Working through Grief: Tensions, Tales, and Taboos in How Working People

Experience Personal Loss

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Dissertation directed by Professor Stanley Deetz

Work has become an increasingly important element in our modern lives. Scholars have argued that, in many ways, work is intertwined with nearly every aspect of our lives shaping how we see ourselves, and the world (Ciulla, 2000; Deetz, 1992; Giddens, 1991). Though often overlooked, work has become relevant not only to how we live but to how we make sense of death and experience loss. Grief is a fundamentally social experience produced through interactions with our social world and the discourses that shape our reality. This research explored the role of work in bereaved individuals' experiences with grief. Four questions were the focus of my analysis: 1. How do workers describe their experience with bereavement in relation to their work? 2. How do people describe workplace interactions after the death of their loved one? 3. How do bereaved workers talk about the relationships between professional identity and their emotional experience? 4. How do workers talk about their experience with bereavement leave policy? To investigate these questions and learn more about the phenomenon in general, I conducted qualitative interviews with individuals who had taken bereavement leave following the death of a loved one. Participants represented a range of organizations and industries and had diverse conditions around the loss of their loved one. What emerged was a picture of grief shaped by practical, relational, occupational, and affective concerns. The narratives in this study revealed insights about the experiences of bereaved workers. First, practicality and coping with the logistics of loss emerged as central to experiences of

bereavement. In addition, it appeared that work may play an important role in coping, and that support from the organization and co-workers can be meaningful. Finally, complexities in participants' descriptions of their reactions to formal bereavement policy suggested possibilities for improving organizational support for bereaved workers.

Dedication

This project is dedicated to my parents, Georgia and Gary Bauer, and the many people who have

supported me in their absence. This study was written for those who have lost someone dear

to them and have developed their own methods for coping with grief. I offer my deepest

gratitude to all the individuals who bravely and unselfishly support others through the

death of a loved one.

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care and respect. At the same time, I hoped to provide critical reflection on how our talk about

grief both reflects and shapes the social systems we are a part of.

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Contents

Chapter 1: The Business of Bereavement

Approximately eight million people will be affected by someone else's death this year. About half of them will get the news while they are at work (Abbott, 2000). As the average age of workers increases the number of employees who experience loss is expected to rise. Commonly referred to as the "graying" of the American workforce—the number of workers between the ages 45-64 is rising (Reeves, 2005) making the baby boomer generation the largest segment of American workers (Johnston & Packer, 1987). What this means is a dramatic increase in workers who are over 40 and have aging parents. Given that the average life expectancy for Americans is approximately 78 years old (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006), a very large portion of the work force will experience the loss of their parents during this decade. Randall Abbott, a senior consultant, emphasized the potential impact that changing workforce demographics will have on the number of bereaved workers, "This issue is only going to get bigger as the workforce ages and the nature of the family changes" (Shellenbarger, 2000, paragraph 12). In the coming years, more workers than ever before, including the most senior and experienced workers, will grieve, negotiate bereavement leave, and continue to define the relationship between work and life.

Unfortunately there is little research that offers insight into the nature and complexity of working through grief in the context of worklife. The goal of this project is to increase the visibility of the relationship between work and experiences of grief. Specifically, I focus on exploring how bereaved workers talk about grief, negotiating bereavement leave, and returning to work after the death of a loved one. In this introduction I consider how work and grief intersect in modern life. I describe Western cultural views on death and the role of work in

modern Western society. After demonstrating the subtle but pervasive connection between meanings of work and meanings of death, I consider how organizations have traditionally addressed the issue of bereavement through formal bereavement leave policies.

A Social Constructionist View of Grief

Despite the fact that in everyday language and in the psychology literature, death and grief are often talked about as intensely personal emotional experiences, they are inextricably social. The social constructionist view of grief offers a framework for thinking through how social interactions at work can become an integral part of how people respond to grief. In this study, it provides a background for interpreting how people describe their experience with grief at work. Charmaz (1994) summarized the social interactionist perspective which asserts that the meanings of death are socially constructed. She argued that our understandings of death stem from "socially inherited ideas and assumptions that have been formed over the lifetime of the society in which one lives" (Fulton & Bendiksen, 1994, p. 7). Although grief can feel isolating and private it is a fundamentally social experience influenced by many different cultural, spiritual, and social discourses which form our life experiences. This is not to say that individuals are blindly adopting the social meanings that surround them. The social constructionist view rests on the premise that experience is a symbolic process where meanings are actively constructed through reflection and action. Individuals may inherent meanings, but they may also reconstruct or create new meanings.

The conceptualization of grief as a social phenomenon is developed through a social constructionist orientation toward knowledge and experience. Gergen and Davis (1985) described social constructionism as "principally concerned with elucidating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world in which they live"

(pp. 3-4). In this light, the exploration of grief moves away from descriptions of individuals'

interpretation of their experiences of loss and toward interrogation of the social, discursive, and

material practices that shape how grief is embodied, performed, and reconstituted. Rack,

Burleson, Bodie, Holmstrom, and Servaty-Seib (2008) argued that research is needed on how

grief is managed in concert with others. They wrote:

> People rarely grieve alone. Family members may collectively grieve at the death of one of its
>
> own, as may friends and other associates of the deceased. Thus, it is important to examine the
>
> communicative strategies that ordinary people use in the effort to manage the grief
>
> experienced by others in their social networks (p. 401).

This argument called for greater recognition of the nuanced ways that grief is, in many ways, an

interactional process that is constructed through and with communication in the social world.

Literatures from various disciplines have argued for the validity and benefit of conceptualizing

grief as a social process and not as a private or internal event (examples include: Burleson &

Mortenson, 2003; Burleson & Planalp, 2000; Gergen, 1994; Gergen & Davis, 1985; Kasenbaum,

2004; Butler, 2004, 2009). For example, Kastenbaum (2004) described mourning as "a

significant process of interaction between survivors and their society'' (p. 359). Grief is

something that is accomplished in the social realm. It is relational and is rarely done in isolation.

Poststructuralist thinking pushes the sociality of grief further by directing attention

toward the politics involved in the construction of particular meanings of grief. The politics of

grief are manifest in the social norms around who we grieve, what counts as a grievable loss, and

how particular individuals can/should embody grief. Consider the ways that members of a family

or social group may collectively mourn the loss of a relative, friend or colleague, or the social

norms and practices that recognize some deaths as grievable and others not (Butler, 2004). As a

social phenomenon, it is relevant to consider how talk about grief and the enactment of bereavement can reveal the complexities and politics surrounding experiences of loss. From this perspective, it becomes relevant to attend to narratives about grief intersects with other aspects of social life. Attention to talk about grief creates an opportunity to consider the implications of various responses to loss and approaches to talking about bereavement.

Grief as a Social Phenomenon

From a social constructionist perspective grief is both personal and social. Hazen (2008) indicated that while there are common themes related to grief, each person's grief is unique according to their life experiences. Hazen summarized, "Personal history, particular loss, personality traits, social relationships, and life situation all contribute to differences in grieving" (p. 79). However, the extent to which individuals experience variation and difference in bereavement is influenced by the varying discourses to which they are exposed. Reactions to grief are formed at the intersections of social, economic, and cultural ideologies. For example, religious doctrine can strongly influence how an individual responds to loss, while at the same time social norms in a particular community may present a different model for how grief is enacted. The strength and social prevalence of the discourse becomes relevant to what it means to be bereaved. The United States is a mosaic of difference composed of diverse spiritual, cultural, ethnic, and lifestyle choices. However, dominant ideologies still surface about the meaning of death and grief in American culture.

To build a foundation for interpreting narratives about grief at work I reviewed popular ways of conceptualizing grief in modern society. Willmott (2000) argued that the current construction of grief is one of isolation. Kubler-Ross (1975) explained that death in our society is viewed as an intruder, as an insult to all that we have accomplished in controlling our

environment and our drive to be productive. Death asserts the inevitable finality of all things, and reveals limitations to human kind's ability to create and prevail. "Death is nothing more or less than the moment at which human control over human existence finds an outer limit" (Giddens, 1991, p. 162). Fueled by the existential anxiety brought on by mortality, grief can propel individuals to avoid or deny death. Confronted with the ultimate lack of control that death asserts, grieving individuals can experience a significant existential disruption. A denial or avoidance of death has become a "condition of maintaining a coherent, dignified sense of reality and self-identity" (p. 650). Fulton and Owen (1994) described the social trend toward reducing the public visibility of death. They charged:

> Attempts to contain or limit the social impact of a death upon the family or community can be seen in the decline in public obituaries, the dramatic rise in immediate disposition or cremation of the body, the increasing formalization of rules governing an employee's time off for bereavement, and the direct implementation of Federal Trade Commission guidelines on the business and practices and procedures of funeral directors (p. 22).

The experience of confrontation with death, when it does occur, is articulated as a rupture to previous understandings of self and the meaning of life. During the disorder inspired by death, individuals are faced with moments of uncertainty where they must find a frame for interpreting the meaning of events and their role as a survivor. Subsequently, bereaved individuals may search for social scripts that provide coherence and guidelines for how to respond to a death and how to describe their experience with bereavement.

The Western version of grief as an un-scripted disruption and individual struggle is in contrast to Eastern and Middle Eastern practices of mourning that emphasize the importance of family and community. For example, in Chinese, Japanese and Hmong cultures the deceased

continues to be recognized and included in the family through symbolic representations in the home. In addition, family members play an important role in burial rites and other ceremonies (Bliatout, 1993; Klass & Goss, 1998). In Afghanistan, family and friends play an important role in the process of mourning. The mourner is never left alone but is kept company and given food by friends and family for the 40 days of mourning (Raad, 1998). Similarly, "death among Hindus is seen as a family and communal affair" (Laungani, 1996, p. 191). It is customary for family from out of town to stay with the deceased's family for the 12-15 day mourning period. In this social context, death and mourning serve to further unite family through social and communal practices.

In contrast to these family and community-centered approaches to death and mourning, the role of family and community in mourning is more limited in Western culture. Laungani (1996) wrote, "Although the bereaved family may not be expected to overcome its grief and loss by itself, it is nonetheless likely to be left alone to do so" (p. 201). British and American cultures value individualism. Through this cultural orientation it is less common to share problems or worries with others. Fulton and Owen (1994) argued that "The American family has been transformed both in structure and in types of relationships. It is more mobile, socially as well as geographically, than ever before" (p. 21). They continued on to assert that distance has reduced connection and interaction with family and friends and has loosened bonds. Similar arguments have been made about British culture. British families are often physically distanced due to work mobility which "may have 'destabilized' society, creating a sense of loss of community life, particularly in cities. As a result, death may often go unnoticed and the bereaved unsupported" (Laungani, 1996, p. 202). Essentially, Western citizens have become increasingly mobile thus

becoming physically distanced from family and community. As a result of increased distance, there is little community support for those who are grieving.

How we act around death and respond to loss is shaped by cultural ideologies, including religious doctrine and community or civic values. The framing of the relationship between the living and the dead provides one source for guiding how individuals act following the death of a loved one. In Eastern culture (deceased) ancestors play an important role in the lives of the living (Klass & Goss, 1998). In Western Christian history bonds with the ancestral dead have been mitigated by a focus on the sacred dead (saints) or by a bond directly with God. Klass and Goss (1999) argued that in Protestant-influenced Western society, "the suppression of ancestral bonds opened the way for individuals to define themselves as part of mass society" (p. 561). The consequence is that rather than focusing on an afterlife, attention is given toward celebrating and emphasizing life on earth (Walter, 1994-1995). "Just as we are defined in consumerism by the temporary satisfactions of products we buy, the dominant theories of grief in modernity have defined us by the attachments that serve us in the present" (Klass & Goss, 1999, p. 561). Following a logic that values a focus on the living and on moving forward, extended periods of grief and mourning become contradictory.

In addition to focusing on attachments with the present and the living, we have created greater distance between individuals and the deceased through the confinement of the dead to hospitals and mortuaries (Cable, 1998). Unlike in Indian culture where the deceased is cared for and prepared for burial by the family, American culture separates the living family from the dead. Confrontation with death is avoided as we increasingly rely on experts and institutions to mediate sickness and death. Potential discomfort and disruptions associated with mortality are minimized by our lack of exposure to the material realities of loss. Fulton and Bendiksen (1994)

described the social changes since the 1960s that have impacted evolving social experiences with death and grief:

> Since the 1960s, American society has experienced an overall aging of its population, the geographic mobility of its elderly citizens and a profound change in who, where and by what causes people die. In addition, society has undergone what has been described as a 'medicalization'; that is, the growth of an unprecedented nationwide health care system that progressively separates the elderly, the chronically and terminally ill as well as the dead from their families and the community (pp. 6-7).

Death has become a hidden, private experience and not a communal event. When viewed as an individual problem, death becomes taboo.

In modern Western society, the taboo of death contributes to a relatively individualized and solitary experience—leaving many people "uncertain and socially unsupported when it comes to dealing with death" (Shilling, 1993, p. 189). In addition to the sequestering of death, an increasing secularization of society (Grossman, 2002) has reduced social and ritual practices surrounding death. In many cultures, public rituals, such as the wearing of particular colors (white, bright colors, or black), are a way of displaying grief and acknowledging a relationship to the deceased (Klass & Goss, 1998; Raad, 1998). While outward displays of grief are common in other cultures, such customs have faded in the United States.

For much of the twenty-first century and before, it was customary to wear black for a time beyond the funeral—wearing black armbands or placing black wreaths on the door of the deceased's family home. These practices allowed those around the bereaved to recognize grief and offer support. However, Corr, Nabe and Corr (1997) argued that today the American view of mourning as morbid or pathological encourages the bereaved to experience their grief in private.

Without norms for community acknowledgment and expressions of condolences bereaved individuals are left without the benefits of social support such as alleviating separation anxiety as well as feelings of rejection and depression (Gibson, Galagher, & Jenkins, 2010, p. 502).

The combination of social taboo and lack of ritual has reduced the formal scripts or support systems for constructing the meanings of death. The rejection of a public and community orientation toward grief can create tensions for a large number of people living in the United States who come from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. Differences in an orientation toward grief and in formal practices for mourning are in tension with a prevailing sequestering of death and grief. For individuals in Western society today, navigating grief is a complex process filled with potential uncertainty and contradiction. However, the social silence that has arisen around death and grief leaves individuals searching for scripts to enact grief and render it intelligible. Today, there is an absence of shared spiritual, cultural, or community discourses to help individuals make sense of grief. In addition, social support can be difficult to find without social norms for greater communal care of the bereaved. In light of the subsequent silence around death and grief, individuals may turn to work for community and structure as they form their experience of grief.

At the Intersection of Work and Life: Defining Ourselves Through Work

In modern society the lines between work and life have become increasingly blurred. The prominence of flexible work schedules, telecommuting, on-site day care, and the relevance of work in individuals' identity, has increased the ways that work permeates all aspects of our everyday lives. Sunoo and Sunoo (2002) found that "full-time employees usually spend more time with their co-workers than with their friends or even their families" (p. 396). The time that we spend at work has dramatically increased as well as our investment in work as a primary

source for our sense of who we are. Try to think of the last time that you met someone new and did not ask "So, what do you do?" as the quickest way to get to know them. In the United States, work now functions as a central source for meaning making as religion and community connections have become less dominant (Ciulla, 2000). It is relevant to understand the role of work in our larger social world and in our personal experiences of self to begin to see the connection between work and experiences of death and grief.

Today, people gain a certain ontological security through the routine and structure provided by organizations (Giddens, 1991). Work provides a sense of stability and offers subjects a way to generate purpose through organized activity. The connection between individuals and work began with the Protestant work ethic, which valued work as a central aspect of religious and community life (Edgell, 2006). However, through the industrial revolution the meaning of work shifted toward a work-for-profit attitude without the Protestant value of asceticism. Notions of success became tied to paid work, and over time identity became affiliated with work, career, and profession.

The issue of how workers develop and maintain a sense of self in relation to their work has been an important focus in the study of identity in organizational communication literature. Our understanding of ourselves in relation to the world is commonly referred to as our identity. Identity is the culmination of our values and beliefs—it is how we define who we are in contrast to who we are not. Identity asserts a person's position in the social order (Cheney, 1983a). Given the centrality of work in America, organizational life has become a central site for developing and maintaining identity in today's society. Associations with work and organizations can provide a coherent sense of self in an increasingly fragmented world (Cheney, 1983a).

Scholars have argued that, in addition to work drawing upon work for a stable sense of how we see ourselves, this phenomenon has been taken to excess. Today, work has become a site for the enactment of the self as a project. Work is not just a part of who we are; it is where and how we *become* who we are. Workers are encouraged, through social and organizational values and norms, to become "entrepreneurs" of a (professional) self (du Gay, 1996; Giddens, 1991; Rose, 1992; Rose & Miller, 1992). The connection between the self and work was evinced by Grey (1994): "in societies where work, and especially hierarchically organized work, is important, career can offer one of the most obvious sites for realizing the project of the self" (p. 482). Despite unstable working conditions and the changing work contract that have characterized work over the last few decades, work and career remain inextricably tied to individuals' identities.

Identity is constructed through processes of identification, or of creating linkages between the self and other entities or value systems (Kuhn, 2008). Scott, Corman, and Cheney (1998) described how identity is formed through identification. They stated, "Identification is the process of emerging identity. Identification, especially as expressed in symbolic terms, represents the forging, maintenance, and alteration of linkages between persons and groups" (p. 304). For example, if I value making positive change for women and am employed with the National Organization for Women, my feelings toward the organization extend beyond a loose association as a worker. Rather, I strongly identify with the mission and values of the organization, so being affiliated with them is a very important to how I define myself. Identification provides a way for us to think about "the feelings of attachment between individual and organization" (Pepper & Larson, 2006, p. 51). Identification can occur with an organization,

but individuals can also identify with a particular occupation or line of work (see Ashcraft, 2007 for an example).

Identification with organizations has implications for organizations and workers. Imagine how work organizations may benefit from a workforce that strongly aligns their sense of self with being a valued organizational member and contributing to the success of the organization. When a worker is strongly identified with an organization, they many internalize the prominent values and norms that make up the organizational culture (see Alvesson & Willmott, 2002 and VanMaanan & Kunda, 1989) for critical examples of organizational identification). Tompkins and Cheney (1985) argued that there is a powerful link between organizational identification and decision making. When an individual is highly identified with an organization they tend to draw upon organizational logics to make decisions—even personal decisions. Identification provides employees with a value system and framework for making decisions, so that even without explicit prompting, individuals will make decisions that benefit the organization.

Given the importance of work in American society, organizational life has become a fundamental site for identification and the production of values. While the influence of organizations has grown in everyday life, other sources of values, such as religion and community, have diminished. Critical organizational communication scholars have expressed concern over the power that organizational discourses can develop when employees are so strongly identified with work that other possible sites for meaning and values are eclipsed. Deetz (1992) cautioned that in many ways organizational values and logics dominate today, marginalizing diverse forms of reasoning produced in other spheres (Deetz, 1992). When other forms of reasoning and value systems are devalued, individuals' ability to freely form unique experiences is constrained.

Organizations and occupations produce value systems and ideologies that are associated with symbolic and material practices for how to be—even to how we feel. Through identification individuals are called to think and act in ways that support the target or source (organization/occupation). The experience and expression of emotion is included in the process of identification. Emotion norms and feeling rules can call employees to experience certain types of emotions (i.e. pride, stoicism, aggression, or compassion) (Waldron, 1994). The literature suggests that organizational and occupational identification have consequences for the construction of emotional experiences. Therefore, I devote attention in chapter three to describing and exploring research on the experience and management of emotion at work. The connection between organizations and individuals' personal experiences raises questions about how work becomes relevant to bereaved workers' experiences with grief.

Although we recognize the influence of work in all aspects of modern life, even the construction of our individual identity, it is rare that we immediately think of work or organizational membership as significant in the way we handle death and grief. However, given the increasing number of grieving workers, and the myriad of ways work and life become interlaced, it is relevant to explore how the meanings and practices of mourning are constructed in relation to work. Hazen (2008) argued that while there is a great body of research on grief, there is little exploration about the relationships between grief and the workplace. With Americans working more that ever (Schor, 1991) grieving employees must negotiate work during times of loss—and organizations are looking for ways to support bereaved employees, and reduce the impact of bereavement on their bottom line. In today's society grief and work are inextricably intertwined.

A Look at Grief in Relation to Work

Thus far, I've argued that the way we handle loss is a fundamentally social phenomenon. Certainly individuals have unique experiences of grief and feel personal emotions—but the meaning of the experience is constructed through interaction with the social world. From a communication perspective, local talk and narrative descriptions of experience are relevant elements of how individuals respond to death. Work organizations, as an influential element of modern Western life, may play a significant role in how people respond to the death of a loved one. However, there has been little research to help us better understand the relationship between work and grief-related actions and stories. Because death and grief are so often viewed as highly personal and emotional phenomenon, I offer a review of grief as an affective experience and the role of emotions in organizations. In this section, I offer a brief summary of grief as it intersects with work, which previews a comprehensive discussion in chapter two.

For many individuals, the death of a loved one is a significant event that generates strong and sometimes conflicting emotions. The previous discussion of the cultural nature of grief focused primarily on rituals, expressions, and meanings of death; however, the emotional aspects of grief are also strongly influenced by cultural norms and feeling rules within the organizational context (Doka, 1989; Fineman, 2003). Waldron (1994) asserted, "organizations influence not only how members express emotion but also how they assign meaning to the emotional experiences of themselves and others" (p. 401-402). The question arises, how can we better understand the relationship between work, emotions, and workers' experiences of grief?

For many working adults who have had a life of success and accomplishment, the loss of a parent is a complex and often traumatic event that introduces personal and professional challenges they have not yet faced. Despite that fact that the death of older parents has often been

normalized through the discourse of timeliness (Moss, Resch, & Moss, 1997), dealing with parental loss as adult children is complicated. Douglas (1990-1991) described the death of a parent as a time of "upheaval and transition," a major life transition regardless of how old the bereaved is that can affect the adult child's relationships with colleagues, friends and family (p. 134). Death interrupts "business as usual" and leads subjects to question the meaningfulness of everyday practices (Shilling, 1993). The symbolic nature of loss surfaces through exposure to death. The potential for daily activities, relationships, or values to lose their meaning is revealed.

Encountering loss can disrupt an individual's sense of who they are and what is important to them. This is certainly relevant to individuals whose notion of self is strongly aligned with their work, and to those who have managed to insulate themselves from exposure to mortality. For organizational members, especially those late in their career, the loss of a loved one disrupts a seemingly coherent and unchallenged self-identity (Moss & Moss, 1983-1984). "Deaths of family members and friends, in particular, are frequently major life events or 'critical situations' that promote deeper reflection upon the value or direction of life projects and the priority given to competing commitments and often have major ramifications" (Willmott, 2000, p. 651). Douglas (1990-1991) also argued that it is common for bereaved children to reassess personal priorities including considerations of career, life goals and personal relationships.

An important aspect of grief is how people respond to the bereaved. Doka (1989) argued that support from others is essential in order to heal from loss. The way that organizational members respond can play a critical role in how bereaved workers manage their grief (Charles-Edwards, 2009). Gibson, Gallagher, and Jenkins (2010) asserted how important work is as a site for social support. They said, "Many people's primary social world and source of support outside the family is the workplace" (p. 504). According to Charles-Edwards:

Bereavement can shake the foundations of [people's] lives, so it is hardly surprising that the workplace can provide a significant element of stability and familiarity, as well as at times discomfort, amidst what can be an unpredictably fast changing landscape (p. 426).

The workplace, though not traditionally considered a site for personal support and emotional interaction has the potential to be an important source of social support during bereavement.

Feminist critiques of organization have argued that organizational structures and logics privilege rationality, which subsequently positions emotions and relational connection as contradictory to the tone and goals of organizational interaction (Ferguson, 1984; Moss Kanter, 1974). Greif, especially, is a phenomenon that many consider a direct contrast to dominant organizational values and logics (Stein & Winokuer, 1989, p. 92). Hazen (2008) wrote "Conversations concerning birth and death—intimately related to the body, sexuality, and emotions—are restricted in organizations. Such matters are considered by many to be taboo— unclean or sacred (p. 238). The taboo around grief at work can lead to a silence and lack of support for bereaved workers. After conducting focus groups Sunoo and Sunoo (2002) found that, unless there is great visibility around death as was the case after 9-11, many feel that 'normal' or individual losses go unnoticed. They explained, "Millions of workers suffer on the job, silently and invisibly" (p. 392). The bereavement literature is filled with descriptions of the negative consequences of unrecognized grief. When grief is not recognized or is marginalized individuals can experience disenfranchised (Bento, 1994) or stifled (Eyetsemitan, 1998) grief. "According to Doka, without the acknowledgement by others of the relationship, the loss, and the grieving person, grief work—the resolution of grief—cannot be complete" (Hazen, 2008, p. 80). The negative consequences of silence around grief are well documented, but little attention is given to how those consequences extend to the work environment.

Charles-Edwards (2009) outlined the many possible effects resulting from a lack of organizational or co-worker support. He indicated that when employees feel unsupported their connection to work and commitment to the organization may diminish. This often leads employees to lessen their contribution, doing just enough to get by, or to leave the organization. In the analysis section of this project I consider how participants talked about support in the organization and how it impacted their experience with grief at work.

In summary, there is the potential for workplace culture to shape the experience of grief by empowering and motivating workers to connect with and support one another, or it can alienate workers during times of vulnerability (Charles-Edwards, 2009). As workers react to grief and their experience of it at work there are consequences for the organization. In the next section I consider how organizations have attempted to address bereavement through policies that have the potential to provide needed support to employees, but may also functionally limit the intrusion of the personal in the workplace.

Managing Grief

Grief over the loss of a family member, friend or colleague, costs organizations approximately 44.5 billion dollars each year (James & Friedman, 2003). These costs are derived from reduced productivity, increased stress, depression, workplace accidents and other related hidden expenses. Now, six years after these estimates were released, costs are increasing as a growing number of workers take time off to grieve for a loved one. A fundamental challenge for organizations is finding a balance between accommodating aspects of employees' non-work lives while minimizing the intrusion on work.

Despite organizational efforts to create a separation between work and life, drawing boundaries between work and life has become increasingly difficult. Dramatic increases in

workforce diversity and demands from globalization, accompanied by rapidly transforming organizational structures, have pushed organizations to respond to a changing relationship between work and life. For example, as more women entered professional careers (Naff, 1997; Sennett, 1998) organizations had to address issues that had previously been "outside" their concern, particularly related to issues of caregiving. In fact, Eyetsemitan (1989) argued that with the increasing numbers of women in the workforce, more of the grief process would have to take place within the context of organized work. In this study, one theme that surfaced was that working individuals felt they had little time or space to engage in a grief process. One consequence was a perceived need to minimize or contain the amount of time devoted to actively processing grief. Another result was that both affective and practical aspects of grief spilled over into all areas of life, including work. The development of diverse benefits packages has been one response to increased demands for organizations to attend to 'private' concerns.

For organizations, benefits (outside of compensation) have been a central tool for attracting and retaining employees (Dulebohn, Molloy, Pichler, & Murray, 2009). Organizations voluntarily provide comprehensive benefits packages under the assumption that employees' satisfaction with benefits will translate to attitudes and behaviors that serve the organization's interests (Harris & Fink, 1994). However, organizations negotiate a constant balancing act as they try to utilize benefits to retain employees while keeping a close eye on the bottom line. Comprehensive and voluntary benefits packages offer potential upside for organizations and workers; however the costs of these programs are significant. In fact, employee benefits account for approximately one-third of an organization's total labor costs—and those costs are increasing (Hewitt, 2002, cited in Dulebohn et al.). This may be a particularly salient issue for organizations as the number of workers taking bereavement leave increases.

Work-life benefits, designed to help employees negotiate, or balance, their work and family lives, commonly fall into three categories: flexible work options, family-leave policies, and dependent-care benefits (Morgan & Milliken, 1992). Many organizations typically offer bereavement or funeral leave, in addition to standard paid time off (i.e. vacation days), as part of their family-leave policies. "According to the 2000 Society for Human Resource Management Benefits Survey, 91% of employers offer paid bereavement leave, up from 89% in 1998. And the number of paid days off that are available annually has increased to an average of 4.1 in 2000, up from 3.4 in 1998" (Wojcik, 2000, paragraph 14-15). Bereavement leave provides employees with time off work to make funeral arrangements, attend the funeral of a loved one, and to mourn. Funeral leave is particularly relevant for study because it applies to the entire working population, regardless of race, class or gender, as opposed to many work-life policies that are predominantly associated with female employees (maternity leave and flex time, for example).

Organizations incur the costs of bereavement leave in part to promote organizational satisfaction; however, it also serves as a practice for mitigating the potential disruption of grief. In many ways the rational organization of late modernity is constructed in distinct opposition to the experience of loss—a time when ambiguity, emotional chaos, and existential uncertainty surface. Given the potentially disruptive impact of grief discussed above, it is not surprising that organizations would seek out ways to manage grief, or minimize its negative impacts. A few days of paid leave can give workers a chance to attend to responsibilities related to the death of their loved one while also insulating the organization from the immediate disruption that can result from the presence of grief in the workplace. Despite the many benefits of bereavement leave policies; there are also many critiques of the approach that most organizations take to their development and implementation.

(Un)Intended Consequences of Bereavement Leave Policy

To contextualize the discussion of bereavement leave policies I offer the following excerpt from the paid-leave section of an employee handbook:

> Bereavement Leaves: If you are a regular full-time employee and experience a death in your immediate family, [the Organization] will provide you time off with pay for up to three consecutive scheduled workdays to attend funeral services and to make necessary family arrangements. Regular part-time, temporary and casual employees will be provided time off for up to three consecutive scheduled workdays without pay. "Immediate family" includes your spouse, children, legal guardian, parents, brothers, sisters and grandparents. Please let your manager know how to reach you while you are on leave. Managers may request documentation, as necessary.

The Last Acts Workplace Task Force indicated that many organizations narrowly define who can take bereavement leave as well as setting tight limits for the amount of time off (Shellenbarger, 2000). Many organizations have designed their bereavement policy to protect the company from employees who might take advantage of it. In this framework, organizations narrowly define the relations that count as a qualifying loss; these typically include immediate family, defined as a spouse, children, legal guardian, parents, siblings, and grandparents. This approach leads to a policing of employees through elaborate tracking of bereavement time to make sure no relative has died more than once, rather than a focus on how the organization can be a source of support for grieving workers. Few organizations go beyond paid time off to offer additional support in the form of workload adjustment or providing managers with training in how to support bereaved workers (Shellenbarger). Abbott (2000) criticized employers' time-based approach to

bereavement leave stating, "The message to employees is: Leave work and grieve for three days, then you're done" (paragraph 3).

Despite the emphasis on paid time off for bereavement, studies show that employees' satisfaction with benefits does not appear to directly correlate with the level of benefits offered (Dulebohn et. al., 2009). For instance, a worker's satisfaction with bereavement leave may not be positively associated with the number of days off (typically three to five), but may also be influenced by employees' perceptions of how the plan was implemented. Satisfaction with implementation may derive from an employee's interactions with their manager or human resource representative, the application of the benefits to different segments of the worker population, and the ways the policy translates into material benefit for individual workers. Subsequently, the issue of bereavement extends well beyond the initial construction of a policy.

Critics of the time-off approach to bereavement leave have urged organizations to modernize policies by expanding who is eligible, which losses qualify, the forms of support offered, and consideration of bereaved workers' needs after they return from leave. Three to five days of paid leave is primarily a benefit for full-time salaried workers. Part-time workers are often excluded from this level of benefits and are forced to take vacation time or unpaid leave. The qualifier that part-time, temporary, and casual employees will not receive paid-leave raises important issues about race and class. Often, part-time, temporary, and casual employees are in a lower pay-grade than full-time employees. Research indicates that despite great advances in gender equality at work, women remain at lower lever and lower paying jobs (Naff, 1997). In addition, many of the workers who take advantage of part-time schedules are people with caregiving responsibilities. The fact that female employees take leave for child care and family care more than male employees in public organizations (Kim, 1998) suggests that a gendered

allocation of caregiving responsibilities still exists. In addition there are differences between how bereavement leave is constructed in blue-collar and white-collar work. Eyetsemitan (1989) stated that "blue-collar employees, except in large unionized companies, are less likely to have leave with pay" (p. 472). The unequal provision of paid-time off is complicated by narrow definition of which losses quality for leave.

Criticism has been directed at how organizations define which losses are covered by the policy. The list of relations seems to set a normative guideline for who is grievable. The list often excludes extended family, friends, and life partners. However, innovative companies are expanding the definition of loved ones. For example, REI allows employees to define their "immediate family" for themselves and Intel includes domestic partners in the policy. Shellenbarger (2000) argued that the nature of family and relationships is always changing; therefore managers should use judgment to determine the relationships that should be included. John Hebden, a consultant with Fusion Consulting stated, "The bereavement policy should be the tool that facilitates and encourages managers and employees to talk about money verses time. Time allotted should be flexible and the policy should be the guideline and not the rule" (Coy-Robinson, 2006, paragraph 9).

The amount of paid leave is also of concern for individuals whose religious or cultural practices extend well beyond three to five days. For example, according to the Orthodox Jewish faith, family members are to remain indoors for seven days, and Hindus stay with the deceased's family for 12-15 days. Among the Chinese, Japanese, and Hmong cultures there are numerous traditions for ancestor worship that can extend as long as 60 days. Within the Islam religion the mourner is never left alone during the first 40 days, but is surrounded by friends and family. In all of these examples death and grief are constructed as a community experience, in contrast to

the Western privatization of a relatively short bereavement period. In addition, it does not

account for how geographically dispersed families have become, making it common for

individuals to have to travel great distances to attend funeral services and be with family.

The temporal norms for mourning in the United States and in England are dramatically

abbreviated compared to the other cultures, contributing to a view of extended grief as

pathological. Pratt (1981) argued that the organizational perspective on the expression

(*containment*) of emotion has influenced the reduction in the socially acceptable time allotted for

morning—decreasing from a socially acceptable average of three years in 1927, to six months in

the 1950s, to the current three to five day period. Essentially mourning is constructed as serving

no useful purpose and ultimately gets in the way of progress (Kastenbaum, 1998). This

perspective is in direct contrast with the other cultural views discussed where we can see an

emphasis on the value of time spent mourning, the importance of ritual and expression in

experiencing death (for the living and the dead), and the influential role of family and

community in uniting through death.

Another source of contention is how bereavement policies only respond to the days

immediately following the death of a loved one, and do not account for grief as a process. Stein

& Winokuer (1989) reported "employer responses to grief center on the early days of

bereavement. Yet grief research indicates that people are initially in a state of denial and

disbelief after a loss, and manifestations of grief often do not begin to show until weeks or

months after the event" (p. 93). Wojcik (2000) offered suggestions and examples for how

organizations can expand their support of bereaved workers. Providing workplace seminars on

dealing with grief, offering Hospice counseling services, making Employee Assistance Programs

available to bereaved workers, can help employees learn to communicate about grief. Coy-

Robinson (2006) stated, "Companies help grieving employees become better workers when they show 'organizational compassion' (paragraph 17). Organizational compassion can include a flexible approach to bereavement leave and the provision of additional support options.

Despite criticisms and recommendations for alternative approaches to managing grief at work, the vast majority of organizations adopt a three-five day leave policy for specified relations. This instrumental approach has fueled the argument that organizations treat bereavement as a disruption that, at some level, threatens the survival of organizations, and is therefore something to be managed and not engaged (Eyetsemitan, 1989). The issue is that organizations play a large role in American culture, shaping many of the values, attitudes, and ways of experiencing life phenomena.

The experience of grief is complex, influenced by organizational and cultural norms and values as well as social identity. For example, socio-economic class structures how people can literally *afford* to grieve. In addition to the nuanced ways that ethnic and spiritual cultural shape grief, studies also suggests that there are gender differences in how individuals grieve (Schwab, 1996). The notion of disenfranchised grief also illuminates the ways that some grief is not recognized in society which produces negative consequences for those outside the normal construction of acceptable grief. In addition, social stereotypes or prejudices can shape the extent to which people feel they can grieve in ways associated with a marginalized culture or belief system. Doka (1989) stated, "the concept of disenfranchised grief recognizes that societies have sets of norms—in effect, 'grieving rules'—that attempt to specify who, when, where, how, how long, and for whom people should grieve. These grieving rules may be codified in personnel policies" (p. 4). Organizational policy, while seeming to have a somewhat bounded reach, plays a significant role in producing norms that shape the how we grief and the meanings of death.

The current organizational response to grief has been critiqued for homogenizing, normalizing, and privatizing the experience. Mukta (1999) argued that the manipulation of mourning and death rituals could have significant power in accomplishing colonization and political control. Despite the powerful influence that organizations play in our society and the political implications of asserting norms for grief, there is a lack of research that explores the relationship between work practices and ideologies and how individuals talk about grief.

Research on communicative aspects of grief has primarily focused on practices associated with mourning or the impact that communicative practices have on the grieving process and/or bereaved individuals. For example, studies have examined funeral orations and eulogies (Kunkel & Dennis, 2003), or the benefits of expressing grief through journaling or narrating (Pennebaker, 1997). Others have explored how social support can aid the bereaved through the sharing of emotion (Rimé, Philippot, Boca, & Mesquita, 1992) or through actively seeking support from others (Eckenrode & Wethington, 1990). However, what is missing from the picture is research that interrogates how bereaved individuals communicate an experience of grief in relation to work and occupational membership.

Kastenbaum (2004) asserted that mourning is a social process—people rarely grieve alone. "Grief, along with its associated thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, is one of the most powerful emotions that humans experience, so research examining how communication affects grief may afford considerable insight about how messages can influence emotional states, as well as how emotions influence the processing and outcomes of messages" (Rack et al, 2008, p. 401; Burleson & Planalp, 2000; Nabi, 2003). Because of the social nature of grief, a better understanding of the day-to-day communicative strategies and practices that ordinary people use to respond to grief would make a valuable contribution to advancing our knowledge about the

relationship between bereavement and work. For Americans, work is a primary source of identity, values, and logics for sensmaking. Therefore, the role of work and organizations in how people talk about responding to the death of a loved one should not be ignored.

Based on the literature reviewed above there is evidence that experiences of bereavement are complex and influenced by social interaction. Therefore, I began this project by asking how people talk about their experiences with bereavement. Then, to develop a better understanding for how work becomes relevant to the experience of losing a loved one, I asked how people describe workplace interactions following a death. The third question guiding this project stems from arguments about the ways that professional identity may shape many elements of life experience, here I ask about the relationship between professional identity and emotional experiences. Finally, given organizations' desire to support employees using worklife policies (Dulebohn et al., 2009) and critiques of bereavement leave policy, I look more to the practical component of this picture and ask how bereaved workers negotiated bereavement leave policy.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study is to develop a better picture of how individuals talk about their experience with bereavement at work. The voices of individuals who have lived through the experience will contribute to research on the role of work in bereavement processes and on how workers describe organizational bereavement leave policy. This study attempts to answer some of the questions raised in research on bereavement leave and on the quality of support offered to workers. By exploring how workers talk about their experience of bereavement in relation to their worklife we may get a better picture of the communicative mechanisms that individuals use to cope with loss in the organizational setting. Given the prevalent conception of grief as a highly affective experience, I turn to the organizational communication literature on emotion to

understand the relevant perspectives and findings on the study of emotions in organizations; this is the focus of chapter two.

To conduct this study of grief at work I made both theoretical and methodological choices. In chapter three, I described the methodology used to investigate the phenomenon. In brief, my methodology is guided by a qualitative approach to research. Qualitative projects attempt to interpret the events that occur and the meanings that people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In this project, I explored how working people responded to the death of a loved one and how they talked about grief by conducting in-depth interviews with individuals who have taken bereavement leave. I then analyzed the narratives looking for themes and patterns in their talk about grief in relation to work. From a qualitative perspective, research is shaped by the social identities of those studied and the researcher. 'Reality' is simultaneous, local and dynamic. As such, I engaged in reflective practices to make visible my role in the construction of the interview data and the analysis.

As is often the case with inductive research, my findings did not exactly align with my original vision of the project. As described in the introduction, and will be further explained in chapter two, research indicates that the ways grief is felt and expressed in the workplace are significant. The literatures also suggest that investigations of this phenomenon should consider the political production of a particular emotional experience of grief. The political questions remain of concern to me, but this study was more preliminary, focusing on how people talked about their experience rather than the process of production. This is discussed more in chapters three and eight. Ultimately, what resulted was a picture of how bereaved workers talked about what mattered to them—what issues and feelings rose to the surface—as they reflected on what it was like to manage grief and worklife.

In chapter four I offer an overview of the issues and concerns that permeated their narratives about bereavement. Here I argue that work does indeed play a significant role in how these participants talked about grief. In chapter five, I look more specifically at the issue of experiences with grief-related emotion at work. In part, the picture of an emotionally neutral and controlled bereaved worker emerges as the ideal. However, insights into tensions and struggles in containing as well as expressing grief at work are revealed. The issue of emotional support becomes a relevant theme that offers contrast to discourses that assert there is no room for the personal work. Chapter six offers a close reading of brief excerpts from the narratives to explore the complexity of selected themes and the ways that narratives about bereavement may be gendered. Attention is given to the consequences of talking about bereavement at work in particular ways. Finally, in chapter seven, I review bereaved workers' responses to formal bereavement leave policy and consider the implications of policy for individuals and the larger organization. Chapter eight offers conclusions that can be drawn from the project the implications of this work for bereavement studies, loss-related emotion in organizations, and organizational policy. Finally, I consider limitations and future projects to continue research in this area. As implicated in the title of this project, what emerges is a picture of bereavement that is filled with stories of loss and connection, of silence and shared experience; it is a complex tale that offers an opening for new approaches to understanding how to meet the needs of bereaved workers.

Chapter 2: Grief at Work and the Political Production of Emotion

Grief has become an increasingly important social and organizational issue. Grief is relevant in the context of organizational life for several reasons. First, the percentage of the workforce that will grieve the death of another person is increasing. Second, grief is an experience constructed through interaction with the social world; with work playing a pivotal role in our social world it becomes intertwined with experiences of grief. Third, grief is understood as an emotional response to death often associated with sorrow, a response that inevitably seeps into worklife. Many have argued that this particular affective experience is fundamentally at odds with work values and norms, thus, there appears to be a tenuous relationship worth exploring. In this chapter, I extend the connection between grief as an emotional experience and organizations as an important site for the production of emotion.

This chapter first offers a general overview of various approaches to understanding the nature of emotion. I indicate that much of the research on emotion at work has adopted the social constructionist perspective and thus continue on to review relevant issues in the study of emotion labor. This section concludes with thoughts on how this body of work has been critiqued and might be usefully developed by attending to issues of power and the discursive construction of emotion. Further, I offer support for the value of turning the focus of emotion studies toward the internal every-day cases of emotion work in organizational life. In the final section of the chapter grief reemerges as the focal point through discussions of grief studies and issues raised in the study of grief at work. In closing I outline a set of research questions that guide this qualitative study.

