Grief and deceased-related digital culture: An exploratory, longitudinal, qualitative inquiry

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Abstract

This thesis is about the diverse digital material produced in the course of contemporary lives, and the role of this material for those who mourn these lives. To study this, I applied three fundamental principles of grief theory and research to this novel empirical terrain. The result is an exploratory, longitudinal, qualitative exploration of grief and deceased-related digital material in the experiences of thirty-two survivors, constellated around eleven cases of digital-age death.

I found that unique and changing arrays of deceased-related digital material were significant to each survivor, even those grieving the same person. I interpreted four orientations toward this unique and changing digital material across all thirty-two bereaved participants, irrespective of death connection. Then, by steeping these orientations in the context of the study's key case: eighteen people grieving the accidental death of one woman over time, I established that survivors' orientations toward digital material were produced within, and inextricable from, the relationships, times and contexts of this dynamic, complex and living grief ecology.

Based on these findings, I proposed an emergent grounded theory called '*Pliable realities-in-relation*', describing grief with respect to deceased-related digital material as social construction, where digital material is creatively deployed by situated, interpretive and communicative grievers to fortify shifting grief realities.

These findings (i) advance contemporary postmodern grief theories to the digital case, (ii) challenge conceptual treatments of digital material's grief role; and (iii) exemplify the importance of applying established grief concepts and methods to this new, yet related, scholarly terrain.

This work's larger original contribution is that identifies that long-debunked, problematic notions about grief are reviving in the digital age. My findings stand as a counter to this revival, demonstrating the fundamental incompatibility of these dead grief concepts with digital-age grieving, and how we conceptualise and study it.

This research has application for digital-age grief scholars particularly, grief scholars generally, and grief therapy practitioners who, on the basis of these findings, I urge to combat the reanimation of these dead grief concepts in their scholarship and practice. This work also provides a much-needed counter-narrative about digital-age grieving for the general public, and it feeds into the policies, terms and designs of arguably the most powerful players in the modern grief environment: technologies aimed at digital-age grievers. The findings of this doctoral thesis have potentially far-reaching ecological impacts, and application not only for the digitally-mediated grief contexts of the present, but those yet to come.

Acknowledgements

I dedicate this thesis to my grandfather; principal teacher, cruciverbalist and original competent authority:

Master Noel Reidy, N.T.

1932 - 2021

Thesis-related outputs, activities & awards

Publications

O'Connor, M. (2020). Posthumous digital material: Does it 'live on' in survivors' accounts of their dead? In M. Savin-Baden & V. Mason-Robbie (Eds*.), Digital Afterlife: Death matters in a digital age* (pp. 39-56). New York: Chapman and Hall/CRC. https://doi.org/10.1201/9780429322198.

Conference presentations and posters

O'Connor, M. (2018). Preliminary findings of The Digital Memories Study: Exploring how individuals and groups of bereaved people use and experience the posthumous digital material of their dead over time. Death Online Research Symposium, University of Hull, U.K., 15-17 August.

O'Connor, M. (2017). Preliminary findings of The Digital Memories Study. Association of Bereavement Service Co-ordinators Annual Conference: Death & Bereavement in the Digital Age. 11-12 July, Trinity University College, Leeds, UK.

O'Connor, M., Seymour, J., Wharrad, H. and Caswell, G. (2015). Unearthing digital remains after death: A qualitative exploration of the experiences of the bereaved in the digital era. Palliative Care Research Society PhD Conference: Research in the field of supportive, palliative and end of life care: developing the next generation of researchers, December 8th, University of Nottingham, UK.

Installations

Designer and curator for *Museum of Random Memory: The Sound of Forgetting*, 21-22 May, 2018, Data Justice Conference (Cardiff/UK) and Webworkhouse (Cork/Ireland). Live sonic installation and interactive event between two countries. Blogpost: https://futuremaking.space/the-un-archivable/

Designer and curator for *Museum of Random Memory: Glitch Memory*, 29-30 August 2018, Godsbanen Cultural Centre, Aarhus, Denmark. Multi-channel video installation and interactive event. Blogpost: https://futuremaking.space/aie_conference_sketch/

Designer and curator for *Museum of Random Memory: Shrine to Lost Data*, 10-13 October, Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) Conference, Montréal, Canada. Sound, video and physical installation built on public contributions.

Invited talks

2019   Open Lab, Human-Computer Interaction research institute, Northumbria University, Newcastle, April 5th. **Title:** *The Digital Memories Study: Exploring how groups of people use and experience the digital material of their dead over time.*

2018   Death Online Research Symposium (DORS) Doctoral symposium, University of Hull, U.K., August 17th. **Title:** *Interdisciplinary research and ethics.*

2017   Derby Crisis Support Annual Training Day, Derby, UK, March 23rd. **Title:** *What are digital remains and why do they matter in crisis support?*

              Treetops Hospice Therapeutic Services Training Day, November 14th, 2017: **Title**: *The Digital Memories Study: Exploring how bereaved people use and experience the posthumous digital artefacts of their dead.*

Associated prizes and awards

2018   Dean Moore Postgraduate Student Award, University of Nottingham Tri-Campus Awards.

              Postgraduate Teaching Award: Highly Commended, University of Nottingham Tri-Campus Awards.

2017   £3K Graduate School BESTS Prize (Building Experience and Skills Travel Scholarship), two-month internship at *FutureMaking* (Denmark /USA) with Professor Annette Markham, Aarhus University, Denmark. Conceived and delivered three installations of *The Museum of Random Memor*y (listed above).

              £500 National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care (CLAHRC) East Midlands PhD/MD Travel/Research prize.

2016   Funding from The Sue Ryder Care Centre for the Study of Supportive, Palliative and End of Life Care, University of Nottingham, to undertake Certificate in Grief and Bereavement Counselling at the Institute of Counselling.

2015   First poster prize. Palliative Care Research Society National PhD Conference, December 8, University of Nottingham, UK.

PhD scholarship: £42K University of Nottingham Vice-Chancellor's Scholarship for Research Excellence (EU).

Media and public engagement

2018   Advisory Board Member for *Apart of Me*, an interactive game to support grieving children and young people, by Bounce Works, London. In December 2017, The Guardian UK named Apart of Me amongst the "Top 10 tech projects to get excited about in 2018". https://apartofme.app/

2017   Interviewed on webcast on digital-era bereavement aimed at young bereaved people, broadcast by design studio Bounce Works, London. https://apartofme.app/blog/2017/10/04/digital-death/.

2016   Online article *Rest In Pixels: How will you be remembered when you die?* published on culture and technology writing website 'Headstuff'". https://www.headstuff.org/topical/science/rest-pixels-will-remembered/

Guest on culture and media podcast *Shitegeist* on portrayals of digital immortality in UK Channel 4 sci-fi series 'Black Mirror'. https://backtracks.fm/discover/s/shitegeist/1ad6f3c04ec64bf1/e/bonus-ep-7-1-san-junipero-follow-up-w-special-geist-morna-oconnor/9c8a28d10700f7be

Speaking appearance on BBC East Midlands Today television news item about digital-era grief.

