual and the arts in group settings as being particularly worthy of interest to grief researchers and practitioners.

Diana Fosha's clinical research was referenced in Learning One and in Learning Three. This dissertation showed the potential for incorporating her techniques in grief therapy. Fosha's research was specifically looking to condense and accelerate the process of transformation into a brief therapeutic encounter. The treatment length for bereavement differs substantially. That said, her research identifies affective markers of change that were readily apparent during the integrative process of participants receiving appreciation from the group. More research in this area could enhance the assessment and tracking of bereavement in important areas beyond those listed in the proposed criteria for Complicated Grief Disorder.<sup>31</sup>

Learning Four places a grim emphasis on the lack of community support in the contemporary experience of bereavement. The privatization of grief over the last one-hundred years has diminished the potential for ancestry-focused grief practices to impact the course of bereavement. A sense of ancestry cannot be maintained in isolation. This implies that the benefits of grieving within an ancestor-focused paradigm will not be available to the isolated bereaved without first addressing the lack of community. Beyond the availability of grief-specific learning communities, bereavement is enriched further when encapsulated in a strong community that has creative ritual integrated into group life. Addressing a lack of communal life in general is beyond the scope of this dissertation. This research, however, does suggest that gatekeeping of bereavement will

be strong if there is a paucity of communal life for the bereaved. This research joins previous findings when it suggests that the experience of bereavement blossoms in a community.

This research thus highlights the sociocentric nature of grief. The influence of modernism has led to an abstract, individualistic, and decontextualized response to loss that contemporary researchers are increasingly demonstrating to be insufficient for understanding the relational reality of bereavement. When the individual is supraordinate to all social obligations and social roles, the empathic states of consciousness which comprise sociocentric ways of perceiving and knowing the world are unavailable to the bereaved. SOP phenomena seem hallucinatory when the bereaved begin by projecting onto the world a monadic view of the self.

As a nadir experience, bereavement potentiates post-traumatic growth in the social domain when it undermines the egocentric worldviews of the bereaved. The ability to survive the horrible chaos of grief depends on an individual's ability to turn toward group life. First, a community must be available and then it must be inclusive of sadness and grief. The social dimension of grief was shown to advance further when skilled facilitation is available for guiding creative grief rituals.

This dissertation suggests that ritual leaders are particularly potent when facilitating grief processes in egocentric cultures. Bly's concept of the sibling society describes a contemporary condition in which all members of a group are considered equal, and older generations are not trusted. This arrangement complicates bereavement, where trusted leaders are desperately needed to facilitate the flow of beloved souls as they depart the group. This is because the shift from egocentricity to sociocentricity

involves altering consciousness. And altering consciousness within groups is the specialty of trusted community leaders, a trait that Winkelman describes as a core characteristic of all shamanistic healers.<sup>32</sup> Additional research could explore the ways in which ritual leaders enhance relational ways of knowing through bereavement rites.

In ITP, grief transmutes into compassion through the ritualization of loss. This dissertation has shown that ritual elders energize this process. Given the tremendous potential this transmutation has for bereavement, additional research could explore how ritual leaders facilitate the transmutation of affects other than grief.

The concept of synchronicity, seen in Learning Four, helps explain how the data collection sessions occurred right at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in the United States. Data collection happened in Berkeley, CA, within a jurisdiction that issued a stay-at-home order on March 16, 2020, nine days after the final data collection session. Fear about the pandemic was a factor preventing two participants from returning for the second data collection session on March 7th. If data collection had been scheduled one week earlier, the pandemic would have had less of an impact on the research, and if data collection had been scheduled one week later, the pandemic would probably have prevented the data collection sessions from happening as they did. The implications of this synchronicity are numinous and profound. These synchronicities impacted me personally by softening my reliance on logic and reason and opening my psyche more to the experience of faith and acceptance.

Grief-specific learning communities cannot function during a highly-contagious global pandemic. Learnings One and Four are dependent on the participants' experience of grief rituals in a learning community. While not strictly dependent on group

dynamics, Learnings Two and Three also emerged from the work done within the group. This dissertation suggests that bereavement will continue to be privatized during pandemics. Therapists will be particularly challenged to address the bereavement needs, and complicated grief could become more common without access to learning communities.

During the writing of this document, the Covid-19 pandemic quickly transformed contemporary culture. Grief and bereavement are likely to play a big role in the continuing transition, and grief is widely predicted to be an ongoing psychological concern after the virus itself has receded. Opportunities already exist to grieve the loss of financial and social freedoms, and to grieve the diminished opportunity to move freely through society. Specifically in relation to bereavement, Doka has warned about the risk of the non-pandemic-related bereaved feeling disenfranchised when they perceive their loss is less acknowledged and supported than others whose loved ones died of the virus.<sup>33</sup> In his clinical practice he sees the pandemic changing the way people die and the way they grieve, leaving even fewer opportunities for closure and increasing the likelihood of more unfinished business. The shortcomings of contemporary bereavement culture will increasingly impact survivors in the years to come.

Many writers have observed that other animals face a tenuous shared reality with humanity. Over a century ago, William Yeats poetically envisioned the horrific end of modernity in his poem *The Second Coming*. This ominous poem is fitting for animals living in the current conditions of accelerating climate change, famine, and disease. As animals, the contemporary situation is just as dire for humans as it is for endangered species. Hillman describes animals and humans as sharing a common fate when he

writes, “their extinction is ours too.”<sup>34</sup> Hillman’s shadowy claim that humans share the fate of the other animals is not widely acknowledged and is extraordinarily difficult to accept.

Learning Two implies that humanity could listen more closely to the animals currently inhabiting the earth. Grief itself has an animal-like quality. Hillman writes, “There is a soul in the animal, a soul of ancient sadness. There is a sadness in the soul of the natural world. All you have to do is stand in the woods or in a field and you feel it.”<sup>35</sup> The energy of grief resonates within our animal bodies. We can learn from the animals how to join more authentically in the contraction of our species. Extinction is more than death – extinction is the end of life, the end of the chain of animal inheritance. Opposing the expansive sense of ancestry described in Learning Four is a contracting sense of extinction that stares more deeply into the abyss than a lone individual fearing his personal demise. This dissertation further implies that accelerated extinction is the biological consequence of psychologically living with a diminished sense of time’s continuity. This dissertation implies that humanity should welcome in the animals while it is still an option. As humanity watches and participates in the deterioration of the environment, the disappearing animals leave diminished opportunities to leverage the animal inheritance that would otherwise be available to humans. This dissertation implies that, through the course of grief, humans can come to accept the role they play in a dying, transforming Earth. As we grieve our losses, we join in bittersweet resonance with the failing ecosystems.

Houston claims that the search for the Beloved moves into the foreground during times of whole-system transitions, a transition seemingly underway during the



production of this document.<sup>36</sup> And yet, the chaos that is seen overwhelming contemporary life is, according to Houston, a movement toward consciousness, and toward a planetary culture. The intensity of the chaos illuminates the potential of the emerging consciousness. I agree with Houston when she writes,

The world may be urging us to coalesce into a new and higher unity for which we feel unprepared, and the only force emotionally powerful enough to call us to educate ourselves for sacred stewardship is communion and partnership with the beloved.

The bereavement myth of Rumi and Shams serves as a model for living the greatest story of all, where we are all lovers searching for the Beloved. This is our chance.

## **APPENDIX**

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **ETHICS APPLICATION**

#### **1. Participant Population**

This dissertation will include data from eight to ten participants. Participants will be recruited organically by word-of-mouth, and data will be collected in two all-day group meetings. Participants will be unknown to me, but not necessarily unknown to co-researchers. The primary inclusion requirement is that participants be adults who have sensed the presence of a deceased loved one, and who have a desire to sense their presence again. The death should be more than six months ago, but there is no upper cap on how old the loss might be. Participants who have lost partners, parental figures, children, or significantly close friends and family will be considered when the relational bond was one of notable emotional intensity. A second inclusion consideration is that participants have strong social support who they could turn to if they find the research emotionally disturbing. Conversely, participants may be excluded if they are living in emotional isolation. Finally, participants must have a cell phone capable of receiving text messages.

Participants will be included when they have had a memorable sense-of-presence experience and would not be afraid of repeating the experience, or in the judgment of the researchers would not suffer adverse consequences from participating. In their review of the literature, Steffen and Coyle identified 34 qualitative and quantitative studies into

sense-of-presence experiences.<sup>1</sup> Summarizing these studies, they conclude that sense-of-presence experiences can involve sensory impressions, including auditory, visual, olfactory, and tactile perception of the deceased. More common than direct sensory impressions, however, is “a quasi-sensory, (partly) ineffable ‘feeling’ or a ‘non-specific awareness of presence’.” This dissertation is interested in both sensory and quasi-sensory experiences.

Participants will be included in the study if they demonstrate a capacity for reflexive participation in the screening interview. Reflexive participation is presented in the literature review section of this dissertation as the practice of surrendering through creative action to the necessities, meanings, and possibilities inherent in the present moment. Reflexive participation is an essential capacity for ritualizing throughout all phases of this research.

Because grief for the loss of an attachment figure is such a common experience, I believe word-of-mouth will be sufficient for recruiting participants. A flier will be distributed to people who claim to know potential participants (see appendix five). Contact information will be shared with me so I can call potential participants, or, alternatively, potential participants will be given my phone number and asked to call me. If enough participants cannot be recruited by word-of-mouth, I will advertise by posting the flier in grief support groups and communities around the San Francisco Bay Area.

## 2. Procedures Involving Research Participants

*Screening Interview:* Participants will be screened in a 30 to 60 minute phone conversation. Potential participants could be directly recruited via the lead researcher himself, or potential participants could be referred from co-researchers, friends and/or colleagues of the lead researcher. The screening conversation will serve to gather demographic information, assess bereavement acuity, affect tolerance, reflexivity, and social support. Participants will be accepted or rejected at the end of the screening interview.

*Preliminary activities:* Upon arrival, participants will be greeted by researchers and shown the meeting space. Once everyone has arrived and is seated, we will go through the informed consent and confidentiality paperwork. Next, prior to introductions, the basic schedule for the day will be outlined. Participants will be informed of the importance of being expressive when journaling throughout the research, and researchers will demonstrate how to respond with gesture. At this point, “key moments” will be defined for participants to help them identify significant happenings when journaling, though in practice participant exploration of content should precede journaling explanation. Participants will have thirty minutes for introductions before the altar sequence. Introductions will focus on the participant in the room, leaving descriptions of the loss for the altar sequence; see appendix nine.