Theorizing Emotion

Conceptualizations of emotion can be categorized into four primary categories:

organismic, cognitive, social constructionist, and poststructuralist. Hochschild (1983) referred to the first category as the organismic model, which includes scientific conceptions of emotions as biological, physiological, and psychological. The second category focuses on how emotions become meaningful through cognitive appraisal (Fineman, 2003; Hochschild, 1983). The third is a social conception of emotion, which emphasizes the cultural contexts that produce particular emotional experiences. Finally, poststructuralist theorizing of emotion has advanced the study of emotions as social and infused with power relations. Following a review of these perspectives, I will discuss how emotion has been studied in relation to organizations.

The Organismic Model: Emotion as Biological Response

To begin, Hochschild (1983) describes the organismic approach as rooted in a biological understanding of emotion. Organismic researchers conceptualize emotion as both an antecedent to behaviors, and as coping strategies to behaviors and events.

The first of the organismic perspectives focuses on emotions as fundamentally biological. Fineman (2003) stated that the biological perspective views basic emotional responses as hard wired into our genetic makeup. This hardwiring programs our emotional responses to various stimuli. For example, when a person experiences increased heart rate, sweaty palms, and a rising anger as an executive announces there will be layoffs, they are responding to threat. Or, when a person home alone becomes fearful at a noise outside they are responding to vulnerability and responding with caution.

When people have a biological response they are demonstrating emotion that is rooted in our prehistoric history (Darwin, 1872). For example, a showing of teeth in rage may be remnant of the act of biting. Darwin became interested in the presence of consistent emotional displays across cultures, which would support the notion that emotions are part of our genetic makeup.

Gergen (1994) summarized this traditional naturalistic/positivist perspective, "emotions [are viewed] as inherent possessions of the single individual, genetically prepared, biologically based, and experientially grounded" (p. 218). Theorizing about connections between physiological changes and emotion can also complicate individuals' fight or flight responses.

Also included in the organismic model are the exploration of physiological-emotional responses, and the connection with cognitive parts of the brain. The relationship between emotion and neurological responses considers how some emotional responses are hard-wired chemical reactions, but it also considers how socialization and experience impact how we feel about the physiological response. For example, an individual may experience physiological arousal when entering a room, but how that response is translated into feelings of love, hatred, fear or anticipation is "embedded in a lifetime of accumulated experiences and learning" (Fineman, 2003, p. 11). Considerations of how life experiences shape and intersect with physiology paved the way for a psychological perspective.

Sigmund Freud, the icon of the psychological perspective, was particularly interested in emotional excess. Through his study of severe emotional problems he contributed three components to the legacy of the organismic perspective: First, our past childhood experiences shape our emotional sensitivities and personality to the extent that we cannot escape them; traumatic experiences are highly influential, they surface in painful feelings and *anxieties* even as we try to repress them; and we develop a number of defenses to the ways that traumatic pain infuses everyday life, such as rationalization, projection, sublimation, and reaction formation. In Freud's work, emotion is conceptualized as affect or the manifestation of early childhood trauma and focuses on anxiety as the predominant emotion. The result is that emotions become viewed as dangerous and pathological. Through the lens of this perspective, Fineman argued that the

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organization is "a cauldron of repressed thoughts, fantasies, and hopes" (p. 13). The focus here is on a humanist view of the individual as autonomous with feelings deriving from within in response to life experiences.

Cognitive Appraisal of Emotion: "I Think I Feel…"

The second perspective marks a shift toward considering how emotional responses become meaningful to individuals in their social contexts. Appraisal theory, advanced by Richard Lazarus (1991), draws attention to the social and cultural contexts and environmental variables that affect cognitive processes, which then impact the appraisal of emotions. Viewing emotion as a process of cognitive appraisal emphasizes that physiological or psychological feelings are not meaningful until we appraise, or make sense of an experience. Emotion and feelings emerge when individuals apply cultural understandings to each social situation (Waldron, 1994). For example, during appraisal individuals might consider first, how the situation affects him/her and if there is any threat or benefit, and second, what can be done (Fineman, 2003).

Within this framework, emotion is not emphasized as an inherent biological response, rather, emotion becomes meaningful when a person goes through a process of appraisal and reappraisal where people cognitively control and shape the emotions they feel (Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994). In other words, social feelings such as loneliness (Wood, 1986), pride or hope (Harré, 1986) are not associated with specific neurophysiological responses, but emerge from cultural guidelines about what emotions are appropriate or even possible. Consider, for example, a time when you felt a lump in your throat or tears stinging your eyes as you watched a Hallmark commercial that elicited an emotional response. The feelings that surfaced were not necessarily a direct biological response associated with love, fear, or grief. Rather, as you watched, you

reflected on the nature of the relationships and the emotions felt by the actors in the scene, then internalized their response as the appropriate social reaction—all in a few seconds.

The cognitive perspective does account for a natural biological experience, but is primarily concerned with how the physiological response is shaped and experienced through interaction with actors and the social and cultural environment. Waldron (1994) noted that emotions are in many ways an artifact of cultural values. He stated, "The performance of emotion is one means by which cultural agreements are enacted, negotiated, and created" (p. 392). Attention to the ways that social discourses and cultural norms affect how we understand and experience emotion, makes this perspective applicable and interesting to communication scholars (Tracy, 2000b).

The Social Construction of Emotion: Social Rules for Feeling

The social constructionist perspective asserts the most external and social view of emotions thus far. Social constructionism centers around the idea that social structure and individual subjects are produced through interaction (Giddens, 1979, 1984). Fineman outlined three aspects of the social construction of emotions: "the effects of different cultural experiences and everyday social expectations; emotion roles and scripts; [and] language and interpretation" (p. 15). The social constructionist perspective asserts that language is central to the formation and interpretation of experience. Haare (1986), a prominent social constructionist, has argued that we can only experience things within the confines of language. Language provides a frame for interpreting emotion, without language the physiological responses would not be meaningful to us as a mode of understanding or experience. Therefore, the language and discourses that are available directly impact the emotions that are "available" as well.

Emotions are manifest through language, specifically through narratives or stories.

Accordingly, emotions and emotion rules are embedded in social norms and rules for the display of emotion. Goffman's (1963, 1967) dramaturgical approach is helpful for exploring how social interaction shapes emotion. His conception of a "front stage" where social expectations are considered prior to the expression (performance) of emotion in contrast to a "back stage" where emotions are less regulated, advances theories of emotion beyond the biological or cognitive models. Goffman indicated that social (and organizational) norms create social expectations that guide how emotions are expressed and experienced. The display of emotion is conceptualized as bound to self-presentation and the desire to meet various expectations for particular social situations.

Fineman (2003) refers to social expectations for emotion as "feeling rules." Feeling rules refer to the social expectations for what we ought to feel in particular circumstances. For example, the socially appropriate feeling for when a friend gets promoted is happiness or delight. However, a person may feel jealousy, frustration, or sadness. In this case, individuals may regulate their emotions to match the expectations, or others may even remind the person of the feeling rules with comments such as, "you shouldn't feel jealous" or "you should be happy for them." The notion of feeling rules builds upon the sociality of emotions, asserting that emotions arise in organizational norms and shape how we talk about, think about, and, subsequently, experience emotion.

Feeling rules are bound to society and culture. "Emotion is a performance tied up with organizational and social norms, culturally-specific linguistic labels, and continuous interaction among actors, directors, and audience members" (Tracy, 2000b, p. 17). Our experience of emotion is shaped by the culture, values, norms and language we use and have available to us. Social constructionists believe that "stories do more than represent individual emotions, they

actually *constitute* the emotional form of work life. Emotions are alive in social interactions, molded by the cultural language and conventions of organization" (Fineman, 2003, p. 17). From a social constructionist position research on emotion should move away from a psychological perspective to explore how and why emotions are constructed and the consequences of these processes (Armon-Jones, 1986). Within this framework, Waldron (1994) argued that, from a communication perspective, the relevant questions about emotion include: "How is emotion performed by members of a particular community?" "What are the accepted causes of emotion?" "How is emotion collectively interpreted?" "How are emotions regulated by the community?" "What functions do emotional controls serve within a community" (p. 393, See also Harré, 1986).

The Poststructuralist Perspective: Power and the Production of Emotion

Tracy (2000a) argued that emotion research could be usefully advanced by drawing upon Foucauldian and poststructuralist conceptions of power and the production of subjects. Poststructuralist theory advances the social view of emotion by promoting the examination of how emotional experiences and subjects are constructed and constrained through the discursive and symbolic (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). Further, this approach advances critical interrogation of the communicative practices which give rise to various emotional experiences for particular individuals in a given social and organizational context—the emphasis here extends beyond considerations of emotional performance to explicate the very production of our most internal feelings. In this section, I offer a more detailed description of the poststructuralist perspective because it is less frequently applied to communicative studies of emotion and may not be as familiar as the others. I continue on to explain the poststructuralist perspective on experience, as it is relevant to how I theorize the "experience" of grief in this project. Following this more

philosophical detour, I will return to a review of how theoretical perspectives have been applied to studies of emotion and work.

Power and emotions.

This fourth perspective approaches emotion as a radically social and political phenomenon (Tracy, 2000a, 2000b). According to poststructuralist thinking, concepts and meanings are social, historical, contextual, and are never absolute or finite. Understanding meaning in this light leads to questions such as: how did this meaning come to be?; how is it maintained or contested?; what social factors or discourse might lead to a change in meaning? These questions then are fundamentally focused on the production of meaning, experience, even subjectivity, within a system of power relations that influence the struggle over meaning.

Rather than conceptualizing power as unitary and exerting influence downward, as in the case of foundational concepts, Foucault (1977) theorized power as an ongoing process that has productive capabilities. In other words, power does not exert force to restrict interaction, behavior, interpretation, but it is a generative process that enables change through the presence of different voices and alternatives. It is through a struggle among multiple and competing discourses that power emerges and is sustained or contested. Power, through this lens, becomes productive as discourses continuously construct and shape experience—even our seemingly most personal experiences of emotion.

Tracy (2000a) argued that the predominant corpus of emotion studies had focused on the micro-production of emotion. For example, a flight attendant might manage her emotions to produce empathetic emotions for a disruptive passenger, rather than allowing herself to feel anger (see Hochschild's, 1983, emotion labor research). Drawing upon Foucault's (1980) theories of power and discourse, micro-practices can be brought into conversation with macro

discourses and organizational structures that shape social expectations for emotion and emotion work. In the example above, we might consider larger social discourses that produce the norm that service workers should necessarily be happy and accommodating. In Tracy's (2000a) study of emotion labor on a cruise ship she investigated the cruise ship's history to understand how emotion labor in that context was historically contingent. Through this process of exploring micro and macro discourses in relation to one another she was able to investigate practices that may have been routinized to the point of invisibility through everyday interactions.

Another benefit of Foucault's dialectical notion of power is that it helps problematize the popular dichotomy between internal or authentic emotion and performed or constructed emotion (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). As will be discussed in greater detail in the following section, studies of emotion labor have frequently emphasized the tensions that arise between our "real" or internal feelings and those that we "fake" for the job, or other social demand (see Hochschild, 1983; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989 for examples). In contrast to emotions as real versus fake, Tracy (2000a) argued that internal feelings and external emotional displays work in tandem to create an emotional experience in line with the moral order that simultaneously construct workers' subjectivity.

In summary, the grounding principal of the poststructuralist perspective asserts that concepts and meanings are social, historical, contextual, and are never absolute or finite. This view encourages research that interrogates the social processes, discourses, and material practices that have led to the construction of seemingly unitary concepts. For the study of emotion, a relevant question is: how are emotion norms constructed and contested through various organizational, social, and individual discourses that are infused with power relations? Leveraging Foucault's theory of power, emotion research has the potential to reveal how

organizational emotion norms and micro-practices construct emotional experiences that produce the subjectivities of employees in and through complex relationships of control (Tracy, 2000a). In this introduction I briefly mentioned the formation of subjectivity as a consequence of the production of meaning. In the following section, I further explain this concept and a poststructuralist view on experience.

The production of subjectivity and experience.

Poststructuralist theories are useful in the study of emotion because they speak to the production of subjects and experience, and emotions are intertwined with our understandings of self and our experiences of the world. From a poststructuralist perspective subjectivity is viewed in a non-unitary way, which is to say that it is continually changing and can be many things at once. According to Weedon (1997), subjectivity refers to both a subject's conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions. It includes her "sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (p. 32). The poststructuralist view is in contrast to the humanist assumption that subjectivity is coherent and rooted in the reality of individual experience. Weedon explained, "poststructuralism proposes a subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak" (p. 32). Discourse creates subjectivities, structures experience, and constitutes what counts as meaningful and important (Mumby, 1997).

Despite the belief that subjects are constituted through multiple and competing discourses, they are not without agency. Subjects are thinking and feeling and thus capable of reflection and redefinition of experience. In fact, the constitution of subjects through a collision of competing discourses opens space for resistance to dominant ideologies or social norms. Foucault (1980) stated, "Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it but it also

undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (p. 101). As Foucault indicated, discourse provides the mechanism of power, but is also the instrument for resistance. Feeling ambivalence about an emotional response can reflect the complex struggle between various discourses to fix meaning and construct a particular experience of the world or local phenomenon.

In this study, the term "experience" refers to the overall summation of discourses, emotions, practices, thoughts and meanings that come together around grief. I specify this perspective on experience because the term is commonly understood through liberal-humanist assumption that "experience is what we think and feel in any particular situation, and it is expressed in language" (Weedon, 1987, p. 81). This popular conception leads us to view our experiences as a truth, overlooking how they are formed and the interests they serve.

Individuals, in embracing emotion as their own, participate in the production of certain views of the world. For example, if I say "I just feel that I need to stay home with my children and not be a working mom," my ownership of the emotion obscures the ways that my feelings are produced through social discourses about the role of women in childrearing. This is not to trivialize or depersonalize emotions by indicating that individuals do not really have emotions. Rather, the goal is to understand how that particular feeling emerged in a given social, historical context. Weedon argued, "The meaning of experience is perhaps the most crucial site of political struggle over meaning, since it involves personal, psychic and emotional investments on the part of the individual" (p. 76). Scott (1992) echoed this premise, "it is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience" (p. 26). This view marks a shift away from conceptualizing experience as primarily rooted in the individual toward a view of experience as emerging in concert with the external world. Decentering notions of "the

individual" and "experience" does not devalue experience. Rather, it creates an opportunity to understand the constitution of experience and "its strategic position within the broader field of patriarchal power relations" (Weedon, p. 71).

Attention to processes of meaning construction position meaning as something that we do in our everyday lives. Consequently, even seemingly private actions and thoughts are always/already political. In order to explore the politics of private experiences we need a "theory of language and social power which pays detailed attention to the institutional effects of discourse and its role in the constitution and government of individual subjects" (Weedon, 1997, p. 104). Language enables subjects to think, speak and make sense of the world and the self. Language is the means by which conflicting discourses collide and constitute individuals as thinking subjects. Personal emotions that seem to emerge from our unique private self and experiences are understood to be formed in relationship with our material and social interaction with the world. The benefit of this conception of emotion is that it creates a space to interrogate how emotion is political.

Emotion at Work

Emotion, as understood by social constructionists and poststructuralists, is inextricably tied to our symbolic interactions with the social world. Americans are working more hours than ever before and identity remains strongly tied to our ability to succeed in the world of work. To put it directly, emotions are bound to our worklives. This view of a fundamental connection between emotion and work has not always prevailed, and in many circles it still exists as an marginalized view. In the following section I first review some of the historical perspectives on emotion at work. I then turn to a discussion of how research has explored the topic and the development of constructs to understand the management of emotion in organizations. I

demonstrate how this field of research has evolved and consider recent approaches to emotion

management that take a poststructuralist approach to considering the role of power and discourse

in the production of emotion. After exploring the topic of emotion (labor) studies I transition to a

more direct review of grief at work.

Evolving Views on the Role of Emotion in Organizations

In order to investigate emotion at work it is valuable to consider how emotions have

historically been conceptualized in the organizational context. In the following section I offer a

brief review of the role and position of emotions in organizations with particular attention to the

politics involved. Where do emotions fit in the world of work? Throughout much of the

twentieth century the popular answer was that they didn't.

Fredrick Taylor revolutionized work in the early 1900s bringing control, efficiency, and

calculation to the fore ground. The path to success rested on the ability to control as many

organizational variables, including the minutia of employees work life. The emergent view was

that feelings were difficult to control; therefore, emotion would be best managed out of

organizational life. According to Mastenbroek's review, emotion was "written and managed out

of organizations in a management attempt for control over an unruly and potentially disruptive

force in organization life" (cited in Rafaeli & Worline, 2001, p. 98). The conception of emotions

that evolved in organizations paralleled the classic mind/body dualism in Enlightenment

philosophy. As Gibson (1997) argued, organizations were conceptualized as the rational thinking

mind that offered structure; in contrast emotions were seen as the unpredictable, unregulated

body. Emotion consequently became associated with "irrationality, with the personal, and

therefore, with the domestic sphere and feminine nature" (Rafaeli & Worline, p. 100). Fineman

(1996) explained that within the myth of rationality in organizations, rationality is viewed as "a

thinking, cognitive process of cool calculation" while "impulsive, emotional, desiring qualities are antithetical to rational and cognition" (p. 547). According to this perspective, emotions are messy, complicated, and unpredictable and are in direct opposition to the preferred view of organizations as rational, productive, and controlled environments

The feminist argument is that the following associations are deeply embedded in both social and organizational life: work/public→ rational/masculine versus home/private→ emotional/ feminine. Through this dichotomous construction where the rational working world is in direct opposition to the emotional private sphere, emotions become necessarily out of place in the office. McDowell and Court (1994) stated, "The workplace is distinguished by its rational and bureaucratic social order: an arena supposedly unmarked by emotion or by personal characteristics or attributes" (p. 729). The series of binaries, public/private, rational/emotional, masculine/feminine functionally elevates the public/rational/masculine while marginalizing the private/emotional/feminine in contrast. Mumby and Putnam (1992) summarized the feminist argument stating, "the traits associated with masculinity are treated as a 'given' (and taken for granted), whereas the traits defined as feminine are constituted as 'other,' or as supporting but not essential to organizational life" (p. 466). Subsequently, the feminine/emotional is marginalized and the masculine/rational becomes the valued dominant in organizational (public) space (Ferguson, 1984; McDowell & Court, 1994).

A central feature of the "rational" organization and the "rational" worker is the absence or control of emotions, particularly emotions that are viewed as antithetical to productivity, such as sadness, anxiety, or fear (Hassard, Holliday, and Willmott, 2000). Moss Kanter (1974) argued that early models of organizations privileged a "masculine ethic" of rationality characterized by: "a tough-minded approach to problems; analytic abilities to abstract and plan; a capacity to set

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aside personal, emotional considerations in the interests of task accomplishment; a cognitive superiority in problem-solving and decision making" (p. 43). Rational traits, and the use of emotion only in service of task accomplishment became elevated to a normalized ideal.

In contrast, specific emotions, especially those associated with female roles (such as nurturing and vulnerability) were "othered"—they were tacitly, if not explicitly, devalued. Rafaeli and Worline (2001) aptly argued that it is not that organizations have traditionally been devoid of emotion or have even marginalized emotion in general, but rather, organizations have been devoid of *particular* emotions (those coded as feminine) that do not fit dominant organizational logics and the prevailing association with rationality. Rafaeli and Worline summarized, "Aggression, forcefulness, assertiveness, confidence, and competition are in. Weakness, submission, modesty, and caring are out" (p. 101).

A consequence of the rational/emotional binary and the gendered politics of emotion at work was that the ideal or dominant image of a professional worker became predicated on an ability to separate the (personal) emotional from the public work environment. Emotion, associated with the private sphere, was constructed as a pejorative trait to be eliminated or managed. The ability to exclude particular emotions from work or to effectively manage emotion in accordance with occupational and situational norms emerged as a significant element in constructing a professional work identity.

Despite efforts to functionally and ideologically manage emotion out of the organization, they remain part of work life. The reality is that "emotions are inextricably bound up with other people and our participation in our social worlds" (Rafaeli & Worline, 2001, p. 96), and thus we cannot remove emotion from the workplace. The presence and role of emotion and emotion norms at work have been the subject of a large body of research since Hochschild (1983)

published her seminal work on emotional labor. The focus of emotion research in organization studies has highlighted the practices, tensions, and consequences of emotion management at work. Three themes in the study of emotions provide important conceptions for my study.

Approaches to Investigating Emotion at Work

Within organizational life emotion has historically been treated as an internal phenomenon to be controlled or managed or as an external performance to be cultivated for organizational or professional gain. In general, the workplace is not a place for un-managed or free-flowing emotions. These dominant conceptions of the place for emotion at work have spurred a significant corpus of research primarily devoted to exploring emotion work, emotion labor, emotion management, emotional intelligence, and the associated impacts or consequences of various organizational approaches to emotion at work. Hochschild's (1979, 1983) theories of emotion labor have significantly influenced organizational communication studies of emotion at work, and so I begin with her contribution. Next, I briefly summarize emotion studies that expand beyond service-related work to include the role of emotions in internal and professional contexts. Finally, I review critiques of emotion labor studies and advances in emotion studies that emphasize communicative practices that facilitate the production of emotion.

Emotional labor.

The social constructionist perspective on emotion has influenced much of the research on emotion in organizations. Within the field of organizational communication, Hochschild's (1983) sociological study of emotional labor has had a pervasive influence, both on theorizing emotion, and on how emotion is conceptualized in relation to organizational life. Hochschild's *The Managed Heart* explored flight attendants and Billy collectors' experiences with emotion management on the job. In the study she interrogated how emotion becomes instrumentalized

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and commodified when an organization makes emotion part of the workers' paid labor.

When experiencing emotion in the workplace an individual may decide to manage their emotions to align with organizational rules for emotions and emotional expressions. Hochschild (1979) identified this process as emotion work, "the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling" (p. 561). For some people emotion management may be more difficult than for others given the personal nature and varying intensities of emotion. "In order to avoid affective deviance, some individuals may face a harder task than do others, the task of consciously working on feelings in order to make up for 'a natural attitude'" (Hochschild, 1979, p. 560). Emotion labor refers to the deliberate expression (and even feeling) of emotion for wages.

Emotion labor can be described at two levels, deep acting and surface acting. Hochschild (1983) described surface acting as a situation where workers perform or display an emotion but keep it segmented from their own "authentic" experience—it doesn't change whom they are. Such as when a service employee smiles cheerfully at customers and greats them pleasantly even if they are feeling frustrated or overwhelmed. In contrast, deep acting is where a worker is required to alter a portion of reality to manage or alter their emotional reactions. For example, a flight attendant imagining that a rude passenger is a family member to evoke feelings of compassion. The problem is not intrinsically in the act of managing emotion; in fact that is a necessary part of everyday interaction. However, Hochschild argued that the production of emotion becomes dangerous when it is commodified. When emotion becomes "processed, standardized and subject to hierarchical control" (p. 153) people risk suffering negative effects on their psychological well-being. Negative outcomes stem from, emotive dissonance, or a clash between what the worker feels internally and displayed emotion.

Hochschild's theory of emotion labor generated interest among organizational communication scholars who turned their attention to exploring social and organizational processes related to the construction and management of emotion. For instance, studies have investigated: processes for communicating emotion expectations; understanding how emotion work is done (communicated) by employees; the interactional processes that shape emotion work; the cultural manipulation of emotion and other related areas. In line with Hochschild's work, numerous communication scholars have explored the demand for (mainly positive) displays of emotion in the service industry including: VanMannen and Kunda's (1989) study of Disneyland employees; and Rafaeli and Sutton's studies of clerks and Billy collectors (Rafaeli, 1989; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987, 1990, 1991; Sutton, 1991; Sutton & Rafaeli, 1988). Rafaeli and Sutton (1987) and Tracy (2000a) summarized this category of emotional labor research: Disneyland employees are paid to put on a happy face; cruise ship employees are expected to be constantly "on stage" and friendly; McDonald's employees are instructed to portray desirable traits such as sincerity, enthusiasm, and humor; and flight attendants are constantly expected to display appropriate feelings.

Communication studies have also expanded the scope of emotion labor, focusing on workers who need to display emotions that are less intense than normal, as in the case of 911 workers (Tracy & Tracy, 1998). The emotional labor research has focused primarily on the study of emotions when they are overtly prescribed and managed by the organization, as well as when they are subtly implied through cultural emotion norms or social expectations. Related to this genre of emotion studies, is the exploration of unintended and negative consequences of emotion labor including burnout and stress (Miller et al, 1988), emotive dissonance (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987) and workplace bullying (Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik, & Alberts, 2006). In contrast to an

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interrogation of the negative consequences of emotion work, managerial literature has emphasized the positive potential of emotion at work.

Emotional intelligence.

Within business and management literature, discussion of emotion has focused on how to harness the positive power of emotion and passion for individual and organizational success. Popular publications included Thomson's (1998a, 1998b) *Emotional Capital: Capturing Minds and Hearts to Create Lasting Business Success* and *Passion at Work: Six Secrets for Personal Success*. The focus on passion at work marked a shift from a marginalized view of emotion in relation to work, toward conceptualizing emotion as a skill to develop in order to achieve business success. If organizational leaders have been unable to remove emotion, the unpredictable variable, from the organizational setting it is not surprising that we see strategies and techniques designed to manage it.

The concept of emotional intelligence has emerged as a way to conceptualize and evaluate the management of emotions. Salovey and Mayer (1990), define emotional intelligence as a "type of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them and to use the information to guide one's thinking and actions" (p. 189). Also known as EQ, emotional intelligence has become a cornerstone of this genre. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to recognize emotions in oneself and others and to then manage emotions toward productive ends (Goleman, 1995). The concept of emotional intelligence asserts validity to emotion; emotion becomes complimentary to rational intelligence (Tracy, in press). Critiques of this perspective argue that it is problematic to conceive of emotion in organizations from a purely instrumental orientation (Hatcher, 2001).

As organizations begin to understand the potential benefits of emotional intelligence we see the distinct possibility that emotional intelligence may become part of the job description for workers at all organizational levels.

Extending Studies of Emotion Management

Research on the various facets of emotion and work discussed above has emphasized the sociality of emotion. However, persisting in these studies is a belief that emotions, or aspects of emotion, are authentic and arise from within the autonomous individual. For example, emotion labor or management becomes problematic and leads to emotive dissonance when organizationally prescribed or influenced emotions conflict with "real" or felt emotions. Tracy and Trethewey (2005) argued that a consequence of theorizing emotion labor in terms of authenticity and emotive dissonance is that it perpetuates the assumption that psychological discomfort arises when fake selves and real selves clash. Holding on to a dichotomous conception of emotion as authentic versus false enables the assumption that emotion is private and real and is falsified through various types of faking it.

Waldron (1994) stated "The dichotomous portrayal of emotion as real or expressed, private or public, genuine or fabricated, lends itself to oversimplification of the role of communication processes in the emotional lives of organization members" (p. 92). The tension between a socially influenced external display and an internally derived real feeling does not account for the ways that emotions and subjects are shaped through a range of macro and micro discourses and symbolic practices. Even though attention is given to social processes and organizational practices that shape emotion, there is a line drawn between emotions that are generated through organizational norms and expectations and those that are internal and genuine. This is problematic because, through this construction, notions of the autonomous individual are

subtly protected and rigorous investigation into the social discourses and organizational practices that construct an emotional subject are prevented.

Cultural and professional emotion norms.

As Waldron (1994) highlighted, the study of emotion management within the organization has received far less attention than emotion labor performed in service-related or boundary spanning positions. A small segment of organizational communication research has stepped outside the bounds of the emotional labor construct to explore the ways that emotion is fundamentally part of organizations and work roles, challenging prior notions of work as inherently non-emotional (Mumby & Putnam, 1992; Miller, 2002). Rafaeli and Worline (2001) summarized this bridge in the emotion research, "The concept of emotional labor had its beginnings in writing that focused on customer service, but the turn toward cultural management reveals the emotional tone of all organization" (Rafaeli & Worline, 2001, p. 108). For the purposes of this discussion, I highlight two significant studies in this area, which build an argument for more research in this vein.

First, Van Maanen and Kunda (1989) contributed to our understanding of the relationship between organizational cultures, the development of emotion norms, and communication strategies for emotional regulation. This work is important because it evidenced how employees willingly engage in emotion management in order to conform to the emotion norms and values produced through organizational culture. The portion of the project that investigated a Tech firm described how organizational culture provided a framework for interpreting appropriate behavior in the workplace, which became linked to "the rules that govern emotional expression" (Van Maanen & Kunda, p. 43). For example, they narrated a situation where an employee, Bob, voiced dissatisfaction and frustration with managerial efforts to promote a positive company

attitude during an engineering group meeting. After the interruption other workers whispered and laughed. After a second comment from Bob another worker said "I'll buy you a beer if you stop talking, Bob." And Bob remained silent.

In this example Van Maanen & Kunda emphasize the spread and containment of tension as intertwined with their culture values. It becomes clear that expectations for emotion management do not only come from employee handbooks and training, but in the internalization of cultural values and the associated emotion rules. Pressure to contain or display particular emotions could be exerted not only from executive mandate, but also from co-workers and peers. Through this study, day-to-day interactions where individuals and groups manage their own and others emotions become part of the conversation about emotion at work.

Yanay and Shahar (1998) focused on exploring the relationship between professional discourse, emotion rules, and emotion management. These topics are important to organizational emotion research because they emphasize the complexity of the relationship between emotions and all aspects of organizing, not just providing service. Yanay and Shahar argued "emotional labor in professional service organizations is the product of contested professional discourse" (p. 371). Their study of therapists revealed that emotion management is also an issue of professional identity. What is of particular interest is how this research places the day-to-day self-motivated emotional regulation of professional workers into the sphere of emotional labor.

While Van Maanen & Kunda interrogated organizational culture as a source of emotion norms, Yanay and Shahar move beyond the organizational walls to explore how professional discourse produced emotional norms and feeling rules. Their findings supported those described above indicating that even professionals who have autonomy over their emotional displays are subject to unobtrusive emotion rules. These studies provide justification for conducting emotion

research which examines how emotion norms and expectations, from a range of explicit and implicit sources, become relevant to workers across functional positions. In addition, consideration of how individuals enforce emotion expectations on themselves and their peers leads into emotion studies that specifically investigate how power operates through discourse in the production of emotion.

The production of emotion.

Tracy (2000a) contributed to the emotion labor literature by introducing the complexity of power from a Foucauldian perspective. Her study of emotion labor on a cruise ship expanded the possible role of communication in emotion labor practices—considering the political construction of emotion norms through organizational, social, and everyday local discourses. Additionally, she explicitly connected emotion norms with the construction of identity and revealed employees' role in subordinating themselves to organizational emotion norms.

To highlight the relevant issues I'll describe an example Tracy (2000a) offered about her feelings following the death of her grandmother, while working as an employee on the "Spirit" cruise ship. While in port Tracy received word that her grandma had died, just a few hours later she was back aboard the ship in her cheerful assistant cruise director role. Tracy reflected on how she felt about performing and dancing with passengers right after the death of her grandmother. She said she felt a bit "guilty" and "stupid" but noted that she simultaneously felt proud at her ability to do a "good acting job." Being able to perform cheerful emotions and conform to the emotion norms set for cruise ship employees in the wake of contrasting emotional norms and feelings from her personal life seemed a marker of her commitment and ability to perform her job well.

So, where did Tracy's discomfort with the situation come from? Was she experiencing emotive dissonance (Hochschild, 1983) or was she "faking in bad faith"—conforming to emotion norms she did not agree with (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989)? Tracy argued that her experience was more complicated than either of those explanations allow. As a result, she moved away from the traditional social constructionist approach and examined the social discourses that produced the emotion norms which contributed to the construction of her experience. Eventually she concluded:

> The above incident illustrates a desperate attempt to jump between two discourses at once—the organizational mandate to be happy and unaffected and the society expectation that one should feel grief after the death of a family member (p. 117).

It was not that she had "real" feelings of grief that clashed with "fake" feelings of being proud of acting happy. Rather, "discomfort came in trying to perform two acts at once" (p. 117). This conclusion reveals how the entirety of Tracy's emotional experience was produced through a struggle between discourses that assert conflicting emotional norms and display rules for responding to grief in the service-work environment.

Research on the production of emotion illuminates the role of discourse and communicative practices in shaping our feelings. Through this perspective we gain the ability to see greater complexity in the formation of emotional experiences. This allows for an interrogation of the various social and local discourses, talk and actions, that ultimately construct our affective experiences through the active and fluid negotiation of possibilities for meaning. As Tracy (2000a) demonstrated, multiple and competing discourses regarding emotion norms intersect when social or personal discourses collide with organizational or professional

discourses—as was the case when social norms for grief were put into play with norms for emotional performance at work.

Grief at Work

Stein and Winokuer (1989) contended that grief is pervasively understood as in opposition to the values and goals of the workplace. Discourses supporting the necessary rationality of work contrast with discourses that articulate grief as a disruptive, unpredictable, volatile, and extremely emotional. Grief-related emotions are often viewed as "passions" or genuine emotions that are understood as beyond one's control (Waldron, 1994). "The involuntary quality of genuine emotion is associated with negative meanings. Coworkers perceived to be in the 'grip' of involuntary emotion are likely to be labeled 'out of control' or 'hysterical'" (Waldron, p. 404). While individuals may be given leeway in the experience of passions at work, in general, they are in direct conflict with the emotional norms of organizational discourses.

So what happens when individuals find themselves at the center of competing discourses? Little attention has been directed toward exploring the emotion work that occurs when employees enter the office following significant affective experiences in their personal life such as divorce and death, which are connected with discourses of loss, failure, and ending. However, these experiences have the potential to reveal the complexities of how emotional experiences are produced through competing discourses between different spheres of life. I begin this section by reviewing continued efforts to conceptualize the various facets of emotion labor and identify concepts that will be useful for this project. Next, research on the experience of grief, and more generally bereavement, provides a foundation for thinking about the possible tensions between

various discourses associated with grief and work. Additionally, a few studies specifically on grief at work paint a picture of the communicative needs of bereaved workers.

Refining and Reconceptualizing the Scope of Emotion Labor

The prevailing approach to emotion studies at work has drawn upon interpretations of Hochschild's theory of emotion labor. However, emotion labor—the performance of emotion as part of paid work—has limitations for study in this area. One deficit is the lack of attention to how "we manage our emotions in the workplace both to benefit ourselves and to benefit the organization" (Callahan & McCollum, 2002, p. 220). However, studies have demonstrated that workers often engage in the management of their emotions without express directives from supervisors (Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989; Yanay & Shahar, 1998) and it is possible for employees to benefit from aligning emotions and emotional displays with organizational norms and values (Tracy, 2000a).

Callahan & McCollum (2002) endeavored to create further distinction in the terms used in the emotions studies literature. The goal was to give greater visibility into the motivation or type of benefit produced through the management of emotions. Drawing upon Marx's definitions of use-value and exchange-value they asserted the following definitions (p. 221). *Emotion labor* has exchange-value, this occurs when emotion is performed or felt in exchange for a wage or other type of valued compensation. In contrast, *emotion work* has use-value—an individual gains pleasure from the act and chooses to manage their emotions for non-compensated benefit. The term *emotion management* becomes an umbrella term that refers to "the control and thoughtful presentation of emotions to others in a variety of interpersonal contexts" (p. 219). Emotion management can refer to the suppression of unwanted or contextually inappropriate feelings, the performance of exaggerated emotion, or the regulation of emotional expressions. The emotion

work construct is useful for thinking about the emotion management that may occur around grief at work. These distinctions enable greater nuance in investigations and descriptions of how emotion management occurs in organizations and creates a possibility for more complex thinking about the consequences of this phenomenon.

In addition to acknowledging that understandings of emotion work are limited by the assumption that affect rules are only beneficial to organization, Conrad and Witte (1994) noted that this reinforced a simplistic view of employees and of affect rules. These arguments shape how the current study attends to the complexity and variation of experience and the ways that emotion work is willingly conducted for some type of individual benefit. Wharton and Erickson (1993) also argued for a more complex landscape of emotion studies. They encouraged greater consideration of the variability in the type of emotion and the content of emotion management. Specifically, Wharton and Erickson focused on the relationship between emotion management at home and at work, attending to differing role expectations and rules for emotional display in the different contexts.

Wharton and Erickson's (1993) findings direct attention toward the ways that emotion norms and expectations across the boundaries between work and home impact individuals' ability to manage emotions and potential consequences of emotion work. They concluded that individuals experience different emotion management demands according to identification with different roles at work and at home. For example, expectations for emotion and care in the home may impact a person's experience of expectations for aggression or additional care in the office. These types of questions and insights are useful for developing an approach to investigating emotion management at work in relation to the experience of grief. What these findings means for this study is that when emotion norms are altered by grief in one sphere, the challenges and

tensions around emotion management in another may be impacted. They encourage an awareness of how discourses across work and life spheres come together to construct different types of affective tensions and experiences for individuals as they respond to complimentary or conflicting emotion norms. The theoretical contributions discussed above provide a framework for this study which investigates emotion management among employees in the day-to-day internal work setting in light of changes in emotion work in both the private and work spheres.

Grief and Communicative Needs and Practices

Several themes have emerged in communication studies of individuals' experiences with grief. Of particular interest for this study are explorations of identity disruption and identity work and communication needs and practices for working through bereavement. As previously mentioned in chapter one, the death of a loved one can dramatically disrupt an individual's sense of self and how they see themselves in relation to others. Toller (2005) found that bereaved parents experience a "liminal identity" where their sense of self is in flux and contradiction, torn between feeling like a parent but no longer have a living child to care for (p. 46). Hastings (2000) articulated the experience of the identity disruption caused by a death as a "fractured identity" which creates identity management needs among bereaved parents. A bereaved parent, and other individuals who lose a loved one who is central to their identity, grieve not only the death but the loss of their identity and the person they were as well. Bereaved parents then, and others, are faced with the task of remaking their identity without the presence of the deceased in their lives.

Hastings (2000) and Toller (2005) described how storytelling and talking about the child's death were important to making sense of the experience and beginning to reconstruct identity. These studies highlight the communicative strategies that bereaved individuals engage in to cope with their loss and to construct a new self. By and large bereaved individuals have

increased communication needs. Part of the process of accepting the death is talking it through (see Toller & McBride, 2008 for a review of this argument). It is through talk that bereaved individuals make sense of the experience and develop an acceptance of the reality of the death. In short, bereaved individuals need to talk about the deceased. However, talk about the deceased and disclosing personal and affective information can open the bereaved up to judgment and negative reactions from others (Hastings, 2000).

Both studies reveal communicative challenges and tensions involved in navigating the affective experience of grief. Toller (2005) identified these tensions as a dialectic or series of contradictions. For example, bereaved individuals may feel a contradiction between a material absence in their lives and the need to maintain the presence of their loved one. Toller offered an excerpt from a man who wore an angel pin to keep the memory of his daughter present:

> That's one of things that bothered people at work, that I wore an angel pin, especially, I was the manager, and it's an automotive type industry it's supposed to have the macho, and here's this here's your regional manager and owner of the company walking around with this angel pin. It bothered them, it really did, and I thought, well that's their problem (p. 60).

This narrative highlights bereaved individuals' need to symbolically express a continuing bond with the deceased as well as how identity issues arise in relation to how one manages their grief. The man who offered the statement above was not concerned with others perceptions; however, Toller and McBride (2008) claimed that many bereaved parents expressed concern about being stigmatized by members of their social networks. These literatures offered a introduction into the issues that bereaved individuals face, particularly with regard to communicating about their loss and issues around identity construction.

These communicative challenges associated with bereavement spill into the world of work when bereaved workers return to their jobs. Rafaeli and Worline (2001) reasoned that because work is a significant aspect of our social lives, it is also central to our emotional lives. They insisted, "Emotional lives are not independent of the context in which they occur, and one of the most powerful emotional contexts people participate in is the organization work context" (p. 96). When bereaved individuals return to work they arguably have an increased need for social support and an opportunity to communicate about their experience (Hastings, 2000; Hazen, 2003, 2006, 2008; Toller, 2005; Gibson, Gallagher, & Jenkins, 2010). However, the potential for conflict and tension arise between the need for affective communication and the prevailing orientation toward emotional control at work.

Studies of Grief at Work

There has been a small amount of research that explores the phenomenon of grief at work, though a communication perspective has been rare. Doka (1989) and Eyetsemitan (1998) have argued that norms for grieving are produced through organizational values and structures. Bento (1994) summarized the dominant perception of organizational norms for appropriate emotions at work: "Sadness and grief should be checked at the door; they are too heavy for the rarefied emotional atmosphere of the workplace" (p. 35). This orientation toward emotion at work positions bereaved workers outside the accepted norm. Research by Bento, Doka, and Eyetsemitan has claimed that because organizational norms are at odds with a healthy process for working through grief individuals are likely to suffer from a lack of support. For the bereaved worker, the lack of support and a conflict between discourses about emotional norms can lead to negative consequences including disenfranchised grief (Bento; Doka) or stifled grief (Eyetsemitan).

Hazen (2003, 2006, 2008) builds on these arguments through a series of studies on perinatal loss and silence in organizations. Hazen (2006) argued that by conceptualizing loss as a personal concern that affects only the bereaved, the roll of community and organization in the grief process is obscured. One of the key aspects of grief, the need and opportunity for social support, is hidden when conversations about death are considered taboo and marginalized in organizations. Recently, Gibson, Gallagher, and Jenkins (2010) conducted a study on how bereaved parents readjusted to the workplace. This descriptive study thematized responses from 11 participants, concluding that social and emotional aspects presented a significant challenge to readjusting to work. The authors evinced the connection between work, bereavement, and social support stating:

> Recognition of the role of a person's social world in accommodation [acceptance of the loss] is significant for many people, as the workplace is where they spend the most social time. Social support plays a major role in alleviating separation anxiety, feelings of rejection and depression among the suddenly bereaved (p. 502).

Social support is important for working through grief, and for many, work is a significant part of their social network. However, the studies described above indicate that the workplace is not necessarily "support friendly" which can lead to a host of communicative challenges.

In summary, the limited research available on grief at work suggests that bereaved individuals face significant emotion management expectations, tensions around social support, and challenges for identity work. The following questions guided my design of this study:

1. How do people describe their experience with bereavement in relationship to their work?

2. How do people describe how they acted at work after the death of their loved one? How do they talk about their own and others' expectations for sharing information about their feelings or experience with loss?

3. How do bereaved workers talk about the relationships between professional identity and their emotional experience?

4. How do employees talk about their experience with bereavement leave policy?

A communication perspective on these issues considers how workers make sense of their experiences with grief in relation to everyday symbolic interactions at work. Ultimately some of the research questions above were addressed better than others. By analyzing bereaved workers talk about their communicative needs and communicative strategies for responding to emotion and emotion norms at work, I hoped to improve our understanding of the nuanced relationship between grief, emotion, and the workplace.