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Glossary of abbreviations

COD	Cause of death
ConGT	Constructivist Grounded Theory
D	Deceased
DCCS	Death-centred case study
DRDC	Deceased-related digital culture
DRDM	Deceased-related digital material
FB	Facebook
GT	Grounded Theory
IP	Internet Penetration
KC	Key contact
MPQL	Multi-perspective, qualitative and longitudinal
P	Inquiry participant
PB	Post-bereavement
PIS	Participant Information Sheet
PM	Postmortem
PMA	Posthumous account
PMI	Post-mortem interval
S-D	Survivor-deceased

Glossary of technologies, platforms and media

Item	Description	Notes
Bebo	American social networking service[1] (2005-2019).	Bought and shut down by Amazon in 2019.
Blog	A digital publication by one or more authors.	Often personal or dedicated to a topic.
Facebook	American social networking service (2004-present), 2.7B monthly active users.	First ubiquitous social networking service.
Facebook Messenger	American application used for exchanging private messages, pictures, videos and audio between Facebook user profiles. (2011-present), 1.3B monthly active users.	Became an application in 2011, previously Facebook integrated.
Faceswap	An application or plugin for an application used to digitally replace one face with another.	Used for humorous or satirical purposes.
FaceTime	American application for making video calls on iOs devices. (2010-present).	Owned by Apple.
Flickr	American image- and video-hosting website. (2004-present), 60M monthly active users.	Used by amateur and professional photographers.
Google	American search engine and technology company. (1998-present), 6.9B searches per day.	Most popular search engine worldwide.
Google Hangouts	Cross-platform messaging application. (2013-present). 2B monthly active users.	Formerly part of Google+.
GoPro	American digital camera manufacturer. (2006-present), over 30M cameras sold.	Often used in first-person sports filming.
Ipad	American tablet computer. (2010-present), over 500M sold.	Produced by Apple.
Ipod	American portable media player. (2001-present), 400M sold.	Produced by Apple.
Kindle	American e-reader used to read digital books, magazines and newspapers. (2007-present), tens of millions sold.	Produced by Amazon.
LinkedIn	American professional networking website. (2003-present), 300M monthly active users.	Bought by Microsoft in 2016.
MP3 Player	Portable device for playing digital audio in MP3 format.	
Myspace	American social networking service. (2003-present), 8M monthly active users.	Often used by bands and musicians.
Pinterest	American image sharing and social media site. (2009-present), 400M monthly active users.	Used to store inspirational content.
PowerPoint	An American presentation program. (1990-present), part of Microsoft Office 365, 200M monthly active users.	Microsoft owned, use in business/education.
ratemyteachers.com	American website where students anonymously rate & comment on teachers. (2001-now), 2M monthly active users.	Controversial due to contributor anonymity.
Skype	American application for video chat and voice calls. (2003-present), 100M monthly active users.	Bought by Microsoft in 2011.
SMS	Text & media messaging between mobiles & devices.	
Snapchat	American mobile multimedia messaging application (2011-present), 433M monthly active users.	Media are 'snaps' with time-limited availability.
Spotify	Swedish music and podcast streaming service. (2006-present), 320M monthly active users.	Popularised legal music streaming
Timehop	American application that collates social media content on posting anniversaries (2011-present), several users.	Emphasis on nostalgia.
Twitter	American micro-blogging and social networking platform (2006-present), 353M monthly active users.	Interaction via 'tweets' & direct messaging.
VHS	Analog video cassette.	Largely defunct
WhatsApp	American messaging application. (2009-present), 2B monthly active users.	Bought by Facebook in 2014.
YouTube	American video hosting website. (2005-present), 2B monthly active users.	Bought by Google in 2006.

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[1] All statistics from https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/

Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2010, my friend's mother died following a brief cancer illness. In the days after, my friend and I sat talking on her mom's bed. On the bedside locker, amongst other intimate things, was my friend's mother's old button mobile phone. It was powered off. As my friend held the phone, it felt like a sacred moment; this object so recently held by this just-gone person.

I wondered if there were text messages, call logs and images on the phone, remains of this woman's correspondence and activities. If so, maybe the phone was password protected, maybe my friend or her family would feel that looking was intrusive. Maybe they would differ in opinions about this, maybe it wouldn't even turn on, where was the charger?

But, I thought—these considerations and obstacles notwithstanding—without gaining access to this device at all, my friend and her family would each have remnants of their own digital correspondence with this woman, by default, and in the short term at least, on the devices and digital channels they used to communicate with her. I imagined her four children, husband, extended family, friends and colleagues would be privy to traces of varying duration, content and substance. I wondered, what role, if any, such material would play in their grief? My friend's mom wasn't much of a technology adopter; in 2010 her button phone was not uncommon. I didn't imagine her text correspondence was extensive, and doubted she had much digital presence beyond it.

As media and communication technologies complexified and proliferated apace over the following years, each advance had me considering the posthumous trail it might produce; what might increasingly sophisticated, rich, comprehensive and vivid digital traces of lives and relationships mean to the bereaved? What is it to grieve when voluminous and varied multi-media fragments of lives lived and relationships past can be scattered across ever-more panoplies of public and private digital, online and virtual spaces?

1.1 Death goes digital

The past two decades have seen unprecedented advances in digital technologies and new media, heralding shifts across diverse avenues of human activity, practice and experience. Mortality is no exception, with a great and growing range of practices, phenomena, products, services and possibilities entangled with ever-evolving technologies and media, relating to dying, death and grief.

In the academic field born of this new context, 'Digital Death' (Pitsillides, Katsikides, & Conreen, 2009) or 'Death Online' (Gotved, 2014), multi-disciplinary scholars are active across arrays of ways in which technologies and media intersect with dying, death, disposal, bereavement and grief, relating to the physical death of once-existing individuals[2].

Efforts to chart 'thanatechnology' (Sofka, 1997)—phenomena, products, practices and possibilities at this thanatology[3]-technology interface—have been undertaken using a variety of approaches. These include a "logic of life" approach, separating

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[2] Per Gotved's (2014) distinction, excluding digital context of deaths of never-existing individuals, e.g. gaming or fictional characters.
[3] Study of death, dying, bereavement and disposal.

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material into ante-, peri- and post-mortem categories as they occur within the lifespan (Gotved, 2014, p. 113; Walter, Hourizi, Moncur, & Pitsillides, 2012; Massimi, Odom, Banks, & Kirk, 2011). A similar life-chronology approach charts thanatechnology related to the abstract, sequential phases of living, dying, death and grieving, rather than to an individual's movement through them (Sofka, Noppe Cupit, & Gilbert, 2012; Cupit, Sofka, & Gilbert, 2012). The chronology approach of Sas, Schreiter, Büscher, Gamba, and Coman (2019) plots material along a timeline of emergence of research in this burgeoning academic field.

All approaches to mapping the Digital Death research terrain field implicate, directly or indirectly, ranges of stakeholders. Four major stakeholders are represented in most approaches: the living, dying, dead and bereaved, with others (e.g. death workers, technology companies, designers, the legal profession, future generations etc.) implicated depending on chronological, disciplinary approaches and related theoretical framings.

1.2   Mourning becomes electric

Examining the Digital Death research terrain from the perspective of the bereaved, these same factors—chronology, discipline, theoretical focus—result in a complex, messy field with many efforts to comprehensively plot how technology intersects with bereavement and grief.

Bereaved-related or -centric mappings of this research terrain have also been guided by disciplines and their related theoretical framings. Examples are mapping thanatechnologies with respect to practice and provision of grief support and grief counsellor education (Sofka, Cupit, & Gilbert, 2012), in terms of material's potential

to afford post-death endurance for the dead (digital afterlife, immortality or 'after-death' (Savin-Baden & Mason-Robbie, 2020; Bassett, 2015; Graham, Gibbs, & Aceti, 2013), and through the lens of shifts in memory, memory-making and remembrance practices (van den Hoven, Sas, & Whittaker, 2012; Pitsillides, 2016).

The above reviews and others (Sas et al., 2019; Gotved, 2014; Cumiskey & Hjorth, 2017; Walter et al., 2012), have identified a number of activity clusters relating to digital-age grieving in the contemporary Digital Death field.

The dominant cluster *Grief online*, is concerned with how new media and technologies mediate grieving, commemoration and memorialisation. This encompasses online & virtual grief practices and communities, and digitally-mediated grieving (Marwick & Ellison, 2012; Refslund Christensen & Sandvik, 2016b; Carroll & Landry, 2010; Brubaker, Hayes, & Dourish, 2013; Hård Af Segerstad & Kasperowski, 2015; Refslund christensen & Sandvik, 2015; Döveling, 2017; Havarinen, 2016; Cann, 2014b); online memorial and memorialisation culture (on social media, social platforms (e.g. YouTube) and dedicated memorial pages/sites) (Walter, 2015; Giaxoglou, 2015; Harju, 2015; Klastrup, 2015; Krysinska & Andriessen, 2015; Mukherjee & Griffith Williams, 2014), and online & virtual graves, cemeteries, monuments and tombs (Roberts, 2004; Faro, 2015; Church, 2013; Gibbs, Mori, Arnold, & Kohn, 2012).