*Altar Sequence:* The altar sequence is the first data collection activity on the first day and will involve the co-construction of a remembrance altar to the dead. During the

process of adding their items to the altar, participants will introduce the one who was lost and will be encouraged to tell stories.

*SOP Storytelling Sequence:* This sequence begins right after lunch on the first day and will start with five minutes of silent meditation. After exercises to ground and center participants, the evocation will be a journaling prompt setting the guidelines for the storytelling. Once they have had some time to brainstorm, participants will each have ten minutes to tell their story. After their story, participants will have a few more minutes to journal their responses to each story, followed by a round in which participants offer a gesture and a word of gratitude for the participant offering.

*Altar Integration Sequence:* The first full-day of data collection will conclude with taking down the altar slowly and mindfully, with an aim toward integration of the day's activities.

*Correspondence:* Emails and text messages will be used for communication during the recruitment process with participants throughout the research. There is an email message sent to family and friends for recruiting participants, emails for accepting and rejecting participants, homework and meeting reminder email messages and texts, and there will be a final message to convey a summary of the research learnings to participants after the study is complete.

*Imaginal Dialogue Sequence:* This is the first data collection sequence of the second group meeting. The evocation for this sequence will be through guided imagery.

*Drawing and Collage Sequence:* In this sequence, participants will draw or construct collage images as an emergence from the imaginal dialogue.

*Key Moments Interpretation Sequence:* This is one of the last data collection sequences on the second day. Key moments will be described and defined again as the evocation for this sequence. Participants will be asked to journal key moments from the entire research effort, and then each participant will have 5 minutes for sharing.

*Research Integration Sequence:* This is the final data collection sequence on the second day of research. Researchers will share their preliminary learnings as part of the final integration sequence. This sequence will end with closing words and gestures from participants before they leave the data collection space.

### **3. Informed Consent Process and Documentation**

Accepted participants will sign an informed consent form at the beginning of the first day of data collection. This form details the procedures of the study and the overall purpose of this research. Additionally, this form addresses issues of participants' anonymity and confidentiality, acknowledges potential risks of the research, and clarifies participants are free to withdraw from the research at any time. Researchers will answer any questions participants might have about the study before they sign the document. Signatures will indicate consent to the voluntary participation in this dissertation. This form can be seen in appendix four.

#### **4. Risks**

Participants could find this research emotionally disturbing in new ways, both during the research and after their participation in the study. Bereavement is often (though not necessarily) a state of significant affective and emotional hyperarousal; there is a real risk that participation in this research could lead to emotional overwhelm and incapacitation.

#### **5. Safeguards**

Ritualizing activities in the integration phase will safeguard against potential lingering effects of participation in this research study. Much grief is experienced painfully, so this research will seek to attract participants who have the capacities needed to engage with their potential distress. Researchers will encourage participants to take breaks or even stop the research if participants appear to be dysregulated or heading toward a dysregulated state. Researchers will continuously track the affective responses of participants and stay in communication with each other about affected participants. Should a participant choose to leave the data collection space, there will be a dedicated co-researcher to follow them. Should a participant be overwhelmed by affect to a degree deemed beyond their ability to contain, they will be encouraged to step away from the activity with a co-researcher who will support them with grounding and centering until they are ready to rejoin the group.



## **6. Benefits**

Participating in my study could produce psychological benefits, including an easing of the suffering related to their loss of an attachment figure, or a change in the bond experienced with the deceased. Modeling the process of ritualizing could provide participants with a new coping mechanism for integrating their grief experiences in the future, representing the benefit of new knowledge and tangible skills acquired through the research endeavor.

This research could additionally serve to benefit the greater community of grief researchers by furthering the inquiry into the numinous dimension of grief.

## **7. After the Study**

Participants will be emailed a thank you message after data collection and analysis is complete. This message will include an invitation to keep an ongoing channel of communication open, where potential future questions could be answered. Otherwise, there will be no additional communication with participants. See the correspondence scripts in Appendix Seven.

## **8. Attachments**

Each item listed in number two of this ethic application is presented in the following appendixes.

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **CONCEPTUAL OUTLINE**

#### **Evoking Experience:**

- Opening Ceremony
- Altar poetry reading and guided meditation
- Guided journaling for SOP storytelling exercise
- Guided imagery for beginning imaginal dialogue
- Prompt for collage work

#### **Expressing Experience:**

- Participants introduce the deceased
- Participants co-create altar with photos and linking objects
- Participant words and gestures following altar creation
- Sense of Presence storytelling
- Imaginal dialogue journaling
- Collage/drawing response to dialogue

#### **Interpreting Experience:**

- Altar journaling – contextualizing (describe altars in personal life and media)
- Participants journal response to each participant SOP story
- Participants verbal and non-verbal appreciation of each other's sharing
- Participants' interpretation of collage/drawing
- Participant journaling and sharing of key moments

#### **Integrating Experience:**

- Closing altars on both days
- Gratitude practice (Stephen Levine's meditation)
- Gathering practice for research closure

## **APPENDIX 3**

### **CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE**

#### **Screening Phone Call (30 – 60 minutes)**

1. Researcher introduces himself and briefly describes the purpose of the meeting and the study.
2. Researcher asks potential participants if they have any questions.
3. Describe research purpose, researcher background, and the general research approach.
4. Have potential participants describe loss and what has been happening since the loss.
5. Describe and brainstorm linking objects that could be included in the altar creation.
6. Ask additional questions that gauge reflexivity and get a sense of their emotional support network.
7. Describe benefits and limitations of participating in this research.
8. Acceptance will be determined at the end of the screening interview, or a few days after the conversation.

#### **Meeting One**

1. Room setup (9:00 - 10:00)
2. Orientation and Introductions (10:00 - 11:30)
  - 2.1. Greeting
    - 2.1.1. Researchers welcome each participant at the door.
    - 2.1.2. Researchers provide general information on the data collection environment including bathrooms, refreshments, and location of exits.
    - 2.1.3. Participants will be allowed to select their preferred seat in the order they arrive.
  - 2.2. Orientation and Paperwork.
    - 2.2.1. Researcher thanks all present for their participation and clarifies that participation is always voluntary.
    - 2.2.2. Researcher introduces co-researchers.
    - 2.2.3. Researcher describes in detail the confidentiality requirements binding the participants, researcher, and co-researchers.
    - 2.2.4. Research describes informed consent while distributing informed consent paperwork.
    - 2.2.5. Participants review and sign informed consent paperwork.
    - 2.2.6. Researcher gathers up paperwork and tells participants that they will be emailed a copy.
    - 2.2.7. Participants place sandwich orders from Berkeley Bowl for later delivery.

- 2.2.8. Describe the schedule for the day.
- 2.2.9. Opening ceremony (10 minutes)
- 2.2.10. Introductions (5 minutes each)
- 2.2.11. Break (10 minutes)
- 3. Evocation-Expression Sequence One: Grief Altar Creation 1 (11:30 – 12:50)
  - 3.1. Evocation: Personal story of altar at home (5 minutes)
  - 3.2. Expression: ritualized co-creation of altar (50 minutes)
    - 3.2.1. Introduce the deceased.
    - 3.2.2. Photos and linking objects will be individually added by each participant
  - 3.3. Expression: A few words or gestures reflective of this experience (30 seconds each)
  - 3.4. Expression: Reflective journaling about altar creation. (5 minutes)
- 4. Lunch (12:50 – 1:30)
  - 4.1. A buffet lunch will be provided and there is a Mexican grill right out front.
  - 4.2. Instructions about how to protect the research effort over lunch.
- 5. Evocation-Expression Sequence: Sense-of-Presence Storytelling (1:30 – 4:00)
  - 5.1. Grounding and centering exercises (5 minutes)
  - 5.2. Evocation: Writing prompt for journaling exercise (2 minutes)
  - 5.3. Expression: Journaling brainstorming ideas for storytelling (10 minutes)
  - 5.4. Expression: storytelling. Each participant tells the story of their previous sense-of-presence experience. (5 minutes each)
  - 5.5. Expression: a word or phrase of gratitude for the story (30 seconds each)
  - 5.6. Expression: reflective journaling (1 minutes each)
  - 5.7. 10 minute break at 2:45.
- 6. Integrative Sequence 1: closing ritual (4:00 – 4:30)
  - 6.1. Closing ceremony, take down altar, gathering and gratitude practice.
  - 6.2. Participants are told they can contact the researcher via email or phone with any questions or additional insights they would like to share.
- 7. Administrative tasks (4:30 – 5:30)
  - 7.1. Gather researchers key moments.
  - 7.2. Reflexive dialogue used to process key moments among researchers.

## Meeting Two

- 1. Greeting and Opening Ritual (10:00 – 10:30)
  - 1.1. Researcher and co-researchers greet participants as before.
  - 1.2. Discuss any questions the participants might have.
  - 1.3. Describe schedule for the day.
  - 1.4. Opening Ritual, moment of silence, rebuild altar (20 minutes)
- 2. Evocation-Expression Sequence: Imaginal Dialogue (10:30 – 11:15)
  - 2.1. Evocation and Expression: guided visualization and reflective journaling in which the participants envision their loved one being present (15 minutes)
  - 2.2. Expression: A word or phrase and gesture from each participant summarizing their experience. (30 seconds each)
  - 2.3. Reflective Journaling (5 minutes)
  - 2.4. Break (10 minutes)

3. Changing Modalities: drawing and collage construction (11:15 – 12:45)
  - 3.1. Evocation: Researcher describes collage material, art supplies, leading into a journaling prompt for collage brainstorming (5 minutes)
  - 3.2. Expression: Collage making or drawing that emerges from dialogue. (20 to 30 minutes)
  - 3.3. Expression: Participants describe the image they created (two to five minutes each)
  - 3.4. Ritual closure of expressive space.
4. Snack break: (12:45 – 1:05)
5. Interpretation Sequence (1:05 – 1:45)
  - 5.1. Interpretive Evocation: describe and define key moments. (5 minutes)
  - 5.2. Interpretive Expression: key moment journaling (10 minutes)
  - 5.3. Interpretive Expression: Key moment sharing (5 minutes each)
6. Integration Sequence 2: Ritualize research and meeting closure, taking down the altar (1:45 – 2:00).
7. Administrative tasks (2:00– 3:00)
  - 7.1. Gather researchers key moments.
  - 7.2. Reflexive dialogue used to process key moments among researchers.

### **Thank you email**

1. Thank participants and share a summary of the learning in a final email message.

## **APPENDIX 4**

### **INFORMED CONSENT**

You are invited to participate in a research study on sensing the presence of those who have died. The study's purpose is to illuminate what these experiences are like, what sense you make of them, and how your community responds.