Chapter 3: Methodological Practices in the Study of Grief at Work

The experience of grief at work is a significant social and organizational issue that deserves greater attention in academic and professional research. Preliminary research on this topic piqued my interest in exploring themes in how grieving workers talked about their bereavement. Further, sensitivity toward emotional control in organizations and the potential implications of talk about grief at work shaped my desire to investigate tensions in workers' descriptions of grief. For example, I began this analysis by interpreting participants' descriptions of their lives after a loved one died. Next, I focused more specifically on accounts of grief in the workplace. To answer my research questions I made the methodological choice to explore how participants told their stories and to analyze patterns and implications. This interpretive approach to analyzing interviews is useful for identifying themes and generating a better understanding of how people talk about their experience with bereavement in relation to their work.

In this project, I explored the experiences of grieving workers by analyzing interview narratives that recounted responses to the death of a loved one and the return to work after bereavement leave. This chapter begins with a discussion of the methodological concepts that guided data collection and analysis in this study. I then describe my specific perspective on qualitative interviews. After presenting these foundational concepts I offer a detailed account of the methods used to gather data, including recruiting participants and conducting interviews. Finally, I provide insight into my analytical process and reflections on the experience of conducting interpretive research. In this chapter I make the authorial choice to write with a more personal voice. This decision reflects my struggle with methodological choices and the evolving process of inductive research. In addition, writing in a more personal narrative tone enables me to convey my reflections on conducting research on a topic that is of great personal and

emotional significance to me.

Qualitative Interviews: Recruitment and Interviewing

In order to examine the experience of bereavement in relation to worklife, I sought out the stories of bereaved workers. The following discussion describes the eligible population for this study and participant recruitment. Anyone who had experienced a death while engaged in paid work could potentially have participated in this project. However, the scope was narrowed by physical and temporal constraints. I did not restrict participation based on the amount of time that had passed since a death occurred. Given my research questions, I was interested in how people viewed their experience of returning to work after the death of a loved one. Reflection on this experience could take place quickly and/or over years of reflection and social interaction.

The goal of this study was not to uncover the authenticity of an experience or the true details of interaction that might require acuity of memory. Therefore, immediacy was not a central concern. Rather, I was interested in the norms and values that influence reflection on what was meaningful about the experience. I chose to focus specifically on the experiences of grief in relation to paid work because of an interest in how organizational membership and occupational identity may intersect with constructions of bereavement at work. This is not to say that un-paid labor may not also significantly shape bereavement, however, it was beyond the scope of this project.

Participants were recruited from across industries and social identities in order to explore the mosaic of grief as it emerged in concert with discourses about work, and to explore the nuance of difference. Feminist research has criticized organizational communication studies for demonstrating a bias toward white upper-class corporate workers. Rees (2001) argued that greater diversity was needed in grief research as the majority of research focuses on the

experiences of a narrow population. In the last decade efforts have been made to attend to and represent the diverse range of workers and work contexts across organization studies. One purpose of research, especially from a feminist perspective, is to give visibility and voice to groups who have been marginalized or ignored. Recruitment of a diverse sample of workers representing a range of industries was an attempt to acknowledge and give voice to differences in workers' experiences of bereavement.

Another goal of this approach was to respond to a call for organizational communication research that moves beyond the container metaphor of organizational communication which presumes that organizing necessarily occurs within organizations. Ashcraft (2007) stated that a turn toward dislocating organization can occur by attending to "where and how else organizing happens" (p. 11). As argued in chapter two, our work experiences do not only impact what goes on within the walls of a work site. Organizational discourses and identification with an occupation or profession can produce a set of values and norms that permeate all aspects of our lives. Responding to this premise, this study explored how bereavement came to be understood in relation to various discourses in and between the boundaries of work, home, and other social communities.

Recruiting Participants

Recruiting individuals to talk about their experiences with grief required sensitivity. Various factors such as how recently the loss occurred, the relationship with the deceased, and other personal situations, influenced how I handled the interview. Part of showing respect and sensitivity meant approaching individuals in a manner that would allow the decision to participate, or not, to be made without pressure from the researcher. A somewhat passive approach to recruitment also felt comfortable to me given my personal experience with loss.

Upon reflection, conducting this study was in many ways my first experience with publicly presenting myself as an individual who had suffered the death of her parents. My desire to create some level of distance between potential recruits and myself may also have been motivated by my reticence to respond to the question, "Why are you doing this type of research?" This question either demanded a formulaic response about a general interest in work/life policy, which felt thin and inauthentic, or the deeply personal acknowledgement that this research was motivated by a desire to make sense of my own return to work in the wake of grief.

In light of the considerations above, email became the primary method for recruiting participants for the project. Three primary strategies were used in email recruitment. First, I emailed friends and family a description of the project and asked them to pass the information along (see Appendix A). Second, I emailed professional colleagues and requested their help in spreading the word (see Appendix B), I sent a similar email to human resource professionals identified through various sources. Finally, I developed a template email that my contacts could forward directly to their networks (see Appendix C). The emails gave a short description of the study and then directed readers to a web page with more information. The use of the web page allowed for a brief initial email, since people are accustomed to relatively brief amounts of information in email.

The web page referenced was part of my larger website. By sending people to this website, they had the option of learning more about me. The site contained several categories of information including a personal introduction, academic interests, my curriculum vitae and two pages dedicated to more detailed information about the dissertation. The personal information included a brief introduction. Additionally, a paragraph was dedicated to remembering my parents and their role in my life. From a feminist perspective, I believe that providing potential

research participants with personal information demonstrated a willingness for reciprocal

sharing. I also chose to reveal my personal experience with loss, and endeavored to be open

about how the deaths of my parents inspired my initial interest in this subject. Admittedly, I was

not entirely comfortable with this. Of the two pages dedicated to the dissertation, one was

directed at individuals who had experienced a loss and the other was designed for human

resource professionals who were considering putting me in touch with workers at their

organization. The web pages mentioned the Human Review Board approval and contained

contact information for my advior should concerns arise. After learning about the project,

individuals had the choice to contact me via email or phone.

Recruiting began using a snowball sampling approach. The recruitment email was sent to

my network of friends and family, who were asked to forward it on to their networks. I also

asked some individuals to share the news at their church, if they felt comfortable doing so.

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) stated, "Snowball sampling may be the only way to reach an elusive

population or to engage people about a sensitive subject" (p. 124). Given the sensitive nature of

death and grief, I decided that the personal connections of snowball sampling would help

individuals feel more comfortable responding. In addition to direct personal connections, I also

sent emails to various alumni networks I am associated with. Students in my organizational

communication class were informed about the project and asked to share it with their contacts.

No extra credit or incentives were given for them to recruit participants for the study. In addition

to snowball sampling, information about the study was posted online at websites such as Craig's

List and Denver Westworld Classifieds. I also posted on LiveJournal.com an online community

for journaling and connecting with others. On Live Journal I posted to communities with an

interest in grief or loss. In the end, five participants were recruited directly through a friend or

colleague, seven responded to a colleague's email to their alumni networks, four were personal connections of mine, and 13 were recruited through a human resources professional at a large corporation. Ten additional individuals were recruited through friends, and one from an alumni network, who did not participate in the study due to scheduling conflicts or various personal reasons.

One challenge presented by the snowball sample and the online recruiting was obtaining a diverse sample. I quickly became aware that my personal network was made up of people primarily in middle and upper-middle class demographics. In order to try and increase the diversity of the sample I began recruiting in different regions of the country and on local community information boards. My desire for a diverse sample raised important questions about which differences would make a difference in this project. Initial thoughts on this issue emerged from my readings about cultural influences on grief. First, religion, ethnicity and race can shape foundational beliefs about how to grieve and the role of family and community in the process. Second, socio-economic class can contribute to the meaning of work and the individual's ability to have or indulge grief in particular ways. For example, one woman I spoke with talked about how grief was a luxury she couldn't afford. Another talked about how the inability to purchase a marker increased pressure for her and other family members to return to work. Finally, sexual orientation became relevant given the social norms around who we grieve and the relations that are covered by organizational leave policies.

The geographic location of recruiting was relevant in constructing a diverse sample. I targeted contacts in Colorado and California due to constraints on traveling for face-to-face interviews. However, the Denver/Boulder area and the San Francisco bay area have a large population of relatively privileged classes. As the project progressed I considered expanding the

geographic boundaries, as well as conducting interviews via electronic videochat or telephone. I recognized that expanding recruitment using technology could also skew the sample toward those who have the financial and educational access to the mediums. I talked with two potential participants about conducting the interviews over the phone. These were both individuals I had never met before and in the end scheduling challenges led us to forgo their participation. All of the participants in this study resided in Colorado.

Planning the Interview: Feminist Considerations

Feminist research has raised concerns about the power imbalance that exists during an interview situation. Several strategies have been developed to mitigate this power differential and to honor the participant. Oakley (1981) argued that feminist researchers should not maintain the illusion of a sharp separation between the researcher and those studied. Rather, the researchers should "work to systematically counteract the power differences constituting standard hierarchical relationships between researcher and subject" (Greaves, Wylie, Champagne, Karch, Lapp, & Osthoff, 1995, p. 308). This can be accomplished using Oakley's friendship method of interviewing. Trethewey (1997) indicated that the friendship method of interviewing provides a way to develop rapport, to reduce power imbalances, and to create an environment that allows for the open flow of ideas. With these commitments in mind, I conducted semi-structured interviews, using the interview guide described below, but allowing the conversation to flow in different directions guided by the interviewee (Oakley).

When scheduling interviews I let participants select the location (Kaufman, 1992). If the participant was someone I knew or had been referred to by a friend I gave the option of meeting in the participant's home. For those I did not know, I suggested we meet at their office, a convenient coffee shop or restaurant, or a conference room on the University of Colorado

campus. This allowed the person to select the location that was most convenient for them, and that they were most comfortable with, given the sensitive nature of the subject. Each participant was provided with an informed consent form which outlined information about the subject of the study, audio recording, storage of data, and the researcher's strategies for protecting their confidentiality. As part of the measures taken to protect participants I asked them to select a pseudonym to be used throughout the analysis and reporting of the study (Trethewey, 1999).

In designing this study I was concerned about the impact the interview experience may have on participants. During the interview I posed questions about how people felt about their loss, asking them recount many details about interactions with others following the death. I was aware that in many ways I was surfacing issues and feelings then leaving them to process emotions on their own after the interview. After looking for precedent on this type of work I found that Dyregrov (2004) indicated that bereaved parents who participated in his study reported their involvement as a positive experience. In addition, Gibson, Gallagher, and Jenkins (2010) found that while interviewees found it "painful to talk about their loss, they reported that it allowed them to tell their story and felt hopeful that it might help others" (p. 506). Despite the data to indicate that talking about bereavement may actually be a positive experience, the Human Research Review Board also expressed concern about negative consequences associated with talking about death and grief.

In response to these concerns and my own I developed strategies to mitigate negative impacts. In recognition of the stress that some people feel after engaging emotions related to death, I decided that a writing exercise might provide a vehicle for processing emotions that arose in the interview. However, after discussing this idea with a committee member, I realized that, while writing has been my preferred method for working through grief-related emotions, it

is not naturally a vehicle for grief work. Writing assumes a particular education level and comfort with written communication; it also emphasizes an individual process as opposed to talking with friends or family and working through emotions via interpersonal support and connection. In light of these realizations, I offered a voluntary writing prompt as one option for participants. They were invited to share their written reflection with me if they desired (see Appendix D). I did not receive any of these reflections though several participants expressed interest in writing after the interview. Another suggested option was for participants to call a friend and talk about the experience with them. Finally, I described the free services, including support groups, offered by Hospice and provided contact information for the local Hospice organization.

Constructing an Interview Guide

To conduct the interview I developed an interview guide. An interview guide is an informal option which allowed me freedom to select from groupings of questions based on the individuals' circumstances and the flow of the conversation. "Interview guides simply consist of groupings of topics and questions that the interviewer can ask in different ways for different participants" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The interview guide was composed of four general categories: Relationship with work; talking about death and grief; how the organization handles death and grief; and the relational experience of grief in the workplace.

I designed the guide to begin with a general discussion of the participants work. I used the grand tour style question (Lindlof & Taylor), "tell me about your work environment" to get a general sense of the person in relation to their work. After initial interviews I modified this initial question to "What do I need to know about your work and the environment to better understand your story?" This change reflected my desire to offer a little more focus to the question since

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respondents seemed perplexed by the large scope of the first option. I also added a prompt for a description of the people who are significant to the work experience.

The next section focused on organizational or occupational identification. These questions helped me to explore how people viewed the role of work in their life and the extent to which they identified with organizational or occupational values. This section included questions such as, "Describe how work fits into your life. How important is your work to who you are or how you see yourself?" I developed these questions by referencing previous measures of organizational identification (Cheney, 1983b) which included constructs such as pride in the organization and concern for organizational success. After conducting a few interviews I found that the issue of professionalism was reoccurring. I decided to add a question asking the individual to comment on their understanding of what it meant to be professional.

The third section moved into talk about death and grief. I created the interview schedule to start with general questions about work and the organization so that the participant could become more comfortable talking with me before I asked about their experience with loss. I found that the first interviewees seemed anxious to find out when questions related to the death of their loved one would occur. In response, I modified the interview so that I began with a statement letting them know that I had a few questions about work before we discussed the situation directly relating to their loss. I began this section with another grand tour question, "please tell me about the experience that brought you to this study." I noted the language the individual used in talking about the death of their loved one and tried to mirror that in the rest of my questions. For example, I used the term "died/death," "passed away," or "loss" based on words they selected to speak about it. I then had a list of potential follow-up questions related to

the various events or situations that might have shaped their experience. An example is, "What were some of your primary responsibilities or concerns following the death of your loved one?"

Following this general introduction to bereavement, I introduced questions about grief at work, asking questions about organizational policy and how they talked about grief at work. I asked participants to describe how they shared the news at work and followed up with questions about how others reacted. These questions were brief since I planned to explore workplace interactions later in the interview. In addition, I inquired about concerns that arouse related to work during this time. I also requested that participants describe the formal or informal policy for bereavement leave at their organization. I followed with questions such as, "What were your feelings about the amount of time off provided by the organization;" "Overall, how would you evaluate your experience with your company's formal policy and interactions with your manager, team?" Since participants' industries and work environments varied I tailored these questions to match the work situation they had described in the first section. I concluded the section with the question, "Can you talk about what it was like to be away from work during this period?" in order to learn more about the individual's relationship with work.

The final segment explored, in detail, what it was like for the participant to return to work after bereavement leave. I led this section with an open-ended invitation to describe the experience of returning to work. Follow up questions included: "Tell me about any conversations you had with your manager, colleagues and/or subordinates about expectations for your return;" and "Was there any discussion of adjusting your workload or responsibilities for a time?" I then asked questions that would provide me with information related to organizational norms and values such as: "Did you have a perception about how you were "supposed" to be?" and "How has your experience affected your work experience and/or work relationships?" The topic of

support was introduced as I explored the type of support needed or offered by coworkers. I concluded by asking people to reflect on the ways their experience may have changed anything related to their perceptions of work or the role of work in their life.

I intended to ask additional questions after the audio recorder was turned off to better understand how participants felt about the interview process. After attempting this a few times I discovered that it may have been too soon after the interview to ask for reflections as participants had limited, if any, response. Additionally, I sensed discomfort from respondents, as they perceived the question as kind of an evaluation. I modified this section to only ask, "Was there anything the interview brought up that you hadn't considered before?" and/or "Were there things about this interview process that surprised you?" The goal of these questions was to allow the participants a space to reflect on how the interview went and for them to react to their own telling of their story. Demographic information was collected on a small separate sheet of paper which was identified by their pseudonym. Categories included: age, nationality, religious affiliation, race/ethnicity, relationship to the deceased, and the amount of time that had passed since the death of their loved one. Having described the interview guide, I'll now briefly describe the interview process.

Conducting Interviews

As previously mentioned, interviews were conducted at individual's homes, in coffee shops, at the work site, and at the University of Colorado. These different contexts presented challenges and influences for the interview. For example, interviews conducted at the work site were often quiet and conducive to audio recording while those at a coffee shop had more ambient noise and distraction. A downside of being in the office was that it may have contributed a particular tone to the interview leading participants to answer in "work mode," while the coffee

shop had the feel of chatting with a friend over coffee or tea. I think that both environments had the potential to influence affective displays, although, individuals visibly displayed emotions in each of the settings.

I would like to take a moment to reflect on my own orientation toward personal disclosure in the interview. All participants knew that I had some experience with the death of a loved one prior to the interview. However, I was uncertain about how to handle additional sharing. Hazen (2003) indicated that sharing her personal experience with grief and her desire for healing as a motivation for the research project enabled her to connect with participants in her study. She stated, "Rather than intruding on the respondents' expression, this explanation seemed to support disclosure" (p. 152). I had mixed feelings about the issue of sharing details about my own experience with participants. On the one hand, I felt that reciprocity was important—that I should be willing to open myself to them the way they were to me. However, I was concerned about how my disclosures would influence the interview, even if it was to influence their engagement in responding to questions. To me, understanding my disclosure as facilitating theirs was to make my feelings about the death of my parents instrumental to producing a desired response from other bereaved individuals, which I was not comfortable with.

I reconciled my feelings on this (to an extent) by deciding to respond directly and honestly to questions that were asked of me. I had varying success with this planned approach. I found that sometimes I spoke freely when I connected with a respondent's story and that I brushed away questions when the topic hit a nerve or I felt uncomfortable. These moments were easily recognizable in the transcripts by brief responses such as, "yes, this project can be difficult for me at times, but I appreciate your involvement." Ultimately, I endeavored to find a balance

between an openness to connect and share with participants and a personal need to maintain a kind of emotional containment and professional demeanor.

In preparation for the analysis of the narratives I audio recorded all of the interviews using either an iPod or a digital recording device. I placed the audio recorder to the side of the table to reduce the intrusion of the record light. During the interviews I took very limited notes, if any. I felt it was important for me to be an active listener and engage in the conversation rather than to appear an observer of their sharing. After each interview I wrote a detailed summary of the tone of the interview, the physical presence of the participant, and any visible emotional responses. I also noted ideas or examples that seemed to illustrate an emergent theme or moments that had taken me by surprise or that I had found particularly interesting. I also took time to record my own affective response to the interview. I found that I had very different emotional responses given the extent to which I personally identified with their experience or found it contradictory to mine. I believed these were important to record so that I could reference them as I worked through the analytic process.

Description of Participants

In total, I conducted 29 interviews with individuals who had taken time off from paid work after the death of a loved one. Interviews lasted between approximately 18 minutes and nearly two and a half hours. The average interview length was 48 minutes and the total amount of interview time was 21 hours and 20 minutes. There were more women in the study, 22, as opposed to seven men. The age of participants ranged, but the highest concentration of participants was between 35 and 55 years old. There was some racial/ethnic diversity among participants; represented categories included African American, Asian, Hispanic/Latin, Mixed, Native American, White/Caucasian. The larges racial group was White/Caucasian with 21

participants selecting this category. Religious affiliations included atheist/agnostic, Buddhist, Christian/Catholic, Jewish, and eleven members did not identify their religious affiliation.

As previously mentioned, I hoped to recruit people across organizational types. The primary categories of work were corporate (18 participants) education, journalism, legal, mental health and service. I also wanted this study to reflect a range of experiences with bereavement as influenced by the survivor's relationships to the deceased and the cause of death. The individuals who passed included the following relations: boss, cousin, child, grandchild, grandparent, nephew, mother-in-law, parent, partner/spouse, and sibling. Those who had lost a parent made up the largest group (11), the second largest was a death of a sibling (5), and the death of a grandparent was the third most frequent (4). Causes of death included: accident, birth defect, brief illness, extended illness (most often Cancer), heart attack, and suicide. Fifteen participants had a loved one die of an extended illness. (Appendices F and G offer a detailed summary of the population.)

Qualitative Methods of Inquiry

The analysis conducted for this project involved a two-phase approach to working with the narrative data. The first phase involved a thematic interpretive reading of participants' descriptions of their experience with grief in relation to work. In the second phase, I conducted a close reading of select interview excerpts to further investigate how meanings of professionalism, work, and grief, intertwine to produce various consequences. Throughout the last century we have seen organizational communication research grow in conjunction with qualitative and interpretive methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Researchers are increasingly using qualitative methods to investigate organizational communication phenomena (Taylor & Trujillo, 2001). Qualitative methods are appealing because they attend to the situated nature of

knowledge. Influenced in part by symbolic interactionism, qualitative methodology emphasizes research processes that enable the exploration of "how the self and the social environment shape each other through communication" (Lindloff & Taylor, 2002, p. 41). In qualitative study, emphasis is placed on the communicative practices that individuals use to construct of meaning and to make sense of their social worlds.

Qualitative research methods suit the study of grief at work because they facilitate the exploration of "how" questions such as: how do people describe the ways that interaction with their work intersects with their experience of grief?; how do bereaved workers' narratives suggest a relationship between their work identity and how they talk about grief; how do narratives about grief at work produce consequences for organizational discourses and worklife? As I analyzed the interviews, I interpreted themes in participants' talk about bereavement and feeling grief at work. The interpretation of themes, such as the seclusion of sadness, was motivated by visible patterns in experiences with bereavement which have been largely unexplored in organizational literature. The primary methodology employed in this project followed the interpretive tradition as I focused on describing how individuals talked about grief and work and explored the outcomes and implications of the connections they made in their reflections. Engaging in this interpretive process produced a descriptive picture of the relevant issues which serves as a foundation for future research that may focus on critical analysis and the constructive process.

In addition to the primary thematic interpretation, I also conducted a close reading of a few narrative excerpts in order to draw out implications and tensions that can be easily overlooked in a thematic reading. Throughout this study I have drawn upon various theoretical traditions within the broader qualitative framework, including feminism and poststructuralism.

Much of the current research on emotion studies, and critical research on organizational practice in general, draws attention to the struggle over meaning. From a poststructuralist perspective, the construction of any phenomenon is made through a series of articulations that attempt to fix meaning (Laclau &Mouffe, 1985; Hall, 1985). This process of articulation is accomplished through discursive acts that link particular concepts together while disassociating others. For example, the phenomenon of bereavement could become meaningful through a series of associations or disassociations between work, emotion, family, religion, race, capitalism, class, community etc.

From a feminist perspective, the poststructuralist interest in revealing how particular articulations form to create a sense of coherence or disruption around meaning is useful for exposing the consequences of talking about things in particular ways. Research on emotion norms and discourses of professionalism, in concert with studies emphasizing organizational practices and discourses that marginalize grief, fueled my interest in taking a closer look at how meanings are formed in talk about grief at work. Drawing upon Martin's (1990) and Clair's (1997) research which argues for the validity of illustrative cases and exemplars, I engaged in a careful analysis to explore the presence or suppression of conflicts in descriptions of grief at work. The close reading of exemplars is designed to enhance the depth of analysis and to illustrate the complexities that emerged in talk about bereavement at work. The primary goal of this second phase of the analysis was to explore the consequences and outcomes of particular ways of talking about the experience. Greater detail on this method of analysis is provided in the section on interpretation at the end of this chapter.

Interviews as Narrative Accounts

To investigate the research questions guiding this study I conducted qualitative interviews with individuals who had taken bereavement leave. Interviews present an opportunity to learn about how a person has come to understand and assign meaning to their experiences. Experiences are constructed through talk about events, actions, reactions, feelings, and meanings. Our understandings of others and ourselves emerge in part through relational dialog, or storytelling about our life experiences and ourselves. Given my view of talk as revealing the themes and tensions associated with lived experiences, in-depth interviews served as my primary method for accessing knowledge about bereavement at work.

In order to explore how people described grief in relation to work I sought out personal accounts from bereaved organizational members. Interviews are a valuable method for obtaining narratives about a person's perceptions of their experiences. "Interview talk is the participants' rhetorical construction of their experience" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 173). To clarify, the interviews are not conceptualized as representations of private or "authentic" experiences, but as articulations of a socially constructed event that has been assigned meaning through active engagement with relevant discourses. Interviews can provide insight into the organizational and communicative resources a person draws upon as they reconstruct events, assign meaning, and even (re)construct themselves through discursive resources.

The discursive phenomenon of narrative is valuable in that provides organizational members with a resource for making sense of their workplace and their own identity (Ylijoki, 2005). In describing one's thoughts and actions around a certain phenomenon, an individual is not only describing but (re)constructing identity in the process. In this sense, interviews can be useful in illuminating identity regulation and identity work in response to the broader

organizational context (Kuhn, 2006). Essentially, the impact of organizational identification is revealed through the stories that people tell about how work became a part of their experience. Keyton (2005) defined narrative as a story, as a common way for people to make sense of their organizational lives. This sensemaking occurs in the process of selecting what is worth telling, how the narrator positions him/herself in the story and through the (re)construction of the events. The telling of a story also involves narrators making normative choices about how they represent themselves and their experience. Ylijoki, citing the research of several organizational scholars, argued, "…creating, telling and negotiating stories and narratives is a key process through which members make sense of events and experiences within a given organizational context and through which they form their professional identities" (p. 558).

According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), the qualitative interview allows the researcher to gather accounts, or justifications for social conduct, and explanations about participants' behavior and their motivations for acting. Since this study concentrates on how individuals talk about grief at work and the issues and tensions that emerge as relevant to their experience, I followed Kuhn's (2006) view of interview responses. He stated, "Framing interview responses as the outcome of scripts or of impression management lays bare the socially sanctioned modes of choice-making" (p. 6). Interview accounts can subsequently be analyzed to reveal the dominant ways of talking about organizational norms, particularly around emotion. Additionally, they can provide insight into identity challenges and identity work that surfaced during bereavement.

The interview text is viewed as a valuable forum to explore how particular value systems and ideologies related to work are engaged in talk about grief. Narratives often reflect what the organization values as good and right, or what is wrong or unacceptable (Ylijoki). This aspect of narrative makes it particularly relevant for this study given my interest in exploring how

bereaved workers construct an experience infused with the power and politics associated with emotion at work. Narratives are a unique cultural artifact because they are imbued with narrators' emotion, values, and information about organizational values, social norms and cultural practices (Keyton, 2005). As such, interviewing as a method allowed me to ask questions about what it felt like to return to work after the death of a loved one and to gather accounts of what it was like to be bereaved in the work context. In addition to gathering descriptive reflections, I was also able to notice the values and norms participants used to explain and justify their perspective on their experience. The interviews were not just neutral statements of events; they were accounts that conveyed underlying discourses and communicative practices used to construct the experience in a particular way.

Analyzing and Interpreting Interviews

The analysis of this qualitative research was guided by theoretical and methodological commitments. Below, I describe how I prepared for analysis before delving to a two-phase grounded theory approach to working through the narratives (Charmaz, 1983). The first phase involved an initial coding where I conducted a close reading and noted actions, events, and feelings. The second step involved focused coding during which I selected relevant codes and compared them across the interviews. In addition to looking for reoccurring themes, I actively explored narratives that asserted unique or contradictory voices or experiences. While this study is an interpretive project that emphasizes the emergence of patterns and themes, I also drew upon critical and feminist principles in coding for exceptions to seemingly neat or coherent categories. The details of my process for thematic coding and interpretation are described throughout this section.

Another important aspect of the analysis was reflection. I engaged in post-interview journaling because reflexivity is an important aspect of feminist methodology, used to account for the researcher's own role in the production of research (Fine, 1992). During these writing exercises I contemplated my own expectations for the interviews and considered how my position and experience might influence upcoming interpretations. As mentioned above, I also spent time documenting and reflecting on my own emotional responses to the interviews and the participants. Having lost both my parents during the first three years of my professional career I was aware that my role in the interview process and analysis were influenced by my experiences. The interview was jointly produced between the participant and myself so it was relevant for me to include my own narrative in fieldnotes as I worked through the analysis. In this study, I enacted the role of the researcher, but I was also performing the role of a person who had and is 'working' through grief.

Analytical Process

I began the official work of analysis with the transcription of interviews. I conducted the full transcription of about half of the interviews, excluding only verbal pauses such as "um," "uh," and "er" but left slang and fillers to keep the tone and flow intact. I tried various approaches to transcription including the use of Dragon Naturally Speaking voice recognition software. Using the software I listened to the audio recording using Escribe software to control the rate of playback. I then spoke the interview into a headset and watched the words appear on the screen. I realized that in an effort to speak exactly what the participant did I tended to try and emulate the voice, pace, and tone of the participant which actually made it difficult for the voice recognition program to pick up smaller words and verbal pauses so there were many errors in this initial pass. I found it most effective to edit the content as I went. I also performed some of

the transcription using a foot pedal to control the rate of play and to easily stop and start the audio.

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) noted the value of conducting your own transcription:

Transcribing also allows the researcher to listen to the interview in a more studied way. One can attend more closely to the conversation and pick up certain themes, issues, or contradictions that may not have been noticed in real time. Thus transcribing can serve as a portal to the process of data analysis (p. 205).

After transcribing 13 of the interviews myself, I felt I had developed a good sense for the themes and issues that were emerging. Given how time-intensive the process of transcription is, I solicited assistance with the process so I would have additional time to continue to conduct interviews. The remaining interviews were transcribed by a professional transcription service and an individual who was referred by a friend in the Communication Department at the University of Colorado at Boulder who had also used her services. I received confirmation that the audio files and transcriptions were destroyed after I acknowledged receipt of the files. About half of the remaining sixteen were partially transcribed by the service and I completed the rest of the transcription. I edited the provided transcription while conducting the reaming portion. This allowed me to continue to connect with the interviews. The remaining eight were fully transcribed by the other party, as I needed to direct my attention toward the analytical process of coding. In every instance, I reviewed the audio file and transcription to edit and make notes where necessary.

Coding: Exploring the Interviews and Looking for Themes

In order to interpret and analyze the interviews I drew upon guidelines for coding from Charmaz (1983) and Lindlof and Taylor (2002). Following the interview transcriptions I

simultaneously listened to each one and read the transcript to connect the voice of the participant with the words on the page. I then continued to read and re-read segments of the transcripts writing analytic memos and conducting open coding. Open coding was conceptualized by Strauss as the initial stage of qualitative analysis which allows a great variety of ideas, meanings, and actions to rise to the surface (cited in Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). In a description of coding in grounded theory practice, Charmaz described coding as "the process of defining what the data are about…Coding means naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes and accounts for each piece of data" (p. 43). She argued that this is the first step in moving toward interpretation.

During initial or open coding the researcher develops codes that stay very close to the transcript, trying to describe what was stated, rather than imposing analytic frames on the data. I found this to be a challenging process, I noticed how I tended to write codes such as "work/life balance" and "emotion management" reflecting categories or events that I was primed to recognized after engaging with the literature on my topic. I then went back into the interviews and jotted down action-based codes such as "cried at her desk" or "planned and coordinated the funeral." After this initial coding process I reviewed my line marks, notes, and color codes to create more consolidated categories. I then went back through and began to group specific examples from participants' accounts into each category to analyze and evaluate the coherence and prevalence of the category.

My initial grouping of categories reflected my interest in interpretation the data from a critical, feminist perspective—or at least with sensitivity toward critical feminist issues. Some of the categories included "Work as an escape from grief" and "Management of grief-related emotions at work." Reflecting my interest in the connection between work identity, work values,

and experiences with grief I also created categories such as "Constructing professional identity"

and "Expressions of emotion norms." My interest in policy also led me to develop categories

related to reflections on the bereavement leave policy such as "Critiques of the policy" or

"Justifications of the policy." Charmaz (1983) described the second phase of coding as focused

coding, which includes the move toward selective and conceptual categories like the ones above.

She indicated that focused coding is useful to "synthesize and explain larger segments of data"

(p. 57). This involves a process of comparing the categories to additional data from the interview

set, looking for ways that the data supports or contests the current categories, while also looking

for new ideas. The purpose of this process was to ensure that the complexity of the experiences

and the accounts were represented, to avoid any sub-conscious tendency I may have to seek out

themes consistent with my own experiences, and to allow the themes to emerge inductively from

the process.

Thematic Interpretation

I had a good deal of anxiety around the task of interpretation. Although not uncommon,

feelings of tension were likely compounded by my personal investment in the project and

empathetic feelings toward participants. Additionally, my desire to engage feminist principles

directed my attention toward the politics of interpretation. Critical and feminist research has

drawn attention to the power imbedded in scholarly work, even when designed to give voice to

participants. The challenge arises to balance the voice of the researcher and the voice of those

being represented. DeVault (1999) summarized this tension stating, "If power is exercised

through representation and interpretation, many ask, how can we justify writing about others?

Should we continue? And if so, how?" (p. 187). The emotional responses triggered by working

through the data in addition to my apprehensions about interpretation provoked a great deal of struggle.

In talking through these issues with a colleague she urged me to continue journaling about the process. The following journal excerpt provides insight in to the issues I focused on during my initial attempt at interpretation:

I found the writing exhausting and I had to take many breaks. I found that during brief breaks small things could trigger emotional responses. For example, a brief scene on television about all the things a daughter would miss if her mother died trigged an immediate and seemingly involuntary sadness where gasped and I burst into tears before I hardly knew what hit me. As I re-read the interviews I found my mind wandering and thinking about my own parents. At the time my younger sister was getting ready to buy a new car and I felt the absence of my parents in the process strongly. I also realized that my PhD graduation would be the first milestone or significant ritual that my parents would not be here for. It's hard to cry and write and I worry that it clouds my analysis.

This segment from my research journal highlights the emotionality involved and my fears about effectively working through the analysis and interpretation. I turned to feminist writing on qualitative interpretation for guidance. DeVault (1999) commented:

To write is to commit oneself to an interpretation; like any commitment, it closes off other possibilities. In addition, becoming an author means claiming attention—claiming that these words matter—and such assertion feels easier for some than for others (p. 190).

This account of interpretation was helpful to me. It made visible the fact that the closing off of possibilities was an inevitable part of the process. However, this study is only one interpretation of this data, and there can certainly be many more that create different openings and closings. In

addition, DeVault's comment articulated something I had been unable to name—that writing this study was to overly claim that grief at work was an experience that mattered. In understanding the tension I felt over making this assertion after years of coving the impact of my own lived experience, I was able to move forward with the process.

Ironically, my first attempt at interpretation was not particularly sensitive or tempered by my location in the meanings I assigned to participants experiences. Armed with a desire to assert critical feminist claims I ended up writing an analysis that essentially argued that bereaved workers were at the mercy of the dominant and oppressive discourses which constructed their experience. I returned to the drawing board feeling like I had dishonored my participants. The best option for me was to let the pendulum swing the other direction and turn toward almost a purely descriptive account of emergent themes. I then worked through the resulting themes and descriptions with my advisor, discussing how to find a bridge between general description and the heavy critical hand I began with to arrive at an analytical interpretation that interrogates the emergent issues and leaves room for further interpretation.

After working through this process I arrived at a place where I could fully engage in scholarly interpretation. DeVault's (1999) approach to writing interpretation matches the essence of my efforts and methodological choices:

> I have in mind a voice that is thoughtful and self-reflective. I imagine a voice that is not imposing authoritative, but clear and personal—the voice of an author who invites others to listen and respond, aiming more toward dialogue than debate (p. 190).

In this spirit, I began my analysis chapters by offering a description of how bereaved workers talked about their experience with grief in general. The goal of chapter four was to convey the patterns that emerged around formative elements that shaped experiences of bereavement and to

notice the communicative and symbolic practices participants used in reasoning through their responses to the death of a loved one. In chapter five, I explore themes related to emotion at work. Rather than explicate a process which evidenced the production of particular emotional experiences, I focused on how people talked about their views on emotion norms at work and how they responded to the experience of grief-related emotions in the office. I also attended to their expressions of expectations for how others should respond to a bereaved co-worker. Finally, my analytical work led me to devote chapter six to exploration of the tensions and challenges associated with negotiating bereavement leave policy and toward bereaved workers' communicative strategies for making sense of their organization's position.

Feminist Readings of Interview Text

As introduced above, I utilized two analytical approaches to exploring the data collected for this project. In addition to a thematic interpretation of themes, I dedicate a chapter to a close reading of interview excerpts that is inspired by feminist and postmodern methodologies. The primary methods adopted by postmodernists in organizational research include genealogy, resistance readings, and deconstruction (Alveeson & Deetz, 1996). Genealogy, developed by Foucault, provides a 'history of the present' (Foucault, 1977) tracing how power has been constituted through discourses over time. Resistance readings focus on problemitizing researcher privilege, often taking the form of re-readings of organizational research. Deconstruction, somewhat similar to resistance readings, refers to a process of interrogating a text for tensions and contradictions. Empirical research has not been the focus of postmodern studies; however, poststructuralist-inspired organization studies have become more prevalent in the field of communication (see Ashcraft & Pacanowsky, 1996; Buzzanell & Liu, 2005; Holmer-Nadesan, 1996; Trethewey, 1997, 2001; Waggoner, 1997 for examples).

Martin (1990) and Calás and Smircich (1991) have argued that a detailed deconstruction of a text, or interview segment in this case, offers a powerful analytic strategy for revealing deeply embedded assumptions and conflict suppression. Deconstruction peels away the layers that obscure hidden values and assumptions, exposing conflicts that have been suppressed; through this process tensions and marginalized positions are made visible (Martin, 1990, p. 340). Trethewey and Ashcraft (2004) argued for the value of tension-centered scholarship as a method for exposing the "irrationality" that is inherent in organizations. Despite the prevalence of myths of rationality in organizational discourse, tension, conflict, and paradox are increasingly recognized in organizational research. A careful reading of narrative excerpts using a feminist poststructuralist lens provides an opportunity to reveal suppressed conflicts and potentially valuable tensions.

Tensions are central to critical projects because they demonstrate how a dominant value system becomes privileged through language and talk. In order to reclaim obscured tensions Martin (1990) and Calás and Smircich (1991) have applied deconstruction as an analytic strategy in organizational studies. Martin summarized how conflict can become suppressed making it difficult to explore various positions that exist within organizational situations:

In a text, dominant ideologies suppress conflict by eliding conflicts of interest, denying the existence of points of view that could be disruptive of existing power relationships, and creating myths of harmony, unity, and caring that conceal the opposite (p. 340).

In our everyday talk a sense of unity and coherence can overshadow the potential to see difference and fluidity or contradiction in meanings and experience. As a result, creative analytical methods are necessary to look beyond the surface meanings that are more visible in general thematic interpretations. Deconstructive strategies begin by displacing taken-for-granted

meanings by opening up potential for an excess of interpretations (Calás & Smircich, 1991). Martin cautioned that "suppressed conflict is easier to deny, harder to detect and combat and more difficult to study" (p. 340). However, the deconstructive process of questioning which experiences and positions are omitted from or silenced by a text facilitates the opportunity to reveal marginalized values and interests.

The ability to reveal how positions have been marginalized and how erasures have occurred is particularly useful for considering the consequences of talking about grief at work in particular ways. Engaging in an analysis of tensions in empirical data is useful, not only for exploring consequences, but for uncovering of how individuals experience and respond to tensions in organizations. In contrast to popular efforts to resolve conflict or minimize tension, Trethewey and Ashcraft asserted that greater attention should be devoted to exploring "how to *live with* tension" (p. 84). Research on tension in organization may usefully focus on how tensions manifest, or are concealed, how members respond to tension, and how individuals cope with conflict (Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004b). The goal of the second phase of analysis in this project is to carefully consider how tension appears or is concealed in talk about returning to work after the death of a loved one. Additionally, the deconstructive approach facilitates a closer interpretation of how gendered meanings and discourses are produced in the subtleties and silences of participants' talk about bereavement.

Based on the interpretive analysis conducted in chapters four and five, I began to notice how the interview talk seemed to smooth over possible tensions around issues such as negotiating professional norms, relational expectations, and occupying the position of a bereaved worker. I suspected that perhaps the complexity of experiences and tensions among discourses and organizational and/or personal values were in greater tension than could be easily seen. To

extend the thematic interpretation in this project I engaged in a careful reading of a few brief interview excerpts using feminist poststructuralist concepts as a lens. Although not a formal deconstruction, the analysis in chapter six applies the spirit of deconstruction, dismantling and reconstructing the interview text to reveal the multiplicity of meanings and potential interpretations that exist in between the lines of text. In this section of analysis, I draw upon the disruptive aspects of the deconstructive approach to reveal tensions and contradictions in how individuals described their experience with grief at work.

Chapter 4 Analysis:

Responding to the Death and Making Sense of Grief

I sat with Garret at his kitchen table as he recounted the day he learned that his seven-year-old nephew had been killed in an accident. It had been a full day of skiing in the mountains and Garrett was headed back to town with friends. A message indicator chimed and he held the phone to his ear as the voicemails started. The strained voices of his family rang in his ears and he realized that something terrible had happened. Garrett repeated the phrases he heard in his voicemail, "Garrett, you need to call now. You need to call now. Where the hell are you? We have no idea what's going on. We need you." Garrett glanced at his hands and said, "So. That was that." Moments like these mark the beginning of complex and uncertain experiences responding to the death of a loved one. While much has been written on grief responses, the nature and nuance of how people experience grief is continually evolving, particularly with regard to the myriad of factors that shape what it means for each individual to grieve a particular relation.

In this chapter, I explore how participants in this study described their experience with the death of a loved one. In reflecting on their stories I draw upon the diverse literatures that have contributed to the body of knowledge on death and bereavement. Notably, the disciplines of psychiatry/psychology and sociology have been influential in conceptualizing responses to death and offering frameworks for understanding grief. From the psychiatry/psychology literature grief is conceptualized as an internal process focused on an emotional journey or process where the bereaved individual must reconcile the end of their relationship with the deceased. Freud's concept of "grief work" and Lindemann's research on acute grief are central to these perspectives (see Rees, 2001, for a review).

In contrast to psychology's focus on grief related emotions and affective responses, the sociological perspective approaches the study of bereavement from the outside in, attending to the relationship between social norms and practices and individuals' experiences of grief (Fulton & Bendiksen, 1994). The communication discipline has also contributed to understandings of grief by exploring communicative practices that influence bereavement and coping (see Hastings, 2000; Rack et al., 2008; Toller, 2005; Toller & Braithwaite, 2009; Toller & McBride, 2008, for examples). Communication research has contributed to the grief literature by investigating the communicative practices that are central to how people experience loss and how communication with others intersects with coping or healing. Further, communication research has provided practical recommendations for how others can support the bereaved while they grieve.

The purpose of delving into respondents talk about grief in general was to consider what can be learned about how people communicatively construct an experience of grief. Drawing on the psychiatry/psychology literature, we might expect stories of loss to be filled with emotion—to convey the disruption and uncertainty that psychological work describes in characterizing grief. Many studies of bereavement begin with phrases to describe reactions to the death of a loved one such as, "a deeply painful event," "devastating," "upheaval," "life-altering," "an intensely personal emotional experience." The literature highlights how loss is accompanied by an onslaught of emotions such as despair, depression, anger, sadness, guilt, failure, and ambivalent feelings of love/hate or loss/relief. In this project, participants offered a somewhat different perspective as they talked about their experiences with grief.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the most prevalent trend that emerged in respondents talk about the time following a death. Predominantly, participants' remarks about

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their initial reaction to the death of a loved one focused on the practicalities and logistics of

responding to a death. Narratives from this group of individuals could be framed as primarily

responding to the question "what do I do now?" versus "how do I feel now?" This is not to say

that the individuals I talked with did not feel; of course they did. In the second section of this

chapter I consider how peopled talked about their affective experience and the ways that talk

about the emotional experience of grief emerged as a secondary or alternative discourse in

relation to the emphasis on bereavement as a series of necessary and practical, yet complicated,

decisions. In closing the chapter I consider the implications of the two primary themes and

explore patterns that emerged within the broader orientations toward a practical or emotional

experience of bereavement.