Another cluster surrounds survivors' *Posthumous access and rights* to the accounts, data and devices of their dead. Inheritance and privacy law scholars research complex landscapes of transmission, possession, and access to the deceased's digital assets for survivors, driving shifts in succession and bequeathement law (Harbinja, 2020; Edwards & Harbinja, 2013; Harbinja, 2019; McCallig, 2014).

Another cluster largely from Interaction Design and Human Computer Interaction disciplines is *Technologies for grief*: design and research to support and facilitate grieving. This includes digital memorials and artefacts, e.g. digital *memento mori* jewellery (Wallace, Thomas, Anderson, & Olivier, 2018), and Moncur, Julius, Van Den Hoven and Kirk's (2015) *Story Shell* digital memorials. Here also is grief-oriented design, e.g. song-writing software as grief therapy (Cheatley, Ackerman, Pease, & Moncur, 2020), grief-support mobile applications (Baglione, Girard, Price, Clawson, & Shih, 2017) and Internet grief-support tools (Dominick et al., 2010). Last, 'thanatosensitive' design for bereaved users (Massimi, 2012) and grief-centric evaluations and improvements to existing platforms (Brubaker et al., 2013; Brubaker & Hayes, 2011) e.g. development of Facebook's 'Legacy Contact'[4] (Brubaker & Callison-Burch, 2016).

A final activity cluster at the technology-grief intersection is the part of technologies at the post-mortem interval (PMI), from *Death to disposition* (Moncur, Bikker, Kasket, & Troyer, 2012) from the bereaved perspective. This includes incorporation of technology into funeral and disposal industries in ways that involve survivors: e.g. online funeral planning (Nansen, Kohn, Arnold, van Ryn, & Gibbs, 2017), interactive gravestones (Gotved, 2015; Cann, 2014a), and robots enabling remote funeral interaction (Nansen et al., 2017).

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[4] Post-mortem user account stewardship function.

1.3 Digital Legacy and Data

However, as noted by others, (Savin-Baden & Mason-Robbie, 2020; Sas et al., 2019), despite this diverse activity on digital-age grief and bereavement in the Digital Death field, to date, efforts principally centre on grief played out in and through digital environments, whereas the part of digital material emanating from the lives and deaths of the departed *in* grieving remains a minor theme.

There is, however, a literature centring on what the last Death Online Research Symposium[5] (DORS4, 2018) termed 'Digital Legacy and Data', i.e. what remains digitally after the lives and deaths of contemporary humans. This is based on a context where, by virtue of modern technologically-saturated lives and deaths, diverse and voluminous digital material relating to these lives and deaths can persist variously across ranges of digital spaces and devices, and be subject to use and repurposing by a range of parties after the biological lives of digital-age individuals.

Figure 1.1 plots the range of material, practices and services encompassed in this broad Digital Legacy and Data category, covering phenomena addressed by diverse and transdisciplinary literature, and contemporary services, and practices in this space. Rather than an exhaustive map—an impossibility in this fast-paced terrain—I intend to offer a sense of the breadth and variety of material at issue when I refer to Digital Legacy and Data, and on which the conceptual literature discussed below is based. Later, I use this map to identify this inquiry's specific focus.

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[5]Symposium of the International research network Death Online, the field's major dedicated conference.

Applying Gotved's (2014) logic-of-life approach, and drawing on Bassett's (2015) distinction between intentional and accidental material (the latter I term 'incidental'), I identify three clusters of material and phenomena in the Digital Legacy and Data terrain. These are (1) Incidental products of digital living, (2) Products of digital dying (incidental to dying and intentionally death-related), and (3) Post-mortem (PM) repurposing of the products of digital living and dying.

As the figure shows, this material is complex on multiple levels. The digital legacy and data that can emanate from these items and phenomena is diverse in form and content, it may exist on a range of public and private spaces and devices, be held or owned by multiple parties, organisations and agencies. Its availability, access and endurance can be subject to the changing particularities and terms of service providers, and contingent upon the particular lives, deaths and relationships involved.

Digital Legacy & Data

1 — Incidental products of digital living

In-life material by / of deceased:
- Messaging platform accounts & activity
- Video-calling accounts & history (Personal, professional, shared)
- Forum account & activity
- Search engine histories, bookmarks, downloads
- Email account(s) & history (personal, professional, shared)
- Personal tracking services & devices (Fitness, diet, location)
- Dating accounts & activity
- Betting & gambling profiles & activity
- Image- & file-sharing profiles & activity
- Pornographic a/cs, profiles, activity
- Online banking accounts & history (personal, professional, shared)
- Websites (Personal, professional, shared)
- Social platform profiles & activity (incl. messaging, calling)
- Video & music channel profiles & activity
- Gaming avatars, activity & progress
- Blogging, writing, podcasting, art

Material about / featuring deceased during life:
- Mentions & references by others (posts, messaging, tags)
- Online professional reviews & ratings
- Online articles & news media
- Featuring but not principally about dead
- Government & corporately held / owned (e.g. Google Earth images feat. dead)
- Online public, government & state records e.g. census, legal records, court proceedings

Material owned / held in life by deceased:
- Digital purchases, rentals & subscriptions (e.g. music libraries & online news subs.)
- Online & external storage
- Domain names & websites
- Email addresses, phone numbers, platform usernames / monikers
- Online commerce/trading/shop
- Devices & misc. hardware (personal, professional, shared)
- Digital currencies

2 — Incidental & intentional products of digital dying

Incidental to death:
- 3rd-party generated (e.g. bystander suicide selfies, murder deathcasts, media reports of peri-death/death)
- Unintentionally deceased-generated (e.g. fatal selfie accidents)
- Multi-media records of peri-death & death (unintended by / unknown to dead)
- Last activity/correspondence

Illness, peri-mortem & deathbed records (continuum of intentionality):
- Illness/death blogging, social media posting (by dead & others)
- Deathbed recording (by dead / 3rd party)
- Suicide chronicling, notes & related communication

Intentionally death related:
- Deathcasting (by dead / 3rd party)
- Funeral recordings (by survivors / funeral sector / 3rd party)
- Digital funeral planning & end-of-life planning tools created with / by dead (e.g. DeadSocial)
- Content / profile / password management & bequeathment services & digital wills set up pre-death by / with dead, triggered post-death (e.g. Google Inactive Account Manager)
- Repositories of in-life material created / curated pre-death via commercial service or DIY, accessible post-death
- After-death digital communication services set up/recorded in life with/by dead (e.g. scheduled post-death social media posts, messages, videos)
- Deceased-based avatars, AI, VR, replicas, holograms created ante-mortem with / by dead

3 — Postmortem (PM) repurposing of living & dying products

By service / platform:
- Platform-automated PM 'activity' of dead (e.g. PM social platform activity, appearing as online)
- By 'memory' services / functions (e.g. TimeHop app / Facebook Lookback videos)
- Automated (e.g. contact / friend suggestions)

Postmortem repurposing of in-life material:
- Deceased-based digital / virtual avatars, AI, VR, replicas, holograms created PM not with / by dead
- Recycling of in-life domain names, phone numbers, handles, profile names, devices
- PM hacking of deceased's accounts, profiles, sites, devices
- Generating material 'from' / about dead
- PM trolling of deceased-related content, accounts, profiles

Figure 1.1: Map of Digital Legacy and Data terrain

1.4   Motivation for this inquiry

This inquiry is motivated by conceptual and empirical literature relating to this broad range of Digital Legacy and Data from the perspective of the bereaved, identifying that:

(i)   Conceptual treatments of Digital Legacy and Data are thus-far not based on empirical research with the bereaved.

(ii)   Current empirical research on the role of Digital Legacy and Data in grieving is not informed by contemporary grief theory.

The following outlines these.

1.4.1   Trends in conceptual Digital Legacy and Data literature

Three trends in current conceptual literature on digital legacy and data fed my motivation for this inquiry.

1.4.1.1 Definitions and classifications abstracted from survivor experience

Much effort has gone into developing terms, classifications and definitions of digital material relating to once-living people, specifications of what material is and is not of significance, and allocating orders of meaning, value, significance and role, to orders of material.