Participation will involve taking part in two group meetings on Saturday, February 29<sup>th</sup>, and Saturday, March 7<sup>th</sup>, at The Finnish Hall in Berkeley, CA. The research will involve the use of the creative arts including journaling, guided meditations, collage-making, drawing, and working with photographs of the persons who have been lost.

Throughout these meetings you will be asked to journal your reflections on what has been happening, and you will be encouraged to respond with nonverbal physical gestures that represent your experience and insights.

Audio data of these meetings will be recorded and transcribed later. Video data will be recorded, but only reviewed if a clarification is necessary from the transcripts. For the protection of your privacy, these recordings and transcripts will be kept securely, and your identity will be always protected. Only the researcher and co-researchers will have access to this data. In the reporting of information in published material, any information that might identify you will be altered to assure your anonymity. All data will be destroyed with the publication of the dissertation.

This study is designed to minimize potential risks to you, but grief is often emotionally painful. There is the potential for you to experience your grief in new ways because of this research. If at any time you develop concerns or questions, the researchers will make every effort to discuss them with you. Researchers cannot provide psychotherapy but referrals to appropriate mental health professionals will be provided, if such a need should arise.

If you decide to participate in this research, you may withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time and for any reason. Please note that the researchers may also need to terminate your participation from the study in order to properly direct the research efforts.

If you have any questions or concerns, you may call me at (209) 770-0003, or you may contact the Dissertation Director at Meridian University, 47 Sixth Street, Petaluma, CA. 94952, telephone: (707) 765-1836. Meridian University assumes no responsibility for any psychological or physical injury resulting from this research.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, understand the intention and nature of this research study as outlined above. My questions about this research have been answered. My participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

---

Participant's Signature

Date

## APPENDIX 5

### FLIER

## SEEKING RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

FOR A DOCTORAL DISSERTATION  
IN PSYCHOLOGY



SENSE-OF-PRESENCE RESEARCH  
FEELING AND SENSING THOSE WE HAVE LOST AND LOVE

Have you felt the presence of a loved one who has died? Join us for two days of depthful research involving storytelling and exploration through the expressive arts. This study will involve two group meetings, one on February 29th and one on March 7<sup>th</sup> in Berkeley, CA. We are looking for 8-10 people who would like to explore experiences of having felt the presence of those who have passed.



#### *Birdwings*

Your grief for what you've lost lifts a mirror  
up to where you are bravely working.

Expecting the worst, you look, and instead,  
here's the joyful face you've been wanting to see.

Your hand opens and closes and opens and closes.  
If it were always a fist or always stretched open,  
you would be paralyzed.

Your deepest presence is in every small contracting  
and expanding,  
the two as beautifully balanced and coordinated  
as birdwings.

—Rumi

If you feel drawn to participate in this research, please give your contact information to the person who gave you this flier. You will be contacted by Culley Harrelson, MA, the lead researcher. If you prefer, you can contact him directly: (209) 770-0003 or [harrelson@gmail.com](mailto:harrelson@gmail.com)



## **APPENDIX 6**

### **SCREENING INTERVIEW**

This script will guide the screening interview. Key points to be addressed in the interview are followed by a list of potential questions for the interviewee. The exact sequence and content of the questions will vary according to what emerges in the discussion.

#### **Introduction:**

Hello, my name is Culley Harrelson. I got your number from {referral name}. Is now a good time to talk? We will need about 30 to 60 minutes total. Do you need to get anything before we begin?

#### **Purpose of Research:**

This research project is looking at what it is like for people who sense the presence of a lost loved one.

#### **Researcher Background:**

I am working on a PhD in clinical psychology. I have completed my coursework and completed a year-long internship as a psychological assistant, practicing psychotherapy under the supervision of a licensed psychologist. You would be part of a project that will be the basis of my dissertation. There will be 2 to 3 additional co-researchers, all from the same psychology program.

#### **Research Approach:**

This research is participatory and experimental, meaning that your personal experience is a vital dimension of the research. We will be looking for you to tell stories about your experiences, and to write out your response to what happens throughout the day in a journal. Nonverbal communication such as gestures and movement will be encouraged.

#### **Benefits of Participating:**

This research project is designed to help you develop a deeper understanding of grief at a personal level, with the research group and within your community.

That said, because of the brief duration of the research activities, you should not expect significant personal change from participating.

### **Demographic Data to be Gathered:**

- Full Name
- Date of birth
- Country of birth, years in country
- Religious beliefs
- Languages spoken
- Name of deceased
- Date of death
- Age at death
- Circumstances of death
- Relation to the deceased
- Would you prefer to communicate over the phone, by text message or email?
- Are you available on the meeting days?
- Can you commit to two full days?

### **Psychological Questions:**

- In the last week, how would you describe your health?
- How would you rate any depressed moods you have experienced in the last week?
- Anxiety?
- How are you sleeping?
- How has your life changed since the loss?
- Are you in therapy? Do you have any mental health diagnoses?
- Are you taking any drugs for your mental health?
- In what ways might you be disturbed by grief research?
- What are some activities and tasks that you are involved in? Hobbies? Exercise? Creative pursuits?
- Are you working? How are you functioning at work?
- Since the loss, how have you been functioning socially?
- How would you describe your relationship with close family (if any)? Non-family significant support?
- Do you have a spouse?
- Do you feel like you need help coping with your current situation?

### **SOP Questions:**

- Can you briefly describe what it was like for you when you sensed {name}? How alert were you? Which of the five senses were involved? Were you comforted, frightened, or upset?

- Are there any particular scents, sounds, types of movement or experiences that stand out strongly as connecting you to the memory of {name}, of that were particularly meaningful to {name}?
- Are there any objects or behaviors that speak to the essence of your memory of {name}?
- Are there any places where you feel particularly close to {name}?
- Do you have any photos of {name} that are particularly meaningful for you?

**Acceptance:**

Participants will either be notified about acceptance at the conclusion of this interview, or they will be sent a letter of acceptance or rejection at a later time. See Appendix 7, Correspondence.

Thank you for chatting with me today! Let's think about our conversation for a week before deciding anything. I will email you my contact information after this call, and let's plan on connecting again next week.

## APPENDIX 7

### CORRESPONDENCE

Each section in this appendix represents a separate message sent to participants, friends, and family. Variables that change within each individual message are indicated with brackets.

#### **Recruitment Email to Friends and Family**

Dear {name},

I hope this message finds you well! After much preparation, I am finally entering the part of my PhD dissertation where I am looking for research participants. I have opted to recruit participants by word-of-mouth, so I am sending out messages to everyone I can think of who might know someone who could be a good fit.

My research is exploring “sense-of-presence” phenomena in the process of grieving a deceased attachment figure. I and my co-researchers are specifically looking for people who have experienced the loss of an attachment figure, including, grandparents, parents, children, close friends, and mentors. Participants must be inclined to explore the paradox of feeling the sensual discontinuity body memories created and shared with someone who is no longer available to join in their expression and reliving. Some participants might have had full sensory experiences of their lost one, and others might simply have had quasi-sensory experiences of the small, day-to-day reminders of closeness. No experience is too big or too small, but participants must have a degree of awe and reverence for their experiences and be open to sharing them in a group. Additionally, we are looking for people with a solid support community already helping them through their ongoing process of bereavement. Finally, we are looking for people whose loss is more than six months old. There is no upper limit on how long ago the loved one might have died. As the researcher, I am drawing from my personal experience of a loss experienced more than thirty years ago.

Attached you will find the recruitment flier. Please consider sharing this with your friends and family members who might also know potential participants. Participants must be able to attend two day-long meetings on {first day} and {second day} in Berkeley CA.

Thank you for reading this message and helping me find participants. I am counting on you and others like you to help me through this transformative educational process.

Sincerely,

Culley Harrelson

### **Participant Acceptance Email**

Dear {name}.

Hello, this is Culley Harrelson, the researcher you spoke to a week ago. I am writing to let you know that you have been accepted to participate in my research study exploring the sense of presence of those who have died.

We will first be meeting on {date}. The second group meeting will be held on {date}. Both meetings will be held at {location}.

Please email me back to confirm you are still interested in participating and are available on the two meeting dates. Also, please feel free to email me any questions you may have regarding this study and your participation.

Thank you for your interest and am excited to include in the project.

Culley

### **Participant Rejection Email**

Dear {name}.

Hello, this is Culley Harrelson, the Researcher you spoke to a week ago.

I am writing to let you know that, unfortunately, I am not able to invite you to participate in my research project. As you may recall, we could accept only ten people to participate, and our goal was to select the most diverse group possible that would fit within our criteria. Your interest in this project is greatly appreciated. Thank you.

Best wishes,  
Culley

### **Altar Homework Reminder Email**

Dear {name},

Thank you for chatting on the phone with me recently, and I am really looking forward to seeing you next Saturday. This message contains all the essential details for our meeting - if you have any additional questions, please let me know.

We will be meeting from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at The Finnish Hall in Berkeley. The address is: 1970 Chestnut St, Berkeley, CA 94702. There are about 10 dedicated parking spaces available on a first come first serve basis, and ample street parking too. This address is about 1.3 miles from the Downtown Berkeley BART station.

One of our activities during this first meeting will be to create a remembrance altar together. If you already have an altar, please consider bringing items that reflect your personal altar's flavor and style. In addition to altars, any other ways of ritually remembering the one you have lost are good sources of potential things to bring. For some people a specific location might provide a link; for others, it might be the smell of certain food or perfume, or some music that held shared meaning for you two together. All of these are ideas for what you might bring. When it is not possible to bring an item (such as a place), you can consider bringing a symbol that represents the item. For instance, you could bring a pinecone from a favorite camp site, or a picture of a beloved restaurant. Please take some time to think about what you might like to bring. Two to four items, including a photo, should be enough, but you can bring more too.

We will have light snacks available, including water and tea. At the beginning of the day, we will have Berkeley Bowl sandwich order forms ready, and will have sandwiches delivered for a group lunch. Alternatively, there is a Mexican grill very close to The Finnish Hall. Please bring any special food you require.

Let me know if you have any questions,

Culley Harrelson  
209-770-0003

### **First Meeting Reminder Email**

Dear {name},

Our first meeting is in less than a week! The purpose of this message is to remind you about our meeting and the need to bring your photos and special mementos linking you to {name}. Previously you had indicated you were going to bring {items}. These are great items to bring; have you thought of anything else that might be good? Please let me know.

We have planned out a simple lunch for the day including {lunch items}. If you need or want any special food, make sure you bring it along.