The Logistics of Loss

Often, when we think about experiencing the death of a loved one emotionality is the first

thing that comes to mind. Poets write of the anguish, longing, yearning, regret, and despair that

wash over the bereaved. When learning that a friend is confronting loss our first thoughts are

often about their feelings and our own uncertainty about how to provide emotional support.

Stehpenson (1994) described grief as "an overwhelming and acute sense of loss and despair. The

entire personality is helplessly engulfed in strong, sometimes frightening feelings. Individuals

can feel out of control as monstrous waves of emotions sweep over them" (p.136). After reading

similar accounts of grief and the bereavement process I was prepared to hear the participants in

my study describe the details of their emotional experience with despair and loss. However, in

talking with bereaved individuals, I found they emphasized how the practical details of

responding to death dominated their experience during the initial moments, weeks, and months

after their loved one died.

In this section, I relay individuals' descriptions of being consumed by details and explore the impact that the practicalities of death had on these individuals. This perspective offers new insight into the relevance of dealing with the practical and logistical aspects of death and the roll of practicalities in shaping experiences of grief in our modern society. Following a general description of loss and logistics, I delve deeper to consider how participants viewed the practical demands of being busy as beneficial to their coping with the loss.

Garrett described his initial confusion and disorientation about how to respond, not necessarily emotionally, but practically. Garrett said, "So I ended up coming home from Aspen, talking to my parents and wasn't really sure what I needed to do. I ended up going into work the next day. And was on the phone half the day with my dad figuring out when I needed to head back to [the east coast]. And so I ended up working a half-day, kind of. And then my boss is like, 'Just leave. Get out of here, dude.' So I left and got a flight the next day." Garrett expressed how, faced with uncertainly about how to react to the death of his nephew, he engaged the practicalities of his everyday life—he got up and went to work. As Garret's dialog continued, he conveyed a sense of how he was moved out of a state of confusion and in-action, finally propelled by the details of travel arrangements.

Monique also shared how attending to the logistics of planning a funeral mitigated her initial uncertainty. Monique expressed the uncertainty she felt wondering what it would be like in the moments after her father was taken off a respirator following a heart attack. She said that what followed his death was a rush of concern for all that would need to be done in the following days. "I think the immediate concerns were definitely, you know, making all the decisions and the arrangements. And we decided to do the service at my parents' house… I mean, having 350 people at the house was like its own thing…" Monique went on to explain that her attention was

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focused on working to complete a partially finished landscaping project, getting catering ordered, and coordinating the arrival of friends and family, to name a few things. Monique said that she stepped into a hostess role to help her mother with all the decisions and details. "So I [just focused on] making food and making sure that everything was organized for every meal." Monique emphasized how the details of planning the funeral, attending to the family home, and going through her father's office consumed much of her time and thoughts in the weeks after her father's death.

Jack, a senior executive, echoed the practical demands that shaped his initial experience following the death of his mother. Jack said:

There was so much to do. My dad couldn't handle the arrangements so my sister and I did all that and then we had a lot of people—[I] had to make a gazillion phone calls, ya know, '[Mother] is dead now.' So I had to ah-- I did all that, and maybe not a gazillion, maybe two gazillion phone calls, and then of course people aren't there and then you leave a message and then they called back and you don't want to tell him on the recording what has gone on… So then you make the funeral arrangements and then you have the funeral and then you have people staying over, and then you get them back to the airport, and by then it's a week plus…Yeah, there was just no time for anything else.

Mason relayed a similar experience, describing how the speed of everything that happened made the time after his mother's death feel like a blur. He said:

And you had to kind of take care of something every day. And in some ways, you know you almost—I ended up treating a lot of it just the way I treat work. You know you come in and do it every day and you just deal with what you got to deal with every day.

Mason and Jack's descriptions give a sense of the momentum and weight that the practicalities of arranging a funeral and responding to condolences can carry.

Saphire and Kate offered insight into the ways that legal matters can occupy bereaved individuals' time and energy. Saphire stated, "There was a lot of legal stuff and paper to deal with and things to sign…The legal stuff—I mean I'm still going to have to do the estate taxes and everything this coming year, so it's still kind of going on." From the moments following a death to months and years after, participants emphasized how logistics permeated their experience and memories of responding to the death of their loved ones.

Rees (2001) reviewed the numerous practical challenges of dealing with death, including meeting official obligations such as registering the death and arranging for the handling the body, planning a memorial or other funeral rite, and responding to condolences. The people I talked with outlined their attention to these practicalities and many more. People talked about how they had to attend to aspects of their own everyday life, for example, Saphire and Alexandra mentioned the need to attend to pets as one of the many little things that shaped their experience. Respondents indicated that the practicalities that demanded their attention were not only those directly related to the death. In fact, it was common for people to describe the way the logistics of work became part of their initial experience. Handling work affairs was often one of the many things that needed attention—from sharing the news and requesting time off to finishing or transitioning projects.

Calling in to work to check in with their supervisor and share the news that their loved one had died was a common necessity; further, the logistics of taking off work became a relevant factor in participants' initial experience with loss. Rebecca said that the day after her grandmother died she had to come into work. She stated, "I had to come in, get my stuff done,

and you know get all my work handed over to somebody, and then I could leave." Janie who works in publishing said that her work couldn't wait for her to return. She said, "I did what they required me to do while I was away [at the funeral]. So I took hard copy…of things to be edited with me. And then did the edits and emailed the edits back to my boss." For Janie and others, the details of everyday life and work were central to their experience with loss. Throughout these examples we can hear the relevance and importance of attending to logistics and how, through these narratives, bereavement is represented as a time of *doing*, more than a time of *feeling*.

In some ways the dominant emphasis on action is to be expected as people describe their responses to the death of a loved one. Stephenson (1994) indicated that the first stage of grief is characterized by a sense of numbness resulting from of the shock of a death. Stephenson summed up the description of this initial numbness phase stating, "one doesn't feel, one just 'does'" (Stephenson, p. 145). This brief description seems to align well with the dominant focus on doing that emerged in this study. However, more detailed descriptions of numbness cease to align with the tone described in the section above.

Rees (2001) characterized numbness as "an inner emptiness" that is accompanied by panic attacks, tearfulness, extreme distress, and emotional outbursts—to name a few symptoms. Rees continued, "Everything seems to be unreal and the bereaved may feel too confused and bewildered to cope with their immediate problems" (p. 161). While participants in this study certainly conveyed initial uncertainty and a focus on attending to logistics, they did not describe bewilderment and they did not articulate an inability to cope. In fact, what is interesting here is the extent to which participants highlighted their ability to act. Participants described how they took control; many drew upon project management experience to help them handle arrangements and planning, and they emphasized their ability to keep moving and be productive. In contrast,

narratives that conveyed a more affective experience and a desire to processes complex emotions associated with loss were less frequent.

Throughout the interviews people described how practicalities and logistics seemed to consume the time following the death of a loved one. The emergent theme was that bereavement was characterized by doing what needed to be done in contrast to indulging feelings. Participants emphasized the benefits of constant demands, to-do lists, and responsibilities, rather than focusing on the costs or burdens of being busy.

The Benefit of Being Busy

A dominant theme in participants' descriptions of the time following the death of a loved one was that engaging in practicalities rather than feelings, which surfaced as a secondary theme, largely shaped bereavement. Considering the literature on stifled grief and pathological mourning there can be an array of negative consequences that stem from the failure to work through grief feelings and accept the death of a loved one (see Rees, 2001, for a review). In drawing upon Lindemann's (1944) research on acute grief, Rees (2001) stated that if one does not grieve properly "the grief work is delayed and the bereaved are unable to express their distress fully and come to terms with their loss" (p. 159). Stephenson (1994) also indicated that people might not feel a sense of resolution after the death of a loved one when the self and others do not recognize the loss. So, the question arises, does the focus on practicality emphasized by participants have consequences for coping or working through grief? Is keeping busy a form of denial that may have negative repercussions? In this section, I share how participants framed keeping busy as a beneficial coping strategy.

One reaction to the whirlwind of activity that followed a loss was to understand the focus on logistics as providing an emotional shield against the strain of loss. The physical and mental

demands of being busy seemed to provide an opportunity for people to continue functioning without directly dwelling on the meaning or impact of the loss. I asked Mason how attending to logistics impacted his own experience with grief. He described the connection between attending to material details and his affective experience stating, "Well, it probably muted or dulled it. You know it provided – it was the opportunity to say, 'Well, you know I can't. Somebody's got to be strong here. Somebody's got to stay with this and deal with this and do it.' So, you know step up, do it, and get through it. So it provided a way to sort of compartmentalize that or, you know, put it aside a bit." Toni summarized these sentiments succinctly stating, "And that's what gets you though the second day is that you're busy." In addition to offering distraction, focusing on tasks provides a sense of focus and direction in the midst of uncertainty.

When I talked with Hunter about the time following the death of his mother, he shared Mason and Toni's sentiments on the benefits of taking care of things, but he also highlighted the confusion he felt. Hunter said:

I felt I was always keeping myself busy, because I just wanted to keep myself busy, I thought that was the better thing to do. So, I was organizing, we had a reception. So, I was organizing a caterer and getting the drinks set up and all that stuff, and then the overall funeral and dealing with that…So, a lot of it was new, just because it was, you know, you never deal with that, especially at our age. You just don't—you're just not sure what's going on.

Hunter more directly connects the benefits of activity to his underlying sense of bewilderment so we get a sense of how attending to details offers stability in the midst of chaos. As participants talked about the time after their loved one died, they depicted the experience as a blur of activity—a time where they went through the motions and kept moving from one event or chore to another.

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Going through the necessary motions of planning and arranging was also described as a way to divert attention from underlying uncertainty and confusion about the practical and existential meaning of the death. Being busy provided some insulation from the affective experience of looking inward and contemplating feelings associated with the loss. For example, Bennie, a young woman whose partner died in an accident, described her response:

My first thought was getting home because I was not there. And then once I got home the shock set in. I was trying to do everything for the memorial service and trying to figure out his house – like it was definitely an order of things. And kind of things that I couldn't really– it was easier to look at the outside things for the concerns, [rather] than myself.

Looking outward for things that needed attention offered a distraction, but also provided an opportunity to feel good about making a contribution toward something.

In addition to tending to chores, bereaved individuals described their efforts to direct their attention toward supporting others affected by the death. Monique, emphasized the centrality of attending to her mother in her experience:

[Taking care of all the people at the house was] definitely the immediate goal and just taking care of my mom because there were so many people around…I mean, we had like 15 to 20 people at every meal from the moment after, you know, he died. But then its really been about supporting my mom, and, I mean, my brother as well, but really about supporting her.

After the death of his nephew, Garrett talked about a similar desire to be there for other family members. He said, "So my role I felt – I looked at myself as trying to be supportive as much as possible and be there for anyone and everyone. And just being a sound board. Or somebody to lean on, or a shoulder to cry on, more or less." In these examples, the individuals talked about

attending to others and providing support as a positive aspect of their experience that allowed them to feel like they were making a positive contribution during a difficult time.

Describing the relative comfort of looking outside and attending to others after the death of a loved one provides insight into why many might find it helpful and comforting to get caught up in the practical problems that follow a death, rather than the ambiguous and sometimes conflicting emotional experience of grief. Bowlby (1961), a noted psychologist who wrote extensively on attachment and loss, stated, "Grief, I believe, is *a peculiar amalgam* of anxiety, anger and despair following the experience of what is feared to be irretrievable loss" (p. 331). Given the proliferation of descriptions of grief that emphasize emotional anguish, it is understandable that bereaved individuals insulate themselves with busyness until they might feel ready to confront affective aspects of loss. The previous description of how people talked about the centrality of logistics in their experience may produce an image of individuals who have essentially managed emotion out of their experience, but this is not accurate. What is important to note is that the participants opted to emphasize and highlight that aspect of their experience during the interview. Under the detail-oriented descriptions of managing events and tasks are subtle expressions of grief-related emotions such as uncertainty, ambivalence, sadness, and remorse.

Mason offered insight into the tensions that arise as individuals negotiate the desire and pressure to return to "normal" alongside feelings of grief, he said:

You know there was certainly, you know a grieving process that went on…Just, you know and even afterwards there was sort of just a need to kind of get back to work and also just get back to – there was still a lot of work to do with taking care of my father [since my mother passed]… You know it was almost an inability to, you know in some ways I just couldn't sit

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and cry all day. Cause there was just too much to do. Which may have been a good thing, bad

thing, I don't know. But it was.

People, like Mason, used work and other responsibilities as a strategy for moving through grief-

related emotions—to get back to a state of normalcy.

Thus far, I have described the trend of participants' focus on logistics and the

practicalities of responding to a death. Additionally, I conveyed that bereaved respondents shared

their thoughts on the ways that staying busy helped them through the experience. As introduced

above, the emphasis on being busy and moving forward does not mean that individuals were not

also confronting grief-related emotions. Jack and Toni, who both highlighted the benefits of

being busy, talked about how driving in the car was a difficult and very emotional time because

there was nothing to distract them. We can hear how emotions seem to sit just below the surface

in how Jack talks about how keeping busy keeps his emotions at bay. He stated, "We're so busy

that we're– there's really never time for, to feel sad– usually if it's sad it's, ya know, driving to

work or drive them home when you have a little more private time." Toni shared a similar

experience, "I'm thinking about my mom on my drive times and so it is very emotional." It was

in the car that they would be likely to cry or "break down." Participants explained that for them,

keeping busy was a way to cope and continue to function in their daily lives.

Toni described how she coped with the grief-related emotions she felt after the death of

her mother:

It's very difficult, and that's why I work – I believe people should. I don't know what people

do who don't work. I don't know how they get through their days. I think you need to work

just mentally …to get through those days.

In Toni's excerpts we get a sense for the fear that can accompany a plunge into grief related emotions. Stephenson (1994) wrote, "Grief can feel like fear, especially when the person has a lack of experience with new and overwhelming feelings" (p. 151). He explained that in American society we place a strong value on control, particularly emotional control, and we are often fearful of strong emotions when they occur. Toni's response is an example of how participants subtly acknowledged their desire to use busyness as a way to avoid an emotional rollercoaster. Many spoke as if they might slip into a state of being enveloped by emotions they would not understand and would be unable to control if they allowed themselves unoccupied time.

Later in the interview Toni reflected on her experience of engaging or indulging grief-related emotions, "To sit around and be emotional all the time, that's really hard. It gives you headaches and everything. Work helps. To me, work is therapeutic." Here, Toni clearly indicated that she viewed her efforts to stay busy as a beneficial coping strategy and not as denial in a negative sense. Jack echoed these same thoughts about the time after his mother died:

> [Being] busy through the whole week I think really helped the whole process. Because ya know, my dad couldn't do much to help, other than sit around and you could tell that it affected him a lot more. So, I think that being busy was yeah, you didn't have time to think about being sad…So I could see how sitting around with – then people start feeling sorry for themselves, and it's just unpleasant, stay busy!

Jack's statement here is interesting in that he conveyed a particular attitude toward the value of being productive in contrast to having emotional experience. Stephenson (1994) described this American orientation toward emotional control, "Triumph over one's feelings, suffering in silence, and refusal to be overcome by emotions are seen as admirable traits in American

society" (p.157). Within Jack's comments we can hear echoes of a larger social discourse of emotion management that favors stoicism and resilience.

The tendency to emphasize staying productive and focused on the practicalities of life during bereavement is a relatively new theme in relation to the current body of work on grief. It is possible that this theme mirrors changes in social attitudes toward death and bereavement. Fulton and Owen (1994) described trends in American approaches to death and argued that "death for this generation [those born after World War II] has become invisible and abstract" (p. 13). Fulton and Owen cite a variety of social changes including industrialization, advances in medicine and technology that insulate people from death, and increasing media exposure to dying where death is viewed at a distance, to name a few. The trend, they indicate, is that individuals are becoming more and more insulated from the social impact of death, which subsequently impacts experiences of grief. Fulton and Owen summarize the impact of these changes stating, "We are more a 'death-denying' culture than a 'death-defying' culture" (p. 18). One could ask if the dominant discourse emphasizing logistics and productivity reflects a larger trend toward the denial or avoidance of death and grief. This question is complicated by the pejorative connotation that concepts of denial and avoidance carry.

As previously mentioned, denial and avoidance of death have often been associated with delayed or acute grief—essentially they lead to negative emotional outcomes. However, this perspective is being challenged (Stroebe, 2001; Bonanno, 2009; Bonanno & Field, 2001) suggesting that avoidance may not necessarily stifle the grief process. Stroebe (2001) argued for new approaches to bereavement research that distinguish constructive working through grief from unconstructive processes. She specifically proposed that new research on bereavement "consider the processes underlying the denial or avoidance of grief" (p. 857). Here, Stroebe

indicates that denial or avoidance of grief may be part of constructive working through grief. In light of these arguments, the themes presented here point toward the possibility that grief avoidance, in the form of a focus on productivity, is part of a constructive process of working through grief that fits the social environment that individuals experience today.

Time for Grief: Expressions of Strain under the Pressure of Momentum

While many people found some comfort in the responsibility and action that accompanied the logistics associated with bereavement and their worklife, others described how external demands and attending to others had a negative impact on them. An alternative that emerged in relation to the *stay busy* theme was a discourse that asserted the need for time to deal with loss and to grieve. In the following segment I explore how some participants articulated the tensions and stress they felt under the weight of logistics and responsibilities.

Kelly used the metaphor of a spinning on a merry-go-round to describe the sense of momentum and accumulating stress she experienced. Kelly described her struggle to keep up with everything that needed her attention after her grandmother passed away. She said:

    And I think that's the hardest thing is afterwards trying to get everything back on track. It's hard; it's really hard because you can't say 'Okay, I'm not going to work for two weeks.' I'm [just trying to] get everything back on track, and it's like, to me it's like a merry-go-round…and somebody's pushing it really fast and the challenge was for you to jump on that merry-go-round…without it hittin' you in the face…Leap back on that merry-go-round to get it all back in order and it's like 'Oh my god, I got to do this again,' and then you're getting halfway there and something else happens and it's like 'Oh, okay, when is it gonna stop?!

As we talked Kelly emphasized the toll it took to care for her family, be present at work, and deal with the practicalities of her grandmother's death. Kelly expressed her desire to step outside the momentum stating:

Sometimes you do feel like running and hiding under a rock or somethin' so nobody can bother you and you could just deal with it that way, but like I said before you can't just freeze life and say, 'nobody move, I'm gonna do what I have to do and then we'll come back to it,' but you can't.

Kelly gave the impression that she felt significant pressure to continue on with very minimal disruption, despite her efforts to communicate her need for time and space to cope. Lucy also highlighted the impact of perceived pressures to keep moving after a death. She said, "You grieve for a few days and then there's that abrupt stop and you've got to—you don't have a choice but to get back into it. You've gotta move on with your life." Lucy explained how this sense of abruptness and emphasis on moving forward was exacerbated by the feeling that, "you're expected to just kind of fall back into place without a lot of thought to what you may still be going through." Both Lucy and Kelly provide exemplars of the underlying feeling of being pushed or pulled by the pace and expectations that exist in modern American society.

While the previous examples highlighted the impact of others' expectations to keep moving, Toni reflected on feeling the opposite. Toni described feeling like she wouldn't be able to move forward after her mother died:

But I just couldn't even imagine [moving on]. Oh I'll just die, I won't be able to get through it. But you do and it's because you don't have a choice. The next day is gonna come. The world keeps going around. You think it's supposed to stop and it doesn't, and it's not even a moment that anything stops for you and it just keeps moving and so you do too.

Toni's statement here along with her prior statement, where she indicated that work kept her going, offers a feel for how the pressure to stay in motion can create stress while simultaneously offering a constructive path for continuing life without the deceased.

During a discussion with Kate we talked about how managing logistics after the death of her father was in some ways beneficial to her, but had increased her stress as well. For Kate attending to her father's affairs left little time to care for her own health needs. She explained how she simultaneously felt strain and relief:

One thing that I would do differently … would be to take more time just for me…Right away it was 'oh my gosh, we got to do my dad's taxes'. And then we had to get everything ready for the attorney to do the taxes for the trusts. And so it's just been taking care of the estate and I haven't really taken a lot of time just for me… So, if I were to do it differently I would [have scheduled 'just-for-me-time'] earlier… Because sometimes when I took off [work] all I would do is run up to my parents' house and manage things…. And I was doing it for them, or for the estate, and the rest of the family wasn't really doing anything for me.

As we talked, Kate indicated that helping out with the estate and other family concerns was therapeutic in a way. However, the lack of personal time and relaxation increased her stress and exacerbated symptoms associated with multiple sclerosis. Tina also indicated that she would have liked a little more time at home to get back into a normal routine after the death of her brother. There were several occasions where she said in exasperation, "I haven't got caught up," or "I'm trying to catch up." Tina aptly described the tensions between logistics and personal bereavement needs as a juggling act.

In this section, the voices of bereaved women expressed the weight of practicalities and a desire to attend to their feelings. This alternative discourse articulates self-nurturing as an

important but constrained aspect of the grief experience. For these women, taking care of others and managing additional responsibilities tipped the scales beyond what they felt they could reasonably handle. In these cases, the women spoke regrettably of not having time or energy to feel emotions of loss related to the death of their loved one. While some people found comfort in a distraction from grief-related emotions, these women wished for time to experience the loss. Through the excerpts above tensions emerge for those who struggle balance these two aspects of dealing with death, the practical and the emotional.

"I need help" versus "I can handle it": Tensions in Requesting and Accepting Help

As suggested above, bereaved individuals may feel increased stress and strain at the plethora of responsibilities that arise following the death of a loved one. In this study, the pressure to handle things efficiently and move forward was complicated by the complexities of asking for or receiving help. Concerns about how others would perceive or judge the acceptance of help surfaced the relevance of identity work in the experience of bereavement. A second tension-based theme arose as respondents simultaneously expressed a desire to be freed from some of their responsibilities while offering examples of how they declined help. Following examples of the apprehension that accompanied social support and practical assistance, I discuss how a communication perspective on facework provides a frame for interpreting the tensions articulated by participants.

Despite the need for assistance, many expressed feeling uncomfortable accepting or asking for help. Monique's ambivalence toward receiving help from women in her mother's group exemplifies the tensions individuals in this study experienced. Monique said:

One of the girls was like, we'll bring food over to you, you know, like we'll organize. Like they were all over it, like, we have a project, you know, like, we're in here. We're bringing

food. We're – can we watch [your son]? What can we do to support you? And I think – you

know– …So it was – it felt weird to like – so I was like, 'no, you know, we're fine,' or

whatever. And it felt weird to like think about people bringing me food. I don't know, but,

yeah. I think people wanted to be so supportive. I don't know…I mean, it was amazing. I'm

so thankful. I couldn't imagine. But I think, too, because I associate so much of who I am by

cooking and by food that it seemed weird for someone else to cook for me if I was able to do

it on my own.

Monique vacillated between feeling grateful that people wanted to support her and feeling

uncomfortable with type of help offered. For Monique, being responsible and organized was a

key part of who she was, especially related to cooking. To accept help in this area seemed to

disrupt her sense of self and her thoughts about what she should do.

Kelly, who spoke about the pressure of seemingly unending duties, also described why it

was difficult to get help even when support was offered. She described her attempt to work

though the subject of help during bereavement:

[People would say] 'if you need anything…' Well what do ya tell people? I mean what do you

need? I mean can you make me a salad? I don't know! It's just, it's really hard, I mean I know

it's a really nice gesture…But even in my culture…if somebody dies, and it's friends or

relatives we all start cooking and take food to that family. And we take food to the services

and that's our way of helping. But not all cultures are the same… My daughter would say,

'mom all my friends keep telling me if you need anything, let 'em know,' and it's like… what

do we need? What do we? Ya know, you just feel like – to me sometimes it's like, like you're

using the situation to get something else… that's how I feel… But you just wonder, what do I

say?

For Kelly, the sense of uncertainty about how she should feel and act following her grandmother's death made it difficult to sort out what kind of help might be appropriate to ask for. For many people, particularly those in care-taking roles, it felt greedy to accept help when they could "technically" or "physically" take care of something themselves. Both Monique and Kelly's statements surface the embedded idea that asking for help will make visible the possibility that you're not ok, or that you are emotionally and physically affected by the loss. Participants highlighted these tensions particularly in requesting or accepting the kind of help that is needed, such as housework or errands.

Hunter talked about how helpful it was to have people who would just step in and run to the store or clean up without being asked. Hunter said that it's "things like that seemed so little, especially that person doing it for the other, but it really is a big deal." During the interview, Hunter expressed feelings of gratitude for people who would just "take control" which eliminated the tensions that Kelly experienced in responding to people who offered help in the form of general statements such as: "let me know what you need." However, while Hunter appreciated much of the asserted help, he also described feeling uncomfortable with the way that some family members inserted themselves, even under the premise of assistance. Hunter continued to describe his experience:

> A couple family members [made it more difficult for me], but that's, you know, just from family drama of wanting to help. I didn't need their help or didn't need their business– their nose in the financials or anything like that. Just wasn't their business. So, that was a little stressful.

Given the logistical demands that many people experience after the death of a loved one, it was not uncommon for participants to highlight chores and the minutia of daily living as the primary

areas where they needed help. However, for many, this type of help was the most awkward to ask for because it felt small or inconsequential. As Hunter indicated, more significant tasks like sorting through family business or personal effects fell into a more personal category and triggered affective responses that made help feel intrusive.

In reflecting upon respondents talk around this theme it's relevant to briefly discuss the role of identity in experiences of bereavement. The death of a loved one can produce disruptions to the survivor's identity. The death of a spouse, child, or other significant relation can place the survivor in a position of having to redefine how they see themselves and where they fit in social groupings. Owen, Fulton, & Markusen (1994) asserted that death is a "crisis of personal identity" (p. 242). If not a crisis, identity is likely a central concern for the bereaved (Klass, 1988). In addition to having to sort out a new understanding of self, many bereaved individuals also experience a stigma associated with grief (Hastings, 2000; Owen, Fulton, & Markusen, 1994). It is not surprising then that people would express apprehension about how others might perceive their actions and disclosures after the death of a loved one.

Within the communication discipline research has explored the impact of identity concerns on support and interactions between bereaved individuals and their social networks. Hastings (2006) and Toller and McBride (2008) extended the argument that identity work is an important facet of bereavement (Klass, 1988; Owen, Fulton, & Markusen, 1994) by applying Goffman's (1967) concept of facework to bereaved parents' social interactions. According to Goffman, face refers to the image one presents to others. As Hastings summarized, "The efforts made to create and preserve the image of all participants in an interaction is known as 'facework'" (p. 358). Facework, or the process of presenting oneself to others, is a central aspect

of identity work as bereaved individuals try to make sense of their experience with loss and their identity as a bereaved individual.

Communication with others can become difficult for the bereaved because talk about how they are handling the loss can produce face-threatening situations where they are unable to maintain their preferred presentation of self. For Monique and Kelly, accepting help with tasks that are part of their everyday responsibilities threatens their face—it calls into question their ability to maintain their image of themselves as women who are able to take care of themselves and their families. Hastings (2006) indicated that demonstrating a lack of control, through the expression of emotions or by presenting a "dependent" or "needy" self, can threaten the face of the bereaved as well as the other (p. 362, 365). Essential to reactions to help is the extent to which help aligns with or contests the face of those involved.

Hunter's description of responding to different types of help gives a sense for the complexity of this experience. Hunter did not have difficulty accepting help with chores; it is interesting to consider how gender roles in the home may impact how individuals respond to offers for help with domestic tasks. Perhaps, Hunter experienced less of face threat around having another tend to household duties because they are not central to his view of himself. On the other hand, Hunter had a different reaction to offers for assistance with financials. Potentially, money matters cross into a domain that is more tied to face for him.

Participants' talk about their ability to focus on practicalities and get things done could be understood as a desire to present the image that they were handling the loss the well—to maintain positive face. This issue is particularly salient as bereaved individuals consider how others might judge their emotional experience in a society that favors emotional control. Identity concerns and a wariness toward judgment emerged as participants conveyed the tensions

involved in the acceptance of social support and the complexity of asking for help. Focusing on

facework as a fundamental component of requesting or accepting help directs attention toward

the important role that communicative practices play in constructing experiences of bereavement.

In summary, the overriding theme that ran through participants descriptions of their

experience with bereavement can be summed up as "What do I do?" or "I just did what had to be

done." Descriptions of how individuals attended to the practicalities were followed by

explanations of how this approach facilitated coping with their loss. While the tendency to tout

the benefits of staying busy through the bereavement phase was strong, alternative voices

emerged asserting disruptions to the dominant discourse. In the margins resided a discourse

speaking a need for reprieve—for time to cope with grief. Despite recognition of a need for

assistance during bereavement to gain space for grief, participants commonly defaulted to

maintaining ownership and control over their responsibilities. The concept of facework offers a

framework for making sense of the contradictions that run throughout this theme.

This analysis revealed that bereaved individuals primarily responded to uncertainty and

identity disruption by focusing on logistics and claiming a sense of control and stability through

task accomplishment—even when this practice produced tensions and feelings of discomfort.

The findings in this study both align and diverge from previous studies of bereavement.

Participants' responses support previous literature that described the experience of grief as a time

of great uncertainty and identity disruption (Hastings, 2000; Toller, 2005; Rees, 2001; Willmott,

2000). However, rather than continuing to focus on the emotional experience of uncertainty

associated with grief, the conclusions from this project suggest that it is necessary to explore the

non-affective ways that people cope. In addition, greater attention should be directed toward

understanding the connection between identity work and communicative practices that bereaved workers invoke to describe their experiences.

Uncertainty, Ambivalence, and Understanding in Bereavement

In the first section of this chapter I explored the emergence of dominant discourse which revolved around working through logistics and practicalities associated with the death of a loved one. Through this discourse participants conveyed the underlying value placed on moving forward and working effectively through the bereavement phase. I now turn to a discussion of how people talked specifically about their emotional experience. A significant aspect of talking about emotion was the expression of uncertainty, complexity, and ambivalence. These themes are prevalent in the grief literature and are somewhat expected. A second facet of emotion-based experiences of bereavement was reflection on working through grief. In contrast to the narratives above, where people moved through uncertainty by *doing*, these excerpts offer insight into how individuals processed the menagerie of feelings. Finally, I conclude this section by considering the various tactics individuals employed to protect themselves from emotional vulnerability.

Uncertainty

Participants in this study described their diverse affective experiences. First, I offer examples of how people endeavored to make sense of the uncertainty and ambivalence they felt, then I turn to the voices of those who had developed a clearer understanding of their emotional journey. Garret offered insight into what it was like to struggle with uncertainty about feelings related to a death:

Well, there was a little bit of conflict 'cause it was one of those I wasn't sure. I'd never – like I said, I'd never really lost anybody. So I wasn't sure where I was supposed to be on the spectrum, in all levels. So this is like at work, with my family, etcetera. So I wasn't sure

whether I should have been like a basket case or totally cool, calm and collected and one of those – I wasn't really sure where I was supposed to be. And so I just kind of let things happen however they happened, but I certainly would stop and analyze things, ask myself why I wasn't grieving more or why I was grieving so much and why I was letting it get in my way. And so it would be kind of – it all depended on the moment. It was just kind of like a (whistle) big wave of things.

As Garrett thought through his emotional experience he described a sense of unfamiliarity with this type of situation which left him without a clear frame for interpretation. He explained his emotional confusion as stemming from a lack of experience with death, which enabled him to accept a range of changing affective experiences. In the passage, Garrett continued to try and makes sense of the feelings he had encountered. He intimated that perhaps there were norms he could draw upon to analyze his emotional response, but ultimately highlighted the fluidity of his feelings.

Stacey, a trained psychotherapist, discussed how she came to think about grief as an entanglement of emotions following the death of her grandfather. She said:

I think sometimes I forgot that, when the anger part came, that that was grief. I'd be like, 'What's the matter with me? Why am I testy and fidgety?'…Like, 'Yeah, this is part of your grief, too. It's okay to be agitated right now and have a context for it.' That you're not just going crazy but this is part of what happens when you lose somebody.

Stacey continued to explore on how she came to make sense of the spectrum of emotions she felt. She reflected, "The thought that came to mind when I was going through it was like, wow, grief is like a secondary color. It's like you get your primary colors of anger and sadness and all that stuff. But then grief is this complex color mixture of all these different things that you go

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through." Stacey articulated the general concept of grief to be an amalgamation of emotions that a bereaved individual might experience at different times following the death of a loved one. Through Stacey's reflections we get a sense of the polysemy of grief as a complex affective experience.

Stacey conceptualized grief as a spectrum of emotions that arose in unpredictable ways. Thinking about her grief in this way provided a sense of comfort and created the option to go with the flow of her volatile feelings. Lisa had a more difficult time, experiencing distraction, confusion, and emotional instability. Lisa described herself after the death of her husband:

I'm not – I'm not as with it. I'm not as sharp. I am making mistakes that I never would have made before. It's almost like you're crazy. You almost feel like that, and you can't – nobody else can understand that hasn't gone through it, but you kind of put it out there that you're – [that] everything's okay… and I was really hoping for it to get better, but it's just not. It's getting harder for us.

Carole mirrored Stacey and Lisa's feelings of emotional upheaval when she simply stated, "I just felt very crazed" after her daughter died of breast cancer. The theme of emotional volatility and fragility echoed in many of the narratives. According to Hastings (2000) use of the symbol "crazy" was prevalent in bereaved parent's discourse (p. 362). The use of crazy in bereaved individuals' description of their affective experience reflects the way that strong and foreign emotional experiences can be scary, causing people to feel like they might be losing control and slipping out of a rational state.

In addition to feeling jarred by grief-related emotions, some expressed feelings of dissonance between what they felt and expectations about appropriate or desired feelings. Caroline expressed multiple and competing emotions about the death of her boss and asserted

how her emotional experience diverged from what she thought she should have been able to feel. Critical comments made by the deceased's wife and the organizational duties placed on Caroline made it difficult for her to sift through emotions associated with the death and the larger situation. She described the emotional conflict she experienced:

I understand [his wife] was going through a lot, but it's sort of like, why are you taking this out on me? You know, I'm the only one helping. And so it's just so much resentment I think, and so I never, I don't think to this day I've had any kind of sadness without anger involved.

For Caroline, the emotions created a conflict between what she felt and what she thought she should or would like to feel in the response to the death of her mentor. Many participants endeavored to sort through the connection between grief as a general concept and the unpredictable bevy of emotions experienced after the death of a loved one.

Identifying and Processing Grief-related Emotions

The ability, or tendency, to express the process of working through grief as an emotional journey was less common among participants in this study. However, participants who worked in mental health or had been trained in counseling reflected on their efforts to gain understanding or discover peace with their grief. Steven's interview provides an exemplar of how some individuals expressed their experience with grief work.

For individuals whose loved one has an extended illness feelings associated with grief can begin long before the actual death. The experience of anticipatory grief, where a person knows of an impending death, is associated with a more complicated emotional experience filled with ambivalence (Stephenson, 1994). Steven discussed the time period after his mother suffered a non-fatal stroke. He said, "That was probably the most difficult time for me because [my mother] went from being this person that I knew, this independent strong woman, to a definite

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personality change. [She had a] loss of recent memories, of not knowing who my daughter was…" Steven continued, "Part of the reason that I wanted to describe that process [in an interview] is because…in retrospect, and even before she passed away, I realized that she kind of died for me when she had the stroke. And so I went through a lot of that intense emotion then."

Five years after his mother's had a stroke her heath worsened and Steven experienced a new rush of emotion. He shared the nuance and mystery of his feelings:

I was the closest to her in my family of my siblings, and so it was really difficult for me in a lot of unexplained ways, in ways that I wasn't really fully conscious of... And so when she actually did die-- when we were driving away from the hospital, the week before she died, I burst into tears because I knew that was it. And so when she actually did die, there wasn't a lot of emotion for me at that point.

In these passages Steven highlighted the progression of his emotional responses, which he had spent considerable time reflecting on. Steven's experience aligns with descriptions of anticipatory grief, which is characterized by a roller coaster of emotions. During the illness phase survivors must negotiate American social discourses that assert a pragmatic approach to death as a problem to solve (Stephenson, 1994). When the loved one dies, it is not uncommon for the griever to feel guilty over being unable to prevent the death, pressure to move on, and relief at the end of suffering.

Steven was able to reflect on the complexity of his emotional experience because he believed in the value of working through emotions. Through reflection, Steven developed a perspective on how his family's view on dealing with emotions had impacted his experience processing emotions after his mother's death. Steven said:

Generally, the two kind of acceptable emotions [in my family], or the two kind of emotions

that you saw most of the time was either anger or laughter, or some combination. But the

other kind of unspoken family thing was you don't ask for help and you pull yourself up by

your bootstraps and that kind of thing. And actually, counseling, in a lot of ways, was very

suspicious. …because you don't need to talk about those things because you can do it

yourself.

Steven talked about how he found it difficult to cope with the emotional experience of his

mother's illness and death on his own. His family's approach to experiencing emotion privately

didn't provide a way for him to gain support or to process the complex emotional experience he

was having.

For Steven the realization that he could talk through his affective experience with others

created an opportunity for him to reflect and make sense of the death of his mother. He

concluded, "Having that shift in perspective of, oh yeah, it actually is okay and helpful to

actually ask people to talk about these things, was very helpful." Steven described his experience

of reconciling not only his emotions, but also the desire to process them through counseling.

Steven developed a practice for acknowledging his emotions and affective experiences. He

commented:

I would conceptualize it as chunks of grief that come up, I almost have this vision of like a

piece of ice breaking off or something like that. And I would just cry and just feel a little

overwhelmed, and they would come out of nowhere, or seem to come out of nowhere a lot of

the time and just be very intense and fairly brief, maybe sometimes driving into work in the

morning or something... And I would just kind of let it be. And it would pass within 20 or 30

minutes.

Steven's narrative offers insight into the ways that bereaved individuals can reflect on their experience with grief and then actively engage in creating or adopting an alternative approach. After encountering a counseling perspective, Steven adopted an interactionally-based process as a way to work through his grief. In addition, the new perspective provided him with a foundation for engaging affective responses, then working through and finally releasing emotions.

Exploring solitary processes to enact grief work.

While counseling provided Steven an avenue to begin to work through his grief, others who shared a counseling background emphasized the necessity of independent or solitary grief work. A theme that arouse in regard to the experience of bereavement was that grief work was necessary and consisted of sorting through the uniqueness in their experience, which required space to retreat into privacy. Stacey noted her need for isolation at times:

I have all these like, psychotherapeutic tools and I can go see a therapist or go talk to friends. There was a part of it that just felt like I couldn't do any of that… at times, just having a breakdown or sleeping a lot, or journaling or taking a bubble bath. It felt like it was a very 'however it needs to show up today' kind of thing. There was no plan or strategy or anything like that…I guess there [was] part of me that needed to isolate to deal with it, I don't know if that was a hindrance or a good thing…But, it was just what I needed to do.

Stacey describes isolation as an opportunity for her to feel whatever emotion might emerge and as a time to care for herself.

Carole also asserted the importance of self care as part of the bereavement process. Carole stated:

But [having self compassion] is the best gift that I could give myself in grieving. Because there was so much I could find to beat myself up about, or have regret, or feel guilty or be

angry about, or whatever it was. I had all those things to come down to. Just be kind to

myself.

Conceptions of self-care often emphasized acceptance and mitigation of judgment and self-critique. Carole also spoke of a process for engaging and elucidating her feelings facilitated by the finger labyrinth[1]. She related her method for processing and transforming grief stating, "Well, release is you allow [an image or feeling] to come up. You notice it. You start to cry. You might get angry. You have feelings. And you also gently and mindfully say, 'Okay. Take a breath. Take a step forward.'" These excerpts reveal how affective engagement became part of the process for experiencing affect as part of bereavement.

Participants like Carole and Stacey described mindful activities for dealing with their feelings of grief, in addition to allowing for a flow of emotion. Carole participated in practices such as art therapy, massage, and finger labyrinths for meditative practice, in order to take a more active approach to acknowledge and process her grief. Stacey said that she didn't anticipate the way the loss affected her which made it necessary to spend more time privately and in therapy trying to make sense of it. In addition to talking with others and setting aside alone time to care for herself, Stacey also found ways to actively work through her grief independently. Stacey commented on how she drew upon her artistic self to work through unresolved feelings toward her grandfather:

So there was some negotiation around differences in beliefs in terms of what I believe.

Actually what I wound up doing because I'm an artist is I wound up writing a screenplay

about it, to process it. Yeah, and one of the cool things about that was that I got to create this

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[1] Carole explained the finger labyrinth as providing both a physical and emotional practice for experiencing and moving through emotion. The physical labyrinth can be made of pottery or satin with groves that create a path for the finger to trace. Carole said you might begin the labyrinth by asking a question such as "what do I want?" or "what do I need?" Then as you enter the maze you begin a contemplative practice where you allow images and feelings to come up and then you release them as you move through the maze to the completion at the center.

fantasy sequence between my grandfather and I that I think helped me feel like he was okay. I also got to dance and sing with him. It was cool.

Stacey's process illustrates an intimate connection with grief inclusive of the unique and mercurial emotions that can arise in the experience. Throughout this section the descriptions of reflection and active participation in constructing an experience of grief demonstrate a learning orientation toward bereavement—one can work through grief in a way that enables self-growth. Rita, whose son died after an extended illness, described how her grief transformed her. She stated:

> In many ways, [my son] was my grief teacher…how to be with brokenness and let it make space for the compassion and love. And wow, I mean, there's so much love, such intense love, fearless love. And for me, that's why grief work is so important because it transforms us into more loving people if we let it. If we don't grieve, then we miss out on the love.

Rita's words captured the spirit of this theme, that grief can be a process actively engaged. It can be difficult and heart wrenching, but ultimately, if embraced, the process of grief work can lead the bereaved individual on a path to acceptance and possibly self-growth.

Emotional Vulnerability and Managing Face

The trend toward accepting, even embracing, an emotional journey was accompanied by a recognition of emotional vulnerability. Another theme that emerged was the desire to protect the emotional self. Participants conveyed their efforts to protect themselves and others from the possibility of too much emotionality in interactions.