In 2013, Lingel used the term 'digital remains' to refer to "online content on dead users" with an emphasis on deceased Facebook user profiles. Gotved (2014) uses the term "digital assets" to encompass "digital assets, legacy and personal profiles". 'Asset' terminology is wedded to legal treatments of this material as digital estates

relating to posthumous succession and bequeathment (McCallig, 2014; Carroll & Romano, 2010).

In 2011, Richard Banks also used 'legacy' terminology in advising we "treat the Internet as a new frontier that forms a part of our digital legacy" (p.123), and by Paul-Choudhury (2011) to denote "myriad websites and blogs, both personal and professional, as well as profiles on Facebook, Flickr, Twitter and more" that can persist after user death. It is also used by the Digital Legacy Association[6], and reflected in Facebook's Legacy Contact terminology, both to denote the posthumous persistence and management of social networking profiles. Waagstein (2014) broadens the 'legacy' designation to "everything from digitised content, accounts, passwords, usernames and hardware since they are all interdependent" (p.46), while later calling this material "assets" (p.61). Pitsillides, Waller, and Fairfax (2013, p. 76) use two terms; "digital heritage" describing "accumulation and curation of data online, which could form the basis of an inexhaustible resource containing the exact documentation of our digital past" and "digital historical artifacts": "digital objects, which contain information for the building up of archives or digital heritage, for example Social Networks".

Reviewing this messy terminological terrain, Bassett (2015) called for definitional clarity, suggesting the field use two distinct categories: "Digital data" ("passwords, account information, digital assets and digital property… things that belong in a digital safe or vault that are static once the user has died"), and "'digital memories'

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[6] U.K. professional body promoting digital-asset planning and legacy safeguarding, particularly of social media profiles: https://digitallegacyassociation.org/

("the digital selves category: personal videos, messages, photographs and blogs which belong in a digital memory box") (p.1129).

As well as jockeying for definition and categorisation, the literature is marked by efforts to designate the value, meaning and use of digital material relating to the dead. For example, Gotved's (2018) mapping of the deceased's 'digital portfolio' (including 'legacy, productions, subscriptions and profiles') from the perspective of 'descendants' proposes material can be mapped in terms of opposing 'affectional' and 'utilitarian' values. Philosophy scholars have proposed the living have a moral duty to maintain posthumously persistent material based on their future value and meaning (Stokes, 2015; Öhman & Watson, 2019). In the same vein, Bassett (2015) proposes some material entails sentimental and memory value, while others is purely functional and monetary. Material's 'sentimental' meaning is a frequent theme (e.g. Gibson, 2014; Morse & Birnhack, 2020; Waagstein, 2014; Bassett, 2015), with certain material offered as fitting this designation more readily than others.

Yet these definitions and meanings are not based on empirical research with digital-age grievers.

1.4.1.2 Conceptions based on technical affordance: aliveness and capture

The second trend in this conceptual Digital Legacy and Data literature is describing digital material relating to once-living people with respect to what this it might technically enable and become.

One aspect of this is equating the material's posthumous endurance to a 'digital afterlife' (e.g. Braman, Dudley, & Vincenti, 2011; Wright, 2014; Bollmer, 2013; Cann, 2014a; Savin-Baden & Mason-Robbie, 2020). Pitsillides (2016) wrote "we not only

'live on' through our estate and in the memories of those we love but on their servers and in their hard disks' (Pitsillides, 2016, p. 114). This rhetorical suggestion of material 'living on' is a literal one in Bassett's (2015) "*Who wants to live forever? Living, dying and grieving in our digital society*", where posthumously persistent material is equated to "the promise of immortality by way of a digital afterlife" (p. 1134).

Cann (2014a) refers to post-death interaction with the dead via messages and videos relating to them, with resulting survivor conversations that can keep the dead 'alive' in a 'virtual afterlife'. Sherlock (2013) suggests the possibility for dead celebrities to be digitally resurrected to perform 'live' enables a representative or symbolic immortality. Again, Bassett (2015) furthers Sherlock and Cann's accounts, suggesting the term "digital zombie" to reflect the continued aliveness of these materials based on the *possibility* of interaction with the living; whether or not it is used or engaged with, material has potential to be 'resurrected' to the extent that it can "remain alive" (1135). Critically here, aliveness is predicated on the endurance of material as a solely technical possibility, where interaction with material is minor or unnecessary.

A second technically-afforded quality of this material is its ability to authentically capture the dead to whom it relates. For example, scholars suggest the combination of the totality of material that remains after a life equates to high-fidelity representations of the deceased's personality (Waagstein, 2014), identity (Lingel, 2013; Clabburn, Knighting, Jack, & O'Brien, 2019), self (Matthee, 2019; Braman et al., 2011) or soul (Paul-Choudhury, 2011). Entangled with this is a suggestion of realness and authenticity. For instance, for Bassett (2015), the more digital material

relating to a life the "more our digital selves evolve into realistic representations of our 'real' selves" (Bassett, 2015, p. 1134). In a similar vein, Matthee suggests a digital legacy corpus "provides a rich reflection of the actual people who created the content" (2019, p. 29).

In both the above examples, portrayals of aliveness and capture are based on what material might become and enable based on its technical possibilities. It is unknown, however, whether and how conceptions of aliveness and capture bear out in grievers' experiences of digital material relating to their dead.

1.4.1.3 Impact and implications discourse

The final conceptual trend motivating this inquiry is the supposition of a causal technology-grief impact relationship; the former affecting the latter. This occurs as a 'help or hinder discourse', i.e. whether digital legacy and data help or hinder grieving. This discourse can be traced to Sofka et al.'s (2012) seminal edited volume and reflected in the editors' plenary chapter: "*Dying, death and grief in a technological world: Implications for now and speculations for the future*" and Ken Doka's foreword noting the volume's frequent use of the term *Brave new world*, with its "sense of foreboding of the dystopia Huxley once described" (Doka, 2012, p. xii). An impact and implications discourse is also represented in another influential contribution in this space, Walter et al.'s (2012) "*Does the Internet change how we die and mourn?",* which "describes a range of online practices that may *affect* dying, the funeral, grief and memorialization, inheritance and archaeology" (p. 275, my italics).

The view of digitality as impacting grief can be seen the line of scholars since taking up this discourse (e.g. Matthee, 2019; Baglione, Girard, Price, Clawson, & Shih, 2018; Braman et al., 2011; Bassett, 2015; Bassett, 2018; Bassett, 2020b). For example, on the 'help' side of this discourse, Braman et al. (2011) suggest "passing on technological artifacts from our lives…can be helpful for those trying to overcome loss" (p.187). On the 'hinder' side, Bassett warns of the "ramifications of data loss and access restriction" (Bassett, 2020a, p. 84). In a recent chapter, Sofka (2020) again invoked this help-or-hinder duality asking "Does the presence of a Digital Afterlife have a positive or negative impact on survivors' process of coping with grief?" (p.62).

Kasket (2019) notes that this discourse is strongly represented in the grief counselling and practitioner community, and in the media, driven by worry that grief will be adversely impacted by the technologies. As Kasket notes, this is presupposed by the idea that 'real' grief is diluted or undermined by technologies, and based on normative ideas of certain griefs (in this case pre-digital) as more ideal, normal and preferable. As Kasket establishes, this leads to a policing of grief; guarding 'real' grief from the impacts and implications brought by technology.

However, as with the previous trends, whether and how this discourse reflects the experience of grieving with respect to the digital leavings of the dead is unclear.

Having identified these three conceptual treatments of digital legacy and data, I concluded that empirical research would shed light on whether these conceptions track with survivor experiences.

1.4.2 Empirical Digital Legacy and Data literature uninformed by grief theory

However, looking at the modest empirical work exploring the role of Digital Legacy and Data in grief, I found it was not informed by principles and methodologies of grief research, which are rooted in contemporary grief theory. Neither, did the existing research apply the related principles and methodologies of a germane sub-branch of grief research: grief and material culture (the grief role of physical material relating to the dead). The exploratory literature review chapter (Chapter 2) establishes these principles and methodologies, and demonstrates the lack of their application in this research terrain. To summarise, these principles and methodologies are:

- Grief, and the role of deceased-related material culture therein, is longitudinal and changing, and best studied over time.