See you soon,

Culley Harrelson

### **Second Meeting Reminder Email**

Dear Participant,

Our second meeting is in less than a week! We will be creating another altar, so please bring your altar items again. If you are inspired to bring different items or to change your offerings in any way, please do.

If you have any questions or ideas, please let me know.

See you soon,

Culley Harrelson

### **Meeting Reminder Text Message**

Hello {name}! Looking forward to seeing you tomorrow! Here is the address for your convenience: {address}. See you soon.

### **Summary of Learnings Final Message**

Dear {name},

Thank you so much for your participation in my research project. I am very grateful for your willingness to join us and help deepen the research. Your participation, courage, and honesty are all very much appreciated.

{summary of learnings}

Thanks again,

Culley Harrelson

## APPENDIX 8

### DATA COLLECTION ORIENTATION: PRELIMINARY ACTIVITIES

The first ninety minutes of the first day-long meeting will be filled with paperwork and introductions. The following outline was used by the lead researcher to facilitate these preliminary activities.

- 1) Welcome Participant, introduce co-researchers
- 2) Give to participant: sandwich/burrito order form, journal, pen/pencil
- 3) Once everyone is seated, thank participants for being there.
- 4) Review space—bathrooms, snacks, exit locations and so forth.
- 5) Introduce co-researchers again and describe how they will be helping.
- 6) Remind participants that participation is voluntary.
- 7) Review informed consent form as a group—have participants and co-researchers read out loud, each person taking one point until the whole sheet is reviewed.
- 8) Sign and return informed consent forms – participants will be mailed copies.
- 9) Review schedule for the day.
- 10) Describe the importance of journaling.
  - a) I will read over your journals and use what you write in the research.
  - b) This is a private way to share something
  - c) It is a way that you are all sharing at once.
  - d) Journaling will often represent your interpretation of what is happening
    - i) I am very interested in what things mean to you.
    - ii) I am also interested in what things remind you of, from the greater culture. Books, movies, myths, other cultures that something reminds you of – this will be our way of adding context.
  - e) Define key moments
- 11) Introductions (3-5 minutes each)
  - a) Name and a little bit about you
  - b) How you feel about being here
  - c) Hopes for the day
- 12) Break (10 minutes)



## APPENDIX 9

### DATA COLLECTION: ALTAR SEQUENCE

In this activity the participants co-create an altar as part of a remembrance ceremony that aims to be personally meaningful and to inspire a sense of the sacred. Participants were asked prior to the meeting to brainstorm linking objects and photographs to bring for this activity, and they will be invited to incorporate their own remembrance rituals when participating in the altar creation. Researchers and participants will be seated in a circle for both days of data collection, and the altar will be a part of the circle.

Evocation:

I want to start here by reading the poem *Birdwings* by Rumi. I have changed my dissertation topic several times, but I think this poem has been hanging around since the very beginning, long before I knew I was directly studying grief.

Birdwings

Your grief for what you've lost lifts a mirror  
up to where you are bravely working.

Expecting the worst, you look, and instead,  
here's the joyful face you've been wanting to see.

Your hand opens and closes and opens and closes.  
If it were always a fist or always stretched open,  
you would be paralyzed.

Your deepest presence is in every small contracting  
and expanding,  
the two as beautifully balanced and coordinated  
as birdwings.

—Rumi

I love this poem! Several others have described the process of losing someone as one of expanding and contracting, just as Rumi did so many centuries ago.

We are next going to work together to create an altar together, and the hope is that this might be one of those expansive moments. But things don't always work out, of course.... So if for any reason you need to take a break or step out, then please let one of us know.

We have about an hour for this, and I want you all to have the opportunity to introduce the person or people you lost, and for you to have some individual time with the altar. You can introduce them however you like, and once this introduction is complete, you can add your items to the altar in a way that speaks to you and your loved ones. If you brought any objects and mementos please add them to the altar as well and tell us about them and what they represent. We will do this "popcorn style" meaning there will be no set order, you can just go when you feel ready.

Additionally, I would like to open this up and allow you all to propose group activities, before, during or after we work individually to add our items to the altar. So, I would like to spend 10 minutes or so talking and brainstorming together what else we could do.

Summary Words  
and Gestures:

We will now go around, and each make a physical gesture that reflects your participation in this experience. Also, please share a few words that summarize your experience.

Journaling  
Questions:

- Describe the altar we have created.
- Describe any vivid sensations you experienced during this activity.
- Describe any vivid images or memories
- How is this type of remembrance shrine different or similar to what you have already had in your life?
- Were there any surprises?

## APPENDIX 10

### DATA COLLECTION: SOP STORYTELLING SEQUENCE

In this activity the participants will tell their story of having sensed the presence of the dead. This sequence contains two ten minutes breaks – one in the middle, and one at the end of the sequence.

Evocation:

We are going to start this activity with a reading from Jean Houston on the importance of story and connecting our lives with the greater story:

Life is a treasure hunt for story. Gregory Bateson describes story as “a little knot or complex of that species of connectedness which we call relevance.” Thus, we seek, consciously or unconsciously, for those people and ideas whose stories seem relevant to our own. Their stories illuminate, run parallel to, and fill in the missing gaps of our story. Human connections are deeply nurtured in the field of shared story.

...

Story is living and dynamic. Stories exist to be exchanged. They are the currency of human growth. Stories conjugate. Alone you are stuck. In the exchange, both you and the story change. Stories need to be told and retold, heard and reheard to reveal their meaning. We ... tell our stories, to remember them, and to dig into their deeper meaning.<sup>2</sup>

With that, you all will now have the opportunity to share your story with the group. First, I want to give you a few moments to journal and think about ways in which you have sensed or felt connected to the people you have lost. And I don't want to give you too much direction for this – I want you to tell your story in your own way. That said, I am curious to hear if you have shared these things before, and if you did, how it went and who you were sharing with. And I am curious about any conclusions you have drawn from your experiences. So, let's journal for 5 minutes or so.

I will put on some music for the journaling.

Summary Words  
and Gestures:

We will now go around, and each make a physical gesture that reflects your participation in this experience. Also, please share a few words that summarize your experience.

Journaling  
Questions:

Time permitting, we will be journaling in between stories about how you are affected, and the conclusions drawn from other's experiences. These notes are just for you and for the research; at the end of the journaling you will have the chance to say a few words summarizing and to do a nonverbal summary as well.

- Did you have any physical sensations while listening? How did their story feel or resonate in your body?
- Does their story remind you of anything? Any other stories?
- If this had been your experience, how would your family or community have responded when you told them?
- What are some of the positive aspects of this story?
- What conclusions do you draw? What does this mean, if anything?

## APPENDIX 11

### DATA COLLECTION: ALTAR INTEGRATION

Gathering:

- Return to chairs
- Grounding and centering practice.
- Word or gesture representing “where I am now”

Altar Closure:

Our main goal at this point of the day is to work toward integrating the experiences of the day as we take apart the altar we created together. To that end, we are going to do some journaling and thinking first about gratitude. For inspiration I would like to read aloud together from Stephen Levine’s book *Unattended Sorrow*. Chapter 40 is a short chapter about gratitude. I will pass around this print out and I would like you each to read one of the small paragraphs before passing the paper to the next person.

*Participants read gratitude chapter out loud*

I’d now like you to get out your journals to do some writing about gratitude.

{turn on journaling music}

- What are you grateful for hearing about, in all the stories brought here today?
- What were some things that your lost one was grateful for?
- What expressions of gratitude are most challenging for you?
- In what ways will you be grateful to get out of here today?

Time permitting:

And with that, I want to spend a few minutes talking about how we want to do with the altar now to help integrate our experiences. What does the group need? What is this situation calling for?

Gratitude  
Evocation:

Each of the below bullet points is a paragraph from chapter forty of Steven Levine's book, *Unattended Sorrow*. This book will be handed around the circle for this evocation, with each participant reading one of the short paragraphs.

What would it be to awaken to a day devoted to gratitude, a day of thankfulness for what was and yet will be?

Gratitude for the love we have experienced and, even more important, for the loving kindness we are capable of generating.

Grateful for this life in which we have been feeling our way toward the truth.

Grateful that gratitude has any meaning for us at all.

Grateful for "just this much" this very instant, this millisecond of awareness in which discovery is possible. Grateful for the ability to recognize that our whole life is to be found in the timelessness of this moment. That though it seems we are compressed by time, caught between the struggles of the past and the somewhat anxious expectation of the future, we discover, when we look into it, the present moment, "the living present," has all the space and opportunity we need.

Grateful for the breath in our body.

Thankful for the food on our morning plate. Acknowledging with gratitude the blessings from the wheat in the fields, the corn on the stalks, the cow in the herd, the grapes on the vine.

Grateful for their lives as they pass into ours.

Grateful for friends who remind us of love, as well as for those who teach us about how unloving we can be.

Remembering throughout the day how wishful thinking eludes this precious moment and excludes a world of possibilities.

Returning to a sense of gratitude for all we have learned and how precious our opening has become.

Gratitude for the potential of our heart to rise above the stormy surface of the reservoir of grief.

Thankful for the capacity to experience “sympathetic joy,” a happiness for the happiness of others. Grateful for our inherent proclivity to love.

Grateful that just as in the cultivation of compassion we may feel the pain of others and an increase in loving kindness, so in the appreciation of life that is gratitude we may begin to feel the joy of others as well.

Grateful for our capacity to be a bit more fully alive each day.

Grateful for the capacity to know ourselves. Gratitude too that there is nothing we know that we could not know on a deeper level.

With gratitude for this journey and the ways toward our deepest healing within each of us. Gratitude that we are able to go beyond what we know into the unknown where all growth occurs.

May all beings be free of suffering, may all beings be at peace.<sup>3</sup>

Integrative  
Expression:

Go around the circle and get a gesture of gratitude prior to a few words of gratitude from each participant.

## APPENDIX 12

### DATA COLLECTION: IMAGINAL DIALOGUE

Altar:	On the second day the altar will be constructed as a devotional space in silence in the center of the circle, around a simple wooden stool. Constructing the altar will comprise the opening ritual. The stool in the center of the altar will serve as the “empty chair” for the imaginal dialogue sequence.
Evocation and Relaxation:	The following script from Courtney Armstrong will be read to participants to begin this exercise. <sup>4</sup>

#### **Envisioning connection imagery script.**

Sit or lie down in a place where you can get comfortable and begin by taking a few slow, deep breaths. Just follow the natural rhythm of your breath as you ease into a more relaxed state. When you are ready, imagine yourself in a beautiful place. This could be a place that you have been before or a special place you enjoyed with the one you lost. Explore this place in your mind, taking in all the natural beauty there.... water, trees, mountains, a garden.... wherever you are, this is your special place, and you can design and adjust it in any way you like. Continue looking around your special place taking in all the interesting scenery there....turning into any soothing sounds you would hear there....inhaling the pleasant aromas...and basking in the wonderful feel of the air... the warmth of the sun on your skin, or a cool breeze blowing gently across your face...let all of it lift and support you.