Kelly recounted her need to construct an emotional barrier in response to condolences in order to insulate herself from the affects of grief-related emotions. Kelly described feeling a sense of dread when she saw people who would give her "that look" and say "I'm so sorry." She

said "It's like, don't even say that. You kinda want to put a shield around yourself." Kelly and others were able to articulate how supportive interactions brought a wave of tension as they struggled to maintain emotional control or distance from painful emotions during the interaction. Research on facework during bereavement has indicated that interacting with others can create the potential to threaten face if the bereaved is unable to control their emotional display or offer an accepted (contained) level of self-disclosure. Interaction can also threaten the face of the other if they fail to help manage the bereaved individual's face (Holtgraves, 1990) or by imposing upon them (Hastings, 2000). Participants in this project indicated that responding to condolences took a significant amount of emotional energy and produced uncertainty about emotional experiences that could follow the interaction. Interactions with people expressing support could lead down a path where the bereaved individual has to make choice about self-disclosure and emotional expression—both of which present significant threats to face.

Toni gave an account of how difficult it was to interact with people after the death of her mother. She said:

> The first day's difficult. People want to say things. That's difficult…You talk to the people who stop by because it's the right thing to do and you get through the day…And I still have people who ask, 'how are you doin?' and it really is very much appreciated but it's still very difficult.

Toni, like Kelly, illustrated the pattern of simultaneous and conflicting feelings that bereaved individuals often experience—appreciating support but fearing the outcome of the interaction. Stacey spoke specifically about her efforts to contain her own emotional experience. She used the metaphor of a roller-coaster ride to highlight swelling feelings and an emotional volatility which led her to monitor conversations.

Stacey indicated that she regulated who she talked with about her experience, the amount of information she divulged, and the best time and place for those discussions. Stacey said, "It's not about protecting them. I think it's about protecting me in terms of I don't want to feel like I let too much out and then I can't get it back in. Or I feel ashamed of it afterwards…" In Stacey's talk we hear a concern for presentation of self as she fears feeling ashamed of excessive self-disclosure or display of emotion. Additionally, the mention of shame engages an awareness of judgment from others. Similar to Toller and McBride's (2008) findings bereaved individuals in this study were careful about selecting who they would talk with based on a belief that the other would not judge them.

Hastings (2000) stated, "The desire of the bereaved to maintain a positive face can often cause suppression of certain disclosures or avoidance of communicative encounters" (p. 364), which occurred throughout the narratives in this study. Carole indicated that she actively prevented interactions she felt would be too risky or uncomfortable for her. Carole put a sign on her door at work indicating she did not want visitors to prevent emotional encounters. She said, "I didn't want people coming up to me…I didn't want some of the sympathy and empathy from people…it felt like it would be just too overwhelming." Carole recognized her own emotional fragility and endeavored to find ways to protect herself as she worked through her grief. Toller and McBride (2008) found that participants would manage face by masking their true emotions when talking with others. The narratives shared here reveal a stronger inclination toward actually managing or mitigating the swell of grief-related emotions, as opposed to masking or hiding emotions that were constantly present.

Alexandra's account highlighted the desire to maintain or assert control over the emotional volatility that can accompany a bereavement period—to prevent rather than mask

strong emotions. Alexandra discussed the emotional sensitivity she felt following the death of her mother-in-law[2]. She stated:

Well, I think I was more reactive. So if people said something and it was irritating to me, or some – in our department, people can tell stories that are really pretty tragic around mental health issues…And those were – I was much more sensitive to those. And so [I could] very, very quick slide from normal to sad or normal to irritated.

Alexandra talked about how, given her increased emotionality, she would endeavor to protect herself from emotional triggers. She went on to describe her response to emotional moments:

I was definitely watching myself and would notice myself just sort of distancing, checking out a little bit. Like, oh here comes a story. And just say, I'm only going to listen to it from over here, in my mind and not be really fully present to it so that I wouldn't go into the emotion as deeply. It would be much more of an intellectual experience versus an emotional experience, which is not typically how I am.

Alexandra mitigated potential face threats that might arise from emotionality by limiting her attention to conversation that might trigger her. Alexandra's articulation of this process as a move between intellectual and emotional experience exposes a struggle to assert control over the affective self during social interactions where others may judge emotional expression.

The narratives offered by these women exemplify a trend toward limiting disclosures to reduce other's discomfort, similar to Hasting's (2000) findings, but also to protect their own face needs as did participants in Toller and McBride's (2008) study. Accounts of emotional vulnerability and efforts to protect and contain emotional expression introduce an awareness of

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[2] The deceased was the mother of Alexandra's partner. Despite the fact that Alexandra and her partner are not legally married, Alexandra referred to the deceased as her mother-in-law, and so that is the relation I will use.

external judgment and evaluation. This theme continued as participants engaged in self study and contemplated their affective experiences.

Reflection or Evaluation: Turning the Gaze Inward

As previously discussed, individuals searched for ways to understand their affective experience following the death of a loved one. Predominantly, the individuals who valued grief work also demonstrated a kindness and accepting attitude toward themselves, conceptualizing grief as an unpredictable emotional experience. Grief was articulated as a phenomenon that is ultimately unscripted and beyond rules or expectations. Despite the discourse of openness and acceptance, participants also demonstrated a process of critical self-reflection. Participants who had mental health training used their knowledge about grief to cast the gaze inward and examine their experience. In many ways they submitted themselves to the kind of evaluation they avoided from others. The tone of this reflection tilted more toward self-evaluation and discipline than the descriptions offered above. The presence of this alternative discourse, which emphasizes evaluation, is set in contrast to the larger holistic therapy discourse that emphasizes acceptance of all emotional experiences. In order to illustrate the tensions that emerged between acceptance and evaluation I explore sections of Stacey's narrative.

When I spoke with Stacey about how she coped with her feelings after the death of her grandfather she vacillated between neutral description and evaluation. Stacey moved fluidly between voicing acceptance about her process for coping with the loss, and evaluating or critiquing both her emotions and process for working through grief. Initially, Stacey reflected on the subtle assumptions she held about how to grieve based on her education as a psychotherapist, but quickly tempered the influence of those norms. She conveyed her thought process:

I think there might have been some pressure on myself in terms of like, 'Come on, you're a

therapist. You should be able to have this experience completely and then move on.' You

know, and then my other voice would be like, ok, and you're a person that this has happened

to…And I think I might be different from the average person in the sense that I know what the

grief process is a little more than most I think. But yeah, I mean my own personal process

with it is like, oh, you can study it in the books, but until it happens to you, and you're like,

'Oh, this is what grief is.'

Stacey endeavored to reconcile expert therapeutic knowledge on one hand, and the validity of

her emerging experiential knowledge about feeling and responding to grief in a variety of ways,

on the other.

Contrary to traditional therapeutic models where emotional experiences are processed

through counseling and talk, Stacey describes her experience as more of an "internal process."

She followed this assertion by stating, "I didn't necessarily feel pressure from anyone that I was

doing it a certain way, or needed to." Although Stacey indicated that she didn't feel pressure, she

continued to explain how she evaluated her feelings. She talked through her coping process:

I think I was surprised how much I went on the– from what we would stereotypically call the

masculine side of it. Like I would get agitated and sort of like the male depression model.

Like I'd get agitated and angry. And the sadness part was definitely there, but I was surprised

at that part of it, like how much anger I had. And so I don't know. So…I don't know, maybe I

put some pressure on myself in terms of like, what's going on with me and why am I having a

hard time when I should be over this?

In these passages we get a sense of the ambivalence Stacey experienced as she worked to accept

her process for experiencing grief, while evaluating and critiquing it at the same time. Stacey

could name her emotions and recognize reactions to them. She was also able to articulate a sense of frustration and disappointment that arouse as she evaluated the grief-related feelings she had.

As previously discussed, within the psychology discipline much attention is devoted to describing a necessary process of working through grief. This perspective emphasizes the experience of emotion and the importance of mindfully engaging in an affective process to understand and accept the death of a loved one. These values echoed through the descriptions of the emotional uncertainty associated with a death as well as in the inclination to engage in an active plan for working through grief—an approach that offered a sharp contrast to the avoidance expressed by those who highlighted the benefits of staying busy. An interesting tension emerged in the final section on experiences of affect. The emphasis on understanding emotional experience became something of a mandate for how grief should be experienced creating contradiction between emotional acceptance and evaluation.

Conclusion

This chapter considered two distinct articulations of experiences with bereavement. First, a focus on practicality and a discourse of productivity permeated the narratives in this study. A second theme that emerged was an inclination to emphasize grief and the affective experience of bereavement. This reading of the narratives indicates that experiences of grief are infinitely complex and shaped by a confluence of individual and social factors.

There are two interesting variables associated with each of the orientations toward coping with loss (practical and emotional). First, the individuals who expressed tension and contradiction between the benefit of being propelled forward and the need for time and space to experience grief were frequently primary caregivers in their personal lives. A second pattern that emerged was that the individuals inclined to assert the centrality of logistics while describing the

benefits of literally working through grief were predominantly corporate workers. On the other hand, those who emphasized their emotional journey through grief were associated with the mental health field. These findings are significant because they expand the factors that might be considered in exploring how experiences of bereavement are constructed.

Bereavement literature suggests that there are several significant factors that impact how an individual may experience grief. For example, "differences in age, sex, cause of death, circumstances of dying, religious beliefs and ceremonialization will combine in a way that individualizes the survivors' bereavement" (Owen, Fulton, & Markusen, 1994, p. 224). Research has also emphasized the following variables: The nature of the relationship with the deceased (Moss, Moss, Rubinstein, & Resch, 1993; Parkes, 1987; Rees, 2001; Schwab, 1996; Stephenson, 1994); physical distance and the loosening of family and community ties (Owen & Fulton, 1994); medicalization and the sequestering of the sick and elderly (Owen & Fulton); purposefulness, meaningfulness, and acceptability of the death (Weisman, 1972); and cultural values (Charmaz, 1994). However, consideration of the relationship between occupation and bereavement has remained undeveloped. Findings from this project offer new insight into the significance of occupation and perhaps occupational identity in how individuals respond to loss and develop their individual understandings of how to grieve.

The themes described in this chapter suggest that occupation is a difference that matters in how people understand their experience with bereavement. This argument developed as corporate workers emphasized a focus on practicalities and logistics, framing emotions as something to avoided or managed. In contrast, the alternative discourses that emphasized affective experience and discussion, processes and reflections on working through grief were spoken by individuals who work (or have worked) in the mental health field. Through the

examples of how bereaved workers engaged in facework to promote either an image of rationally handling the consequences of a death or a mindful processing of grief we begin to see how individuals' sense of self, and the image of self they want to convey or maintain, may be linked to their occupational cultural norms and values.

Following this analysis, which explored bereaved workers' descriptions of significant aspects of their experiences with bereavement, I turn my attention specifically to the intersection of grief and work. In chapter five I explore what it was like for participants to return to their jobs after a loved one passed away. The analysis of bereavement at work focuses specifically on responding to and managing grief-related emotions at work and bereaved workers' expectations for social support.

Chapter 5: Exploring the Intersection of Work and Grief

This study is concerned with how bereaved individuals talk about their experience with the death of a loved one in relation to their organization and occupation. In this chapter, I look specifically at how bereaved workers describe their experiences with bereavement as they intersect with work. To begin, I delve into the issue of grief-related emotions in the workplace finding that employees reproduced the belief that personal emotions are not appropriate at work. Second, this analysis reveals unexplored expectations for interaction rules during bereavement that, to an extent, challenge the discourse that being personal is unprofessional.

As discussed in chapter three, there is a complex relationship between emotions and organizational life. Research that demonstrates how "personal" or "unmanaged" emotions have developed a pejorative connotation would lead us to believe that grief-related emotions would be unwelcome within the work setting. Subsequently, it is possible that workers may be inclined to manage or contain their emotional expressions. In this study, participants offered accounts of their view on the relationship between work and their affective experiences of grief. In this chapter I discuss participants' attitudes toward emotion at work and how they described their own experience of the collision between emotion and work. First, I consider the possible connection between workers' conceptions of what it means to be a good or professional organizational member and perceptions of emotion rules. I then look more explicitly at the issue of emotion management and how bereaved workers responded to feelings of grief at work. What surfaced was a set of communicative strategies for managing grief-related emotions in the office.

Participants' talk about a professional separation between emotional display and work confirmed what we might expect given organizational norms for creating a separation between work and personal concerns. However, in the second half of the chapter I investigate a trend

toward the development of interaction rules for responding to bereaved workers. New insights on social support and emotion rules to interaction emerge revealing the complexity of grieving workers' expectations of co-workers and the organization during bereavement. Ultimately, what arises in participants talk about their expectations for social support at work is an alternative discourse, a discourse of possibilities about what work relationships can and even should be.

Managing Emotion at Work

As discussed in chapter two, historic notions of a rational world of work that was necessarily separate from the private (and emotional) sphere have contributed to an ideological boundary between worklife and the affective experiences associated with workers' personal lives. While it is widely recognized that emotions are an inevitable aspect of organizations (Ashkanasy, Zerbe, & Hartel, 2002; Mumby & Putnam, 1992), in the American workforce it is generally accepted that *certain* "personal" or "unproductive" emotions should be left at home or contained while at work (Rafaeli & Worline, 2001). Mastenbroek (2000) described the organizational view of emotions as potentially volatile and disruptive. The organizational response, then, has been to focus efforts toward managing emotions out of the organization or developing a strategic plan for the instrumental use of emotions at work. The popular social expectation that the personal should be kept separate from organizational life is epitomized in the statement, "It's business, it's not personal." In fact, a myriad of emotion norms, feeling rules, and feeling scripts provide guidelines for emotional experiences and displays while at work (Fineman, 2003).

In this study, I focus on exploring the communicative practices around emotion in bereaved workers' descriptions of their return to work after the death of a loved one. I consider how participants' talk about emotion at work provides a framework for reflecting on the

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experience and expression of grief in the workplace. The central questions guiding this section of the study are, "how do bereaved employees talk about their experience of grief at work?" and "how do bereaved employees respond to grief-related emotions while on the job?"

In considering the questions above, three communicative processes emerged related to the experience of grief-related emotions at work: drawing upon professional identity as a source for emotion norms and general approaches to handling affective disruption; articulating specific expectations about the regulation of emotion; and finally practices for managing emotion at work. The first finding was that a discourse of professionalism became a resource for making sense of emotion norms and rules. For example, participants described their efforts to be professional in their work (i.e. "I didn't let my grief interfere with my ability to get the job done") and painted a picture of their worker identity (i.e. "I am a dedicated employee who puts work first"). Second, through the narratives an individual's professional image then served as a resource that influenced the experience and expression of grief-related emotions at work.

After illustrating how participants talked about their professional self, I specifically consider their talk about perceived emotion norms; specifically the belief that personal emotions are out of place in the work environment. Finally, I identify bereaved employees' strategies for managing their emotions in the office. First, workers engaged in active management of their grief-related feelings trying to stifle or minimize the affective experiences of grief while at work. Second, when feelings did arise, employees employed a number of tactics to contain or conceal outward expressions of grief-feelings. In summary, the first section of this chapter is dedicated to in-depth reflection on the various communicative themes in bereaved workers' descriptions of grief and emotion management in their work lives.

Professional, Hard-working, Me: Participants Talk about their Worker Identity

As participants talked about their image of themselves as workers the concept of professionalism emerged. People used the term professional to refer more to a valued code of conduct, rather than to reference a type of work (i.e. white collar or corporate work). The concept of professionalism was often invoked to describe a level of commitment and a mature approach to work. However, professionalism extended beyond a general approach to doing good work and became paired with a work ethic rooted in exceeding expectations and contributing to the success of the organization. These notions of professionalism and an extreme work ethic emerged as the foundation for a preferred worker identity which fueled a willingness to adopt norms for emotion management and the regulation of the personal at work.

"To infinity and beyond!": Worker as hero in descriptions of professional identity.

One way that individuals talked about their identity as a worker aligned with larger social discourses about an American work ethic where individuals work hard to achieve success. In these narratives about individuals' relationships with work value is placed on consistently making work a priority and going above and beyond to excel at one's job. Hunter, a corporate employee, described how he viewed himself as a worker stating, "I guess I typically see myself as that person that's willing to go above and beyond. That's kind of how I've always been deemed, and I've kind of been able to work myself up through the chains over the past ten years." In this description, Hunter highlights the connection between his extra effort and his success.

Steven's comments about his work style were in the same vein as Hunter's. Steven stated, "Yeah, part of what became my regular working style was working well beyond 40 hours a week and really kind of embracing, and I still embrace it, the idea of doing a job well rather than trying

to keep track of how much time." Garrett, also in a corporate position relayed his commitment to giving one hundred percent to his work. Garrett stated:

I'm pretty much a perfectionist. It's one of those where I probably don't get out of it what I should, but I always go that extra mile and I'm willing to work to all hours. I remember there was one time when, it was right before I was leaving for a trip to Eastern Europe. And I ended up staying up till like two in the morning to finish some stuff that I was supposed to finish beforehand but didn't really, really need to. It's just kind of something I do.

In all of these excerpts, being a committed worker is more than a necessary part of their job—it is a core aspect of their identity as a professional.

Mason, a lawyer working for a government organization, talked about his willingness to make sacrifices in order to excel at his job. Interestingly, he contextualized his orientation toward work in relation to his feelings about the organization he was a part of. Mason indicated that his belief in the organization, the product, and the work that he did, provided a justification for making sacrifices such as working overtime, traveling, and putting company values above his own when necessary. Central to Mason's description of himself as a worker was the image of a man who thrived on the challenges of work. Mason said, "But I enjoy coming home every day thinking that I've, you know, met the challenge of the day." Later in the interview he continued:

I mean it's hard for me to put my work away. You know, I like what I do. I feel a sense of responsibility to my work. And it's hard for me, whether it's, you know, vacation or illness, to not be there and to be working.

In his narrative, Mason conveys the feeling of being emotionally connected with work and the reward he experiences through hard work and accomplishment. Interestingly, Mason notes the

feeling of discomfort he experiences when he may be missing out on the chance to contribute to his work because of an absence.

Meeting professional expectations.

The voices of Hunter, Steven, Garrett, and Mason all conveyed a willingness to go above and beyond as a personal attribute, as something that is personally rewarding not externally mandated. There were a few individuals who offered a slightly different perspective on the facets of their commitment to work. For example, Kelly and Monique conveyed how feelings of obligation and a desire to maintain their preferred worker identity influenced their approach toward work. Kelly shared that she felt proud to be given more responsibility:

My manager just ah, selected me. She said I was attentive to detail, and because I liked resolving issues and finding out- and learning new ways on how to-…it was exciting because at the time I needed some change… I was chosen, they're watching me, and I felt I had an obligation to do well.

Kelly's talk gives insight into the complexity of feeling both proud and obligated at the same time. Her desire to perform is connected with the image of a valuable employee as constructed through the promotion she received.

Monique also talked about how she tried to balance the complexity of internal and external pressures to meet the professional expectations associated with her managerial position. She said:

I think [my work is] a tremendous part of who I am, and I think I've tried and I think I'm continuing to try to look at where work falls in the scale of how I think of myself and how I define myself…One of my coworkers I'm very close friends with, and she always says like, 'Well, Monique, you bring part of this on yourself,' you know, like 'you're doing this to

yourself, you could probably make other choices.' But I mean, as I'm sure you feel as well,

sometimes you don't – it doesn't always feel like the choice is always yours.

In Monique's comments she asserted a picture of herself as a very hard worker who was often

making sacrifices to excel at her job, much like those in beginning of this section. However, she

also exposes a tension between the standards she sets for herself and recognition that there are

external standards constraining her. Monique's statements reveal that a desire to succeed might

drive her actions, but the image of what success is stems from other sources. The overarching

theme of these narratives about work ethic is that part of being a professional is a willingness to

subordinate individual needs in order to provide superior service to the job.

Participants' descriptions of themselves as professional workers emphasized control,

efficiency, and a commitment to going above and beyond. Talk about professional standards and

the individual's professional self-image offered a context and framework for their subsequent

narratives about how they handled grief-related emotions and their return to work during

bereavement. As interviewees elaborated on their image of being professional, they

predominantly articulated an image of a worker who separates the personal from their work and

maintains control over affective experiences and expression in the work environment.

Articulating Emotion Norms and Rules for Professional Behavior

As will be revealed in the following discussion, the conceptions of professional identity

described above have implications for bereavement at work because they are intertwined with

values such as stoicism, perseverance, commitment to the organization, and the ability to leave

the personal at home. While many would recognize that emotions are an inherent part of the

workplace, just as they are in any facet of life, the perception that personal emotions are to be

contained or managed at work persists. Fineman (2003) stated that, "Many professional workers

are, in effect, expected to be skilled at emotion management, but that expectation is largely tacit, unwritten" (p. 36). He goes on to argue that implicit emotion-rules "typically emphasize rationality, objectivity and detachment" and that workers are to display these emotions regardless of what else they might be feeling (p. 36). In the interviews participants highlighted the norm of maintaining a necessary separation between work and the personal. In addition, they conveyed more specific thoughts on rules and norms for emotion management at work—to maintain the image of professionalism. The following narratives provide insight into how bereaved workers' reasoned through the connection between professionalism and their understanding of emotion norms in retrospect.

Understandings of the professional/emotional divide: The rule is, leave your feelings at home.

Interestingly, the conception of professional often emerged in tension or contrast to the presence or display of affective experiences reinforcing the traditional rational/emotional binary and creating subtle rules for emotion management. The concept of emotion was typically connected with a general references to one's personal life in the interviews. Participants would move fluidly between talk about feelings and personal issues often conflating the two. In many ways, affect, feelings, and emotion were all categorized as, first and foremost, part of the personal sphere or private life.

An excerpt from Ruth's interview offers an exemplar of the connection between images of professionalism and the ability to sequester personal emotion to the private sphere. Ruth explained:

Well, I think [being professional] means you should be composed, you should be able to

compartmentalize your feelings, you should be able to perform your duties on schedule, and if

you can't do that then you should stay home. So if you're gonna come to work, my idea is

you better be able to work. You'd better be able to just put that stuff aside, step into your role

in the classroom or in the department, at faculty meetings or whatever… So being able to– I

guess it means to put your– keep your personal life separate from your professional roles, and

sometimes they overlap but you shouldn't let it happen too much. So if you're having

problems at home, maybe a few key people at work you might confide in about that, but in

general you would just keep it to yourself and you would present yourself in your usual way,

as being in control and focused… It's a hard balance to strike, to know how much of myself

can I let show when I'm here, and what might be the consequences of doing that.

Here, Ruth described her understanding of what it meant to be professional in her field of higher

education and the challenge of balancing emotional experience with these professional

expectations. Ruth's response offers insight into the necessary separation that many participants

endeavored to maintain between their work and personal emotional experiences; she also

provides a sense of the tension between knowing the norm for emotional containment exists and

being able to perform it.

For other workers, secluding emotion to the personal sphere seemed a natural part of

work and enacting a professional identity. Jack's narrative casually described how he maintained

a boundary between work and more personal aspects of life—as though this was an inherent part

of being an executive. For example, when I asked Jack about sharing emotional things at work he

had this to say:

If it's um, if it's a personal issues then I only tell- say enough so people know what's going

on, if they need to know what's going on, ya know, 'I'll be out of the office or this is going on

and I need to deal with this.' But, beyond that I've- it's all business. Yep.

As Jack indicated, the only place for emotion in professional life is in service to something else. This instrumental approach positions the role of emotion in organizations as acceptable only if there is a functional benefit to sharing them. Jack highlighted the normalized view that emotions, and the personal, are acceptable in organizations if they are in service to the task at hand or meeting organizational needs. Christine, a corporate worker whose two cousins recently died, also articulated how emotions are a part of her worklife, however acceptable emotions are limited to being positive and happy. She conveyed the standard practice of limiting the expression of "negative" emotions at work. Christine conveyed the prominent view that being professional also means being upbeat:

> [Being professional here] means carrying yourself in a business-like manner because you never know when a big boss is going to walk through…If I have to communicate with people, I am pretty upbeat. Typically, I think I am pretty happy. If there is ever any emotion that comes in from my personal life, you know you just kind of have to put that on the back burner, either that or take the day off and deal with it.

Christine mentions her strategy of either managing her emotion out of the work space, or of removing herself from work to a personal space. Here Christine articulated the casual acceptance of an organizational norm encouraging workers to remove themselves from work to deal with personal/emotional issues.

Professional norms for emotion management.

The dominant orientation toward maintaining boundaries between work/professional and private/emotional persisted as individuals moved into more specific descriptions of their thoughts on experiencing and expressing grief at work. Garret indicated that, to him, work was just not the place for him to express feelings related to the death of his nephew. He said:

I didn't feel like it was the place [to be emotional]. And I would just try and honestly kind of

take my mind off things. And it was one of those, 'Alright, well I'm at work, I'm doing – I'm

focusing on this and getting what I need to get done finished.'

Garrett endeavored to limit the emotions he experienced while at work as one way to maintain a

professional barrier between work and his personal life. Bill, a corporate employee, shared how

he preferred the reserved approach co-workers took after his sister died because it helped him

stay focused on his work rather than become involved in emotional conversation. Billy stated:

I just think it's a negative subject to begin with okay, it's better left unsaid. And ya know you

just go on because you're at work. You're not at home. Ya know uh when people would ask,

yeah I'd tell 'em. I'm not gonna lie. And that's it. I didn't- they did it exactly the way they

should.

Billy emphasized the dominant view that work wasn't the space for sharing emotional

experiences. He stated that he was happy that "it wasn't discussed" at work because "then you

gotta come back and cry a lot," and for him, work was not the place for that.

Another concern that individuals conveyed was that their expression of emotion might

put others in the position of having to respond to emotionality in the professional environment.

Ruth, who shared her general views on being professional above, also talked about how those

views translated into guidelines for her return to work after the death of a sibling. Ruth asserted:

So I guess at work I thought I was supposed to come here and be together, be collected, be

professional, and I thought it was okay for me to show emotion, but only within certain

limitations. Like it would be okay to tear up, it would be okay to cry a little bit, but it wouldn't

be okay to just completely lose it and have to go home, and it wouldn't be okay to burden

[others] with what I was feeling.

Ruth's talk captures the fundamental tensions that participants expressed between being professional and experiencing or displaying grief-related emotions at work.

Participants shared perceptions of a normative guideline for how quickly one should move through their grief. Lisa, a call center manager, talked about how she tried to conceal her grief in response to the belief that co-workers expected her to get back to normal after the death of her husband. Lisa said:

I am sort of starting to feel now that people are kinda like, 'Well come on. It's been almost four months. You should be over it'…And you know, so you feel like you to have to hide it kind of even more, and maybe that's why it's almost getting worse, 'cause I've hidden it so long.

The perception that grief should be hidden or contained because it is not something that work colleagues want to hear about was pervasive in the interviews. Tina, a corporate worker whose brother died in an accident, summarized this view:

People really just don't want to talk about your loss. I don't think we just really want to deal with it. Or maybe it's because it's too close…I don't ya know it's really easy to just get buried in your desk at work and stay there but I don't think anybody really wants you to talk about your grief for your loss. And when you do you know, they're not very supportive and so many people have similar experiences that they can share their experiences with__ but for the most part I don't think people really want to talk about personal grief…I tried not to cry in front of people.

Tina's statement demonstrated the largely unquestioned understanding that grief and sadness are out of place at work—the professional norm is to manage your emotions so as not to impose a lack of professionalism on others. Bereaved workers in this study internalized the expectation to

minimize the intrusion of grief-related emotions partially based on a lack of support from other organizational members.

The discourse of non-emotional professionalism highlights an underlying or fundamental contradiction between being bereaved and experiencing grief, and being a professional. The outcome is a perceived expectation for emotion management; or at least a feeling that managing emotions makes the existence of grief easier on everyone. In this context, emotion management is the umbrella term used to describe "the control and thoughtful presentation of emotions to others in a variety of interpersonal contexts" (Callahan & McCollum, 2002, p. 219). The narratives in this project demonstrated two facets of emotion management: managing feelings and the management of displayed emotions. To better understand this distinction it is helpful to briefly review the difference between feeling rules and emotion or display rules (Hochschild, 1983). Fineman (2003) summarized feeling rules as our internalized beliefs about what we ought to feel based on particular circumstances. Feeling rules are the socially correct prescriptions for what we should be feeling. For example, the feeling rules for bereaved individuals are that they should feel sadness, grief, loss, etc. In contrast, emotion rules are the conventions that "signal the appropriate emotional display for the situation, event or happening" (Fineman, p.18). Emotion rules, or what Hochschild (1983) called display rules, speak specifically to the presentation of emotions and not to norms about how people should feel. In the workplace, the display rules for "professional" workers are emotional control and neutrality. The contradictory feeling rules and display rules create an emotion management challenge that bereaved workers must navigate[3].

In the participants' stories described above we get a sense for the complexity of emotion management, both in regard to feeling rules and display rules, that bereaved workers confront in

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[3] This scenario can also include a situation where an individual does not feel the socially acceptable feelings of grief over the death of a loved one, which can create a pressure to conform to feeling rules for a grieving individual but may alleviate the need for emotion management in performing emotional neutrality at work.

the context of maintaining their professional standards during bereavement. What emerged from the norms associated with emotion management were a set of communicative strategies for maintaining a professional identity despite feelings of grief. The communicative practices participants emphasized included: not discussing personal issues at work; being positive and upbeat; not dwelling on personal or grief-related emotions at work; limiting the expression of emotions, particularly those related to grief; and containing emotional displays of sadness. These findings are not unexpected in light of the literature on the privileging of rationality and emotion management in organizations. The prevalence of this theme reinforces arguments about the persistence of a discourse of rationality which marginalizes the expression of personal emotions in organizations (Mumby & Putnam, 1992). In addition, this data contributes to the limited body of research on emotion management in non-service related positions and outside the realm of emotion labor practices.

Managing Emotion and Containing Affective Displays

The articulated norms for emotional neutrality and restraint at work reviewed in the previous section align with the emotion display norm known as emotional masking (Wharton & Erickson, 1993). When engaged in emotional masking, workers display emotional neutrality and practice emotional restraint. Hochschild (1983) noted that the practice of masking emotion among professionals is a norm expressed as "detached concern" (p. 150, cited in Wharton & Erickson, 1993, p. 467). The notion of detached concern allows for recognition that workers are often expected to have feelings and to care. However, expression of those feelings should reflect a distance or detachment from being deeply in, or at the mercy of, emotion. In order to meet perceived demands for emotional masking participants engaged in a set of communicative practices for managing grief-related emotions in the workplace. Participants in this project

described two distinct approaches for controlling grief-related emotions at work. The first strategy involved efforts to manage the experience of feelings by preventing grief-related emotions from arising while at work. Second, participants described their efforts to conform to display rules for containing or concealing expressions of grief.

Avoiding emotional experiences at work.

Two related strategies that arose included mindfully focusing on work as a distraction and keeping co-worker interaction task-focused. Both were intended to help mitigate the arousal of grief-related emotions. These approaches were adopted to minimize affective experiences so that the bereaved worker would not have to engage in suppression or concealment of emotion. Looking back, Garret's statement about attending to work tasks and Billy's desire for limited condolences from co-workers are examples of this approach.

Toni, who runs three corporate departments, also shared her concerns and efforts to contain her emotions and to not "burden" her coworkers. To do this she concentrates on the job at hand the team members who need her leadership. Toni stated:

I try not to express my grief at work. I don't want to just sit at my desk and cry…because I think you make people really uncomfortable. They don't know what to do for you. They can't do anything for you and I try not to make people uncomfortable. So I just try- I focus on my work. I truly do. I focus on my work. I focus on my people and I just don't - I don't let it consume me through the day but some days I leave and I say 'Oh, Jesus, this was a really bad day, I gotta go home and cry.' And I go home and cry. And then I get okay and I- and then you just move on, but I try my best to not let it consume me at work.

This passage reveals Toni's internalization of the norm for emotional control. She describes how organizational members can be uncomfortable with expressing of feelings such as sadness

because they don't know how to respond, especially in a work environment. What is also apparent is that Toni does not reference an expectation to not feel grief-related emotions, but rather, the emphasis is on her strategic ability to contain the display of her feelings and maintain a neutral emotional environment. Toni's statement, like Jack's, revolves around the idea that expressing emotion is not appropriate in the absence of an instrumental outcome. This raises the underlying question, "Would it be appropriate to cry or express sadness if there was something co-workers could do to offer support?" Throughout participants' discussion of their experience, efforts to contain emotion become intertwined with the idea that nothing good can come from crying at work.

Janie, who works in journalism but was educated in psychotherapy, described how she actively used her work to pull her out of emotive states in order to maintain her professional image. She said:

If there's something really painful that I don't want to be thinking about, if I repeat [a word associated with my job, i.e. 'editing'] to myself, totally like body symptoms of sadness and thought just kind of drive away because the circuits are so separate for me.

As another way to regulate emotional interactions at work Janie employed a scripted response to questions about how she was doing. Since the emotion rules associated with her vision of being professional indicated that she should not become overly emotional or share too much personal information, Janie used the scripted response "I'm fine" to answer inquiries about how she was coping. Janie shared how she reacted when her boss asked the question, "Are you ok?" Janie said:

'Yes, I'm fine.' Because I was afraid that if I said no I'd be devaluing myself at work and I'd be contributing toward losing my job…I felt like I needed to kind of just deadpan my way

through the experience and not show emotion. If somebody would ask me about it, I would be

honest but very brief about it…Because I just didn't want to do anything that would endanger

my position.

Janie's comments highlight her communicative strategy to curtail conversation about her

affective experience. By limiting the amount of personal information she disclosed about her

grief and how she was coping she was able to try and maintain her preferred worker image and

not potentially "devalue" herself.

Stacey, who worked in the mental health field, also described her efforts to avoid talking

about her feelings while at work. She said:

So I wouldn't say anything that takes me on a roller coaster ride I can't get off of, I probably

won't bring up at work because it's just not appropriate to, getting – , I mean I don't know if

there's a counterpart to too intellectual or whatever. Yeah, if I feel like I can't pull back the

pieces or something then I won't probably bring it up at work…But the fact that I've got a job

to do, I'm not going to bring up something that's going to totally annihilate me.

Alexandra shared Stacey's concern for slipping into affective experiences at work and took a

similar approach to managing her emotional engagement, "[I would distance myself] so that I

wouldn't go into the emotion as deeply. It would be much more of an intellectual experience

versus an emotional experience, which is not typically how I am." The statements from Stacey

and Alexandra exemplify the way that individuals often expressed concern for negative

outcomes that would arise if they were to head down an emotional path while at work. A desire

to avoid the potential discomfort that may arise led them to adopt various communicative

strategies for avoiding encounters that could generate emotional reactions.

Hiding emotion in the office.

The desire to avoid grief-related emotional experiences at work motivated participants to regulate interactions that might spur the flood of emotion. They also endeavored to stay busy in an effort to limit the space for feelings related to the death to arise. However, it was rare that grief-related emotions could be contained altogether leading participants into strategies for managing or concealing their emotions.

Female respondents described a desire to control expression of their sadness or remove themselves from public work spaces. Consider the following examples from Kelly and Dorothy who work in a corporate environment, and Saphire who works in library services. Kelly stated:

> So, even at work I put myself in that same- [image of being a strong person where nothing effects me] you know, I'm a professional. This is a professional environment. So I'm 'n handle myself professionally, and if I was to break down and cry then I wouldn't feel professional. But I know I'm still human but, it just doesn't feel professional. So I would avoid the conversation or ya know sometimes, I would just have to swallow and then take off to the bathroom or something. And I'm sure they knew because my eyes would get all red right away. But it was hard.

Dorothy conveyed her fear that new co-workers would develop a negative perception of her if she expressed her grief at work:

> I really didn't express except when I cried at my desk and then I'd usually get up and go to the restroom and do it. Because, I didn't know anybody and I just felt like these people probably think there's some lunatic new person that sits at her desk and cries all day and I mean they had no idea.

Saphire commented:

> I felt like I couldn't really show [my feelings] that much because it's not professional.
> But there were times where I just took time-outs. I just said, 'I can't do this. I can't
> talk about this right now. Can I come back at 3:30 and we can finish the discussion?'
> So I would just exit stage left if I felt– because sometimes little things will bring it on.
> That's what was hard to manage… I'd sometimes go into the bathroom and just– if I
> had to cry a little, I would just let myself. And I would always bring makeup to work
> so I could try to fix myself up after. Because my nose just turns bright red. It's really
> hard to – so I just brought some stuff for that.

These excerpts exemplify the tensions that many participants felt between a preferred image of being professional and the emotional aspects of their experience with grief.

Kelly's narrative illustrates a focus on meeting individual standards for professionalism, while Dorothy's reveals a greater awareness of potential judgment from others. Saphire aptly captures the common view that the bathroom offers a separate space for the personal or emotional to spill out at work, but emphasizes her efforts to clean up and put her "work-face" back on before reentering the professional sphere of the office. It was not uncommon for people to talk about how they tried to hide expressions of sadness, particularly crying, by secluding themselves in their private workspace, heading into a bathroom, walking outside, or going to sit in their car. These patterns align with descriptions of service workers' pattern of "retreating to a less-demanding emotionalized zone" when overwhelmed by emotion labor demands (Fineman, 2003, p. 38).

In this section I began with a general description of how workers talked about their vision of a professional image. I then explored how that vision became a discursive resource for

emotion rules. Patterns surfaced around expectations for emotion management and participants

conveyed a set of communicative practices for reducing their affective experiences and displays

while at work. Now, in the second half of this chapter, I consider the role of interactions between

co-workers and supervisors in workers' experiences of bereavement.

Emotion Rules for Grief Support: Revealing Interaction Expectations

Participants in this study widely demonstrated an acceptance of emotional containment

and neutrality at work. In the narratives above it becomes evident that the bereaved workers went

to great lengths to prevent emotional experiences at work and to contain affective displays of

sadness. However, there was a flip-side to employees' willingness to enact a resilient

professional image: Bereaved employees in this study hinted at an expectation for co-workers

and supervisors to show sensitivity and offer a moderate amount of social support. What

emerged was a notion of common social/organizational interaction rules such that if a bereaved

worker engages in emotion management to suppress the display of emotions at work, then others

should create an opportunity for the bereaved to display their feelings. The rule of reciprocity

indicates that both parties engage in the management of emotional display, one to contain and the

other to display an invitation to emotional exchange, so as to relieve the bereaved from the

stigma of being emotionally uncontrolled (i.e. unprofessional).

In the following section I begin with a description of how bereaved workers articulated

interactions rules based on stories about a lack of support at work. Next, I outline the potential

impact that a violation in expectations for affective communication can have on bereaved

workers and their attitude toward the organization. Finally, I explore an alternative discourse that

asserts the benefits and validity of relational communication at work.

Confronting a Lack of Support

Many employees found the return to work after the death of a loved one difficult because they were still experiencing the emotional and physical effects of grief. For some, the stress of returning to work was compounded by a lack of support in the work place. As statement made by Carl, who worked for an educational institution, nicely captured the image of polite but emotionally-detached co-workers. He described how organizational members responded to him after his mother died:

> It was very polite empathy. Very genuine awareness, but it is the same as, it is a little more than hearing something bad on the news, you know when you say the reaction. 'Oh that's a shame, I'm really sad for you.' And it's genuine that their sad, but then that's about it, now move on. So no one stays on the topic for any length of time. No one asks me about the topic in any way… And I think that's probably a combination of the normal professionalism, you don't ask too much, perhaps even some sort of respect we don't want to ask too much and make you feel embarrassed or something. And it's also to a degree people want to maintain their distance.

The tone of Carl's reaction to this approach was regretful. His passage highlights the desire for a greater sense of support and connection from the people one works with everyday. Regardless of participants' own beliefs about professional behavior and a general separation between emotionality (or personal issues) and work, they still had expectations for at least some recognition of their grief and the possibility of (minimal) emotional communication. In the following section I explore how interaction expectations were articulated as employees shared stories of both offensive and supportive encounters during bereavement.

Offending comments.

One category of inadequate support came in the form of insensitive comments that offended bereaved workers. For example, Toni talked about her reaction to an uncaring remark from a superior:

> I was out that next week and my supervisor's boss, who at one time I did report to, was in the area and saying, two people told me this, and saying very loudly 'Why isn't Toni back? When is she coming back to work?…I don't know why anyone would take this much time off just because somebody died. I'd be glad when my mom died. I'm sick of her.' And I jus' thought that was very inappropriate and it has given me just maybe a little bit less respect for him.

Toni asserted that, while she believed in maintaining a level of non-emotional professionalism, she also found insensitivity from others inappropriate even at work; going as far as to refer to her supervisor's lack of sensitivity as unprofessional. Dorothy also had an experience with an unsympathetic manager after the death of her father. She said:

> Yeah, [returning to work] was awful. It was awful because I couldn't concentrate, I was thinking about my dad… I didn't wanna get in trouble for not ya know, the focusing was hard, and I told [my manager] that I didn't think- I said I haven't even had a chance to grieve yet. And she goes, 'Well maybe you can do that when you get to [your new department].' And I just, my mouth dropped open and I couldn't even say anything. Because it was not going to be nice…Oh yeah, she was serious. And I just thought that was the rudest thing that anybody could have said.

Both Toni and Dorothy clearly conveyed disapproval of supervisors who failed to meet their expectations for interaction rules that accompany bereavement in the work environment.

Saphire, who worked in library services, illustrated how the expectation for emotional sensitivity extended to co-workers. A perceived disconnect between bereaved worker's emotional experience and coworkers' business-as-usual approach surfaced in many of the responses. Saphire expressed feeling surprise and disappointment at co-worker's lack of sensitivity to her grief after the death of her mother. She explained:

What I found annoying was like everyone just expects me to be normal now…It's like everyone had forgotten about it, but not me. It's like, 'Oh yeah, her mother died. But that was months ago.'…Yeah, I saw somebody I hadn't seen in awhile in July and she asked me how I was doing. I said, 'Oh, I'm okay. I'm just – it's getting a little easier. I'm just feeling still badly about my mom.' She said, 'Oh, still?'…I'm like are you kidding? It's not like it's been five years…So, that's the part that pisses me off actually.

The fact that coworkers did not acknowledge the bereaved worker's emotional state, and were explicitly insensitive, was perceived as a lack of support and a violation of professional expectations for interactions with a bereaved coworker.

Feeling the absence of emotional openings.

In addition to denouncing comments from supervisors and coworkers that blatantly lacked sympathy, respondents expressed an anticipation of social support in the form of invitations to emotional interactions. Respondents indicated feelings of violation when relational support was not offered; bereaved individuals then felt isolated, left to cope with their grief-related emotions alone. Tina indicated that she received little support from her co-workers. On the one hand, the group gave her a card and made a donation after her brother died, but interpersonal support was lacking. Tina described her teams response:

I came back and my supervisor, she didn't give me the card until late Friday and I came back

on Monday. And I can remember how I kind of felt hurt that no one really said anything to

me. In fact, I mean most people don't really say a lot, I don't really feel like I can turn to any

of my colleagues or anything. I know one day, someone said I looked really sad and we kinda

talked a little bit… For the most part they really don't mention it.

Near the end of the interview Tina summarized how she saw her organization's take on grief at

work:

When I saw this study on how your company handles bereavement, my general reaction as

they didn't, or they don't. And I still kinda have that feeling—they don't. You're just

expected to come in and do your job and keep your personal life personal and your work

separate.