- Griefs, and the deceased-related material culture involved in them, are as diverse as the relationships to which they pertain; research must be open to a diversity of involved material.

- Grief is not an individual matter but forming in and shaped by relationships, communities and socio-cultural contexts. Grief research must factor in inter-survivor relationships and grief contexts.

1.5 This inquiry

Motivated to empirically explore these conceptual treatments of digital legacy and data with the digital-age bereaved, and a lack of empirical research consistent with grief and material culture concepts and methods, I undertook an empirical exploration driven by grief and material culture precedents.

Classic grief and material culture studies use the aftermath of the death of the individual as their starting point (Ariès, 1981; Seremetakis, 1991), asking openly what material culture is of significance to groups of people grieving that particular loss over time (Gibson, 2008; Miller & Parrott, 2009). In keeping with this, and considering my friend's mom's death, and the community grieving her over time, I took the digital-age deaths of multiple individuals as units of study, and undertook to broadly ask *what* deceased-related digital material was playing a grief role and *why*, for communities of people grieving each death over time.

The result is an exploratory, death-centred, material-inclusive, longitudinal piece of empirical grief research in the digital context.

1.5.1 Deceased-related digital culture: A classification

Though wishing to clean down non-empirical characterisations of what digital material might be involved in grief, to have a manageable empirical focus, it was necessary to exclude some material in the broad Digital Legacy and Data terrain. Identification of this focus was also driven by grief and material culture literatures in that, like these literatures, I was interested in digital material whose resonance and relation to the dead originates in their life and death. This excludes the post-death

repurposing of material by parties other than dead or in digital systems, as I suggest that is a level of abstraction from the life and death of the individual in question that does not accord with the 'aftermath' orientation of the grief and material culture literatures (e.g. Gibson, 2008, 2004; Miller & Parrott, 2009; Hallam & Hockey, 2001).

This designation, which I term *deceased-related digital culture*[7], equates to clusters one and two of Figure 1.1, and it is material in these clusters that is the focus of this inquiry.

1.6 Thesis structure

The thesis is in ten chapters, broken down as follows:

Chapter 2: Exploratory literature review establishes warrant for this exploratory inquiry by: setting out three key principles and methodologies of grief and material culture literature, and then reviewing empirical literature on grief and deceased-related digital culture according to these principles and methodologies.

Chapter 3: Methodology and method describes my exploratory approach; with aims and objectives in dialogue with an emergent ethos and sensitive terrain. It also locates this inquiry in an ontological and epistemic tradition, detailing methodological and methods selections, and ethical positions emanating from this.

Chapter 4: Data overview briefly overviews the data and recruits generated in this inquiry, showing totals and details of: data, bereaved participants and death cases.

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[7] Hereafter, I use 'deceased-related digital culture', 'deceased-related digital material', and 'digital material' interchangeably to describe material in this designation.

Chapter 5: Findings preface breaks down data and participants into each death case. It shows case profiles for each death, detailing bereaved participants, deceased-related digital material, and its availability and use in each case. This information prefaces the following two findings chapters.

Chapter 6: Cross-participant orientations, presents four orientations toward heterogeneous deceased-related digital material interpreted across participant data, irrespective of relational and contextual specifics.

Chapter 7: Case deep dive steeps these orientations in the relationships and context of one particular death, and grief community: 18 survivors grieving the accidental death of a young woman with respect to heterogeneous related digital material.

Chapter 8: Presentation of theory outlines a theory I interpret from these findings, presented in two parts, combined in the theory proper, and grounded in data via worked examples.

Chapter 9: Discussion puts theory in conversation with three key literatures, detailing advances upon research and theory. It then reflects on qualities of inquiry, data, and theory.

Chapter 10: Conclusion takes a critical evaluative look at what these chapters add up to, returning to the inquiry's original motivation, drawing out original contributions, key takeaways, and wider implications.

The thesis map below appears at the beginning of chapters to help orient readers.
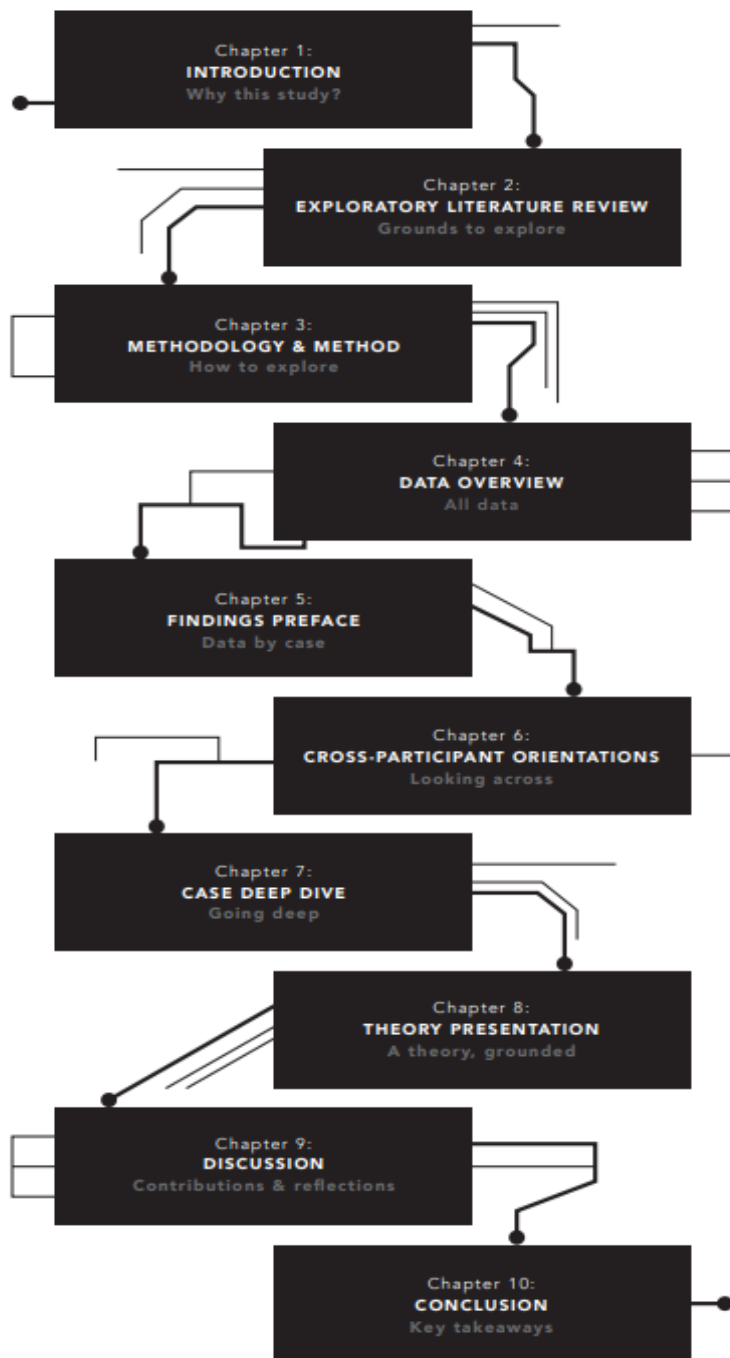
Figure 1.2: Thesis map

1.6.1 Thesis disposition

Reporting research is not a neutral transfer of ideas to page. Rather, academic writing entails assumptions about the role of researcher, researched and reader, how research knowledge is constructed and produced, and what constitutes knowledge (Van Maanen, 1988; Hammersley, 1995; Eisner, 1997). Recognising this, research reports should reflect on and indicate the rhetorical strategy, argument type and knowledge form the reader can expect.