As you settle into this scene more and more, you may notice a luminous light and a sparkling energy radiating all around and through things. On an inhalation imagine you can breathe in this healing, brilliant light. The light can be soft and gentle, or bright and energizing; your inner mind will adjust it to be the right color and intensity for you ... whether it is pure and white or warm and golden, or iridescent with many hues.



Imagine the light moving through each area of your body ... taking special care around your chest and heart area ... here the light gently loosens any tight places ... lifts the heavy places ... and tenderly fills the hollow spots ... it continues ... dissolving grief's hard protective shell ... and mending the torn, broken places ... as more and more, you are aware of a safe, sweet, compassionate love shining all around and through you.

And you sense that within this light is the light of your loved one .. coming from a renewed place of healing ... even if you can't see them clearly, you can sense their intention to comfort you and let you know they are alright now. Perhaps you can imagine them gently holding your hand ... or caressing your face ... or giving you a warm hug. Your loved one lets you know that all the pain and sorrow are understood ... all the confusion and anger ... all the yearning ... all the tears ... everything is understood and accepted.

And they let you know that they're here to walk beside you, support you, comfort you, and get you through ... so you can just open up as they send this healing, loving energy throughout your heart ... your spirit ... your body. And as you connect with them, they let you know that they are ok and they want you to be okay too.

If there is anything you want to say or ask your loved one, you can do that now too. They may answer you quickly or slowly ... and it could be in the form of words, pictures, songs, or feelings they send to you ... just stay open and listen ... their message will come through.

You can continue sitting with this as long as you like ... enjoying the awareness of being in their presence ... realizing they are available to you whenever you want to call them up. They are not gone ... they are not lost ... they are forever with you and in your heart.

When you are feeling ready you can open your eyes or return to your seat and rejoin the room.

{wait for everyone to gather}

In order to preserve your fresh experience, we are going to go around the room and each offer a word or gesture to

respond to your experience, and then we will move into some journaling. We will go around clockwise.

{participants respond}

If you can now get out your journals, we will do some journaling before taking a break.

How did it feel to do this activity? Were you comfortable? Uncomfortable? Did it work for you? Were you able to see them? Could you smell them, or imagine hearing them? What were they wearing? Is that significant? What words, if any, were exchanged? Did this exchange feel familiar?

Finally, and we will use your answers here in the next activity, list some of the images and details of your special place. What was there? Were there any animals? If not, what animals might have joined the two of you in this scene? If you, or them or both of you might have been spontaneously transformed into an animal at the end, what animals would you be?

Take your time finishing – we will transition into a 15 minute break now.

## APPENDIX 13

### DATA COLLECTION: COLLAGE AND DRAWING

Evocation and  
Expression:

Ok we are now going to shift modes here, and work to represent what came up the previous exercise in images. We have large sheets of paper here, drawing materials and a bunch of books and magazines for collage. If the idea of drawing makes you uncomfortable, I encourage you to focus on the collage and simply selecting and arranging a single image or images. The process we are going for is one of “low skill and high sensitivity” – so your sensitivity is what matters here. We are seeking meaning, and fancy artistic techniques are not required.

What matters most is that the image you create emerges from the previous exercise – desirable images are the ones you already have in your mind, including the images that come to you spontaneously in this process. If you are unsure about where to begin, you can consider using the animal you wrote down right at the end of the exercise. We have a bunch of animal and nature books to use here (pointing) so you should be able to find something. Again, if you already have something in mind, please go with that.

I invite you all to take a piece of paper when you are ready. If you don’t already have something in mind, draw a line down the middle, or just imagine the paper divided. I’d like you to come up with two images – the animal from the previous exercise could be the starting point for one of these images. The second image is up to you. It could represent you as an animal responding to the animal that came to you in the last exercise. Alternatively, these two images might represent before and after images, for you, or the person you lost. It could be you before on the one hand, and you now on the other. Or them before, and them now. Or it could be “us” before and “us” now. How the two images are connected is up to you. And if you prefer, you can of course simply create one drawing or collage. These are just suggestions.

We will have 20 to 30 minutes for this process so please take your time. When you are all done, we will go around and you will all have the chance to share.

{5 minutes each for viewing and sharing}

Journaling:

We will close this exercise with a few more minutes of journaling:

Any closing thoughts? What was the impact of making these images?

## APPENDIX 14

### DATA COLLECTION: FINAL INTEGRATION SEQUENCE

Integration  
Sequence:

- Return to chairs
- Silent meditation (5 minutes)
- Word or gesture representing “where I am now”

Ok we have reached the end of the activities for today and all the research. Rather than going through a closing activity that was chosen in advance, we are going to do something a little different. We are going to take 10 or 15 minutes and brainstorm together what we might do to co-construct a closing activity that honors all that we have done. By working together, the hope is that we can come up with something that is more integrative for our particular group. So, we don't want to do anything that is really activating or bringing forth a lot of new material; the goal is to be integrative and working toward closure of our meeting. Any ideas?

## APPENDIX 15

### SUPPLEMENTAL DATA COLLECTION INTERVIEW

This interview with Lisa (pseudonym) was conducted separately from the main data collection sessions. Lisa was uncomfortable sharing her story in a group setting. Three other potential participants had similar concerns, potentially pointing to cultural gatekeeping around group grief work. Several people felt it would be difficult and dangerous to be vulnerable around these topics in a group, especially in a group of strangers. I was concerned about missing out on important perspectives of people who wanted to participate but were uncomfortable with the group format. This concern inspired me to conduct two additional interviews with individuals otherwise not in the research group. Of these two, I decided to include only material from the talk with Lisa. Here is the relevant section referenced in Chapter Four:

...so, um anyways we are on this temple and he gave a talk and then we kinda got this roof hangout there and um it just be on our own or go off on our own and there were a group of us, there were like 40 of us group, shaman Peruvian guy saw this bird and he said that's a falcon. And I just I was kinda struck because uh um Hilton had a car, his favorite car was a Ford Falcon and um so I just had this feeling come over me like like and then there was someone there who had some psychic abilities and she was saying "you've been here before" and I just had its just a feeling that went through my whole body of whoa, "he's saying hi" you know?

## APPENDIX 16

### WILDWOOD TAROT

I first encountered a Wildwood Tarot a few weeks before my first week of intensive coursework as a new student at Meridian University. On a whim, I sat down before a man with some tarot cards in front of him at a folding table set up in the corner of a small retail shop in Berkeley, California. He was an unemployed MFTI who had stalled in his clinical training because of financial difficulties. The irony of meeting such an intern at this time and place in his career path was not lost on me, as I was readying myself for a career in psychology. He had two tarot decks with him, and he said I could use either of them for our inquiry. I chose the stack of green cards, which I later learned was the Wildwood Tarot deck.<sup>5</sup>

I remember being struck by the imagery of the cards on that first inquiry. I had asked him for feedback on starting graduate school, and the impact of this experience was accentuated by synchronicities in the cards I selected. He indicated that the main card drawn was representative of the question I brought to the table. The card I had drawn was the first card in the deck, titled “The Wanderer.” This card, in traditional Tarot decks, is “the Fool.” Tarot scholar Rachel Pollack described common associates for this card:

Ask most modern Tarot readers about the Fool and they will speak of his spontaneity, and freedom, innocence, and joy. They will say how he takes chances and can do seemingly impossible things because he acts on instinct (like the fairy-tale character), without the analysis and second guessing that so often paralyze us when we need to do something important.<sup>6</sup>

I had not read this at the time, but over the years since I have come to realize what poignant synchronicity it was to draw that particular card at that point in my life. The power of the moment led me to cultivate an ongoing relationship with the Wildwood Tarot deck.



## APPENDIX 17

### SUMMARY OF THE DATA

This appendix provides a summarizing sample of the collected data. Included are all references to transcripts of the data-collection sessions not otherwise adequately cited in the primary document. Also included are striking, unusual and noteworthy key moments that did not lead to research learnings.

The opening ceremony was the focus of Learning One:

Victoria: We will start our opening ritual. I am going to say a few things because I don't know everyone. Maybe some of you are familiar with this process, but what we are about to enter into is a very special process, and so being able to really formally create the atmosphere and the space for it is what we are about to do. And I um use several traditions, so I will call on some of those.

We will start with a brief kind of centering meditation and then call in what maybe helps us open up and bring into our circle and then at the end I will invite if anyone has anything special for them that they want to invite in, and then you will get a sense of what I will be doing, I will be calling in the directions also, Native American, I have been part of a Moon Lodge for 26 years.

[group wow]

Yeah it has been wonderful. So, get comfortable, and we will begin.

[rings chimes]

Let this sound begin to take you in, inside.

[rings chimes]

[rings chimes]

We are going to take a few moments to just settle in. to let ourselves fully arrive. Fell our bodies, our feet on the ground, our seat in the chair, the air on our skin. And just take these few minutes to just check in with yourself. To arrive. Notice your breathing. Feel the breath in, and follow the breath out, and just settle.

[long silence]

And now we are going to open the space with these human beings here among us, who have gathered together to do special work. We openly create a sacred and safe place to do that work. And to opening our hearts, and our minds, our senses. And let in the mystery, the unknown, the place that is both empty and full. And to call in what we usually think of as the unseen.

And I'll start by calling in the directions. And we'll start with the north. Calling in the energies of the north, we invite you in, energies. The place of the warrior, the place of the wide sky, the place of air. The place of the eagle that looks down and sees the whole picture. The place of the elder and winter. Come into this circle today and be with us. Wow.

And next I call in the energies of the west. The place of the teacher, the place of darkness and mystery, the place where things incubate. The place of autumn, where the bear hibernates. Where we contemplate and we open to knowledge. Come be in this circle with us today. aho.

And I invite in, I call in the energies of the south. The place of the healer, the place of summertime. The place of delight, and play, and innocence, of green grass, of storytelling and rejuvenation. We invite in your energies into our circle. aho.

I call in, I invite in the energies of the east. The place of new beginnings, of spring, of inspiration and vision. The place of passion, a fire. Bring your energies into this circle today and aid us in the work we do. aho.