Later Tina shared that she found working with her team "stressful" and "depressing." Ruth, who

worked in education, also described her reaction to a failure to support a bereaved worker. Ruth

talked about how colleagues had (not) responded to a bereaved co-worker before the death of her

own sibling; she asserted her belief that others workers should have done more to show

sensitivity and support. She stated:

The fact that people could just walk in and out of [my coworkers] office and not pay attention

to [her grief and emotional strain] was mind-boggling. Business as usual, and almost some

people were kind of annoyed that she wasn't functioning at the level they needed her to

function. So that was pretty eye-opening.

Ruth conveyed her surprise that more compassion was not given and that invitation to emotional

communication was inappropriately missing from interactions with the bereaved co-worker.

Alexandra also described an absence of support when she returned to her mental health job after the death of her mother-in-law. Alexandra said:

I got support from the two people I look forward to coming to see. The, 'Oh, I'm so sorry to hear about your mother in law. How are things going?' and that was it. I did not hear boo from anybody else. Not email, not in the hallway…I think I had a sense that they expected me to just show up the way I always show up, like no different. I think if I had said I need to excuse myself or I just can't focus, I'm feeling really distracted, some people would have understood. But not everybody, and again that would have felt like it would have created a dynamic that I just didn't even want to deal with.

Alexandra's tone indicated that she took her coworkers lack of support in stride. However, later in the interview she questioned her decision to stay with the organization. She felt uncertain about having support from colleagues and if the company was a good match for her.

In summary, a pattern emerged around participants' expressions of expectations, and often disappointments, around relational communication and invitations to affective expression. These descriptions revealed how the absence of reciprocal participation in interactions that facilitate emotional sharing or opening produced a kind of affective silence around the bereaved person's experience. Without acknowledgement of grief-related emotions from co-workers and supervisors, individuals were left to manage and contain their emotions in isolation or risk violating emotion display norms at work—effectively producing a form of emotional closure or barrier to the expression of grief at work. In the following section I describe participants' reactions to violations in the perceived interaction rules for bereavement communication at work.

Emotional closure at work contributes to changing attitudes.

Bereaved individuals whose co-workers and supervisors had failed to offer emotional support or sympathy tended to express newly-formed negativity and resentment toward their company and particular coworkers. A pattern emerged indicating the presence of a set of interaction rules that bereaved workers perceive for professional responses to bereaved workers' efforts to maintain emotional neutrality. When these expectations or rules were violated, participants reacted in a variety of ways including: emotional withdrawal from work relationships; disappointment; resentment toward the individuals and/or organization; searching for new employment; and resignation.

 Ruth described how insensitivity toward another bereaved coworker, described above, led to feelings of resentment among colleagues. In her case the lasting result was a shift in the work culture and what it felt like to be a part of the group. However, feelings of dissatisfaction from a lack of social support for grief caused some workers to engage in passive resistance. Dorothy, whose supervisory had been "rude" and "insensitive" said:

I was shocked [at my supervisor's behavior]. So that made me more, I don't know if apathetic

is the word I want. But, I really didn't care about anything that I had on my desk right then.

Ya know if she's gonna have that attitude then why should I even try to be productive.

Dorothy's response demonstrates a desire to push back or find a small way to balance an inequity. In her eyes, she had done her part and worked to display professionalism while she grieved, while her supervisor failed to give her something in return. The result is that Dorothy endeavored to level this imbalance by reducing her efforts in other areas.

Feeling a lack of structural and interpersonal support also caused Alexandra to question if her organization was the right place for her following the death of her mother-in-law. Alexandra

hadn't been sure if the government organization she worked for would provide bereavement leave for the death of her partner's mother, since the deceased was technically outside the relations covered (as they were not legally married). After a few uncomfortable interactions with human resources, she was able to get time off but felt the issue was swept under the rug and she continued to wonder if there would be repercussions. Alexandra relayed the situation:

I went for a longtime with the suspicion about whether I had made a good decision [to stay in this job]. I would say I went another six to nine months wondering because I thought, 'Do I have support here or not?' …Yeah, [I questioned] if I'd be supported, if this was a good match company wise for me as a person. Career wise and skill set wise, it's a great match. But was it gonna match for me who I am as a person? I wasn't sure.

While Alexandra's experience made her ambivalent toward the organization, others developed a strong conviction that it was time to leave.

When Tina returned to work after the funeral of her brother she received little acknowledgement of her emotional experience with grief and was forced to work mandatory overtime. She believed that act showed a lack of support and insensitivity and ultimately inspired her to look for a new job. Janie had a similar experience and decided to look for a new job after her office denied her time off to see her dying grandmother, who had raised her, and then pressured her to take work with her to the funeral. Janie described the scenario and her feelings:

The owner of the company called me into my boss's office and told me she wanted to talk to me about me leaving. And she started pressuring me to not go. And I'm crying at this point – right…It was just hideous. And I just– I was very– trying to make it work. I'm not– in a work environment, I'm not an assertive person. And it was just excruciating…And my regular boss gave me work to do on the day of the funeral to take with me. And I went. And inside there

was like this really big just 'fuck you' toward the company. And I tried very hard not to show

it. I don't think I did. I behaved professionally, but just 'fuck you'…I went from having pretty

positive feelings about the owner of the company and the company itself to being really jaded

and having very negative feelings about her and feeling, feeling like, feeling resentment;

feeling much less loyalty.

In Janie's case there was a policy in place for her to take time off to attend a funeral, however

there was a lack of managerial support for her absence from the office. As Janie reflected on the

experience she articulated a sense of being wronged; she reasoned that the company and her

supervisors failed to give her the kind of respect and professionalism she had earned through her

commitment to quality work and management of grief-related emotions at work.

In summary, bereaved participants' talk about expectations for condolences and

understanding created a theme indicating interaction rules for professional support during

bereavement. However, narratives about workplace interactions following the death of a loved

one did not only emphasize negative interactions. In some cases, co-workers and supervisors

exceeded bereaved workers' expectations.

Appreciating Relational Connection at Work during Bereavement

An alternative discourse that emerged was that workplace interactions during

bereavement have the potential to enhance and transform work relationships. This less prevalent

theme asserted the possibility that emotional communication, support, and relational connection

can, and perhaps should, be an important element of work. In the following section I offer

examples of individuals feeling pleasantly surprised by the presence of relational support at

work. I then turn to narratives that extend this theme to include stronger statements about the

value of relational connection as a core aspect of management and organizational life.

Enhancing work relationships through bereavement support.

The belief that grief-related support at work can change work relationships emerged as another theme in this project. In some cases, individuals were surprised by how much co-workers cared for them in a more personal (not work-related) way. This awareness encouraged workers to rethink the value of layering the personal into work relationships. For several men working in a corporate environment, the support offered by coworkers challenged their long-held views about work as "all business." For example, Jack, who had largely kept his personal life separate from his work, faced the realization that his coworkers cared for him as a person, and not just as someone there to get the job done. He stated that he had a normal routine of chatting with people briefly about their weekend or other casual banter, but it wasn't more than that. After his colleagues sent flowers, attended his mother's funeral, brought food to his home and offered other condolences he began to see his coworkers in a different light. Jack explained:

I guess it showed me how much more I, maybe I took for granted how much the folks actually cared about me and my family, 'cuz they really stepped up to the plate with all the nice things that they did. So in terms of the work, I don't think it affected work, but I …I have a– I'm more appreciative of the people I work with because of you know how much they seemed to have cared.

The experience of social support at work began, in a small way, to challenge Jack's long-held beliefs about a natural separation between work and his personal life. Jack's story demonstrated how relational support can inspire a reconsideration of the nature of work relationships.

Both Hunter and Steven shared stories about how their supervisors wrote heartfelt cards that made a big impression on them. They conveyed their surprise and gratitude at the extent to

which someone from their work, especially a supervisor, would be willing to offer personal support. Steven reflected on interactions with his manager:

I think, again, getting that card from my manager meant a lot to me. And what I realized recently– actually, she's told me, is that she's not – she doesn't open up a lot to a lot of people. And so in a way, that expression kind of gains more meaning for me. In that she's willing to connect with me in that way. So that certainly made me appreciate– and just the general support from my colleagues was really nice to have and see. And I know that my experience is probably in with the minority; that a lot of people's work experience with bereavement is not like that.

Both of these men shared how much it meant to receive unexpected relational support and personal connection at work.

Mason also saw a work-related benefit to having more personal connections with his co-workers. He described a shift in how he saw his role in relation to others at work after team members pulled together to help him manage his bereavement leave. Mason began by talking about his past trouble delegating and relying on coworkers:

And even just from the experience of that I can look back and say, 'You know there are people here who are willing to reach out and help me.' And whether or not it involves because my mother passed away or not. And so I think it's helped me at work. I think it reinforces in me that, you know the fact that I can turn to others in the workplace and they'll step up and help me out. And I can trust them to do that.

Mason also described another individual and organizational benefit that emerged from how the company handled his bereavement leave. He and a few others mentioned specifically that they felt more connected with and loyal to the company as a result of the support they felt. In

summary, participants' stories of surprise and gratitude articulated the presence of an alternative discourse that valued relational connection at work.

Getting comfortable with the value of emotional support in work relationships.

Another facet of the relational connection theme was that co-workers and supervisors went above and beyond to offer both emotional and logistical support, in addition to the kindnesses mentioned above. These examples extend the previous theme in that they introduce an orientation toward emotionality and relational connection at work as a natural and important aspect of the organizational environment.

Lucy gave examples of how her supervisor expressed sympathy while her mother was sick and after her mother's death. Lucy explained:

And the first thing she said to me is, 'Don't worry about your job. We're going to sit down. We're going to create a plan and we'll be ready whenever you need the time.' So it was that– just that initial of me kind of freaking out and her saying don't worry about it. Don't worry about your job; we're going to take care of it. We can do it.

After Lucy's mother passed her boss said, "We'll do whatever we need to do to support you…Sorry for your loss." Lucy went on to indicate that the whole experience strengthened her relationship with her supervisor both personally and professionally. Participants who voiced this alternative perspective on the value of emotional connection at work talked about how one or two of their coworkers made a difference in their experience and how support eased their transition back into work. Having people who were willing to listen, share their own stories, and offer a hug, all helped bereaved workers feel more comfortable expressing and experiencing grief-related emotions at work.

Avi's case provides another exemplar of the impact that care and support can have in easing bereaved workers transition back to work. In Avi's case, financial strain and her teenage daughter's intense grief after the death of her infant left Avi feeling very conflicted about her return to work. She related a conversation with her daughter about her need to return to work:

Because I explained my situation, I need to go back to work and we need the money, so I need the work. Because I do not have the cash, I do not have savings, I do not have nothing. I need to start clearer, you know, like fresh again. [My daughter] says, OK, it's fine. But this is the first day in, and when I was here I feel like, how am I going to handle when I am working. And I say OK, I need to be strong. My tragedy happened.

Avi's voice asserted a strong conflict between the necessity of returning to work, fear of being overcome with emotion, and a commitment to maintain professionalism in her service work. Avi continued her story, emphasizing how expressions of empathy and thoughtfulness were essential in helping her move forward. Avi explained:

So I can handle this, but I say God I need to be strong because I don't want tears every single day, you know. But when you come in the first day, it is like you are living the moment [of loss] you know. It takes awhile for healing a little bit. More important, you know, I really appreciate, like you thinks, like thinking about me, and receiving support, because I receive clear support from everybody, especially the faculty and the staff.

Avi described how regular customers to the University Grill where she worked asked about her and her family and created opportunities for her to talk about what she had been through. It was this ability to connect and receive support that, in part, facilitated a process of healing.

Monique, an account director, had described herself as someone who was always very committed to her work and to managing her team in the best possible way. For her, this meant

maintaining an image of holding everything together. However, after her father died she was

suddenly confronted with the juxtaposition of alternating between working efficiently and

"bursting into tears." I asked her to talk about the impact this had on her work relationships and

she offered the following response:

Well, I think it's probably made it a stronger relationship just because it has been this whole

other dimension and I think because I have always been this person who has very much tried

to be in control of things and to be – bucked up and, you know, all tied together that showing

some sort of weakness, so to speak, has been good for them to help support me through it.

Monique's reflection captured the positive potential of vulnerability and the benefit of opening

the opportunity for greater reciprocity between supervisors and subordinates. This passage

highlights how offering relational support at work can benefit both the provider and recipient of

that support.

Kate, a manager, described how her experience with emotional and relational support in

the office strengthened her belief in managing her team more as "whole people" than workers.

Kate advocated personal connections at work, stating:

I have such a supportive work environment, with relationships, with people. I mean, they're –

we find that we – there's so many people that I know that have had cancer or family members

who died of cancer; both of my parents died of cancer. So that does affect your work

relationships when you have those common bonds on a personal level with the people that you

work with because they've gone through similar things. But if anything it's just enhanced it

because people find a commonality with you that they can relate to you and you feel like –

they can perceive you as somebody who can relate to them. So it makes – it creates a better

work relationship with people when you can be perceived to be more human and

understanding and patient and those kinds of things.

Kate articulated a connection between recognizing individuals' emotional and personal lives and

a positive work environment. In making this connection, Kate's and the others' stories,

emphasize and justify the value of relational logics in organizations and contest the dominant

trends toward a strong division between the instrumental/rational and relational/emotional

spheres of work and home. The alternative discourse of care asserts the potential for a new set of

interaction rules that extends bereavement interaction beyond condolences and limited support.

What is voiced in these narratives is the value of relational connection and emotional support at

work—discourses of care become a valued component of professionalism.

Reflections on the Themes

The contrast between the themes related to emotion management and those related to

interaction expectations make visible interesting tensions between organizational logics. In the

descriptions of the norms for emotion management traditional instrumental approaches to

organization and rational forms of reasoning prevail. However, an alternative approach to

organization is revealed in participants' descriptions of their experiences with, and expectations

for, relational and emotional support at work. In the tension between these approaches bereaved

workers seem to be asserting a balance—a willingness to conform to a display of emotional

neutrality and rationality, accompanied by the normative belief that others should employ logics

of care and relational reasoning.

These expectations create a set of interaction rules that say, "I'll recognize that my grief

is not productive at work and maintain a professional emotional neutrality so that you are not

obligated to respond to my sadness and other grief-related emotions; but in return, I expect you

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to show human compassion and professional kindness by acknowledging my grief and offering emotional support." A desire for emotional opening and recognition is conveyed in bereaved individuals' articulation of interaction rules. Without reciprocal action from another, the grief-related emotions experienced by a bereaved worker potentially become marginalized and sequestered. If only the emotion management half of the interaction agreement is performed, instrumental reasoning and rationality are privileged and the possibility for relational communication at work is mitigated.

Emphasis on emotion management dominated the conversation, but one alternative approach to organization finds a voice in reflections on this highly personal and emotional experience that spills over into the work environment. The conflict that emerged here, between instrumental and relational approaches to organization, is one that found voice in the interview setting, but did not seem to explicitly surface in the organizational environment. Emphasis on the value of care and support may or may not have been conveyed to other organizational members. According to the interviews, dissatisfaction with poor emotional communication was largely hidden as bereaved workers continued their management of emotion, put on a good face, whispered reproach at a lack of support, or opted out of the organizational environment.

This chapter explored themes and tensions that surfaced as bereaved workers described their workplace interactions after the death of a loved one. The first section detailed connections that participants made between their notions of what it meant to be professional and interpretations of emotion rules for the workplace. In addition, it offered a description of the communicative practices workers engaged in to manage and contain their feelings and affective displays at work. Finally, in the second half of the chapter, I recounted participants' assertion of

interaction rules for providing support at work and discussed the alternative view of emotion and professionalism that stems from an expectation for emotional connection in the workplace.

In the next chapter I revisit the themes and patterns in the previous two chapters. I consider how patterns in participants' talk may have consequences and implications that are difficult to see in an initial thematic reading. In particular, I explore gendered patterns in descriptions of managing and expressing grief-related emotions at work. To conduct this in-depth analysis I use feminist concepts and a close reading of a few exemplars from the interviews.

Chapter 6: A Feminist Reading of the Meanings of Grief at Work

As I revisited the themes that developed in chapter five, I noticed how assumptions about work and professional behavior were subtly intertwined with gender. The prevalence of hiding or controlling emotion, descriptions of professionalism associated with rationality and control, and tensions around support at work, led me to consider the possible implications of how people talk about grief at work. This chapter offers an analysis focused specifically on a closer reading of interview excerpts to get a better understanding of how particular meanings are produced in talk. This process facilitates exploration of the possible implications of talk about grief at work that is interwoven with gender binaries and references to behaviors or traits that have been coded as masculine or feminine in feminist research (see Acker, 1990; Buzzanell, 1994; Fondas, 1997 for examples). In this chapter, I explore the discourses and values that surface in narrative excerpts about bereavement in the work context. Then, I consider how talking about grief at work in particular ways may generate consequences for individuals and organizations.

Narratives about grief at work may become gendered through everyday talk. For instance, casual conversation can reproduce an oppositional relationship between rationality and emotionality—particularly as this relationship intertwines with talk about what it means to be professional. Talk can become gendered especially when discourses of professionalism, as an example, articulate a particular (hegemonic) masculine view of an ideal professional worker (see Mumby, 1998). Mumby and Putnam (1992) attended to the communicative processes around the production of gendered discourses, arguing that discourses become gendered through associations with concepts that have been coded as masculine or feminine. "Historically, organizational discourses have privileged formal terms, such as *rationality, male, public,* and *mind* over their informal opposites, like *emotionality, female, private,* and *body*" (Trethewey &

Ashcraft, 2004, p. 83). In this project, the gendered coding of phenomenon like emotion, rationality, relational connection, and social support may be relevant to the consequences of how individuals talk about bereavement at work.

In the narratives gathered for this project, rationality and an instrumental approach to working through grief emerged in contrast to expressions of emotion and a desire for community or relational support in bereavement. From a feminist perspective, concern lies in the potential for this tension to tilt toward the privileging of stereotypically masculine orientations to the experience of grief (i.e. rational) at work while marginalizing emotional or relational approaches. Mumby and Putnam (1992) stated, "discourses of professionalism have privileged formal terms such as male, public, mind, and rational over their informal opposites—female, private, body, and emotional" (p. 466). Mumby and Putnam help us see how discourses become gendered through a series of linkages between gender and other traits such as rationality or emotionality. Note that it is not that a construct such as rationality is inherently masculine—but rather, rationality has been associated with a certain view of masculinity over time so that their meanings become intertwined (Ross-Smith & Kornberger, 2004).

Organizational communication and feminist research has examined the reproduction of gendered power relations at work by exploring how various organizational practices and language reveal associations with masculinity and femininity (Acker, 1990; Calás & Smircich, 1991; Ferguson, 1984; Fondas, 1997; Martin, P. Y., 1990; Trethewey, 2001). Consider the following examples which establish a precedent for exploring how discourses about work become gendered. First, feminist analysis has demonstrated how *bureaucracy* arguably demands a separation of the public and private, which places the masculine/rational in the realm of work and the feminine/nurturing in the private (Britton, 2000; Martin, 2000). Additionally, the

association between masculinity and rationality has been investigated to explore how emotion, in contrast to rationality, becomes feminized within organizational theory and practice (Mumby & Putnam, 1992; Ross-Smith & Kornberger, 2004).

Feminist research has described how particular qualities have become associated with masculinity or femininity producing a sense of coherence around masculine or feminine traits (Fondas, 1997; Trethewey, 1997). These associations between traits and gender have then been used as an analytical tool to explore the ways that language and practices become gendered. For example, Trethewey explored how organizational discourses and interview talk referenced "masculine qualities of objectivity, professionalism, and rationality" in contrast to "feminine characteristics of empathy, care, and concern" (p. 291). There are potential risks associated with naming discourses or traits as gendered; the act of identifying something as masculine or feminine potentially oversimplifies the subject and reproduces narrow conceptions of both masculinity and femininity. However, naming the gendered assumptions embedded in talk is useful for exposing the subtle ways that gender imbalance may be subtly reproduced in talk about work.

The binaries that underlie discourses of work and gender have the potential to reproduce a power dynamic between masculine and feminine whereby anything associated with the feminine is marginalized and cast as "not essential to organizational life" (Mumby & Putnam, 1992, p. 466). In the thematic interpretation conducted for this study descriptions of what it meant to be professional resonated with what the literature would characterize as masculine images of careerism, such as putting work first and keeping the personal separate from work life—even in the context of coping with the death of a loved one. I was surprised at how little the interview dialog focused explicitly on emotional experience, despite an organizational trend

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toward valuing interactional and relational approaches to leadership that depend on an emotional process (see Fondas, 1997, for a review). Rather, descriptions of managing feelings and emotional displays became the primary focus of the affective side of being bereaved at work. As individuals talked about grief-related emotions a pattern emerged around rationalizing the experience, disciplining the emotive body, and sequestering the personal. However, it is relevant to notice how discourses of care, empathy, connectedness, and reciprocity were woven into narratives shared in the interviews.

Using feminist concepts of gendered communication I was able to notice and attend to potential meanings embedded in the talk that would otherwise be difficult to see. For example, notions of careerism and professionalism were invoked that seemed practical and innocent enough, but that may have implications that go unexamined in everyday talk. In the interviews, participants talked in ways that (re)produced a stereotypically masculine image of an "ideal" bereaved worker—one that was focused on productivity and endeavored to maintain a firm public-rational/private-emotional divide. However, in this study, stories that placed a strong value on emotional empathy, openings for emotional talk, and relational connection were only expressed by women. Additionally, female participants described tensions around the need to manage emotions—a struggle that was not voiced by the men in this study.

I do not attend to a difference between male and female participations to imply that a finding of this study is the presence of second-wave-feminism-style gender difference in the experience of grief; nor do I interpret the talk as representing a "female-advantage" (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982). Rather, noticing this difference draws attention to the way that women appeared to draw upon more discourses than the men in this project. If female participants had more diverse discourses available to them, then it is possible they had greater freedom in how

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they made sense of their experience. In contrast, men, who more consistently used a particular

discourse that emphasized rationality and a careerist approach to work (Wieland, Bauer, &

Deetz, 2009), may have experienced a narrower range of available discourses which could have

constrained how they experienced grief at work. The availability of diverse discourses is

essential to the free and open construction of experience (Deetz, 1992; Weedon, 1994) and this

data suggests that perhaps experiences of grief at work are influenced by the availability of

diverse discourses.

My interpretations in this chapter are informed by feminist research on organizational

practices and research (including Ashcraft, 1996, 1999; Buzzanell, 1994, 2003, 2005; Martin,

1990; Trethewey, 1997, 1999). The observations in previous chapters suggest a need to further

explore how emotion, professionalism, and gender intersect in talk to create particular (gendered)

meanings of grief and work. In the following analysis I offer a few close readings inspired by

feminist poststructuralist methods for destabilizing the meaning of a text (Calás & Smircich,

1991; Martin, 1990; Mumby & Putnam, 1992). These readings act as exemplars to show how

the meanings of grief, professional, emotion, work, home, and gender are discursively

constructed in relation to one another. In addition, this type of analysis creates the opportunity to

consider the consequences of talking about grief at work in particular ways. The first section of

this critical examination begins with the exploration of two exemplars individually and in

relation to one another. The content focuses on talk about work/life boundaries and is

complicated by analyzing the talk as a situated performance of gender. The next segment extends

the exploration of boundary construction and gendered performance by inspecting talk about

emotions in the workplace.

Constructing Work/Life Boundaries through Talk about Grief

During the interview, I asked Billy, a middle-aged Catholic man working as a financial analyst, how his co-workers responded to the death of his sister; he stated, "I mean I got the card, yeah ya know hey. But they weren't overly supportive or protective. And I appreciated that too. No, they handled it perfectly. They really did." I followed by questioning Billy about how he viewed his experience with co-workers after his loss and he remarked:

I just think it's a negative subject to begin with okay, it's better left unsaid. And ya know you just go on because you're at work. You're not at home. Ya know uh when people would ask, yeah I'd tell 'em. I'm not gonna lie. And that's it. I didn't- they did it exactly the way they should.

A careful reading of this statement provides an opportunity to consider how Billy constructed meanings about work, home, rationality, and emotion through his talk about supporting (or avoiding) bereaved employees. I begin this analysis by first exploring the potential for Billy's statement to claim a sense of empowerment by reinforcing a divide between the public (rational) and the private (emotional). Then, I push the reading further through the use of substitutions and different constructions to reveal alternative discourses that are silenced through the text. Throughout I consider how the language engages masculine discourses about the relationship between work and the personal while marginalizing more feminine alternatives.

A Strategic Separation between Home (Grief) and Work

In the previous excerpt a sharp distinction is drawn between work and home, "…you just go on because you're at work. You're not at home." The ideological separation between work and home has been a subject of feminist critique (Kirby, Golden, Medved, Jorgenson, & Buzzanell, 2003; Mills & Chiaramonte, 1991). Arguably, the (re)production of a binary between

public/work/rational and private/home/emotional has the potential to position the masculine as the dominant half of each dichotomy while the feminine is marginalized as the 'other' (Acker, 1990; Buzzanell, 1994; Ferguson, 1984; Mumby & Putnam, 1992). However, in this text the work/home boundary is also invoked to create an opportunity for control, to some extent, by managing the experience of grief. The boundary becomes a discursive resource that can be used as a justification for creating work as a space where the bereaved individual is insulated from the experience of loss.

In contrast to interpreting the separation of work and home as constraining, one possible reading of this passage focuses on how Billy used the boundary between spheres to generate a sense of relief. The discourse of grief as an experience of sadness, feeling, disruption, loss, and remorse that circulates in the social sphere was, in a way, paused as Billy claimed solace in the discourse of rationality, control, order, and action. Rather than talking about feeling oppressed or constrained by pressure to leave life at the office door, Billy described feeling a sense of gratitude that he could separate himself from the "negative" experience of grief. This type of discursive strategy has been the subject of critique—as it highlights a pattern of organizational workers escaping the messiness of home by throwing themselves into work (Hochschild, 1997; Tracy, 2000). However, I want to acknowledge how the use of an ideological boundary between work and home was invoked as a resource for taking an active role in managing grief. Consequently, I appreciate this discursive practice as an individual process of resilience, despite the potentially constraining aspects of this communicative practice.

Billy stated that the lack of discussion and support offered for his loss was preferable. He suggested that if co-workers asked about how he was doing he would have felt obligated to talk about his personal experience—which he did not want to do. Billy's talk reinforced the

separation between work and home and indicated that the lack of personal conversation about the death of his sister helped him move forward. In his statement, the boundary between public and private was valued, which validated an exclusion of the personal (emotional) from his worklife. The work/life barrier was constructed as a benefit because it allowed him respite from thinking about the death of his sister. The boundary work embedded in the text enabled Billy to justify his desire to avoid the topic of his personal experience at work and to endorse the lack of support from co-workers. In this way, the public/private boundary does not appear to oppress or constrain Billy's experience. Rather, the construction of separate spheres provides a discursive mechanism for Billy to articulate a set of benefits associated with keeping his personal emotions separate from his worklife. In this case, the reproduction of a rational work sphere that exists without intrusions from the emotional personal space is, for Billy, advantageous.

Complicating the Reading of Boundary Work

Through this initial reading it is difficult to imagine any conflict or tension in the experience. However, the meaning of each phrase and statement is predicated on the devaluing of that which is unstated—meaning exists through the system of what is present and what is absent (Mumby & Putnam, 1992). So, let us also consider that which is absent or implied. The passage begins by defining the subject (of death and grief) as negative. In place of "I just think it's a negative subject to begin with okay…" we could substitute the phrase: *Death is a violent disruption that reminds me of my mortality, which is something to be ardently avoided. Grief, for me, is isolating.* The substitution offers a more explicit description of the possible meanings of "negative." Through the alternative we can make visible a meaning of "it's a negative subject" which definitively articulates the absence of value, joy, benefit, or peace surrounding death and loss. Additionally, it highlights the connection that Billy's talk makes between death, grief, and a

seemingly necessary solitary experience. In this excerpt the potential for human connection or personal growth from working through the meanings of death is forestalled.

The "negative" label echoes popular new age discourse that emphasizes the value of positivity and devalues anything classified as "negative," such as being fearful, sad, or overwhelmed (Erhrenreich, 2009). Talking about, or dwelling on, a negative subject is positioned as taboo and unworthy of recognition or expression. Research suggests that workers are actually rewarded for demonstrating positivity, which promotes a causal relationship between organizational success and positive emotions (Staw et al., 1994). The research on positivity at work has created a kind of normative wisdom about the need to avoid being negative at work (Erhrenreich; Avey, Luthans, & Youssef, 2010). Following research on the values of positivity, the best thing to do with a "negative" topic is to avoid it—especially at work. It is possible that Billy is normalzing his behavior toward a workplace expectation for positivity. If that is the case, Billy is making an instrumental move, expressing how he wants to feel and how he wants to achieve the desired affective experience.

Though the discursive linking of positivity with work, negativity, in contrast, becomes associated with the private sphere. Billy indicated that, "you just go on because you're at work." What is implied, but unstated, is the contrasting vision that at home it is difficult to move forward, perhaps because of the presence of negative subjects such as death and the emotions of loss. Billy's language subtly reinforced a vision of the public organization as a place for optimism, progress, and rational thought. In contrast, the messiness of uncertainty, negativity, grief, and emotions becomes relegated to home or the personal sphere. Additionally, the description reinforces a dichotomous relationship between the potential for the experience to be

either negative or positive—where one is clearly valued over the over. This binary obscures the range of possibility in and between positive and negative meanings of death.

The problem, from a feminist perspective, is that the linkages made in the talk heavily privilege an image of work which values rationality, control, autonomy, progress, and life while devaluing home, emotion, relational connection, ambiguity or conflict, and the feminine. Billy's production of silence around a negative (personal) subject at work, through language that takes emotional containment for granted, hides the potential benefits of discussing grief and other difficult personal issues with co-workers. Consider, for example, Kate's talk in direct contrast to Billy's:

> I have such a supportive work environment, with relationships, with people…there's so many people that I know that have had cancer or family members who died of cancer…So that does affect your work relationships when you have those common bonds on a personal level with the people that you work with…it creates a better work relationship with people when you can be perceived to be more human and understanding and patient and those kind of things.

Kate, a manager, articulated a discourse that emphasized the benefits of care, empathy, and emotional connection at work. Kate's dialog made it seem natural to share personal experiences with co-workers and to help one another through difficult personal times. Kate indicated that there are positive emotional and organizational outcomes that stem from this alternative blurring of the public and private boundary.

Examining talk presented by Billy and Kate surfaces the potential for narratives about grief at work to do more than describe an experience of bereavement. Embedded in the language and framing choices are contrasting depictions of an ideal worker and the norms for what is

work-appropriate. When exploring Billy's talk, what is interesting are the omissions—what is left unsaid. As discussed, in excluding expressions of an emotional experience or the potential for emotion or relational connection to surface at work, Billy's narrative reproduces the public/private boundary. In addition, this excerpt can be viewed as a situated performance of gender.

West and Zimmerman (1987) described how expressions of masculine and feminine "natures" are embedded in situated conduct that reproduces the meanings of gender. Through discursive practices and embodied acts individuals "do gender." The performance of social acts then reproduce a normalized construction of the masculine/feminine binary. As such, the reproduction or contestation of an ideal worker image, as it intersects with aspects of social identity such as gender, class, and race, occurs in even the most micro aspects of talk and interaction. The absences in Billy's narrative, so delicately obscured, facilitate the performance of a particular dominant masculinity whereby he slides into the subjectivity of the ideal worker who is unaffected by the personal and works best as an autonomous agent. In performing this subject, other articulations are formed in relation: a "negative" construction of grief; a feminized notion of the private; a marginalized view of emotionality and personal connection; and a rational workplace. Billy's talk is not only a performance of *his* position and gender, it contributes to an articulation of macro meanings of gender and the relationship between gender and work.

The performance of gender in these small segments of talk becomes more striking when viewing alternatives in relationship to one another. Kate's dramatically different focus on relationships as central to coping with loss, and an ideal work environment, demonstrates a different construction of work than Billy's, while also reproducing gender norms. Kate's talk

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rejected rationality and notions of an autonomous worker as the ideal. Emphasis on the benefits

of care and connection facilitate a construction of professionalism that offers an alternative to a

more independent and competitive careerist version. The alternative encompasses traits

associated with more feminine approaches to organizing. While the meanings of feminist forms

of organization are debated (see Ashcraft, 2000 for a discussion), descriptions tend to include

characteristics that offer an alternative to bureaucratic forms including an emphasis on

empowerment and collective practices (Martin, P. Y., 1990; Morgan, 1994). Note the language

Kate uses: support, relationships, people, family, bonds, human, understanding, and patient.

Relationship is stated three times and references to people or the personal occur in seven

instances in the short passage. Additionally, she spoke the word "cancer" which brought the

taboo of illness and the association with death into the realm of the discussable. This move

introduced an image of a successful feminine managerial style and a work environment where

the boundaries between public and private are productively blurred.

Consider how each of the statements would viewed if we transposed the speakers. If Kate

had emphasized the negativity associated with death and reinforced an image of work

relationships as impersonal and emotionally-restrained the meaning might feel different. There's

the possibility that Kate would seem particularly harsh or unfeeling; the statement might be

viewed as a false performance used to meet a stereotypically masculine worker image. We could

even interpret the statement as an effort to "pass" as a (masculine) manager who can hold her

own in a rational organization. On the other hand, if Billy had talked about building relationships

through shared experiences with illness and loss the excerpt could be read as tapping into

feminine managerial traits. This move could support his image as a versatile and successful

manager in a modern organization. Or, the statement could be read as needy and weak—it could

even challenge his masculinity and his ability to manage. The argument I suggest here is that the meanings of the texts are intertwined with the gendered identities of the speaker and with gendered beliefs about appropriate organizational relationships.

If we examine Kate's talk we can see how it reflected a situated performance of gender. She articulated a version of femininity, one that illustrated a level of security with her position at work. Kate's perspective was associated with a certain level of security that comes with the authority of her managerial position, education level, and financial security. While the example offers a vision of a workplace which is inclusive of, even dependent on, relational connection, it also obscures the complications of negotiating work/life boundaries from various intersections of difference. Kate's talk allows us to see an approach to negotiating the relationship between public (rational) and private (emotional) where lines are blurred, however the possibility of conflict in the experience remains hidden. Billy and Kate's statements both make the meanings of work/personal boundaries and what is appropriate at work seem finished and uncontested. The lack of ambiguity or explicit tension in making decisions about notions of professionalism make it difficult to see the complexity that could exist in making sense of loss at work. Next, I offer an alternative construction to surface possible tensions and introduce other ways of talking about the experience.

Billy's statement could have been: *I'm struggling to make sense of the death of my sister. I don't know how I feel because my emotions are frequently changing. I find it difficult to talk about. Although I may be embarrassed to talk about my feelings at work, I feel a little hurt that none of my co-workers have asked me how I am or offered support.* Each way of talking about an issue—each choice about what to say—creates opportunities for how to construct and understand the world around us, but also eclipses other meanings and the potential to explore tensions.

Carefully interrogating the potential meanings in a text and offering alternative articulations allows for a reading that displaces taken-for-granted assumptions and highlights conflicts that can be difficult to see in everyday talk (see Calás & Smircich, 1991, and Martin, 1990 for examples). In crafting an alternative we can see how the original statement limits the potential to explore nuances and conflicts that can surface in experiences of grief.

The alternative notion of struggle introduces the potential for an experience that is still in process and undetermined. Here, struggle around understanding and meaning contrasts with the finished articulation of grief as negative. The language of struggle accomplishes an "undoing" of meaning. The unfinished nature of the experience implied by struggle generates space for a third voice, one that may not be imagined yet, that suggests greater possibility in the experience (Dimen, 1989). The possibility for fluidity in the experience of the world emerges in the notion of struggle. The articulation of ambiguous emotions allows for the unknown or undefined in the experience to surface. The original text shrouds the potential for expressing and working through conflicts that might exist on an emotional level because the meaning of grief or death is seemingly stable and uncontested. The alternative statement deals explicitly with emotional tension and uncertainty and problematizes how meaning appears to be fixed. Dimen (1989) stated, "This [feminine] morality of seeing 'both' and 'and,' of grasping two points of view simultaneously, is at home with the discomfort of ambiguity" (p. 39). According to Dimen, the strong presence of ambiguity introduces the feminine while creating an opening for creativity and a move away from binary thinking. The language of struggle enables us to see more clearly the complexity of meaning formation and the opportunities for contestation which can reopen the construction of meaning.

The alternative statement above also highlights conflict around how to draw boundaries between work and home. The messiness of navigating public/private boundaries becomes visible through the presence of uncertainty about how to interact with others in relation to bereavement. When Billy stated that co-workers responded the way they "should," keeping the personal firmly separate from work, it left little room to evaluate the choice that those individuals made and the consequences that could arise from a different action. On the opposite end of the masculine/feminine spectrum, Kate's language also reduced the opportunity to see how incorporating the personal into worklife could produce conflict. The alternative construction highlights how talk has the potential to invite exploration into the role of co-workers in supporting bereaved individuals and keeps the possibility for tension intact. Additionally, it begins to destabilize masculine-coded notions of a rational, autonomous, work sphere by introducing the possibility of a nuanced worklife that incorporates feminine-style discourses of compassion, empathy, support, and emotion, without simply substituting the feminine into the position of dominance.

Exploring the complexity of references to emotional uncertainty, fear of embarrassment at work, and discomfort with personal conversation at work, alongside an expressed desire for support in working through grief, allows us to consider how the public/private boundary may simultaneously offer opportunities for individual coping while also closing down alternative ways to deal with loss at work. Further, the analysis reveals how gender politics are suffused in the discourse of work as a public, non-emotional space. This reading considers the politics embedded in alternative discourses that privilege femininity and attends to how alternative discourses can also reproduce a masculine/feminine binary. In carefully analyzing small excerpts of the interview text it becomes easier to see how gendered discourses run throughout

descriptions of employees' efforts to contain emotional displays, sequester grief, and focus on staying productive and moving forward. By taking apart the meanings of the excerpt and offering alternatives the relationships between work, home, emotion, individual, organization, masculine and feminine are complicated and placed in tension with one another—upsetting the seemingly stable depiction of work as necessarily (and productively) separate from home.

Gender, Emotion Work, and the Grieving Worker

In addition to statements that accomplished boundary and gender work like Billy and Kate's discussed above, norms about grief at work also surfaced through talk about containing emotions. Bereaved workers described their efforts to be "normal" and professional at work through the management of emotional experiences and displays; in other words, to balance the emotionality of a bereaved-worker identity with the rationality of a professional-worker self. As discussed in the review of themes, participants engaged discourses of professionalism as they described a desire to manage grief-related emotions in the work environment. The definitions and meanings of what it was to be "professional" (in any line of work) carried norms for self-imposed emotional control and the exclusion of "personal" emotions from the workplace. In this section I carefully examine a statement made by Toni to reveal the complexities of boundary work, emotion norms, and the consequences of talking about grief at work in particular ways. What unfolds is an exploration of how talk about emotion management, which also constructs public/private boundaries, becomes intertwined with doing gender at work.

As mentioned in chapter five, Toni, a female manager, described her efforts to contain emotional displays at work. She stated:

I try not to express my grief at work. I don't want to just sit at my desk and cry…because I think you make people really uncomfortable. They don't know what to do for you. They can't

do anything for you and I try not to make people uncomfortable. So I just try- I focus on my

work. I truly do. I focus on my work.

Articulating a different experience than Billy, Toni's statement introduced a sense of struggle

with grief-related emotions. In the text above, grief was named and emerged as a visible aspect

of the discussion—grief and work became linked in a way that does not allow for a simple

disassociation of one from another based on their connection to an appropriate sphere. However,

Toni's language and phrasing showed vacillation around the extent to which emotion can and

should be present at work. The presence of grief *at work* is immediately made problematic,

suggesting that grief belongs elsewhere. Arguably, the phrasing creates a meaning through the

inverse of what is stated, that grief belongs *at home*. Through a careful reading of this simple

statement we can begin to see the possibility for series of associations between work, rationality,

and masculinity contrasted with home, emotion, and the feminine.

Articulating Gender through Emotion Management

In the opening of the excerpt grief was introduced into Toni's experience of work

following the death of her mother. Toni made a space for emotions and caring for others as she

described her return to the office. The experience of grief at work can be seen as more complex

as Toni wrestles with considering her emotions, demonstrating an awareness of others' needs,

and making sense of how to get through her loss. The use of the word "try" is important in

Toni's passage because it reveals something we did not see in Billy's excerpt—tension around

controlling emotions and relating to coworkers.

The effort surrounding grief management was made explicit in the use of "try" whereas

Billy's dialog exuded naturalness in the separation of spheres and the associated management of

emotional experience. The word "try" was used three times emphasizing the effort it took to

manage affect. Toni's description gave a sense of the power of grief-related emotions and the impact they had on her and on others. She showed her awareness that others may have been uncomfortable and emphasized the difficulties faced by people surrounding the bereaved. She said, "They can't do anything for you." In highlighting the power of the emotions and the impotence of those who might want to help, the narrative elevated the impact of grief in the workplace. Toni's narrative surfaced the importance of care for others, even as she was struggling to cope, when she emphasized her desire to make coworkers more comfortable relating to her during bereavement. Rather than offering a story that depicted Toni as a stoic and independent manager who naturally contained emotions in accordance with her professional position, the excerpt offers a picture of a person who is kind and concerned about others.

In the dialog emotion is recognized as powerful and present in organizational life. However, Toni's desire to care for others led her to reduce, or even remove, grief-related emotions from her worklife. The consequences of her talk are complex—she makes a space for relational connection and care, but limits the support she herself can receive from others. In attempting to keep grief out of her work she gives herself a lot of work to do on her own. She becomes responsible for managing the emotional wellbeing of herself and others. Another outcome is that emotion is given little room to appear or become valued in the workplace; in essence emotions related to grief and compassion are marginalized and sequestered to more stereotypically private spaces. This particular way of talking about grief and the managing of emotions at work can also subtly depict emotion as an intruder in the rational organization. Emotion, then, carries a tone of burden and imposition in the way it reduces the power of coworkers to help and support one another. By invoking the notion of effort, of trying to manage the situation, struggle appeared in reference to managing emotion, accommodating others, and

performing professionally. The presence of discipline in each of these areas parallels an underlying effort to try and manage grief by turning to the structure and distraction of work related tasks as a mechanism for getting back to life as normal.

To complicate Toni's description of her efforts to manage emotions, I offer an alternative construction that substitutes references to emotion with explicit references to gender.

I try not to *show unpredictable and uncontrollable aspects of my womanhood at work. I am only a woman at home—naked, untamed*. I don't want to just sit at my desk *showing my hysteria, my tears, my breasts. In grief I am like a storm...* Because I think you make people feel really uncomfortable. They don't know what to do for you. They can't *help you become a man, they can't help you regain control*. I try not to make people uncomfortable. *I care for them, as a mother cares for others. I mirror the feminine ethos people need and desire. I focus on protecting others*. So I just try- I focus on my work. *I focus on quieting my grief, but it is powerful. I try to conquer myself*. I truly do.