I have endeavoured to write this thesis in a self-reflexive style that coheres with the interpretivist-constructivist position of the work (Finlay & Gough, 2008; Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). As to this, I use the first-person form to describe the study's undertaking from my perspective. This enacts in writing my role in coproducing this inquiry and its products, thereby ensuring consistency with its epistemic foundation (Carter & Little, 2007), and creating congruence between form and content (Eisner, 1997). I refer to data generation (rather than collection) and interpretation (rather than emergence) of findings to indicate my involvement in their production. Following Breen's (2007) distinction between insider and outside research stances, I describe conducting this inquiry with (rather than on) participants. With this, I hope to feed abstract philosophical positions into the "nitty gritty" of research practice and reporting (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, p. 413).

1.6.2 Study name

The name The Digital Memories Study was formulated prior to this study's remit being established. Though a focus on 'digital memories' did not eventuate, this is to be expected in exploratory work where inquiry focus is found through its undertaking. This name, and logo, were nonetheless useful as monikers, helping audiences and participants grasp the study. While the Digital Memories name does not feature in the thesis title, it does feature in the write-up of the thesis as it was used throughout inquiry undertaking (e.g. in publicity, participant-facing materials, study website etc.).

Chapter 2: Exploratory literature review

Chapter 1:
INTRODUCTION
Why this study?

Chapter 2:
EXPLORATORY LITERATURE REVIEW
Grounds to explore

Chapter 3:
METHODOLOGY & METHOD
How to explore

Chapter 4:
DATA OVERVIEW
All data

Chapter 5:
FINDINGS PREFACE
Data by case

Chapter 6:
CROSS-PARTICIPANT ORIENTATIONS
Looking across

Chapter 7:
CASE DEEP DIVE
Going deep

Chapter 8:
THEORY PRESENTATION
A theory, grounded

Chapter 9:
DISCUSSION
Contributions & reflections

Chapter 10:
CONCLUSION
Key takeaways

2.0 Introduction: Making a case for exploration

This chapter draws together diverse literatures to build a case for this exploratory inquiry. Literature reviews undertaken in established research terrains involve surveying prior scholarly activity and identifying knowledge deficits to be addressed by proposed inquiries. However, where directly relevant literature is limited or non-existent, alternate means of demonstrating inquiry grounds for inquiry are required (Stebbins, 2001; Wolcott, 2009; Stern, 2007). In such cases, the role of literature is to demonstrate there is something worthy of exploration.

This is achieved by drawing together disparate literatures—inter alia: branches of theory, primary research, socio-cultural trends, population statistics, grey literature, policy documents, archival data, social significance of the phenomenon, implications for policy and applications to practice—to establish the potential merit in exploring a particular group, process or activity (Stebbins, 2001; Wolcott, 2009). By weaving together previously unconnected strands of information, exploratory reviews point to new terrain and its potential fertility, establish that no other study has examined it, and demonstrate grounds for an exploratory approach.

This exploratory literature review establishes inquiry grounds by weaving together three information strands:

Strand one: **Three principles of grief research & theory** traces historical and contemporary conceptualisations of grief along three themes: (i) survivor-deceased relationships can continue and change after death (ii) grief is diverse and (iii) grief is social. This strand establishes these themes as critical to empirical grief inquiries.

Strand two: **Material culture in grief** reviews literature on the role of material objects relating to the dead in grief, with reference to the strand one themes. Strand two establishes that material objects can play a role in grieving that (i) can continue and change after death, (ii) is diverse and is (iii) embedded in social contexts.

Strand three: Empirical research on grief and deceased-related digital culture is a narrative review of extant empirical studies in this terrain, using strands one and two as critical lens. Strand three shows a paucity of explicit research on this topic, and that extant research is not informed by the conceptions of grief, and the role of material culture therein, established in the preceding strands.

Together, these strands demonstrate grounds for an exploratory empirical inquiry into grief and deceased-related digital culture, informed conceptually and methodologically by the grief and material culture literatures. The chapter culminates by stating this inquiry's research question, aims and objectives.

2.1 Strand one: Three principles of contemporary grief theory and research

This strand first traces the evolution of twentieth-century grief conceptions. It then describes the paradigm shift in academic and clinical understandings of grief that occurred around the turn of the last century, using three key themes that characterise this shift, and its accompanying methodological and epistemological shifts.

2.1.1 Twentieth-century grief conceptions

Early-modern grief theorising occurred at the beginning of the twentieth century when Freud's 1917 essay *Mourning and Melancholia* conceived grief as "work of severance" of relational links between bereaved and deceased (p. 255). Freud postulated that grief entailed a processual, predictable withdrawal of psychic energy from the "love object" and its redirection elsewhere, such that "when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" (p. 245).

Though describing grief only briefly and indirectly—as a non-pathological comparison to melancholia (depression)—(Granek, 2010; Bradbury, 2001), Freud's attention to grief, and the analogy with depression, put grief in the remit of psychiatry and psychology, and rooted it in the institution of medicine and its "disease model" (Granek, 2010, p. 59; Valentine, 2006; Hedtke & Winslade, 2016; Jakoby, 2012). In this model, grief was understood as a pathology—a deviation from normal functioning that progressed along a universal sequence and timeline—that could be intervened upon and predicted, and wherein, per Freud, resumption of normal functioning was predicated on grievers relinquishing ties with their dead. The

prevailing positivist knowledge paradigm of psychology at the time brought grief

"under the regime of science" (Hedtke & Winslade, 2016, p. 31). Thus began a

"psychologising of grief", with contributions to understanding, addressing and

studying it over the next seventy or so years dominated by psychology and

psychiatry (Bradbury, 2001, p. 59; Hedtke & Winslade, 2016; Stroebe, Hansson,

Stroebe, & Schut, 2001). Freud's brief sketches of grief have been extrapolated from

and reified into a "standard psychoanalytic model of mourning" whose vestiges can

be traced through twentieth-century grief theory and practice (Hagman, 2001, p. 14).

In particular, Freud's account of the deceased-bereaved relationship—that severing

ties is grief's goal—has persisted, beginning with first-generation Freudian theorists.

Grief psychology theorist Klein (1940), conceived of grief as a process of

detachment akin to weaning from the mother's breast; physician and psychoanalyst,

Lindmann, (1944) construed grief as a functional abnormality with "grief work"

leading to "emancipation from bondage to the deceased" (Lindemann, 1944, p. 156);

and Bowlby, also a physician and psychoanalyst, drawing on Klein, framed grief as

disequilibrium corrected by stepwise relinquishing of attachments to the "lost object"

(Bowlby, 1961, p. 334).

In the mid-to-late twentieth century, Freudian grief accounts became the basis for

therapeutic understandings of grief, translated into "prescriptions for grief" (Valentine,

2006, p. 60). Construed therapeutically, grieving was a time-bound process involving

'work, stages and tasks,' through which counsellors could guide grievers towards

relinquishing ties and recovery (Walter, 1999; Stroebe et al., 2001). Examples of

phasal, goal-oriented grief accounts are those of Parkes (1983, 1972) [numbness,

pining, disorganisation and despair, and recovery]; Kübler-Ross (1970) [denial,

anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance]; Worden's (1982, 1991) 'tasks of mourning' [accepting the reality of the loss, working through its pain, adjusting to life without the deceased, emotionally relocating the deceased, and moving on with life]; and Rando's "undoing of the psychosocial ties that bind" via a linear process of loss-adjustment [avoidance, confrontation and accommodation] (1995, p. 219).

Disengaging from the dead in a normative, time-bound manner was also the conceptual basis for psychometric tools to measure grief, wherein continued attachment to the dead was pathologised. Examples are the Texas Grief Inventory (TGI) (Faschingbauer, DeVaul, & Zisook, 1977), which measured Lindemann's construct of pathological (unresolved) grief by assessing "normal" versus pathological grief 'symptoms'; The Grief Resolution Index, GRI (Remondet & Hansson 1987), an instrument to identify widows experiencing "extended psychological distress" (p.30); the Revised Grief Inventory (Lev, Munro, & McCorkle, 1993) measuring 'maladaptive symptoms' of loss to discriminate between 'uncomplicated' and 'complicated' grievers (Prigerson et al., 1995); and the Grief Measurement Scale (Jacobs et al., 1987), based on Bowlby's attachment theory, with anxiety and other detachment 'symptoms' used as grief measures.