Then I call in the wise ones from each tradition. We invite you in, we welcome you in. We open to you, to what you can bring us, how we can serve you. Then I call in the ancestors, our ancestors from each of our lineage. We invite you in, we welcome you. Ancestors ancient and ancestors recent. We invite you into our circle today.

And if there's anything that anyone in the circle would like to say, would like to invite into this work we do today, into the sacred space, please speak it. We invite in those that have passed, that want to come [unintelligible]. We ask for [unintelligible] courage to hear [unintelligible]. And I'm also gonna invite in not just the human beings. But also the animal world, the earth. Because it is also our source, our ancestor, and there's love there. And so, we invite you into our circle. So, thank you. aho.  
Our circle is open.

Michelle peppers her emerging understanding of her grandmother with

appreciation for the group setting:

Well, I felt like there's X-ray vision in this group, especially the [unintelligible]. I hadn't realized how much I was suppressing, and then you said, "I think there's something else there in the story." And then, bleh, it comes out. I mean not bleh, it was good, because that part that came out. I felt so light since that moment. I have felt so much less guilt, and guilt about even... I experienced guilt ahead of time thinking, "Okay, I'm going to try to not talk about certain things." I was conflicted in that from the beginning. And then as I was talking, through the process of each of you helping me get through it, I just felt, "It's okay. We're whole people." Who was it that said we're human beings, not... Something, yeah, and everyone's a mixture. So, it has allowed me to get an appreciation for the mixture, the combination that was my grandmother,

grandma, and all of us. Everyone I get a little irritated with because they're not, you know, something, how they affect you, or how I'm affected. What's it called, dysregulated? Anyone that gets me dysregulated. Or, well I should rephrase it, anyone that I allow myself to become dysregulated about. Just know that they're human beings doing the best that they can do. So that is the [unintelligible] that I'm noticing in myself, I feel different now. So, thank you all for a great space, for talking and questioning, and with the feedback afterwards, like the closure. So, there's this whole part in process.

Sofia describes her use of sage and her thoughts about mirrors:

Sofia: That's why I have sage, because with the sage, I open the windows, because the evil or the negativity goes way down. So, I go through each room and I have my words that I say, because sometimes I think that they're stuck or they can't get away.

So, I have sage all the time because stuff happened. You know, my son will be there or my grandson. I have rooms in the back, so I threw them out there, but they see things. I don't see that stuff. I feel it, but I don't see it. So, everybody has their own sage thing, so they do that, and I've taught them how to do that. Not only does it release, I think, the negative energy if that's what it is, it helps them calm down too, you know.

Yeah. It helps the spirit go and it helps the person that's doing it calm down, I think, because one of my grandsons, he doesn't trip on it at all, but he'll do the sage. And the other one is just really freaking out. Actually, he's looking to move. [laughter] And that's okay. I believe in sage.

Peggy: What do you say, if you don't mind my asking? Is it something you can share with us?

Sofia: Oh, it's just that I'm walking room to room and I'm releasing the energy. I don't call it negative energy. I just say, "I'm releasing the energy. It is time for you to go. I am releasing you from the house." Because I think sometimes things get stuck, and so sometimes I think, for me anything, like I said, I open up all the windows and the doors, and I'll go from room to room to room, bathroom, kitchen. I even go in the basement, and I'll do it there. No, I hit everywhere. I hit everywhere, because you know, because people come over and they'll see stuff. I don't see, but they see it, shadows walking, like a person or something like that. I don't see that stuff. I know the old lady comes back every once in a while. But what I do with her, I talk to her. I tell her, when I first moved into that house, I felt her and I said, "Honey, I'm going to take care of your house. I love your house. I'm going to tear down all these freaking mirrors, but I love your house." And that's what I did, I tore down all the mirrors, because I think mirrors hold spirit. That's why—

Peggy: They do.

Victoria: They do. That's why they cover them.

Sofia: And she had the mirrors. You know those vane mirrors with the [unintelligible]? That lady had them all in the living room, all in the bedroom. I'm thinking, "Hm, okay."

Tina describes "the river" as her special place:

I always go to this place, and it's [unintelligible] resist it sometimes, but – I mean, not always, but the river is just such a special place for me. It always has been, since a child. And I have this one place in my mind where I spent just a lot of time as a child and so much – I felt like even though it's so familiar, the landscape, I had this new sense of total expansion and the fragileness of, like, a teeny, tiny life and how a teeny tiny creature – and you find where they are, like that's a whole world. And I could see that in this place where I go. Like, for example, like the water skipper, that's at the river. And watching the water skipper and then the ring it makes and just that creep – like, it's so much beauty just in that, right? And so I just – my whole meditation or whatever you call it, visualization, was about that.

And then kind of at the end, there was this one really beautiful part where we would always swim, and we'd jump off this wooden bridge. And it was like this big, deep green pool. And I was just kind of laying there.

Peggy describes part of herself as a black Rottweiler:

[unintelligible] her, and I felt, it still hard for me [unintelligible] [this], I felt like this black Rottweiler dog who saw something that needed to be destroyed. I just felt it like come out of me, and I'm like, "No!" and just went like this, right? And [so] I said, "Mom, don't you talk to her that way," but I felt like I wanted to kill my mom, and I was absolutely horrified.

It was horrifying. Fortunately, [Grandma] [would do it], and she goes, "Oh, I'm glad you came, and like oh, you're so sweet." And [then I'm just] kind of horrified with the fact that I have this dog inside me that wants to kill things, and like I [unintelligible] [that]. So, I went down to the hallway, I was just, seriously, my self-talk was, "I am Jeffrey Dahmer," and it was really horrific, and so I did the only thing [I knew] to do, which was to call my husband.

So, I'm dialing the phone, and then I'm like, "[unintelligible] [talking to my favorite person] [unintelligible]," and he was so priceless gorgeous. He said, "Honey, you're talking so that only dogs can understand you [unintelligible], you know." So, then I said, "[unintelligible], right?" He goes, "Yeah." [unintelligible] "I wanted to kill her, [well, at least bite her face off."

And without skipping a beat, he goes, "I haven't even been raised by your mom and I want to kill her." So, it was like I got so much during all that, which is, you know, this is much later, I could accept that [dog], and was like, [wow, I

mean, that dog] was just gorgeous. That dog wanted to take down evil. There's nothing wrong with that [thought], and you didn't let that happen, so you're not Jeffery Dahmer. This is good.

She had it really hard, and of course, that's all she could have done for me. There's no doubt in my mind she did the best she could. And I have to [get it] fell so way short of what I needed. It fell so way short. I feel like [black dog in me] right now, [going], yeah, you've got to get them both.

Sofia describes an experience with her mother:

So, she wasn't particularly happy there, and when she went back to Texas it was better. But I came into a little bit of money, and I thought, "You know what? I'm going to do my homage to Momma." And so, what I did is I had a landscaper come in and put in like a garden and stuff. And so that's my homage to my mom. And one day, sometimes I just go out there and sit and go, "Hey Mom, see? See mom?"

Anyway, so one day, I had a screen door, and the dogs, they come in and out, and this monarch butterfly comes and lands on my door. I mean, I see butterflies, but not a monarch butterfly. And it comes and lands there, and I'm looking at it and I'm going, "Mom, is that you?" So, I'm like, oh, well the door's open, and I go inside the house and I come back out, and the butterfly's still there. So, then I go downstairs and I wash some clothes, and I come back and the butterfly's still though.

And so, I call my sister, I'm going, "Betty, Betty, Mom was here!" She goes, "What are you talking about?" So, I told her and she's going, "Oh yeah, that's Mom." And my sister's very intuitive to stuff like that. People come and visit my sister. Yeah, they do.

Victoria: You mean dead people? That's what I thought.

Sofia: Yes. So yeah, anyway, so that was really trippy for me. And that was like a lightness, because it was like Momma came to say, "It's okay, honey." So anyway, those were my two right there.

Michelle describes her dog's passing:

Well, part of my dog's passing, a woman, a friend of mine called me up three days before [unintelligible] on Friday, happened on Tuesday. She goes [unintelligible]. I'm like, "What?" And she says, "She lets you know she's going to be fine." And at this point [unintelligible] she had two knee surgeries, but she said, "I saw her running as a puppy across a field, and on the horizon was a golden light. And she just ran, she merged with the golden light. She became the gold light."

Lisa's telling me this, and I'm like, "What?" So anyway, a couple days later with the vet, the vet says, she told me that the dog had cancer and we should put her down. That was out of the blue. I mean, I knew she was slowing down, but I didn't know she was ready to be put down. So, I was a mess.

We did have her put down. The next morning, there was [unintelligible] cartoon. It was called Doggy Heaven, and these dogs were... It was heaven for dogs, and they were all running around. They go to their dog bowl, there's this big steak in it, or there's lots of [unintelligible]. It was a cartoon. So, I went to go for a swim. I get to my car after the swim, I turn on the radio and the Police song, [Everything she does is Magic].

Again, this is just before and after her passing. I had forgotten about all of that.

In response to Victoria's comments about goth culture, Becca tells a story of taking her daughter to their first concert:

Victoria: You know what strikes me is that the whole goth thing was a reaction to how we put death in the shadows.

Peggy: Amen.

Victoria: We deny it. And they're like, "I don't think so." And that they were expressing what we put in the shadow, some other cultures don't.

Becca: Are you saying goths?

Victoria: Goths, yes.

Becca: Well, I don't think my daughter was doing that.

Victoria: Oh, okay. But in general, I think there is something.

Becca: Yeah, that might be goth, but not her. She just [unintelligible]. In fact, I took her to... Marilyn Manson. And you know, it turns out, I knew the guy that managed The Warfield, and he was going to be there. And she was probably in her teens then. She loved him. She called herself Monika Manson. I mean, everything was...

She was an artist, so the art teacher would say, "You know, we're going to do something on [unintelligible], and you don't really have to do Marilyn Manson." But of course, she does. And I mean, they were incredible paintings.

But when I talked to my friend about this, he said, "You know, [unintelligible]." And they really supervise a lot of his work there. They're just walking around adults all the time. So, I said, "Okay, so I'll take her with me." So, I went too, which wasn't for me, but I went. She was so thrilled, and she brought three of her friends. I went, "Monika, I'm kind of hesitating on saying this, but Monika, you look just like everyone else here." I didn't know if she was going to hate that or not, but whatever.

And then I saw all these people my age. My age, and just really decked out in Marilyn Manson stuff. I'm like, "God, this is amazing." But it didn't have any mosh pit or any of that, because it was really tamed down. It didn't have drinking for the kids or anything. It was really well supervised.