Through a reconstruction we can begin to explore how emotion, grief in particular, is articulated through an interlacing of binary discourses associated with gender, control, nature, work, and the private. When emotion is named as explicitly feminine its exclusion from the workplace becomes more political. It does not make sense to envision a modern work environment that is so fearful of the feminine—the taboos of body, nature, and the unpredictable. And yet, tales of grief at work are lined with attempts to manage and control emotion as though their presence places individuals and the work environment on the brink of chaos. However, it is only emotions that are perceived to burden others that are excluded; emotions of care and protection are present and valued. This presents an interesting parallel between the stereotypically feminine traits that are

strategically cultivated in organization, such as an orientation toward the collective, in contrast to those that are taboo, like the leaking feminine body (Trethewey, 1999).

The tendency to construct emotion as wild and pejoratively feminine is highlighted in the alternative writing. The concern expressed for reducing the impact of grief can potentially contribute to a depiction of emotions as equivalent to the obscenity of nudity and the taboo of publically bared breasts. An additional layer of complexity arises if we read efforts to mitigate grief as constructing emotions as taboo and intrusive. When Toni highlighted the need to reduce others' discomfort, emotion was framed as an unsolvable problem that others would not be able to respond to. The focus of the experience shifted away from the needs of the bereaved and toward the needs of others. One unintended consequence is that the needs of the bereaved individual become marginalized and the space to engage bereavement is limited to the personal sphere. The only reasonable reaction to the disruption of emotion was to contain and reassert rational control via a focus on work tasks.

In Toni's text, and in the alternative, struggle is made explicit. As Toni "tries" to cope with her emotions she turns to her work. Focusing on work becomes both an escape and a strategy for helping others and for helping herself. In working through a careful reading of Toni's statements it becomes easier to consider how this particular way of framing the experience may be a useful strategy for coping, but may also close down a number of possibilities for Toni to benefit from relational connection and support in working through loss. Perhaps too little credit is given to coworkers and their ability to respond to the reality of death and needs of a grieving colleague. In the narrative, tensions surface around making sense of emotion and where it belongs, in the articulation of a workplace that necessarily contains and admonishes emotionality, and in the struggle to embody a complex and contradictory

professional image. Toni's excerpt makes space for these slippages in a way that Billy and Kate's seemingly "finished" articulations did not.

Greif as a Weakness and an Opportunity

This analysis of how interview talk about grief at work can simultaneously reinforce and marginalize emotion and relational connection at work can be extended through the examination of another excerpt. Monique, a female manager, talked in a way that introduced the value of emotion and vulnerability in building work relationships:

> I think [my experience with grief] probably made it a stronger relationship [with my direct reports] just because it has been this whole other dimension and I think I have always been this person who very much tried to be in control...that showing some sort of weakness, so to speak, has been good for them to help me through it.

Monique's talk intertwined notions of control and rationality with compassion and relational support in her description of herself as a manager who is "in control," but who also uses relational connection to develop her team. What is interesting is how Monique's talk begins to articulate a more nuanced notion of superior/subordinate relationships while also validating her gendered performance of managerial practice.

In this complex passage, notice how competing discourses arise around the experience of loss and superior/subordinate relationships. Monique began by describing herself as always in control. Self descriptions in the interview of Monique as a manager, and of her vision of professionalism, aligned with traits culturally ascribed to men including being assertive, tough-minded, able to ignore the personal, and demonstrating a "heroic orientation toward task accomplishment" (Fondas, 1997, p. 260). However, through her experience with bereavement at work her enactment of control was disrupted by fluctuating emotions. The talk reveals how her

previous image of herself as a manager is put in tension by her experience with bereavement at work. Monique experienced vulnerability in her grief which opened her up to seeing the positive potential for a different type of relationship with the people who reported to her.

In the passage Monique named her grief as a weakness. This move is similar to Toni's description of grief as burden for others. However, rather than focusing on work to manage emotion, Monique suggested emotion could facilitate improved employee relations, and could even help her cope with the death of her father. Through the narrative, the weakness of emotion is transformed into a mechanism for building relationships and fostering a supportive work environment. Monique's reflection created a space for rethinking the benefits of the stereotypically emotionally-void workplace and the rational worker image that infused her previous view on organizational life. It also demonstrated the limitations on control, planning, and other strategically-dominated approaches to work. When Monique released control relational possibilities opened up.

Monique is at once a masculine ideal and a feminine alternative: in control, strategic, turning potential disadvantage into a positive end, *and*, undone by grief (emotion), weak, connected to others, and attentive to relationship development. In vacillation between these orientations toward work, professionalism, and understandings of grief at work, the traditional dichotomies between public/private, rational/emotional, and masculine/feminine are destabilized. This slight disruption reveals the tenuous nature of meaning and makes space for diverse experiences of grief at work and alternative meanings of emotion in organizational life. Through the language in the excerpt, the experience of grief was imagined as a state of contradiction that simultaneously produced weakness and opportunity for workers and organizational structure.

Monique and Toni's narratives illustrate the potential opportunities and consequences that flow from everyday talk about experiences at the intersection of work and the personal.

Exploring the Gendering of (Talk About) Bereavement at Work

The analysis conducted in this chapter offers a careful feminist reading designed to explore how discourses of gender, professionalism, and work intersect to produce particular meanings about grief in the organizational context. The analytical practice of writing substitutions and reconstructions of brief textual excerpts offered a way to explore how discourses about public/private boundaries create a mechanism for coping, while also potentially constraining the range of possibility for experiencing grief and understanding the relationship between work and the personal. Further, a critical focus on language and word choice illustrated how meanings could be opened and contested or closed down, as was the case with the labeling of grief as a "negative subject." Without making generalizing claims, the analysis helps us consider how social identity intersected with particular ways of talking about emotion at work, relational connection among workers, and meanings of professional behavior.

Through the voices of Kate, Toni, and Monique we hear possibility and complexity in the role of emotion and relationships at work. The sense of struggle around understanding the role of emotion at work and how grief should be managed dances in and between cultural stereotypes of masculine-rational images of professionalism and an empathetic, caring, relationship-oriented, feminine management style. We can see how the experience of bereavement at work can potentially become gendered through bereaved workers' talk about the factors that shape interactions with others and emotion management in the office. In conclusion, this critical reading of interview text demonstrated how particular orientations toward the relationship between public and private, and rational and emotional conceptions of workers, were present and

reproduced in talk about bereavement. The discussion focused on the consequences of talking about grief in ways that reproduce gendered articulations of work and organizational practices. However, the analysis also revealed the potential for talk about grief at work to disrupt seemingly stable meanings and assert new possibilities for emotion and social support in organizations.

In the next chapter I return to the question of the relationship between the experience of grief and organizational bereavement leave policy. I draw upon themes and a few in-depth cases to explore how employees negotiate the complexity and uncertainty of their experience in relation to the standardized policy. Participants' narratives illustrate the tensions that arise between individuals' personal situation and needs and the constraint of a one-size-fits-all policy. Additionally, I focus on the communicative process bereaved workers engage in to resolve their feelings of dissonance enough to remain part of the organization and feel good about their work. Participants' interviews indicated that during the affective and financial disruption that can accompany the death of a loved one, it is helpful to find a way to maintain a sense of work stability and pride in maintaining a coherent worker identity.

Chapter 7: Talking about Bereavement Leave Policy

In chapter one, I described general approaches to organizational bereavement leave policy and the practice of standardized policies. I also reviewed the unintended consequences of standardization and criticisms of this dominant approach to managing grief at work. Now, I turn to examine how bereaved workers in this study described their reflections on negotiating bereavement leave, as well as their thoughts on amending the organizational approach to policy. What is important from a communication perspective is how the issues related to bereavement leave get voiced or silenced, and the discursive mechanisms by which that occurs. In the second section of this chapter I move from reactions to the policy toward an investigation of how employees communicatively reconcile tensions between their feelings of discontent and the organization's policy. What is revealed is a tendency to highlight the impossible situation the organization is in as a way to justify a standardized policy.

In the first part of this chapter, I discuss the nuts and bolts of taking time off work for bereavement. As was expected, participants relayed some dissatisfaction with aspects of policy content and implementation. These critiques followed similar themes as those made by academics and professionals including: limited paid time off; restricted coverage of particular family relations; lack of grief support options; and a general absence of flexibility. I begin this chapter by offering participants' comments on these issues, highlighting how the nuance of these experiences adds complexity to the larger discussion.

Second, I explore the discursive mechanisms used to move out of a state of discontent with the organization and the policy and toward a position of understanding. I then discuss the implications of this discursive practice, arguing that when bereaved workers relieve the organization of the responsibility for accounting for difference in experiences of grief, the

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diverse needs of the bereaved are subordinated to a blanket approach. This communicative strategy conceals the unique conflicts bereaved employees experience across the organization. Effectively the alternative, that the policy could be written and enacted another way, is silenced or closed off. However, bereaved workers may benefit from this discursive strategy which minimizes conflict, which will be explored in the closing of this chapter.

Navigating the Details of Bereavement Leave Policy

The issue of working with a formal bereavement leave policy played an important role in participants' talk about bereavement and work. In many ways, the formal policy asserts a baseline for norms around bereavement including who we grieve and for how long (even if that is not the purpose of the policy). David Russo, CEO and president of Empliant, Inc. said that three-day leave "creates false expectations of how the employee is supposed to behave" (Sunoo & Sunoo, 2002, p. 393). Policies provide a kind a benchmark for what is "standard"—however participants' descriptions of the challenges that arose in relation to the policy indicate that there is a disconnect between the standard policy and "standard" bereavement. In this analysis I focus primarily on the central aspects of policy: time off and relations covered. I also briefly consider the absence of provisions for other types of support.

Taking Time Off for Bereavement Leave

The most common point of contention with a formal bereavement leave policy was the bounded amount of paid time off. The most common features of the time-off policies described in this project include: three days of paid time off for an immediate family member; five days of paid time off if a service was held more than 200 miles from the Company facility; half to a full day to attend a funeral service for a non-immediate family member. Sunoo and Sunoo (2002) conducted focus groups with bereaved workers finding that the standard three days of paid time

off left bereaved workers wanting. They argued, "In the case of death, the standard three-day bereavement may cover time to plan and attend a funeral, but grief itself is rarely so contained" (p. 393). For individuals involved in the planning of funeral services or in other responsibilities related to the death three days was just not enough time.

After the death of her father, Dorothy considered the conflict between how she would have liked to grieve with her family, and the policy that required her to return to work after five days. Dorothy elaborated:

I would have liked to have taken more time. You know, just to be with my family. Nobody lives in the same city. I have, [brothers and sisters who all lived in different parts of the country]. So it would have been nice to have stayed together for awhile instead of just getting through everything and then just leaving. Because um we're Jewish so they have the – I don't know if you know anything about that, but, three nights we do a sitting shiva thing. So that was half the time at the house doing that so… [We were] very busy cuz some people come each night. Um it just would have been nice to have been able to visit and share stories more… I didn't have extra time to take because I was moving the following month, out here [to work in a different division of the company]…I understand that ya know the job needs to get done but I just don't think that the five days or the three days is long enough. Because it's just like scratching the surface and I think you need a little bit of time to absorb like the experience of the service and everything else before you get back to work you need some-- you have to process it and I don't think that with five days, going out of town coming back going back to work the next day, I don't think you really can.

Dorothy discursively invoked cultural, relational, and psychological logics for asserting the validity of her experience and the conflict that emerged between her experience and the

organizational policy. Dorothy called upon religion to assert legitimacy in the practice of extended mourning rituals. In addition, she described her relationship with her family and implied that increased distance created a greater need for familial connection and ritual following the death of a loved one[4]. A final element in Dorothy's justification of her needs was the invocation of psychological perspectives on grief that suggest the necessity of grief work. Dorothy's narrative asserted that religious practices and familial relationships differed across employees creating unique situations for bereavement. In addition, it suggested that bereavement leave is about more than attending a funeral—it is also about mental wellbeing. Her narrative exposed the differences between employees' experience with bereavement that get overshadowed by a standardized policy for time off for funeral attendance. Dorothy put organizational needs (to get the job done) in conversation with her own needs (to grieve), making the tension between them visible.

While time off was not really a problem for Jack because of accrued vacation time, he advocated an increase in bereavement leave time for those who do not have options for extending time off work. Jack contended:

And to be perfectly honest with you if this, I don't know that it reverts back to the policy at all, but if even though it's local, if you're involved in the arrangements, three days is definitely not enough time. And I have enough [personal accrued vacation days] I just ya know chip in my own time…Yeah and it doesn't-- time off it's time off and I have plenty of my own time [personal accrued vacation days]. I'm just saying that for those that don't and to stick with the official bereavement policy, if you're involved in the arrangements and- …

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[4] Dorothy's assertion that distance between relatives increases the need for ritual and community mourning contradicts Owen, Fulton, and Markusen's (1994) that distance has reduced the bonds of family and decreased the practice of funeral rituals.

Yeah three days is not enough. That's barely enough travel time, for travel, much less to do all

the other stuff that you have to do.

Jack was able to strongly voice his critique of the policy from the position of not having a vested

interest in actually needing more time. In our conversation, Jack spoke about the need for more

official bereavement leave as something that would more likely impact workers at a different

organizational level or in a different financial class. He speculated how much more difficult it

would have been to negotiate time off with a manager who was not sympathetic if he did not

have accumulated vacation time, or if he did not have the personal and financial resources that

helped him through the process. In contrast to Dorothy and her use of relational, cultural, and

psychological logics, Jack drew upon instrumental reasoning in making his argument. Jack's

story is built upon the values of productivity and efficiency. He described bereavement as

associated with the tasks of funeral arrangement and essentially indicated that there's a job to do,

and that job takes more than three days. Rebecca, who recently lost her grandmother and

grandfather, echoed Jack's point arguing that the organization overlooks the time and energy it

takes to make all the arrangements for funeral, memorial, and handling personal affairs.

Janie's reflection provided more direct insight into the professional tensions that can

emerge related to paid bereavement leave. She emphasized how difficult it was to take any time

off, even time allotted to her by the formal policy.

[Taking time off] was very hard because the economy is very tenuous. I have a job that a lot

of people would love to have. It would be very easy to fill if I left. I had no idea where I

stood… It was – and so I was afraid of losing my job. I was afraid that if I didn't be a good

little girl and work super hard and like, actually work during the time of this incredibly

important person's funeral was happening that I would lose my job.

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Janie's response provided insight into the potential clash between having time and being able to take the time without fear of professional and financial repercussions. Concern for the consequences of taking bereavement leave and/or additional time for bereavement surfaced as participants explained why they didn't take more time off. Rebecca summed up this perspective when she said, "It's not a problem, not having the time, but really being able to take it." In these statements the hidden side of the policy, implementation, is exposed as a significant aspect of navigating the policy.

Who counts?: Raising Questions About Narrow Definitions of "Immediate Family"

In addition to raising concerns about the amount of paid time off for bereavement, participants challenged the practice of defining the relations that are covered by the policy. The question of who we grieve has been raised in sociological approaches to understanding bereavement. It is widely recognized that "grief is a function of the intensity of the relationship" (Stephenson, 1994, p. 137). However, there are many social variables that influence the intensity of various relationships. According to Stephenson, although grief is unique, personal and emotional, the phenomenon occurs in a social environment that shapes our notions of which losses are socially appropriate to mourn (p. 137). Stephenson argued that in American culture we are expected to grieve close family relations, the more distant the deceased is from the nuclear family, the less grief is expected (p. 136).

The norm of grieving close blood relations is reproduced in the organizational pattern of defining relations that qualify for bereavement leave. Many organizations specify that it is only "immediate family" who are covered by the official policy; it is common for the policy to then specify who counts as immediate family (i.e. spouses, children, parents, grandparents etc.) most often based on a traditional family tree model. Participants' reflections on this issue revealed

how complex this question, "what counts as a grievable loss?" really is. Frequently, the answer is that it depends; it depends on the nature of the relationship, which often has little to do with bloodlines and more to do with the role the deceased had played in the survivor's life. In this second section I offer a few brief examples of how individuals elaborated on the association between their grief and their relationship with the loved one who died.

At some point in the interview most participants explained their grief reaction by sharing the nature of their relationship to the deceased. Janie conveyed a sense of disconnect between the official named relationship and the role her grandmother played in her life. She remarked, "My grandmother raised me from the time I was two years old. She was my legal guardian. She and I were very close. She was my mom. That's what she was. She was my mom." Here, Janie engaged in the communicative act of renaming the relationship so that her feelings more closely aligned with the emotion norms associated with the relation who died. In this act of renaming the social norm of associating greater feelings of grief with a mother than a grandmother becomes visible. Providing detail about the intimacy of the relationship was more common when bereaved workers were describing the death of a loved one who fell outside the nuclear family.

Billy's narrative offered another example of how participants' communicatively worked through the tension between the prescribed relations one may grieve and feelings about deceased individuals who fall outside the policy. Billy's feelings over the death of his wife's cousin exemplify this theme. Billy shared his conclusions:

I think that ya know rather than basing [the bereavement leave policy] upon relationships, ya know, the immediate family, I think they should look deeper into that relationship itself. If all of the people are dead and only a cousin is alive that cousin becomes the immediate family. You can't look at the tree and say that that's the only limb on the tree. Ya know, when there's

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another tree next to it that's the closest living relative that becomes the, ya know what I mean. Uh maybe a substance over form ya know. We're looking at form when we should be looking at substance. I think that they outta take a deeper look at that and in the case of my wife, uh no they should'a said no uh that's an immediate relative. That's the only living relative there. And she is the executor of the estate there should be no question as to whether he [the employee] gets five days it should be immediate because that's substance over from. We're gonna look at form. Oh well the mother is dead, the father is dead, the brothers are dead, the sisters are dead, there's no wife involved. Wait a minute, who's the closest? Oh the cousin, and she's also the executor? Well bingo there's the immediate family. So I think they have to take a close look at that. That is totally wrong.

Billy had been intimately involved with the death of his wife's cousin. He talked about needing time to grieve and help his wife handle all of the affairs. As Billy recounted his experience he articulated a conflict between the norms for who we grieve and his feelings about the death of his cousin-in-law. Billy asserted a new way of thinking about defining who is covered by the organizational policy when he offered the notion of "substance over form"—which emphasized the nature of the existed relationship as opposed to the cultural expectations for a given relationship. In addition, he surfaced the arbitrary nature of standardized policies and the complexity that emerges when organizations attempt to define the nature of relationships.

Alexandra's Case: Confronting Exclusions in the Policy

Describing general approaches to articulating dissatisfaction with the formal policy offers insight into common themes and patterns in participants' experiences. An in-depth example, in contrast, provides a more detailed view on the experience of how confronting exclusions in an organization's bereavement leave policy. The authorial choice to include an expanded individual

account offers greater insight into the challenges that many individuals shared. Additionally, in providing longer excerpts, I attempt to honor the integrity of unique participants' voices. Excerpts from Alexandra's interview have appeared previously, however I'll provide additional context on her situation. I made the decision to write this case in the first person in effort to maintain the flow of her narrative as it was in the interview. Where possible I have written the excerpt using words and phrases she selected. I differentiate her voice from mine using quotation marks for the excerpts that are exactly as she spoke them.

I had been working in a mental health department of a government organization for a few months when my partner's mother, Penny, died. I wasn't sure about how people would react to my same-sex marriage so I wasn't overly vocal about "my partner being female." "And I'm not the kind of person that talks very much about it. Now I have a picture of my partner here in my office, but I don't know who knows and who doesn't. Certainly the people who are closest to me do, and the people who I talk to on my team. But I don't know how far that ripples out kind of thing." I was uncertain about how the organization, specifically Human Resources, would respond to my request for bereavement leave because "there are no policies in place that support us, so we don't have domestic partner benefits." When Penny died and I needed to request time off "I asked about a bereavement policy via email. Because I always do that stuff via email because I want to get something in writing back. And what I got in writing back was that it applied to these categories– and in bold – was the word '**only**'. Well that's not the way it shows up in print in the staff manual. The word only is not bolded. And it was clear that it had been cut and pasted and altered from the staff manual. And so I was like… what do I do with it? I wasn't sure if I should confront her on it, if I should go to my boss on it." The policy we had gave us three days of paid leave. "You get three days which I

think is typical. Sort of to be expected. If you get anything, you get your three days. Which, of course, if it's a traumatic event that's nowhere near enough time. But for us to zip out there for a long weekend, it was actually sufficient. But this '**only**' thing was a little bit suspect."

So the relations that were covered by the policy were "father, mother, and it lists brother, sister, in-laws as part of that. But technically, Penny wouldn't have fallen under that category if you want to be legalistic about it. And I believe that was the point of the email. And I don't know for absolute certain– and it was so weird to me. And it was like, oh God, what kind of a place did I come to work?" At that point I decided to talk to one of my co-workers about it. I showed her the manual and then showed her the email pointing out the difference in the word only. "And I said, 'Okay. Why do you suppose [the HR representative] altered it?' My co-worker tried to assure me that the HR representative was really sweet and probably didn't mean anything by it, and that she might not be secure in her position because she was also new. But, "I'm like– so I'm still trying to understand if this would happen if had been somebody else who had– who was legally married. And I'm still not convinced that it would have. I decided to sleep on it, and the next day my co-worker stopped by and said "Okay, now I'm really angry. I think you're right. I think it's bullshit."

But I had to figure out what I would do. "And I eventually decided that I was going to behave as I behave in my normal life. And for me, I felt like I fit in this policy and if she wanted to make an issue of it fine… But I felt like I sorta also wanted to know what's going to happen as if I just behave as if this is normal. So I decided not to even mention it to my boss. And I just turned my timesheet in which we have to turn in…I marked it as bereavement…And nobody said a word. But I was waiting. I was like, 'what's gonna happen?' And nothing happened, which is, I think, how it should be. But I also don't feel like

there's any resolution because of course, there's no change in the policy. But I also feel like, well if it's really all-good then change the policy. Why are we acting as if it's good? Why don't you just say it is?" In the end, I'm thankful that I was able to take three days bereavement because I didn't have enough vacation at that point. It was nice to have this special chunk of time to be able to use in these situations. "But I think the definition of what those situations are is– doesn't work for everybody. I'm sure there are other people in this building it doesn't work for, for reasons that are different than mine. I don't know what they are, but I'm pretty sure I'm not the only one."

Alexandra's story provided a detailed account of one person's struggle over the exclusion of particular relations. In the segment, Alexandra endeavored to sort through meanings in the content of the policy and in the actions of the human resource representative implementing the policy. As she talked about her efforts to understand the situation she walked a tightrope between the organizational message and her own interpretation. There was an underlying awareness that the benefits that applied to most employees didn't always apply to her; but at the same time she seemed cautious about assuming her loss was excluded from the policy. Alexandra's desire to consider and understand the messages written between the lines hinted at an ongoing effort to sort out her place in terms of organizational policy and work life. In some ways, when Alexandra was faced with the amended bereavement leave policy, her difference in the organizational setting became more visible causing her to reflect on how and if she "fit" in the organization. Later in the interview Alexandra asserted a belief that what is needed is "equality at the [federal] level, in writing and in policy, in order for it to actually cover everybody." Despite her strong position, if we examine her story, she is somewhat tentative in her evaluation of the policy.

Alexandra indicated that she wanted to participate in the interview in order to share her experience with the policy and her concerns about exclusionary practices that are imbedded in narrow definitions of family. It is interesting then that her approach to speaking out against the organization and the policy are somewhat mild. Notice how Alexandra indicated that three days was not enough time, but brushed the issue aside as "typical" and "to be expected." At the end of the excerpt Alexandra tempered her reproach of the organization and the human resource representative and fore grounded her gratitude at having being granted the time off—even though the issues of equality and difference were not dealt with directly. What I want to highlight in this segment is how Alexandra discursively navigated a vacillation between self-examination (am I having the right reaction) and organizational-examination (is the organization doing the right thing). In her narrative and in her conversation with her co-worker, Alexandra voiced (to an extent) the possibility that what counts as legally defined family is not inclusive or representative of the relations we grieve.

Reasoning through the Organization's Position

In the previous section I outlined the general themes in employees' complaints about organizational bereavement leave policy. I offered a detailed example to illustrate the complexity of working through a bereavement leave policy that implicitly or explicitly excludes the relation a person mourns. Now, I continue the previous line of thought and further examine how participants sift through their feelings of discontent with the policy and/or the organization.

A trend toward explanation and exemption surfaced as bereaved employees talked through their reflections on policy. It was common for participants to offer critiques of policy or describe the ways a policy did not work for them. However, these criticisms were often followed by a reflective process whereby bereaved workers explained the motives underlying policy

which subsequently absolved the organization of making substantial changes in the content or practice of the policy. To explore this communicative practice of reasoning through feelings of dissonance in relation to bereavement leave I provide three examples and then discuss them in detail. I begin with a brief statement from Lisa who talked about how she felt three days was not enough time to plan a funeral or to deal with all that was going on after the death of her husband. Next, Kate described her thoughts on what was missing from the policy, namely provisions for support. Finally, Toni provides an exemplar of the tensions that arise and are mitigated in talk about improving bereavement leave.

Lisa: "[If I was going to change something I'd make the policy] longer than the three days, even if they could give you a week and then additional time if you needed it…But I know they don't have to give us anything."

Kate: "I think my understanding of the bereavement policy is just typically– is just the days allotted as time off. So I think it's standard. I guess I've never seen it anything more than standard. I think what has made a bigger difference to me is the supportive environment of my managers and the department and being able to accommodate my request. I think it's also because of what I've seen one of the gals on my team go through that if you didn't have any vacation time three days isn't enough to deal with what she had to deal with, get some counseling or do whatever she needed to do. Some– I think by dealing with everything you need to deal with from a physical standpoint and an emotional standpoint, in order to do it really healthy and do it in a really healthy way, it doesn't– you can't do it in three days. You can't really do it in a week. You need to have additional support, whether that be people, hotlines… but there's never been anything mentioned here at work [about free hospice services]. So as a manager I feel obligated to make sure my staff knows of all the resources

out there for them, maybe just not just their HR department but in the community. So I would like– I think that our bereavement policy is standard. It's probably nothing. I really haven't compared it to others, but I could see that there would be benefits to looking at it and enhancing it.

Toni: "Overall, I think the bereavement policy is actually fine. While I don't think certainly that three days is enough time, what would be enough time? You know, you can't- the company has to keep going and a company can't just say, well, you're just off indefinitely and we'll call it bereavement. What kind of policy would that be? They have to have a policy. I think the policy they have is probably standard in all industries. They give you the little bit of time to go and be with your family, do what you have to do which isn't enough time, but I don't know that I personally feel they could give you enough time because I don't know what enough time means. So I think its fine. I think for the most part and other people that I know who have suffered through this same thing I think this company has been fairly supportive. I mostly see supervisors and departments and managers as being supportive of people and sympathetic to people and sending flowers and groups of people that people work with doing a little something like maybe when you get back they take you to lunch."

Upon conducting a close reading of these narratives a trend appeared toward absolving the organization of wrong-doing or responsibility to do more.

Lisa's statement demonstrated the casual practice of heading off a more detailed evaluation of policy by framing bereavement policy as a luxury. By categorizing bereavement leave as something extra that an organization does for employees it becomes difficult to critique the details or suggest that more should be done. Kate's excerpt gave visibility into a back-and-forth tension between wanting to offer suggestions, but not wanting to assert too much criticism.

She began by justifying the policy as standard, implying that standardization makes the policy beyond reproach in some ways. However, she did go on to build a case for including social support as part of the organization's response to bereaved employees. Kate drew upon her own experience with bereavement and in managing others who had taken bereavement leave to build her recommendations. Kate advocated for providing bereaved employees with a range of support, beyond paid time off. Suddenly, near the end of her response Kate backed off her suggestions. She resorted back to her previous reliance on the discourse of standardization and then undermined her suggestions for change by stating that she is not really qualified to offer recommendations since she hadn't researched the issue. Finally, in closing Kate finds a balance, mildly stating that policy review could be beneficial.

Toni's reflection had a different tone than Kate's. Kate devoted a good portion of her talk to asserting particular suggestions and providing evidence for increased support. Toni dedicated more attention to working through possible justifications for the organization's current policy. Throughout Toni's narrative she reasoned through the tension between her own experience of not having quite enough time off before she had to return to work, and her managerial support of organizational policy. When reflecting on the policy she quickly draws upon the discourse that organizations *must* have standardized policies in order to function, similar to Kate. In her defense of the bereavement leave policy she invoked the common discourse of "best practices" that is used to justify organizational decision-making. By this reasoning, the bereavement leave policy was acceptable (even desirable) because it was standard—it exemplified the way that bereavement leave benefits are done. Intertwined with this discourse is an assumption of fairness—that a bereavement leave policy, which is standard, is fair to all employees. A consequence of drawing upon discourses of standardization and fairness is that different

positions and experiences are erased. It becomes hard to consider the diverse needs of workers who have: limited vacation time; strained financial resources; reduced family support or significant care-giving responsibilities; loved ones outside of "immediate family" definitions; or those who practice various religious or cultural funeral/mourning rites.

In addition to calling on discourses of standardization, Toni invoked the impossibility of effectively dealing with (personal) emotions in the work place. The problem of "enough time" for family and for emotions was positioned outside the realm of organizational decision-making and the task of sorting through tensions related to returning to work was left to the individual. The idea that a nuanced alternative that better meets the needs of workers is un-knowable closed down the potential to continue a line of reasoning and discussion that might lead to new and innovative approaches. Interestingly, Toni concluded that the company had been supportive. However, the support she described is in the form of individually-based co-worker and supervisor support, and not in the form of policy. To a lesser degree than Kate, Toni conveyed the value of relational forms of support, which are typically outside current bereavement leave policies.

Individual Benefits to Absolving the Organization

Thus far my analysis of how participants talked about organizational policy focused on the topics of critique and the discursive practice of explaining the organization's position and exempting the organization from making change. Now, I consider this discursive practice from a different perspective, that of coping. Just as a focus on logistics and work emerged as a coping strategy for bereaved workers, reducing dissonance or conflict between the individual and the organization may be an approach to maintaining a coherent professional identity during bereavement.

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I have previously argued that bereavement is a time of disruption—both on a material and existential level. In addition, bereavement forces individuals into various degrees of identity disruption. For example the death of a child ruptures the identity of parent; the death of spouse dissolves the part-of-a-couple identity. In the midst of this unstable and jarring experience it is not surprising that individuals would desire a sense of stability in other aspects of their life. With work as a strong source of identity for Americans today, it is reasonable to expect that bereaved workers would endeavor to maintain their sense of work-self or professional identity through bereavement. As demonstrated, participants allotted significant time to describing their commitment to their organization, their work, and their image of professionalism. Often they went to great lengths to suppress their affective experiences in order to meet the professional standards they internalized. It appears possible that bereaved workers would endeavor to reflect positively on the organization to prevent a further disruption. This pattern of justification can be interpreted not only as silencing dissenting perspectives, but as bereaved individuals providing themselves with a way to be at peace with the organizational practice. After 25 years with the organization, it is not surprising that Toni would endeavor to defend the company she had devoted her career to.

Consider Kelly's remarks following our discussion of her desire for more time off after the death of her grandmother. Kelly stated:

Umm, I didn't want to come back…I well yeah I wanted at least a couple more days, but um again, I just felt like I was neglecting my work. So I just came back and jumped in, and like I said, just tried to keep my mind off of it. Ya know and I would avoid, avoid talking about it because I would get emotional…And it is it's hard to come to work because I mean I don't know if it depends on who passes, or it's just hard… But I felt- [the project is under a lot of

deadlines] big time, yea, I think that was part of it to…my main thing was, we have deadlines,

um I was chosen, they're watching me, and I felt I had obligation to do well.

Kelly went on to say that the pressure she felt to return to work was not pressure from the

organization or her supervisor, but pressure she put on herself. Two things are accomplished in

Kelly's account of her return to work. First, Kelly took ownership of the decision to return to

work before she was ready and absolved the organization from the responsibility of providing

extended time off for bereavement leave. Second, Kelly affirmed the professional identity she

described throughout the interview—an employee with a strong work ethic, commitment to the

project, and a willingness to subordinate the self to the larger goals of being a professional

worker.

The broader theme that emerged in relation to policy was a desire for a sense of

resolution or peace around the experience. This often took the form of supporting the

organization, but it could also take the form of resistance. Bereaved workers who did not find

contentment with the organization's approach to bereavement engaged in passive resistance like

scaling back their work effort or more active resistance such as attempting to make changes in

the policy or resigning.

Participants' tendency to explain and justify the current organizational approach to

bereavement functionally privatized the tensions that arose with regard to navigating leave.

Essentially, the burden of stress over not having enough time, being excluded from the policy, or

feeling like the loss was not validated, was an individual problem, not an organizational one.

However, as the narratives indicated there are certainly real consequences for organizations even

if the cause remains hidden. Feelings of dissatisfaction and resentment led workers to reduce

their workload and even leave the organization. The personal and professional consequences of a

policy that does not truly support employees may be hidden or marginalized, but the unspoken

consequences are felt by the organization over time. The insights offered here indicate that more

attention should be devoted to understanding the complex needs of bereaved individuals at work.

Additionally, new approaches toward bereavement policy could consider how to offer variety

and flexibility to better support organizational members.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

"I told myself that I wasn't gonna be in denial about my feelings, that the only

way that I'm gonna get through this is to be raw, and allow myself to experience

that whenever, wherever, as long as it wasn't too inappropriate"

(Nicole, corporate worker).

As Nicole talked about returning to work after her sibling's suicide she voiced a complex narrative where she endeavored to balance the affective and professional or organizational expectations that intersected in her experience with bereavement. The passage above exemplifies a core theme that surfaced in this project—that bereaved workers are doing what they can to respond to a difficult situation. Nicole placed the goal of "getting through this" at the heart of her description of dealing with bereavement at work. This idea of getting through, overcoming, and moving forward resounded through participants' talk about grief. Rather than generating narratives laden with deeply emotional descriptions of grief, the interviews yielded stories about how people survived—of how grief was dealt with as a practical problem to work through.

Participants' descriptions of dealing with loss were certainly not void of emotion. What surfaced was a picture of bereavement that revealed practical and affective elements of the experience, and how the practical and emotional intersected with one another. As is illustrated in Nicole's statement, one way that bereaved workers described affective experiences was in relationship to others. For example, people negotiated others' responses to grief-related emotions, professional expectations, and organizational norms. The quote above highlights how the practical and affected elements of bereavement occurred on a continuum where employees worked to find their own level of comfort with how they would act at work after the death of a

loved. Being bereaved at work meant addressing the practicalities of moving forward, the emotional experiences of loss, interactions with others, and perceptions of professional behavior.

In concluding this study I reflect on the themes that emerged in workers' descriptions of their experiences with bereavement and work. I consider how patterns in the narratives were articulated through talk about grief, work, occupation, and professionalism. This study revealed the complexity of bereavement at work by making visible an overlooked experience—negotiating grief at work. This project gathered narratives from workers who had taken bereavement leave across a variety of organizational and occupational settings. The individuals who participated in this project represented diverse experiences in the following categories: types of death and relationship to the deceased; levels of organizational hierarchy; religion/spirituality; race and ethnicity; and gender/sexual orientation. Participants' accounts of grief demonstrated how work could be a productive or detrimental resource for coping, even with personal and emotional life experiences.

A communication perspective on this topic directed my attention toward the narrative descriptions of how people worked through bereavement. I was not focused on reports of internal emotional states, but rather, on how individuals talked about their experience: the discursive strategies used in working through grief; descriptions of social interactions that were relevant to their reactions to bereavement; and the discourses that surfaced in the talk. In addition, I was attentive to the ways that particular communicative practices potentially enabled or constrained the possibilities for responding to grief at work. In the analysis, I explored the communicative choices that individuals made in talking about their experience. For example, I looked at how participants chose to talk about logistics as a central aspect of what it meant to be bereaved. I also explored how they communicatively constructed a space for emotion and empathy at work

by justifying interaction rules which suggested that peers and supervisors should display compassion and support. Through a careful exploration of the implications of participants' talk about their experience, I created an opening for further discussion about the consequences of particular communication practices and the discourses used to depict experiences of grief at work.

This chapter begins with a discussion of how employees described their experience with bereavement as a practical problem to overcome. The findings from this project suggest a need for a shift in how we view the experience of bereavement and expectations for coping methods. What surfaced was a picture of resilience among bereaved workers and an individual and creative approach to getting by or moving forward after a loss. Next, I consider the implications of how bereaved workers talked about their emotional experiences at work and how they communicated with others about their experience. Through the interviews, individuals described various expectations for themselves and others which created a framework for thinking about the management of grief-related emotions and support at work.

In summary, bereaved workers' narratives about how they experienced and navigated grief across personal and professional spheres have implications for how we think about modern experiences of grief, the consequences of gendered discourses about the relationship between public and private spheres, and the relevance of professional expectations for handling emotional experiences. The themes and findings from this project also surface a practical need to rethink the popular best-practices approach to organizational bereavement policy in order to more fully address the complex picture of bereavement. In this chapter I discuss the conclusions and limitations of this study and provide recommendations for future research in this area.

Descriptions of Bereavement: Avoidance, Coping, and Resilience

In beginning this project I explored grief as a social phenomenon. The literature described how social, cultural, and organizational norms and practices have shaped the meaning and experience of grief in various societies throughout time. With the idea that work may play a relevant and largely unexplored role in bereavement in mind, I asked the question: How do bereaved workers describe their experience with bereavement in relation to work? In addition to providing insight into experiences of grief and worklife, the narratives analyzed for this project also offered a picture of responding to the death of a loved one in general. A significant pattern in the analysis was that bereavement was, in many ways, talked about as a practical problem.

To interpret this finding I first considered traditional perspectives on grief which paint a picture of loss as a traumatic event that requires a Freudian-style approach to working through grief (Stix, 2011). The traditional view on grief indicates that individuals must actively process of grief in order to resolve feelings of loss and move forward. In line with this view is the argument that organizational and social taboos around death can promote death-avoidance and lead to disenfranchised or stifled grief—which are said to have negative consequences on the resolution of grief (Lindemann, 1944; Rees, 2001). However, in contrast to what the literature would suggest, employees in my study seemed to be doing well despite avoidance-style behaviors; they described how focusing on practicalities and their jobs helped actually them to move forward. Through the analysis I found that a focus on logistics was engaged as a type of coping strategy that enabled individuals to create a sense of balance between the ambiguity and emotionality of grief and the ability to control events and one's own situation. This finding challenges conventional wisdom about the nature of grief, the necessity of active grief work, and

contributes to modern research, which suggests that people naturally find ways to cope and move forward (Bonanno, 2009; Bonanno & Field, 2001).

Expert knowledge produced in the fields of sociology and psychology has long asserted the necessity of actively working through grief-related feelings (Lindemann, 1944; Rees, 2001; Stephenson, 1994). When bereaved individuals throw themselves into their work and find distractions that insulate them from death and the grief process they are said to be participating in denial or avoidance (Fulton & Owen, 1994). In the literature, such acts of denial and avoidance of grief are thought to have negative long-term emotional consequences (Rees, 2001). However, in the last decade few have voiced a call to revisit strategies for grieving previously dismissed as denial and thus nonproductive. Stroebe (2001) suggested that denial may not necessarily stifle the grief process. Stroebe argued that we need to devote more attention to considering the diverse constructive practices that individuals appropriate, including the types of avoidance that help a person work through their grief.

One of the primary themes articulated by participants in this study was that bereavement was an experience shaped largely by logistical activities. Rather than expressing dissatisfaction with being busy, many participants went a step further and described how the ability to focus on tasks muted their pain and helped them cope with their loss. The ability to actively manage activities and accomplish goals provided grieving individuals with a sense of purpose and agency in the midst of uncertainty and significant life disruption. Taking control of concrete tasks had a grounding effect and facilitated external connection as opposed to becoming overwhelmed by existential feelings of fear, uncertainty, sadness, or remorse. Participants' belief that directing attention toward logistics and work responsibilities mitigated their grief expands our

understanding of how individuals can empower themselves to discover diverse coping

mechanisms that work in a particular time and local environment.

A focus on work provided a valuable respite from the stress and uncertainty of grief that

ultimately helped some participants move forward. One approach for coping with the messiness

of grief-related feelings such as uncertainty, sadness, ambivalence, and regret, was for

participants to direct their attention toward work-related tasks. Avoiding emotional conversations

at work was described as a useful strategy for protecting oneself from slipping into an emotional

state that would be difficult to recover from. Participants recounted strategies for distancing

themselves from what they deemed to be too deep an emersion into the emotionality of grief.

Strategies included physical separation from people who might want to talk about their loss,

pretending to be fine by smiling to continue with normal daily interactions, and mentally

distancing themselves from painful conversations or interactions (i.e. mentally going somewhere

else), managing emotional displays, and mitigating feelings of loss or sadness through various

distractions. All of these strategies, including a focus on work, were offered as helpful to the

individual in dealing with loss. The analysis of narratives in this study suggests that a focus on

work should not simply be classified as an act of denial, but rather represents a more complex

and potentially productive effort to cope during a difficult emotional time.

Research on resilience may offer a framework for expanding how we conceptualize what

counts as productive coping. Stix (2011) described the increasingly popular study of resilience as

a new perspective on how individuals cope with trauma and difficult situations. The fundamental

idea behind resilience is that people have the ability to bounce back after significant stress or

strain in a relatively short period of time. In the field of behavioral science, Bonanno (2009) has

argued that extended mourning can be detrimental to individuals. In fact, he found that human

beings demonstrate many creative and productive strategies for coping that would traditionally be classified as denial. Strategies such as avoiding negative thoughts or emotions, positive self-talk, and laughter all seem to actually help people develop resilience (Stix). The findings in this study support new research on bereavement and resilience that create space for diverse coping methods. The analysis indicated that practical accounts of individuals' lived experiences offer a valuable alternative to expert knowledge that classifies strategies such as focusing on work as a detrimental form of avoidance or denial.

In drawing upon various strategies to find an individual approach that facilitated coping, including periods of avoidance, participants complicated the accepted view that attention should be directed toward actively processing grief to avoid long-term emotional consequences. This pattern suggests a need for future research in fields that explore bereavement and coping such as sociology and psychology. Additionally, the benefits that bereaved individuals assign to diverse coping methods, including a focus on the practicalities of moving forward, have practical implications for professional counseling work. If grieving individuals are given license to seek out their own best methods for coping, even through a degree of avoidance, it may reduce the pressure of trying to work through grief according to expert knowledge and best practices based on traditional wisdom.

Recently, in the field of organizational communication, Buzzanell (2010) argued that resilience is developed through communicative and symbolic interaction. Studying processes of resilience has the potential to generate new knowledge about how individuals overcome adversity in and outside of organizations. The patterns of talk about getting through bereavement in this project suggest that bereaved workers are actively engaging in processes of resilience where they develop and discover their own best methods for coping with the death of a loved

one. In some cases, organizational tasks and relationships may be a valuable resource for cultivating resilience.