Tools to measure psychological disorders were also used to measure grief, further implying that grief was a normative disorder with a predictable, time-bound course. Examples are the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock, & Erbaugh, 1961), Impact of Event Scale (Horowitz, Wilner, & Alvarez, 1979); and SCL-90R (9 dimensions of psychological distress) (Derogatis, 1977, 1994).

Psychometric instruments (both explicit grief measures and those applied to grief) were used to measure grief in research contexts. Examples are the widespread use of the TGI and iterations in grief research (e.g. in Balk, 1996; Meuser & Marwit, 2000; Prigerson et al., 1995; Nam & Eack, 2012; Bierhals et al., 1996) and SCL-90R and iterations (e.g. in Balk, 1996; Shanfield, Benjamin, & Swain, 1984; Shanfield & Swain, 1984; Shanfield, Swain, & Benjamin, 1987; Gallagher-Thompson, Futterman, Farberow, Thompson, & Peterson, 1993). Thus, Freudian conceptions of grief found their way into empirical definitions of grief, propagating the relational discontinuity model.

In this model, and the clinical and research approaches emanating from it, relational continuity—e.g. thinking about, talking to, or feeling the presence of the dead—was antithetical to resolution, acceptance and recovery, and viewed as unresolved, reality-denying, maladaptive, pathological or hallucinatory (Lindemann, 1944; Gorer, 1965; Marris, 1958; Freud, 1917 [1915]; Parkes & Weiss, 1983; Parkes, 1986).

However, in the late 1980s to early 90s, a paradigm shift in thanatology challenged this dominant grief model and its core assumptions. The first was its conceptualisation of the posthumous deceased-bereaved relationship.

2.1.2 Deceased-bereaved relationships can continue and change

One assumption challenged in the paradigm shift was that grieving entails divesting connections with the dead (Hedtke & Winslade, 2016; Valentine, 2006; Hagman, 2001; Silverman & Klass, 1996). The 1996 collection *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief* was a watershed, with consensus from multi-disciplinary grief scholars, and empirical studies from diverse socio-cultural contexts, suggesting an "expanded view" of deceased-bereaved relationships; that they could endure posthumously (Silverman & Klass, 1996, p. 3).

Thus began a new wave of contributions employing methodologies that allowed for the possibility of relational continuity. Inductive research approaches from outside the methodological remit and knowledge paradigms of the disciplines that had theretofore dominated it (psychology, psychiatry, medicine, and nursing) suggested that grievers' experiences in practice differed from the then-dominant model.

Exploratory qualitative studies suggested grievers were aware of the demand that they 'let go' of their dead but rejected it in practice (Bennett, 1999; Bennett & Bennet, 2001). Rather than maladaptive, maintaining bonds was a source of comfort and solace wherein grievers incorporated the dead into their ongoing environments and lives (Rosenblatt & Burns, 1986; Neimeyer, 2001; Attig, 1996). Grief could involve survivors reformulating their self-representations, and developing posthumous constructs of their dead, thereby enabling changed but sustained relationships (Walter, 1996; Marwit & Klass, 1995).

Survivor-reported grief experiences also made compelling cases for relational continuity in practice. For example, sustained relationships many years post-bereavement were evident in unpublished nineteenth-century grief diaries (predating twentieth-century conceptions) (Rosenblatt, 1996, 1983); and in published grief diaries of Simone deBeauvoir (1964), Roland Barthes (2010) and C.S. Lewis (1961) where relationships with their mothers and wife (respectively) did not end but were recast in conversation, writing, thought and memory. Tony Walter's (1996) autobiographical exposition of his personal griefs made the case for relational continuity, constituting an explicit challenge to the prevailing "clinical lore of bereavement counselling" (p.8). Though criticised as subjective and anecdotal (Stroebe & Schut, 2005), the disconnect between Walter's experiences and the standard grief model was important in infiltrating it, suggesting the model's prevalence and means of studying grief were insufficient in accounting for grief experience.

Contributions from grief counselling also suggested that continued engagement with the dead was common, and that forgoing relationships was not all grievers' aim. In-depth qualitative research with bereaved parents attending grief support groups suggested sustained relationships with late children were commonplace (Klass, 1987-88) and that people rejected therapy that suggested they relinquish emotional investment (Littlewood, 2001).

Re-examination of classic grief texts also suggested that continued relationships with the dead was a minor but overlooked theme. Freud was equivocal about removal of ties in all cases (Bradbury, 2001; Walter, 1996; Valentine, 2006), passages in Bowlby (1979, 1980) support both bond-relinquishing and bond-continuing theses

(Stroebe & Schut, 2005; Noppe, 2000; Peskin, 1993), and Parkes (1986) described continued presence of the dead as both hallucinatory and adaptive (Walter, 1996; Rosenblatt, 1996).

Scholars also began to point to a lack of methodologically sound empirical studies supporting the contention that relinquishing ties was cognate with loss adjustment (Stroebe & Schut, 2005; Valentine, 2006). Contributions from within psychology, psychiatry and grief counselling also identified a paucity of empirical evidence for the relational discontinuity thesis, pointed out damaging myths about loss that had grown around it (Wortman & Silver, 1989; Melnick & Roos, 2007), and suggested that the prevailing model and methods for studying it were so widely accepted as to be "almost impervious to data" (Nisbett & Ross, 1980, p.169, cited in Wortman & Silver, 1989).

Attuned to the possibility of continued relationships with the dead, empirical research began to study grief longitudinally. Repeated applications of grief-measuring scales over short periods suggested bereaved people retained relationships with their dead (up to two years) (Balk, 1996; Shuchter & Zisook, 1993). Longitudinal qualitative studies began to uncover individuals maintaining long-term, idiosyncratic, complex and changing relationships with their dead for decades after bereavements and, for significant losses, across survivors' lifespans (Rosenblatt, 1996; Rosenblatt & Burns, 1986; Rosenblatt & Karis, 1993, 1993-1994; Gilbert & Smart, 1992).

In recent years, there has been increased emphasis on grief as an open-ended reconstruction of meaning in response to the shift in relationship and identity brought about by death. This involves a variety of meaning-making enterprises where survivors narrate the death, the dead, the deceased-bereaved relationship and their

identity as survivors, such that the dead continue to be part of survivors' lives across the lifespan (Hibberd, 2013; Neimeyer & Gillies, 2006; Neimeyer, 2001, 2015; Walter, 1996; Rosenblatt, 1996). Rather than the modernist idea of grief as entailing a 'letting go' or 'getting over', this postmodern conception views grief as fluid, continuing and reflecting the developing narratives of the living, and therefore ongoingly vital and relevant to the bereaved.

Grief's fluidity over time has also been construed as changes in intensity that resist pattern. Clinical psychologist and Digital Death researcher Elaine Kasket, describes the intensity of grief as one that "judders up and down. Grief has peaks and troughs, waves of sorrow alternating with periods of contentment and even joy…not only is it normal for these oscillations to happen, but it's typical for them to be utterly unpredictable and uneven" (Kasket, 2019, p. 43). Some models of grief have attempted to formalise this dynamism and unpredictability. The Dual Process Model (Schut & Stroebe, 1999), for example, construes grief as oscillating between loss orientation (focused on the dead, death and grief) and restoration orientation (oriented toward continuing experience that does not pertain to the death, dead or grief).

However, grief scholars have criticised the DPM as underrepresenting and simplifying grief's unpredictability and volatility (Kasket, 2019; Valentine, 2006; Bonnano, 2009), such that "when we look more closely at the emotional experiences of bereaved people over time, the level of fluctuation is nothing short of spectacular" (Bonnano, 2009, p. 14).

Though broadly accepted that grief can entail maintaining relationships with the dead, this is a possibility, rather than expected, normal or ideal (Vickio, 1999;

Rosenblatt, 1996). With this caveat, it is now widely acknowledged that grief

research ought to entail a longitudinal element to account for grieving that may

continue and change over time, with data "needed for many years beyond a loss"

(Rosenblatt, 1996, p. 47; Hagman, 2001; Valentine, 2006; Walter, 1999; Neimeyer &

Hogan, 2001; Hedtke & Winslade, 2016).