But she loved it. It made her day. But I just thought, "What's the harm? I'm going to go. He said it's fine, and it is fine." And at some point, maybe

it wasn't, but... And I wasn't trying to enforce Marilyn Manson, but on the other hand I wasn't trying to push her away. I just thought... Because she was reading witch books. One thing she was really good at is reading. She was reading like college witch books on witches and stuff like that when she was in second grade. Yeah, so she had that.

So maybe it was death, but... Then, when she saw my mother the night before she died, she said, "I don't ever want to." I said, "I thought you wanted to..." She's an artist, "I thought you wanted to do makeup on dead people." "Yeah, not my grandmother." She didn't really know what death was.

Becca, in response to questions regarding her early thoughts of suicide after her daughter's death:

Yeah. She's just so unique, you know. She'd play with fireworks, and this guy that took her, I mean, I took with his daughter, he allowed them to just look at them. She said, "I wonder how they do that." And she'd see lighted buildings at Christmas, she goes, "How did they do that?" Rather than, "Oh, lights!"

Victoria: Right, right. She and I kind of vibe.

Becca: Yeah, and then she'd see the telephone poles. I never thought about this, "Why are all those other wires up there?"

Moderator: Oh, really good question.

Becca: It's strange, because I came from a family where everything's black and white. You love someone or you don't. And when they're mad at you, you don't love them. You couldn't be mad and love.

One time she said to me when she was three or four, "Mom, I am really angry at Dad. I still love him, but I'm very angry at him." I looked at her and went, "Where the hell did you learn that? God, why can't I learn that?" You know? Just, things came out of her mouth, she was incredibly smart. Like, way up there. That's why school [unintelligible]. She flunked a lot because... But she was just so out there. I mean, she just was really amazing.

One of her questions to me was, when she three, "Mom, are you going to be a grandma?" And I went, "Someday I might." "Oh, no, Mom. I don't know if I like that. I don't like that wrinkly skin." She says, "It's really important to me that my parents look good." [laughter]

Victoria: How old was she?

Becca: She was like three or four. I remember her asking the question, and she just really floored me all the time. I just thought, God. I asked a question. I was reading this little trivia book. I was yelling from the kitchen to the bathroom, "Hey, kids, answer this question. What bugs you?" And my older daughter said, "My little sister." And Monika says, "It bugs me that I'm going to get wrinkles someday." And she was four or five. Where does she get this stuff?

But it was really interesting. And she taught me ways to look at things, because she'd say something, and it'd be totally different from... It wasn't wrong, it just wasn't the way I took it. They see things so differently, and not incorrectly, just differently. [unintelligible] and she was. It was really amazing. Just very unique.

Becca talks about her daughter's sense of style:

Oh, [wow]. And [unintelligible]. And then she made [me], [I mean], one Christmas, she usually didn't give anybody anything, then complained that she never got anything [from friends], always. But one Christmas, she got really busy and she made me this necklace, and then she made me two earrings to go with it, and they're different. One's a lion, and one's a cat or something.

But at the time, when she was doing this kind of stuff when she was young, you notice things where you have holes in your sleeves now?

Michelle: Yeah, right.

Becca: She had put holes in all her sleeves way before they [ever came out that way]. And I finally [stopped] telling her to quit ruining her clothes because that's what she was wearing, so, again, [that was] [unintelligible], [so she] [unintelligible] [act]. And the other thing she did that I noticed [they've been selling a lot] is she would never wear matching socks, ever.

Victoria: That's really in.

Becca: Yeah. And this way before this ever happened. And, anyway, so these, she said, "Now, Mom, they're different, because you don't ever want anything the same, so."

Victoria: She said that about you?

Becca: No, about these earrings.

Victoria: Just in general?

Becca: Yeah, because [we need] to have them different [with her], so I don't have any problem when things don't match anymore [because of her] [unintelligible]. And it really touched me when she did this because she never spent [any time] on anybody's gifts.

Sofia describes her dad, leading to Becca talking about her mom:

My dad is not a nice guy all the time. I love my dad, but he was not always a good person, but there is nothing I could do about that. So, what I do is I remember him being a dancer, I remember him calling my mom babe, that's as good as it gets with my dad.

Victoria: I also hear you accepting and acknowledging.

Sofia: yeah I do.

Peggy: I think what you are saying, and it took me forever to get this with my own mom, was this comfort with what my mom. By feeling guilty I was dishonoring her. But it is an incomplete memory. So, I guess what I



hear you saying is “yeah he did some stuff. But there no protecting this man.” it is what it is. There is something about letting both sides - if you don’t have both sides you are going to miss out.

Victoria: compassion for imperfections

Peggy: my mom, damn she was controlling, but she was also who she was, you know? Without that piece, part of me goes unadvocated for. If I can’t go clearly see that my mom really wanted me to be something different, then I am not owning that part of me that got hurt. Something like that.

Victoria: that was really beautifully said.

Becca: you were talking about the inner child before - my mother was an alcoholic. For years, even though I felt neglected and abandoned she wasn't like an abusive alcoholic, she was just out there all the time and wasn't there, but I could always justify it because my dad was such an asshole and a narcissist. And as I was dealing with a therapist on this he said “yeah, and you were neglected by your mother.” you can also see that part, as well as she might have had a reason to drink. And I need to hold that. I need to care for my inner child when they are feelings these things.

Peggy talking about her mom:

But she was acting out what we weren’t [wanting] to acknowledge, so there was these act-outs that were happening, and I wanted to just [get her] [unintelligible] just get [along], and instead, I felt I got soft, and I said, “Sweetheart,” I just was good with her, I was just good with her. I was remembering who she is, and I went to the sauna that day, and that’s when I heard my mom say, “You done good, [Peggy].”

And [it was] [unintelligible], but what I [hadn’t] recognize is how much [unintelligible] feelings like, “Why couldn’t you be the one who raised me, because then I would be the president of the United States and we’d have world peace?” I wouldn’t think I’d have to ask, I can’t speak twice. I wouldn’t have to have that to work through now. I wouldn’t have to ask permission about every [unintelligible] thing [unintelligible].

I wouldn’t have to [unintelligible] too much [and my emotional nature] is too much. But just like [that same] with you, I mean, I’ve [got to get] [unintelligible], [and seeing her] [unintelligible] this, I’ve got to see her whole, or I am not going to do that for my daughter.

I want those two parts married, and my mom had it really rough. She had it really hard, and of course, that’s all she could have done for me. There’s no doubt in my mind she did the best she could. And I have to [get it] fell so way short of what I needed. It fell so way short. I feel like [black dog in me] right now, [going], yeah, you’ve got to get them both.

Victoria talks about her mom:

Mm-hm, yeah. And some people describe [in a way], you know, I'm so grateful for the journey that I've been on with my mom, because I had to go through that process. She was an alcoholic, basically, [borderline], [you know], and she was a wild drunk, because she would, you know, and I can say it because I really feel like I finally got to this place where I can acknowledge the inner child that did not get what she needed, that was so wounded by it, [and] [unintelligible] PTSD, you know.

And I've done that, and I continue to do that work, but I've been able to kind of see her in more wholeness, and to me, that's such a [unintelligible] [gift]. And when she got lung cancer, and I don't remember, [you know], my age, I'm 68, timeframes like kind of like slip away from me, but [what's] important and what's not.

I don't remember exactly how long ago she died [unintelligible], but we got to spend a lot of time getting real with each other, you know, and that's really an amazing gift because I can also understand her mother had her at 40, and didn't want to be pregnant and didn't want her, and basically, rejected her, and so she was raised by her father.

And I never got to meet any of my grandfathers, but, you know, and so she had a thing where [she's all looking towards] men, [unintelligible] my dad, you know, she'd get involved with all these loser drunks, you know. So, I can understand her, but also understand the child that had been really hurt and wounded by all of that. And I [feel in this], you know, really grateful place because I do feel like I see the whole picture.

And I have a necklace that kind of, in a way, symbolizes the light and the dark, and the acceptance of it, because [unintelligible] I can laugh at this story now, [right], but my mother could be really childish, and I [share those] stories about that.

And so one is, you know, my first husband, [unintelligible] [making] good money, but it wasn't that much, you know, but she's like, "Now you can buy me a diamond." So, she didn't really understand that it's not as much as you think, [Mom]. So, I went out and got her a diamond, and she was really upset because it wasn't big enough.

This is my mom. You know, she was like a little kid, like, you know, [unintelligible], "I want a bigger ice cream cone," you know. But I found it after she died, and I have it on a necklace that I have, a heart someone had given me, and so, for me, it's a symbol of [carrying] all that she [was] and loving her and keeping her close to me.

And so that's a really wonderful feeling, and so what I want to put up here, and this was also [kind of] amazing, you know, synchronicity, and I love synchronicity, is I felt her so strong after she died, [unintelligible] [memorial], and I found a poem, and I'll read the poem first, and then I want to, [the picture will be] up there.

“Those we love from the first can’t be put aside or forgotten, after they die. They still must be cried out of existence, tears must make their erratic runs down the face, over the craters, confirming the absent will not be present, ever again. Then the lost one can fling itself outward, its million moments of presence can scatter through consciousness freely, like snow collected overnight on a spruce bough that in midmorning bursts into glittering dust in the sunshine.”

And I [have] [unintelligible] my mom’s death, and I feel that with her because I still feel her. I [even] didn’t appreciate, until I heard people talk about her, the capacities that she had and the way she touched people’s lives, and so this is [Janice], and she helped me. This [unintelligible] was her idea, and we had found [unintelligible] had medicine of a snake, and the snake is a [transmutations], which is turning poison into medicine, and [it’s about] [unintelligible].

Becca a vivid dream where she encountered her daughter:

Well, no, I can think of something that just comes out. I guess I had this dream once, and I wanted it all the time. It must have been ten years ago, or maybe... I don't know, something, quite a while.

Well, first of all, let me back up. When she died, when [Monica] died, any parent will tell you this, that I started feeling like I was a horrible mother. And that was my belief about myself, because my belief was, I'm supposed to protect my daughter, period. And other people say things like, "Well, kids aren't supposed to die before their parents." And I started seeing all these stories, and that's such bullshit. Many kids die before their parents. All over this world, they're dying.

And it really sets you up to feel like you're not good, when somebody tells you those things. Anyway, so I, for a long time, had that feeling, you know, the perfectionism thing. And I just remember having this very vivid dream, because I don't remember dreams most of the time, where my daughter was like two. All I remember is I was holding her out in my arms, and she was running to me. And I walk up, and she was gone. It was so real, just holding her, you know, two. Just one of those.