Considering the Emotional Aspects of Bereavement at Work

The second research question guiding this project inquired about employees descriptions of how they acted and interacted at work after the death of a loved one. As indicated in the opening of this chapter, employees responded practically and emotionally. Based on the narratives in this project, work offered many opportunities for employees to engage in practices to mitigate emotional experiences and direct attention toward work while in the office. For example bereaved workers described the following types of behaviors after returning to work: avoiding personal discussions about their experience; acting positive and upbeat even if they were feeling sad; trying not to dwell on grief-related emotions and seeking out distractions; containing emotional displays; and generally attempting to limit how grief appeared at work. One interpretation of these behaviors is that they represent communicative practices that promote resilience.

As Buzzanell (2011) indicated, downplaying negative feelings and foregrounding positive emotions can be a useful communicative strategy for dealing with tragedy and challenges. Invoking or portraying positive emotions also provided a means for bereaved workers generate a sense of routine and normalcy. Talk about getting back to life as normal often accompanied a subtle vision of a time when the individual would no longer feel a weight or stress associated with the death of a loved one. Participants' descriptions of their efforts to control their emotional experiences were, in some cases, connected to a desire to promote the health of oneself and others. These narratives painted a picture of self-preservation and of relationship maintenance, which they believed would help them move forward. Engaging in

communicative practices that allowed the bereaved individual to move through their workdays without indulging grief was as one way that participants worked through bereavement.

The tendency toward avoiding and managing emotion and using work as a distraction from grief is also open to other interpretations. It is possible that participants' descriptions of how they responded to grief in the workplace represent the potential for work to shape how people engage with other aspects of life. Organizational communication research has argued that the increasing role that organizations play in our everyday lives has implications that should be examined (Deetz, 1992). For example, the pattern of "escaping to work" to cope with (or avoid) the complexities of personal life (Hochschild, 1997; Tracy, 2000a) is a phenomenon that has been critiqued. Similar to critiques of the detrimental effects of denial in the bereavement literature, organizational communication research indicates that there are potentially negative consequences that can arise from using work as a resource for dealing with other aspects of life.

Research question three asked specifically about the relationship between professional identity, work norms and values, and descriptions of emotion at work. In analyzing the narratives, there was a connection between descriptions of what it meant to be professional and controlling or containing the personal at work—included grief-related emotions. The analysis suggested that self-directed emotion management is occurring across a wide range of non-service work environments—largely influenced by individuals' conceptions of professionalism. This finding extends research on emotion management by looking at how workers manage emotion in various contexts. What is particularly interesting is this study is how organizational, professional, and individual expectations intersect in employees' descriptions of why and how they responded to feelings of grief at work. Through the narratives we get a sense for the complexity of emotion

management as a process that individuals may engage in to benefit or protect self and others, but also out of a sense of responsibility to meet professional or organizational norms.

Through descriptions of professionalism bereaved workers invoked a boundary between their work lives and their personal lives. The notion of a public/private boundary provided a resource for individuals to make sense of how to act at work after a death. At the most simplified level, personal emotion was out of place at work. Individuals subsequently endeavored to align their behaviors with their sense of professionalism by managing affect and emotional displays. It appeared that reaffirming one's professional identity was an important aspect of responding to loss for individuals in this study. This pattern supports research on the importance of identity work during bereavement (Hastings, 2006; Toller & McBride, 2008). In addition, affirming a coherent sense of self by reinforcing particular identities can be understood as a process for constructing resilience (Buzzanell, 2011). In this analysis, discourses of professionalism, rationality, and productivity intersected to support a preferred image of self that could productively respond to loss by maintaining a sense of professional and emotional control. The effort to (re)establish a confident self by anchoring oneself to their work identity may be a valuable process for bouncing back or building resilience.

However, an additional consequence is the potential to reproduce images of a non-emotional professional and a rational work environment. It is possible then, that how workers respond to bereavement and invoke discourses of professionalism to make sense of emotional experiences may contribute to resilience while simultaneously constraining the range of possibility in the experience. What is clear is that the narratives demonstrate that emotion management is a core element of workers' return to work after the death of a loved one. What remains uncertain following this analysis is what motivates the management of emotion. This

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project offers descriptions of the communicative practices that bereaved workers engage in to mitigate emotional experiences, but we cannot see all the consequences of these practices. What we can observe is that the motivations and practices around emotion management following bereavement are complex and lead to various and contradictory outcomes. For example, one possibility was for workers to report a sense of resentment and sadness in addition to feeling disconnected from the organization and other workers. On the other hand, there were also descriptions of how the management of emotion via the distractions of work made it easier to move through the hard times. The motivations, processes, and consequences of emotion management following bereavement are all topics for further study.

Interaction Rules and Social Support at Work

Emotion management emerged as one key aspect in participants' descriptions of their return to work after a loss. Another related phenomenon was the recounting of an expectation for reciprocity from coworkers. Stories that criticized rude or insensitive coworkers and highlighted the benefits of individuals who offered emotional or practical support wove together to create a picture of interaction rules for responding to bereaved individuals at work. This pattern provided insights that responded to the second research question which asked about how individuals talked about their expectations for communicating about their experience with loss. From the study we can see that bereaved individuals had expectations of themselves and of others regarding communication practices during bereavement. Ultimately, this analysis supports the idea that social support is an important element of coping with loss (Doka, 1989; Charles-Edwards, 2009) and that work is an important site of social support for bereaved individuals (Gibson, Gallagher, & Jenkins, 2010).

Stories about organizational members who failed to offer support to bereaved employees depicted the important role that coworkers have in workers' experiences with grief at work. Through the accounts of colleagues' insensitivity or avoidance, bereaved workers voiced their emotional reactions to the lack of support. For example, the narratives contained descriptions of feeling angry, sad, disappointed, offended, hurt, stressed, depressed, shocked, and isolated. However, in offering a normative description of the offending interactions (or absence of interaction) participants validated their feelings of discontent and asserted their right to be supported—without placing themselves in the vulnerable position of seeking or needing support. Rather, they were offended because support was something that *should* be offered, not that it was necessarily needed.

The communicative practice of asserting interaction rules offered a mechanism for maintaining strength and for protecting oneself from the ramifications of a lack of support. By asserting a necessary connectedness between workers and accountability for compassion and empathy at work, these narratives offered an alternative to traditional notions of a separation between work and employees' personal lives. This practice can be viewed as contributing to building communication networks that offer the support that is necessary to build resilience. It is interesting to note that women in this study voiced this practice. Men also talked about their expectations for communicating with others about their experience. However, the accounts offered by men in this study took a different tone—social support was a pleasant surprise rather than an expectation for professional interactions. This pattern may indicate that expectations around social support are gendered, or that expectations for emotional connection at work facilitate the gendering of social support. It is also possible that expectations for interaction at

work following bereavement are gendered. The pattern that existed in this study suggests this might be an area for further research.

Regardless of how social support was described, as an expectation or a welcome benefit, it was clear that interactions with organizational members mattered. Participants who did not feel supported reported the following responses: increased apathy toward their work; a conscious effort to do the minimum out of resentment; and thoughts or plans to leave the organization. These findings reaffirm research asserting that employees who experience a lack of organizational or coworker support often show signs of reduced commitment and contribution to their work (Charles-Edward, 2009). In contrast, positive feelings of connectedness and descriptions of relational connection and support were associated with tales of how supportive workers eased the transition back to work and facilitated healing; improved work relationships; and increased feelings of loyalty to the organization. It appears that supportive behaviors and invitations to talk about the experience of loss, to whatever extent is desired, make a positive impact on the bereaved workers' experience (Charles-Edwards, 2009).

Difference in Balancing Bereavement

Intertwined with discourses of professionalism, work, and family are gender discourses (Kirby et al., 2003). Though not a primary focus of this project, gender politics are inextricably linked with constructions of the relationship between the public and private and the dominant discourses of rationality and emotion in organizations. Thus, it is valuable to consider how difference enters into the ways that individuals make use of various orientations to the public/private relationship during bereavement.

For the most part, men in this study most comfortably articulated a unified logic of separation. For example, they talked predominantly about the benefit of being busy and the ease

with which they managed grief-related emotions at work. In general, their talk showed little conflict in navigating the experience (this is not to say their grief was minimal or easy). The women I talked with showed greater mobility in drawing upon diverse and even competing discourses and logics. For example, Kate referenced organizational logics and practices for organizing her time in managing estate affairs and for making a case for a temporarily reduced workload. She also called upon discourses of care and community as she rethought her approach to managing her team after the death of her father.

Another way that some of the women engaged multiple discourses was to reinforce the separation of spheres while also selecting opportunities to blur the boundaries. In the narratives we saw an acceptance of a vision of the ideal worker as one who can be emotionally controlled but also heard alternative views about the acceptability of emotion and care at work. I note this difference, at the risk of being overly reductionist, because I believe it hints at differences in how individuals experience opportunity or limitations in constructing experience based on the discourses available to them. I raise this issue, not to assert that there was a significant gender difference in approaches to bereavement at work, but to suggest that individuals in organizations seem to experience varying degrees of pressure to conform to a traditional view of the rational professional. To ground this argument I'll state it more simply through further explanation.

Based on the individuals I spoke with, it appeared that people who align or identify with masculine organizational discourses could find balance in separation or by applying organizational values and practices to their personal experiences (public→private). Those who wish to fit the dominant worker ideal may also endeavor to gain stability or emotional relief from separation. In contrast, those who are othered or always/already outside the ideal worker model may potentially feel more freedom to assert difference, or on the other hand, even greater

pressure to conform to an ideal worker model. However, as was presented in this study, individuals do not simply fall into one of these categories by nature of their sex, race, or class. The extent to which a bereaved individual might align with these different orientations varies based on life experience and aspects of social identity such as gender, class, religion, organizational position, and others. Negotiating the relationship between work and life during bereavement is a complex phenomenon intertwined with gendered discourses of work, family, emotion, and professionalism, which deserves further attention.

One strength of this project is that it offers a range of voices speaking the nuance of their situated experiences. The participants in this study represented men and women from different races (28% non-white), more than five religions, aged between 25 and over 56, working across six different industries, and who had lost various relations from diverse causes. From this population of respondents we get a sense of how work-life issues, such as negotiating bereavement, are complicated when we expand the scope of research beyond upper/middle-class white women and corporate workers. This finding complicates current models of work-life issues by suggesting that the extent to which individuals reinforce or resist a separation between work and home (and rational versus emotional discourses) is highly situational and impacts organizational members in different ways based on their experiences and preferred images of self. Further research is needed to better understand the discourses that individuals draw upon to make sense of the relationship between the public and the private and how micro-practices function to enable or oppress to varying degrees.

The inclusion of participants from diverse occupations also contributes to advancing theorizing on how ideologies of public and private, particularly with regard to emotion, are shaped by occupational discourses. Noticeable differences between corporate workers and those

in the field of counseling indicate that occupational discourses become an important resource in individual's sensemaking about grief. Further, the opportunities for finding balance during the disruption of bereavement by blurring or constructing boundaries takes different forms as workers draw upon different occupational value systems. For example, mental health workers found value in blurring boundaries and calling on professional expert logics to work through their grief while also describing stress and constraint when the practical knowledge emerging from their lived experience conflicted with the expert knowledge of their field. This finding is significant in that it suggest a gap in the work-life literature and a need to explore how occupation impacts work-life issues and the nature of boundary work.

Implications for Work-Life Policy

Work-life studies have predominantly focused on policies and practices that apply to women and parents. This study expands the scope of work-life research to include a phenomenon that applies to all workers. While much attention has been devoted to researching the creation and implementation of maternity leave (see Ashcraft, 1999; Buzzanell, P., & Liu, M., 2005, 2007, for examples) bereavement leave has been largely overlooked. Kirby, Golden, Medved, Jorgenson, and Buzzanell (2003) argued that once policies are in place issues are often viewed as solved—the need successfully addressed. However, this kind of thinking prevents examination of how the tensions that exist around policy: the adequacy with which diverse values are represented, barriers to successful implementation, and how employees benefit (or don't) from the policy in place. This research explored bereavement leave as a significant work-life policy that has consequences for workers and the organization. By gathering narratives from employees who had taken time off work after the death of a loved one, the project examined the nuance of how policy was enacted, how individuals negotiated the policy, and how employees talked about

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returning to work after bereavement leave. This study treated the experience of bereavement as a complex phenomenon that is not solved or addressed by policy alone. This analysis showed that satisfaction with how organizations handle bereaved workers is related to the policies that are in place—but it is also about how those policies are implemented and enhanced by supervisors' support.

Through in-depth interviews with individuals from various occupational settings and with diverse experiences with loss, this study offers a more nuanced picture of how employees negotiate bereavement leave and the issues that arise. The emergent themes suggested that current approaches to standardized bereavement leave policy could do more to support grieving workers. Standardization and the discourse of best practices which surrounds bereavement leave policy appear to constrain the potential to develop creative approaches that would meet the unique needs of situated workers. There is the potential that bereaved workers' simultaneous critique and justification of the standardized policy reduces the opportunity for conflict to emerge in a way that would allow for open discussion about how policy could be better formed and implemented. Despite the communicative strategies participants employed to support bereavement leave policy, mentions of frustration and dissatisfaction offered insight into the extent to which policies are actually meeting the needs of employees.

Research suggests that organizations develop work-life policies such as bereavement leave as a way to promote worker satisfaction which will translate to into attitudes and behaviors that will serve the organization (Dulebohn et al., 2009; Harris & Fink, 1994). This study supports these arguments. Participants who reported a good experience with bereavement leave described feelings of gratitude toward the organization and increased loyalty. However, it was clear that satisfaction with the policy was connected more with how it was implemented than with the

content of benefits offered, which aligns with previous research (Dulebohn et al.). In particular, flexibility with both the content and procedure was a key element in satisfaction. Examples of flexibility in the policy included: the ability to supplement the formal policy with additional time off; managers who offered the maximum number of days regardless of the situation around the death (i.e. five rather than three days); and managers who helped relieve work stress by off loading work or with reassurance of job security.

In contrast to feeling positive about the policy based on flexible implementation, participants also talked about feelings of frustration and betrayal with regard to intractable bereavement leave policies or unsympathetic managers. For example, Garret talked about how upset he was that his nephew was not covered by his organization's policy—there was a point when he considered leaving his job because of this. However, when the owner made an exception to the policy and covered his time off his feelings changed. Current criticism of bereavement leave policy has argued that policy should be more flexible particularly with regard to the relations that are covered (Shellenbarger, 2000) and the amount of time off (Coy-Robinson, 2006). The participants in this study voiced these same desires for policy that can be customized to meet the needs of bereaved individuals who have very different circumstances surround their loss, family structure, travel needs, and coping or mourning process. Kirby et al. (2003) asserted that "empowerment would occur though a recognition that universal policies for work-family issues always leave someone out and that therefore, established policies do not go far enough to meet individuals' concerns" (p. 33). Further, they indicated that current approaches to policy formation lack creative approaches to incorporating diverse voices. This project draws upon diverse voices to assert that organizations could do more to acknowledge that, because not

all bereavement is the same, greater flexibility and customization would be valuable in creating policies that truly support bereaved workers.

An important aspect of moving toward responding to the individual and organizational needs that surface during bereavement is revealing the barriers that mitigate conflict which, if voiced, could assert a call for change. This study advances the goal of foregrounding the range of lived experiences in conversations about the role and effectiveness of bereavement policy. This project has not taken an instrumental approach to finding a solution or single best practice for bereavement leave. Rather, it attempts to highlight the complexity of the experience and the communicative practices that employees use as they navigate the many facets of being a bereaved worker.

The discursive process by which individuals in this study voiced tensions then moved to justify current policy is particularly important to understanding the complexity of how communicative practices can advance or hinder new creative approaches to work-life policy. From a critical perspective, the tendency to call upon dominant discourses best practices to justify a standardized policy closed down the opportunity to consider new and more inclusive approaches. However, the process of justifying the organizational practices served a purpose. Employees were able to avoid feelings of victimization and disconnectedness from their organization during bereavement—a time when additional uncertainty and disruption could be overwhelming. In this sense, the move to silence conflict gave the employee a sense of peace in controlling their reaction to the issue. What this project offers is a chance to engage the complexity of these situations and to honor the ways that bereaved individuals communicated about their experience. The contribution is not a call to emancipate bereaved workers from standardized policy—but to engage complexity in the study of work-life policy. A focus on how

particular ways of describing an experience can coincide to create opportunities and close down possibilities is useful to organizational communication research. This focus on communicative mechanisms for coping with conflicting feelings and complex affective situations at work advances the inclusion of diverse voices and experiences in organizational research and practice.

In light of the tensions and themes expressed by participants there are practical implications for improving bereavement leave policy. These recommendations are not presented as a "solution" but as approaches that might do more to honor the range of experience with bereavement. Themes in this study align with research, consultancy studies, and popular arguments about the need to expand how organizations conceptualize how bereavement is addressed at work (Gibson, Gallagher, & Jenkins, 2010; Sunoo & Sunoo, 2002). The prevailing approach of standardizing a bereavement leave policy constrained participants in a myriad of ways. Despite the fact that this constraint was experienced largely at the individual level, organizations are not exempt from the ramifications of inadequate policy creation and implementation. The most significant opportunity for improving organizational support for bereaved workers lies in extending bereavement policy benefits and practices to include empathy and flexibility in policy implementation and a supportive environment.

Hazen (2006) asserted that silence around death is detrimental to grieving workers and outlined how organizations might create dialog and facilitate support. She argued the following options would have material benefits for grieving workers: managerial expressions of sympathy and assistance in communicating the situation to others; coaching for co-workers on how to offer grief support; active listening; and increased awareness about grief. The findings from this study support these types of measures as a means to increasing the potential for support at work.

The participants I talked with widely confirmed a general lack of understanding and uncertainty about how to treat bereaved individuals. In fact, they highlighted their own feelings of uncertainty. Gibson, Gallagher, and Jenkins (2010) indicated that organizations could also offer training or materials to help bereaved employees prepare for their return to work with strategies to deal with co-workers reactions. Organizations and individuals would benefit from a more inclusive approach to bereavement geared toward support and not solely toward time off.

Sunoo and Sunoo (2002) summarized the mutual benefits of a policy that is supplemented with social support training, "Creating a workplace culture of compassion is not only a noble visions—it's an increasing labor-management imperative" (p. 392). As James and Friedman (2003) argued, grief costs organizations more than the financial burden of offering paid time off for bereavement leave. The costs of grief extend to turnover, reduced work effort, and generally less-committed employees. The unique finding from this analysis is that employees want to feel good about their organization, they are grateful when they receive organizational support, and they return the support they are given. For organizations and employees, there are benefits to expanding the type of bereavement support and the methods of implementation.

Limitations

This study contributes to our understandings of bereavement and the role of discursive strategies and communicative practices in making sense of grief. However, there are limitations to the current project related to methodological choices, demographic characteristics and size of the participant sample.

First, the kinds of questions that could be investigated were limited by methodological choices. As I began the analysis, I was inclined to think that accounts would be filled with stories

of struggle with emotional experiences, efforts to make sense of feelings in relation to feeling rules, and tensions in reconciling how, when, and where to feel grief-related emotions. In short, I expected to see the presence of dueling discourses vying for voice in the production of a bereaved subject. However, the interviews offered bereaved workers' reflections and re-tellings of their experience. In many cases the narrative was told from a position of distance (temporal and emotional). The interviews I conducted became a chance for participants to share a story they had not told and to construct that story in a coherent way—in a way that brought it all together for them and for me. The thematic interpretation of the data in this project acts as a first stage in exploring the phenomenon of grief at work with consideration of critical and poststructuralist concerns. The goal of the project was to begin with a careful reading of how individuals talked about their experiences and to consider the implications of their talk and discursive strategies for making sense of grief.

Given what I learned about the relationship between facework and bereavement, I am inclined to notice how the interview acted as an opportunity for the participants to continue to construct their preferred sense of self in the wake of the identity disruption that can accompany death. In general, the data offered stories that demonstrated a theme of commitment to professionalism and to work, rather than emotional struggle. Insights on the extent to which individuals engage in face work or discursively construct a (bereaved) worker identity through interactions would usefully advance research on bereavement. However, even with the selected method, this project could have gone further to consider the communicative practices of constructing worker identity through the interview process.

When setting up the study, I hoped to recruit a diverse sample with regard to the traits associated with the death, type of work, industry, and social demographics. In the end, the

sample fell short of my desired range of diversity. The participants represented a range of

bereavement scenarios as well as various work experiences. However, this study lacked broad

demographic diversity particularly with regard to race and class. Rees (2001) argued that:

> Most studies in bereavement are limited to conjugal loss in white, middle-class people and
>
> this leaves many serious gaps in our knowledge of bereavement, especially in the case of
>
> children, impoverished ethnic minorities, recent refugees and migrants (p. 183).

This study responded to this gap in the literature by including different experiences with grief.

However, participants who are not middle-class and are members of different minority groups

were underrepresented. This lack of significant diversity precluded me from engaging in a

critical feminist analysis about the differences that matter in experiences of bereavement at work.

Additionally, this study was constrained by my lack of experience conducting and

analyzing qualitative interview data. Upon reflection on the interview transcripts I wished I had

probed further and encouraged to participants to talk in greater depth about why they made some

of the choices they did, about the factors that enabled and constrained their situation, and about

their own reflections on their motivations and feelings. I found instances where rich insight about

underlying issues or emotions may have surfaced had I not moved on to the next question on my

list. Certainly, my ability to let the interview follow a natural flow and to probe the nuance of

affective experiences improved through the set of interviews as I gained experience. However,

my lack of expertise in conducting interviews created limitations in the type of data I was able to

collect. In addition, my ability to conduct a critical analysis and make critical claims was

hindered by the fact that this project represented my first effort at a critical study.

Next Steps: Recommendations for Future Research

The study's findings and limitations highlight several areas of future research. These include expanding grief studies to include the role of work in the process of coping, extending research on bereavement in organizations to include other types of loss at work, and building on research that explores how employees communicatively create resilience in the face of loss, stress, and other work-life issues.

Expanding Research on Coping and Work

As Fulton (1994) asserted, changes in modern society are transforming the ways in which people experience death and loss. Participants' emphasis on logistics and tasks as a relevant and even defining aspect of bereavement suggests that this often overlooked element may need more central attention. Certainly descriptive studies have revealed that responsibilities associated with a death are one of the many things bereaved individuals confront (Rees, 2001). However, the findings in this project suggest that logistics are not just an annoying piece of the puzzle. Rather, the implication is that the magnitude of logistics and practicalities materially structure the time immediately following a death.

The presence of the bereavement-as-logistics theme also raised the possibility that attending to practical responsibilities can be engaged as a coping mechanism or as a process of resilience. Stroebe (2001) argued that we need to devote more attention to considering the diverse constructive practices that individuals appropriate, including the types of avoidance that help a person work through their grief. As the narratives revealed, participants' focus on arrangements and even unrelated work or care offered a sense of respite. In many ways the distraction of being busy gave a reprieve from the tumultuous emotions that can surface during grief. However, in some ways this tendency matches patterns of denial or avoidance, which is

primarily described as detrimental in the grief literature. There is an interesting tension here between the benefits and consequences of distraction that should be further explored.

Overall, findings related to role of logistics in shaping bereavement contribute a jumping off point for more in-depth study, specifically on the value of busyness and distraction for coping. This line of research may usefully advance how individuals are counseled regarding coping strategies. Further, qualitative study in this area would help develop the body of practical knowledge produced about the variety of approaches to working through bereavement which could lead to a greater focus on cultivating resilience and enabling individuals to discover coping mechanisms that are best for their needs.

Additionally, I suggest new exploration of the consequences for families and communities, not just individuals, of particular coping strategies. Grief literature has primarily focused on the process for resolving grief for individuals and has given little attention to how others are impacted by bereavement processes. The tension between individual resilience and collective constraint raised a need for further study on how particular approaches to bereavement may have unintended implications for family, community, and even organizations. It is possible that when individuals find comfort or strength in drawing upon organizational logics that a particular discourse is perpetuated which may simultaneously constrain how others experience bereavement. The findings gathered here suggest a need to focus on the complexity of approaches to grief and to give greater consideration to grief work as it intersects with various spheres of life.

In addition to complicating research on coping strategies, the narratives in this project steer attention toward everyday experiences with death and loss. Much of the research on grief, especially in relation to organization studies, focuses specifically on traumatic loss and grief as

an overwhelming affective experience. Grief studies have tended to focus on specific populations of the bereaved, such as bereaved parents, or those who have lost a loved one to suicide or other "traumatic death." This project contributes to theories about bereavement by studying a diverse group of participants in terms of the relationship to the deceased and the cause of death. By broadening the participant population I was able to allow relevant differences to emerge and for other to fall into the background. Interestingly, talk about emotion at work varied little according to these traditionally "significant" factors (relation and type of death). Based on the stories conveyed for this study, greater attention should be devoted to exploring the everyday experiences of grief rather than focusing almost solely on traumatic grief. This type of work will enhance the nuance of the knowledge available as practitioners in organizations and the mental health field work to serve the needs of bereaved clients and employees.

Extending Work-Life Theory and Practice

Work-life scholars are well suited to expand research on the relationship between grief and coping, and to investigate the consequences that arise from various uses of work and organizational discourse. The body of feminist and critical organizational research on how power operates in and through organizational discourse provides a foundation for research on the work-life tensions that surface during bereavement. Further, I suggest that future studies build on this project by attending to work-life policies that apply to a range of organizational workers. Possibilities include other types of leave, particularly elder care. Projects that explore the complexity of policy development and implementation can be improved by increasing the range of needs and voices that are given consideration.

Academics and practitioners will benefit from exposure to diverse experiential knowledge as well as critical analysis of the outcomes of individuals strategies for negotiating

the personal at work. Kirby et al. (2003) argued that "communication can serve as a catalyst for empowerment" (p. 2) particularly in relation to negotiating arrangements for improved work-life balance. By extending research on the communication practices that enable bereaved workers (and others) to cultivate resilience we can shed light on new and subtle ways that work facilitates the ability to bounce back from life stresses like death and other losses. This line of research has the potential to contribute to the development of policies that better meet the needs of workers. Furthermore, a continued effort to understand how communicative practices around the personal at work enable and constrain employees, organizations, and families as interconnected elements is necessary to facilitate improved decision making about work and life.

Experiences with loss impact all aspects of our lives—personal, family, community, and work. This project endeavored to make visible and relevant the experience of loss in relation to worklife by interpreting the narratives of workers grieving the death of a loved one. In working through this project I noticed how participants referenced other types of loss in talking about their experience with a death. For example, one person talked about the impact of multiple losses—a move, the death of her father, and the death of John F. Kennedy Jr. In this case, not all were deaths of immediate family, but they all brought about feelings of loss. Others referenced various types of loss at different points in their lives, such as a divorce, a child moving away, and the death of a pet. Organizational communication research on bereavement offers an entry point for exploring the communicative practices workers engage when confronting other types of loss. Another opportunity for future research is exploration of the discursive practices surrounding the construction of loss and how various losses become validated or trivialized through organizational discourse and practice.

A final topic for future work-life research is the study of how spaces become coded as public or private during emotional life points. Conceptions of boundaries could be expanded to include the ways that workers construct home and work space across physical locations. For example, participants in this project often referred to the bathroom at work as a private space, within the public sphere of work, where they could indulge greater emotional expression and experience. In contrast, when entertaining family surrounding a funeral, it seemed the home became a kind of work-space that carried expectations for decorum and emotion management. Narratives portrayed the car as a kind of "true" private space where workers could have full emotional release without containment. I recommend that future work-life research consider this kind of messiness around boundary blurring and the communicative practices involved in the symbolic creation of public and private space.

Closing

The goal of this project was to contribute to our understanding of how bereaved workers navigate the experience of grief at work. My hope is that this study has illuminated the complexities and tensions around experiences of bereavement and navigating organizational policy. The brave voices of the participants who shared their stories revealed that grief has become an experience filled with practical, relational, and organizational tasks. The narratives conveyed a desire to persevere, keep it together, and manage vast personal and organizational responsibilities, indicating that bereaved workers would benefit from increased resources and support. This project provided a general picture of grief for workers today, but also raised critical questions about how experiences of bereavement may be gendered through talk; and how talk about grief at work may contribute to gendered organizational discourse and practices. Additionally, descriptions of various mechanisms for resilience offer new and interesting ideas

for thinking about how organizational members communicatively work through loss and find creative ways to persevere.

The analysis offered here indicated that current organizational practices are not fully addressing the diverse needs of bereaved workers. The general silence around grief and the ways that formal organizational policy mitigates productive conflict not only stalls our ability to investigate the nuance of bereavement in relation to work, but also precludes the development of new approaches for bereavement support both inside and outside organizations. I believe that the narratives shared for this study make a case for renewed interest in developing innovative and beneficial approaches to supporting bereaved individuals and their coworkers. I look forward to seeing this area of study grow toward the development of creative approaches to working through grief.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Email General

Friends & Family –

It's finally time for me to begin my dissertation research! For the dissertation I am studying how worker's experience grief over the loss of a loved one in relation to their work life. The following questions guide my study:

- What was it like to take time off for bereavement (funeral) leave? What was it like to return to work after bereavement leave?

- How do workers' experiences with loss influence their sense of who they are at work and at home?

- How does organizational life influence how workers understand the experience of grief?

***Right now I am trying to recruit people to participate in my study*.** That's where you come in! I am reaching out to individuals who have taken time off work to grieve for a loved one within the last few years. I want to talk to people who have had to negotiate grief and work in various industries and life situations.

How to Help: A brief summary is posted on my website and can be passed on to anyone who might be interested in participating in my study, or anyone who is willing to pass it onto their network of family and friends. http://web.me.com/janellbauer/Site/Dissertation.html (just copy and paste the link into your web browser if it doesn't automatically open)

How the Study Works

The study will take the form of informal interviews or small group discussions lasting between 30-50 minutes. I will be conducting interviews in California and Colorado throughout September and November. My goal is to have at least 50 interviews!

Thank you so much for your time on this. As you know, this research is deeply personal to me and I am committed to the highest standards of research integrity and confidentiality. Ultimately, I hope to use this study to reach out to organizations as they develop bereavement leave policies and strive to accommodate bereaved workers in a way that truly benefits individuals and their families.

~ janell

Appendix B: Recruitment Email Academic Contacts

Hello everyone –

As many of you know, I am studying how workers experience grief in relation to their work life.

Right now I am trying to recruit people to participate in my study and I'm hoping you can help.

I am reaching out to individuals who have taken time off work to grieve for a loved one within the last few years. I want to talk to people who have had to negotiate grief and work in various industries and life situations.

How to Help: A brief summary is posted on my website and can be passed on to anyone who might be interested in participating in my study, or anyone who is willing to pass it onto their network of family and friends. http://web.me.com/janellbauer/Site/Dissertation.html (just copy and paste the link into your web browser if it doesn't automatically open)

How the Study Works

I will be conducting informal interviews and small group discussions, lasting between 30-50 minutes, in California and Colorado throughout September and November. My goal is to have at least 50 interviews!

Thank you so much for your time on this. As you know, this research is deeply personal to me and I am committed to the highest standards of research integrity and confidentiality. I hope you will be comfortable referring people.

~ janell

Appendix C: Recruitment Email for Contacts to Forward

Dear [XXXX group],

A friend is doing some very interesting research on bereavement and work, and would value the chance to meet with people who are willing to share their stories. Janell lives and attends graduate school here in Boulder, so the interviews should be easy to arrange. Please see below for details and website. If you or someone you know would like the chance to share their experience, please contact Janell at: janell.bauer@colorado.edu

Best,

[YOUR NAME]

Participants Needed for Important Research on Grief and Work.

My dissertation research explores how people experience grief in relation to their work lives. I am seeking assistance in answering the question: ***How do employees simultaneously negotiate bereavement leave, the responsibilities of work, commitment to family, and grief over the loss of a loved one?***

This research was inspired by my own experiences after the deaths of my parents, so I understand how difficult loss can be. My goal is to work toward improving the ways that organizations support bereaved employees.

How it Works

Participants will take part in a 30-50 minute interview where we talk informally about your experience. The interview will cover topics such as taking time off for bereavement, and the return to work. You can learn more at http://web.me.com/janellbauer/Site/Dissertation.html.
 If you may be interested in participating, please contact me at janell.bauer@colorado.edu.

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Thank you for your participation in this study. As I mentioned in the email, I am interested in learning about how organizational members handle death in relation to their work.

General [5 minutes]

Help me get a feel for what your workplace is like and what your work means to you.

- What do I need to know about your work and your work environment to better understand your story? [tell me about your work environment]

- Tell me a little about the people who are important to you , or who play a significant role, in your worklife?

Organizational/Occupational identification [12 minutes]

1. Describe how work fits into your life. How important is your work to who you are or how you see yourself?

2. Tell me about your organization. How do you feel about working at your org? Are there things about your organization that make you proud to work there? If so, please describe.

3. How concerned are you about the overall success of your organization?

4. Has there been a time that you were willing to go "above & beyond" to help your organization? Please describe?

Talking about Grief [20 minutes]

1. Please tell me about the person who [passed/died], your relationship with them, and the circumstances. (Who was it, how long ago…)

2. Please describe the time when you learned that your _____ had [died/passed away].

   a. You may share anything that comes to mind. Concerns, fears, hopes, anxieties, financial demands …

Optional Follow up Questions

3. What were some of your responsibilities related to the death?

    a. What were your primary concerns?

4. Describe how you attended to the needs of others? How did this impact your experience of grief?

5. How did your religious/spiritual beliefs shape your experience?

6. What kinds of resources did you draw upon to help guide you through this time? (Friends/family support, Hospice or counseling, Self-help books, Other?)

    a. Please describe the things that were most helpful to you during this time?

    b. Were there things that were unhelpful or harmful to you? If so, please describe.

Work

7. Describe how you shared the news of your loss at work.

    a. Who did you tell [and how]?

    b. Describe their reactions and response.

8. What immediate concerns arose related to your work?

Policy

9. What is your organization's policy on bereavement or funeral leave?

10. Describe your experience using the formal leave time?

    a. Who did you go to, describe that experience.

    b. How much time did you request, how much did you take?

11. What were your feelings about the amount of time off provided by the organization?

    a. Did you try to negotiate additional time off? If so, describe that process

    b. Did you have the option of unpaid leave to extend your time off?

12. Overall, how would you evaluate your experience with your company's formal policy and with your interactions with your manager, team?

13. Can you talk about what it was like to be away from work for this period?

    a. If you worked from home while on leave, can you describe that experience?

Returning to Work [15 minutes]

1. Describe your experience of returning to work.

    a. Tell me about any conversations you had with your manager, colleagues, and/or subordinates about expectations for your return or special requests that you had.

    b. Was there any discussion of adjusting your workload or responsibilities for a time? If yes, please describe. If no, was this satisfactory to you?

2. In general, did you have sense of how you were "supposed" to be?

    a. Where did those expectations come from?

3. Often people feel they need to express grief carefully. Can you describe an instance when you felt this way at work?

4. Has your experience with grief has affected your work experience and/or work relationships? How? Please elaborate.

    a. How did this affect your work with your supervisor?

    b. How did this affect your work with your team or work group?

5. Were there instances where people you worked with offered support? If so, will you share an example?

    a. Were there instances where people you worked with provided inadequate support? If so, will you share an example?

6. In reflecting on your experience with bereavement and work, would you say that anything has changed with regard to your feelings about work or your organization?

7. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about your experience?

REFLECTION: Off Tape

1. I'd like you to reflect on the interview experience for a few minutes. What did it feel like to talk with the researcher about your loss in relation to work?

   a. Would you describe yourself or your experience differently in retrospect?

   b. Was there anything that caused you to think differently about your experience?

   c. Were there things the interview brought up that you hadn't considered before?

2. Is there anything that you would like to clarify or expand on?

APPENDIX E: Interview Reflection Prompt (Optional)

Working through Grief: Understanding Grief Through the Narratives

of Bereaved Employees

Researcher: Janell Bauer

Please reflect on the interview experience. This should be a free-writing exercise so you

don't need to edit or spell check. Think of this as a release of your own thoughts in

whatever form feels right. You *may* use the following topics to guide your writing or

you can write freely on your own reflections about the experience of the interview.

Please write for 10-15 minutes. This exercise is optional.

1. What was it like to describe yourself and your experience?

    a. How do you think you represented yourself in the interview? Do you feel

    like that representation aligns or differs from how you see yourself?

    b. In retrospect is there anything you would change or add?

2. Describe aspects of the interview that surprised you, or where you found your

    responses surprising to yourself.

3. Did the interview cause you to reconsider any previously-held thoughts or

    experiences related to bereavement and your work? If so, describe.

4. Explore any emotions the interview surfaced for you.

If you would like to share your written reflection, please send your responses to Janell

at: janell.bauer@colorado.edu, or mail to University of Colorado at Boulder's Department of

Communication, 270 UCB, Boulder, CO, 80309-270. This is option and will not impact the

inclusion of your interview responses in the final study.

APPENDIX F: Summary of Participants

Total Participants: 29

Interview Duration Range: 18:22 – 2:26:55

Average Interview Length: 48 minutes

Total Interview Time: 21 hours, 20 minutes

Gender		Age	
Women	22	25-34	6
Men	7	35-44	5
		45-55	5
		56+	3
		Unknown	10

Religion		Race	
Atheist/ Agnostic	2	African American	2
Buddhist	3	Asian	1
Christian/ Catholic	7	Hispanic/Latin	3
Jewish	1	Mixed Race	1
NA	5	Native American	1
Did not identify	11	White/Caucasian	21

Nationality		Industry	
US Citizen	28	Corporate	18
Non-US Citizen	1	Education	3
		Journalism	1
		Legal	1
		Mental Health	5
		Service	1

Cause/Type of Death		Method of Recruitment	
Accident	4	Personal Contact	4
Birth Defect	1	Colleague Direct Referral	5
Brief/Sudden Illness	4	Colleague Network	7
Cancer/ Illness	15	Human Resources	13
Heart Attack	3		
Suicide	1		

Relationship of the Deceased		Time Since Love One Died	
Boss/Mentor	1	< 6 months	7
Cousin	1	6m–1 yr	5
Child	2	1-2 yrs	11
Grandchild	1	3-5 yrs	4
Grandparent	4	5+ yrs	2
Nephew	1		
Mother-in-Law	1		
Parent	11		
Partner/Spouse	2		
Sibling	5		

Appendix G: Participant Details

Participant Bereavement Information

Participant	Relation of Deceased	Years since	Cause of Death
Alexandra	Mother in Law (non-legal)	1-2 years	Cancer
Avi	Grandson (infant)	6 months	Birth defect
Bennie	Partner	3-5 years	Accident
Billy	Sister	Under 1 year	Illness
Carl	Mother	Under 6 mo	Illness
Carole	Daughter	9 years	Cancer
Caroline	Boss/ Mentor	1-2 years	Illness
Christine	Cousins	2 years ago	Illness
Dorothy	Father	8 years ago	Brief illness
Garrett	Nephew	1-2 years	Accident
Hunter	Mother	3-5 years	Heart failure
Jack	Mother	1 year	Cancer
Janie	Father, Grandmother (Mother figure)	0-2 years	Illness
Kate	Father	1-2 years	Cancer/Illness
Kelly	Grandmother (Mother figure)	Under 6 months	Brief illness
Lisa	Husband	Under 1 year	Illness/ Accident
Lucy	Mother	3 years	Illness/ Cancer
Mason	Mother	1-2 yrs	Illness/ Cancer
Monique	Father	4 mo	Heart attack
Nicole	Brother	1-2 year ago	Suicide
Octagon	Brother	Under 6 months	Heart attack

Rebecca	Grandparents	1-2 yr	Illness
Rita	Son	Under 6 mo	Extended illness
Ruth	Brother	1-2 years	Accident
Saphire	Mother	6m-1 year	Breast cancer - extended illness
Stacey	Grandfather	6m-1 year	Illness
Steven	Mother	3-5 years	Extended illness
Tina	Brother	Under 1 year	Accident
Toni	Mother [father & brother in the last 3 yrs]	Under 6 months	Brief illness

Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Religion	Race	Ethnicity	Age	Nationality
Alexandra	Female	Buddhist	Caucasian		45-55	American
Avi	Female	Catholic	Mexican		45-55	American
Bennie	Female	NA	White		25-34	USA
Billy	Male	Catholic	Italian-American		62	
Carl	Male	Militant Atheist	Caucasian	Scottish/ Irish/ Cherokee	35-44	US
Carole	Female	Buddhist	White		56+	USA
Caroline	Female	NA	Caucasian		25-34	American
Christine			Asian-American			
Dorothy	Female	Jewish	Caucasian			
Garrett	Male	NA	Caucasian	British Isles	25-34	American
Hunter	Male	Catholic	Caucasian		25-34	Canadian
Jack	Male		Caucasian			
Janie	Female	Buddhist	Caucasian/ Native American		35-44	US

Kate	Female		Caucasian			
Kelly	Female		Hispanic			
Lisa	Female		Caucasian			
Lucy	Female		Caucasian			
Mason	Male		Caucasian		45-55	American
Monique	Female	Christian	White		25-34	American
Nicole	Female	Christian	Mexican		35-44	American
Octagon			Caucasian			
Rebecca	Female		Caucasian			
Rita	Female	Christian	White		45-55	US Citizen
Ruth	Female	NA	White		56+	US Citizen
Sapphire	Female	Agnostic	Caucasian		35-44	American
Stacey	Female	Christian	Black & White	Jewish	25-34	US
Steven	Male	NA	White		35-44	US Citizen
Tina	Female		Caucasian			
Toni	Female		African-American		45-55	

Participant Additional Information

Participant	Industry	Recruited Through	Interview Length
Alexandra	Education Admin/ Mental health	Colleague network	1:00:00
Avi	University Food Services	Personal	2:26:55
Bennie	Mental Health	Colleague network	38:00:00
Billy	Financial analyst/ Corporate	Org - HR	43:05:00
Carl	Higher Education Admin	Colleague	1:02:43
Carole	Mental Health	Colleague network	58:00:00
Caroline	Small Business	Colleague	1:05:02
Dorothy	Claims Processor (Data entry)/ Corporate	Org - HR	37:32:00
Garrett	Marketing	Colleague	48:00:00

Hunter	Tech/Management	Colleague	47:50:00
Jack	Exec/ Sales/ Corporate	Org - HR	18:22
Janie	Journalism/ Media	Colleague network	1:24:05
Kate	Manager / Corporate	Org - HR	42:30:00
Kelly	Tech/ Corporate	Org - HR	63:07:00
Lisa	Customer Service/ Corporate	Org - HR	42:36:00
Mason	Legal	Personal	59:04:00
Monique	Marketing/ Account management	Personal	1:16:23
Rebecca	Financial Services	Org - HR	43:59:00
Rita	Mental Health/ Education	Colleague network	1:22:40
Ruth	Academic/Education	Personal	53:49:00
Saphire	Academic/Library	Colleague	1:02:03
Stacey	Mental Health/ Education	Colleague network	48:04:00
Steven	Tech/ Information Services	Colleague network	57:13:00
Tina	Claims Processor/ Corporate	Org - HR	50:23:00
Toni	Manager / Corporate	Org - HR	1:10:18