Michelle: Was she running like with [unintelligible]?

Becca: She was running like this, to me, and I was... I just never forget that.

Sofia describes her annual Dia de los Muertos altar:

Can we start? I'm Mexican, so we do the Dia de los Muertos, so every year I have my altar on top of my fireplace, and I have friends who do their own. Normally what it is for me is I put [unintelligible] primarily. I have multi-cultures in my family, but that's my thing. I have a box that my mother gave me. It's an old jewelry box. It's like a Plumfield box, falling apart, but my mother gave it to me, so that goes up there.

I have pictures, of course. I have icons that go there. When my dad died, they gave me a cross, a glass cross. That goes up there. My man was an old, hippy motorcycle guy, so I've got like a motorcycle and a skull face right there.

I have a friend, [unintelligible], just passed away a couple years ago. She was just a tiny little thing, so I have a picture of her from way back in the day, and she looked really good. In the end, she looked really bad, but there was a time that that's the way I remember her. So, I have those pictures, flowers, colors. I'm real big on color.

So, what I did, because I did bring the stuff, see, I'll do stuff like this, flowers, because it's light. It represents light to honor the dead. So that's kind of my thing, but it's primarily a lot stuff, you know, memorabilia. Yeah.

I have the letter opener that I brought, but it was too colorful. I brought some things, super colorful. Oh, I'm all about color.

So that's my view. It'll stay up for like a week or two, and then I'll finally... I have a box. So, every year, unfortunately, back to the box. And that's okay because that's life or death. So that's my take on it.

Sofia describes her family more:

It wasn't as much with my mom, but my grandma, she's the one who really, when I got in trouble for smoking dope, they sent me to Texas. So, my grandmother was there, and she would do that. And then I have friends, as I've grown up, I married a Filipino American Indian man, and his family, we're just primarily Hispanic through there. So, beginning with those people, I would go into their homes and I would see them. And I knew that we had that background, but I never really had done it. And starting like maybe about 20 years ago, I started doing that, and it worked out good.

Plus, I like it because when my sons and my grandkids come over, they get to see. And I have pictures of my great grandmother and my great grandfather, you know, which I have found. So, they get to see those, and they get to see other pictures, and they'll ask questions about it. Maybe they'll do it, maybe they won't, but when they come to my house, I've done it there. So, yeah.

Michelle: I was wondering if it's for the folks who passed or for the living, but it sounds like it's both.

Sofia: It's both. It's both. I have a girlfriend who, actually, her altar is up all year around, all year around. Yeah. So, whatever works for you.

Victoria: If you ever want to see a movie that does deal with that, that's what Coco is.

The group appreciates for Sofia's stories:

Peggy: [unintelligible] appreciation for your sharing now, but I just want to thank you for sharing at the altars, because one of the things [we were looking] is our cultural background, and where I grew up, my culture, I don't [know] if I have like a culture, but, you know, mixture of German, Norwegian, and whatever, I don't recall ever having a way of [unintelligible] you describe in your altars, so the pictures, and I don't know, [I love it], and it evoked in me a thought that [you two] [unintelligible] talk about [create an] altar, [unintelligible] [there should be an altar for] [unintelligible], so thank you for that and thank you for sharing.

Victoria: I'm blown away because it speaks to what I was praying for at the start of this, which is to directly confront the [line] we've been told that exists between life and death, so as both of you have been sharing about those that you want to remember, I'm just [kind of] blown away with this feeling of like we're making that line up, and I feeling like I've blessed by the presence of both the people [you're talking]—

Peggy: So [unintelligible], number one, being blown away. Number two, I also come from an [unintelligible] heritage, and I [always] felt like [unintelligible], so I'm also having more of a sense of [place and home], because growing up, I was always drawn to Hispanic [and] Indian culture, and they recognize that, but they also kind of [unintelligible], so I really appreciate your whole story, just like all these, the combination and how much I don't want just [life], I want everybody's [little] culture, [but I kind of like border on the] [unintelligible] somehow, you know? [Like] how you're representing [and] honoring death just really appeals to me. I feeling like it's going to help me with my grief. Like it's not so much about letting go. I'm thinking it's more about recognizing they're still here, but just in a different way, [and I'm like] [unintelligible] is so cool.

Michelle: [unintelligible] I just want to say how [touching] it was for me, because I came from a family that really, we never even had cousins that we saw, even though they lived two hours, three hours away. We never, ever saw them. I never, ever met them. [They're] everybody on my dad's side.

My mother's from Denmark, so [unintelligible], but we just didn't have relatives. I mean, nobody. I mean, I can't even think of all these people that died. I mean, I'm just so amazed how much [unintelligible]. I appreciate you sharing [those].

0:17:29.8

Moderator: It's a weird word to use in this context, but the word that comes to mind is "abundance."

Victoria: Mm-hm.

Moderator: You know, and it's there's a lot, [really] a lot, [a lot] there, you know. And a certain, [I have] a feeling, or a certain envy of [things you didn't] recognize of just the [container] and the context of family and having people to [do this sort of a thing] [unintelligible].

Michelle: And I [have a gesture], but another [word, to me] that's close to abundance is I feel enriched.

Moderator: Yes.

Michelle: Enriched, and [unintelligible] [and about] the amazing stories that you have about them, [it's more of a] [unintelligible], enriched, and cultural [unintelligible].

Sofia: I [unintelligible] [have to], I also have to say, I really, really wanted to be able to, and I don't normally write [unintelligible] [I'm writing] a lot, but I wanted to get every single fact about them, and just like it just felt so important to me, and it feels so lovely. Thank you.

## APPENDIX 18

### POETRY

#### Rumi Searching for his Lost Love

Through the weeping, I witness the path I have chosen.  
 I search for a lost soul, lost only to me.  
 With every step I pull a caravan of fear,  
 But there is no turning back.  
 Not a star points your way.  
 What remains of your tenderness  
 Are the memories my mind incessantly paints  
 And the yearnings of a heart torn from the breast of love.  
 Emptiness echoes into the abyss.  
 Even the wind denies me sorrow.  
 I have become someone in some other place at another time.  
 The shallow voice in the shadow of night is my own.  
 Where have you gone?  
 What might I touch to find you?  
 Shams, who wrested your life from mine?  
 The mule of sorrow marches stubbornly.  
 Do not pull me so!  
 My steps are weighted and I wander in circles.  
 I am the hub of a wheel revolving in longing,  
 With hope as my destination.  
 Is he in Damascus?  
 Does his blood stain the sands?  
 Belighted One of Wonderment, is this the lot of fairness?  
 The flame of our fire no longer burns in my hands.  
 I require nothing, nothing but my friend.  
 Heavenly Star of all that loves, where is Shams?<sup>7</sup>

#### The Guest House

This being human is a guest house.  
 Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
 some momentary awareness comes  
 As an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!  
 Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
 who violently sweep your house  
 empty of its furniture,  
 still treat each guest honorably.  
 He may be clearing you out  
 for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
 meet them at the door laughing  
 and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,  
 because each has been sent  
 as a guide from beyond.<sup>8</sup>

### **Love Dogs**

One night a man was crying Allah! Allah!  
 His lips grew sweet with praising,  
 until a cynic said, "So!  
 I've heard you calling our, but have you ever  
 gotten any response?"

The man had no answer to that.  
 He quit praying and fell into a confused sleep.  
 He dreamed he saw Khidr, the guide of souls,  
 in a thick, green foliage.

"Why did you stop praising?" "Because  
 I've never heard anything back."

"This longing you express  
 is the return message."

The grief you cry out from  
 draws you toward union.

Your pure sadness  
 that wants help



is the secret cup.

Listen to the moan of a dog for its master.  
That whining is the connection.

There are love dogs  
no one knows the names of.

Give your life  
to be one of them.<sup>9</sup>

Let the lover be disgraceful, crazy,  
absentminded. Someone sober

will worry about things going badly.  
Let the lover be.<sup>10</sup>

### **Chickpea to Cook**

A chickpea leaps almost over the rim of the pot  
where it's being boiled.

'Why are you doing this to me?'

The cook knocks him down with the ladle.

'Don't you try to jump out.  
You think I'm torturing you.  
I'm giving you flavor,  
so you can mix with spices and rice  
and be the lovely vitality of a human being.

Remember when you drank rain in the garden.  
That was for this.'

Grace first. Sexual pleasure,  
then a boiling new life begins,  
and the Friend has something good to eat.

Eventually the chickpea will say to the cook,  
'Boil me some more.  
Hit me with the skimming spoon.  
I can't do this by myself.

I'm like an elephant that dreams of gardens  
back in Hindustan and doesn't pay attention  
to his driver. You're my cook, my driver,  
my way into existence. I love your cooking.'

The cook says,  
'I was once like you,  
fresh from the ground. Then I boiled in time,  
and boiled in the body, two fierce boilings.

My animal soul grew powerful.  
I controlled it with practices,  
and boiled some more, and boiled  
once beyond that,  
and became your teacher.'<sup>11</sup>

### **Birdwings**

Your grief for what you've lost lifts a mirror  
up to where you are bravely working.

Expecting the worst, you look, and instead,  
here's the joyful face you've been wanting to see.

Your hand opens and closes and opens and closes.  
If it were always a fist or always stretched open,  
you would be paralyzed.

Your deepest presence is in every small contracting  
and expanding,  
the two as beautifully balanced and coordinated  
as birdwings.<sup>12</sup>

### **The Second Coming**

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;

The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.  
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out  
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi  
Troubles my sight: a waste of desert sand;  
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,  
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,  
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it  
Wind shadows of the indignant desert birds.

The darkness drops again but now I know  
That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?<sup>13</sup>

**APPENDIX 19****ARTWORK**

**Illustration 1. Relationship to the Topic**

## **APPENDIX 20**

### **SUMMARY OF LEARNINGS**

The cumulative learning for this research is that an expanded sense of time can emerge when the bereaved gather to share their longing for reconnection. Learning One states that, for newly-formed grief groups, experienced ritual leaders can greatly reduce the impact of cultural and personal blocks to grieving. This learning points to the important ways in which facilitation of the research environment contributed to the learnings. Learning Two claims animals often appear in the grief narratives of people who are receptive to sensing the presence of lost loved ones. The creative perception of this imagery energizes and sanctifies the grief process. Learning Three contends that the desire to feel whole can lead the bereaved toward an authentic and integrated sense of the departed when they reassess their pre-loss understanding of problematic relationships. Learning Four claims that when presence-sensing experiences feel authentic, bereavement can lead to an expanded sense of time, into both the past and the future.

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