2.1.3 Grief is diverse

A second element of the standard model of grief challenged in the turn-of-the-century paradigm shift was the notion of a normal way to grieve. Conceived in psychology, psychiatry and medicine, grief, like physical or mental illness, was seen as a naturally occurring pathology with universally manifesting, predictable courses and expressions. To be diagnosed, recovered from, and scientifically studied, limits to grief's normal duration and features were demarcated (examples in Lindemann, 1944; Engel, 1961; Faschingbauer et al., 1977).

However, this normative discourse was criticised for its deleterious effects on grievers; creating expectations that they grieve in particular ways and durations, and discrediting deviating experiences (Valentine, 2006; Wortman & Silver, 1989; Hedtke & Winslade, 2016). For example, the standard grief model considers sensing the presence of the dead abnormal (Freud, 1917 [1915]; Bowlby, 1980; Lindemann, 1944; Parkes, 1983; Worden, 2001). Consequently, grievers with sense-of-presence experiences report not disclosing them to others for fear of ridicule (Rees, 2001), being thought insane (Datson & Marwit, 1997; Parker, 2005), "mad or stupid" (Hay & Heald, 1987, p. 22), and made to feel "abnormal" when disclosing this to therapists (Taylor, 2005, p. 60). Studies of grief counselling interactions also show enactment of normative discourses, discrediting non-normative interpretations and steering clients toward responses aligned with linear, curative discourses (examples in Hedtke & Winslade, 2016; Wambach, 1986; Broadbent, Horwood, Sparks, & de Whalley, 1990).

Other harmful normative assumptions are that the most profound griefs are those of nuclear family and that relationship-based grief categories are generalisable, i.e. widow grief has features applicable to all widows. This undermines the diversity and complexity of human relationships, demanding particular responses for some griefs (first-degree family) and disenfranchising others (friends, colleagues, homosexual relationships) (Fowlkes, 1990). Moreover, reductive Western grief norms have been exported to non-Western contexts, with other cultures examined against Euro-American benchmarks or construed as exotic grief prescriptions that also exclude individual difference and variation (Gunaratnam, 1997; Field, Hockey, & Small, 1997; Klass, 1999a).

The normative grief model has also been criticised for inflicting the bereaved with a solely negative account of grief, from which they must expediently escape. Schut and Stroebe (1999) described the danger in the idea that "human suffering, integral to grief as we know it, will be considered bad, and that the human condition should only, ideally, encompass positive states and emotions" (p. 203). Similarly, psychotherapists Melnick and Roos (2007) contend that the normative quest for 'closure' traps the grieving in "non-redemptive grief and longing…reparable only by the undoing of the loss" (p. 104); suspending positive experiences until grief is resolved. This mires grievers in a "deficit orientation" (Hedtke & Winslade, 2016, p. 32), curtailing the potential for alternate experiences wherein "profound beauty can emerge from creativity that is driven by profound loss" (Melnick & Roos, 2007, p. 102) and overlooking grief's positive dimensions (e.g. new and strengthened social bonds, spiritual and personal growth) (Frantz, Farrell, & Trolley, 2001; Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2001).

The idea of a 'normal' way to grieve has congealed into 'requirements of mourning' (Wright, 1983) that imply a universal, context-free subject undergoing grief that involves universal basic principles, and against which grievers, well-meaning friends, researchers and therapists calibrate grief, judge the grieving, and undermine divergent experiences.

The paradigm shift involved the normative account being undermined by social science approaches interested in "the reality of how people experience and live their lives rather than finding ways of verifying preconceived theories of how people should live" (Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996, p. xix). Inductive, reflexive, discursive, narrative and exploratory approaches studying grief as experienced in particular lives, societies, cultures, times and contexts explicated grief's deep diversity, with differences within and between individual experiences, relationships, cultures and times (Valentine, 2006; Walter, 1999; Klass et al., 1996; Hagman, 2001).

This profound diversity caused grief scholars to problematise the very idea of a normal way to grieve. Shuchter and Zisook (1993) observed that if grief is a natural response to losing a loved one, then it is both always 'normal' and so varied, complex, dynamic and idiosyncratic as to be incompatible with categorisation with respect to a 'normal'.

"If grief is normal, what, then, is "normal" grief? In our experience, grief is such an individualized process - one that varies from person to person and moment to moment and encompasses simultaneously so many facets of the bereaved's being - that attempts to limit its scope or demarcate its boundaries by arbitrarily defining normal grief are bound to fail."

(Shuchter & Zisook, 1993, p. 23)

New grief models attempted to incorporate this diversity, e.g. Stroebe and Schut's (1999) 'Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement' and Rubin's (1999) 'Two-Track Model of Bereavement' allowed for gender and cultural differences, but have been criticised for resting on a normative premises of healthy grieving and universal grief features (Hedtke & Winslade, 2016; Valentine, 2006). As Walter (1999) points out, normative discourses die hard and are found even in accounts refuting them (Shuchter & Zisook, 1993 is an example of this).

Myriad issues with normative grief discourses, and extensive empirical explication of grief's diversity, have generated calls for research that is methodologically open to diversity and resistant to normative discourses. As to this, grief scholars have called for open-ended, exploratory studies of grief as experienced in particular lives, contexts, cultures and times, with emergent methods that flex and sensitise in response, rather than imposing pre-suppositions about grief's dimensions or expressions (Neimeyer & Hogan, 2001; Valentine, 2006; Howarth, 2000; Bradbury, 1999). Moreover, researchers must employ methods entailing sustained critical reflection on their own grief "tradition" (Klass, 1999a, p. 174)—the experiences, values and presuppositions they bring to bear—such that they remain interpretively open to griefways other than their own and guard against recapitulating normative

discourses (Klass, 1999a; Bradbury, 1999; Hockey, 1990; Howarth, 2000; Valentine, 2006). In employing these methods researchers avert "a tendency to reproduce rather than interrogate normative assumptions" (Valentine, Bauld, & Walter, 2016, p. 823), and come closer to studying grief on the diverse terms of those experiencing it.

2.1.4 Grief is socially embedded

The final constituent of the standard grief model challenged in the paradigm shift, is that grief is a primarily intrapsychic process; "a problem of the individual psyche" divorced from relational, social, cultural or historical settings (Pearce, 2019, p. 23; Charmaz & Milligan, 2006). Around the turn of the last century, there was a broad challenge to the notion of the individual as the site of experience, separable from socio-cultural settings. Scholars from diverse social sciences contended that the idea of experience as individuated, internally focused and autonomous was an artefact of Western modernity that eschewed the role of sociality in constructing and shaping experience (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Jakoby, 2012; Gergen, 1989; Sugiman, Gergen, Wagner, & Yamada, 2008).

Alternative, postmodern accounts conceived of the self as constructed in dialogue with (real and imagined) social others, such that experience itself is not divisible to individuals but occurs in dialogue between them. The postmodern self is not fixed or situated within individuals, but continually constructed and negotiated with others who are also similarly socially constructed. Dialogue or conversation (real and imagined) is the primary way in which these relational selves are formed and reformed.

"We are constituted by others (who are themselves similarly constituted). We are always related by virtue of shared constitutions of the self" (Gergen, 1999, pp. 11-12)

Postmodern, relational conceptions of the self, and interactional accounts of sociality, had implications for grief theory, opening up a view of grief as similarly relational and intersubjective – occurring "at least as fully between people as within

them" (Neimeyer, Klass, & Dennis, 2014, p. 485). In particular, the *Continuing Bonds* model (section 2.1.2)—the possibility for relationships to continue after death—called for a relational view of the self, and intersubjective account of sociality, wherein relationships with imagined others (the dead) could be central to grief (Valentine, 2006).

This opened up theorising about the ways in which relationships were continued with the dead, leading to further explication of grief as profoundly social. Central to bond continuation was the development by the bereaved of a posthumous representation or account of their dead, with which to continue to relate (Walter, 1996; Marwit & Klass, 1995; Howarth, 2007). In 1996, Walter theorised that posthumous representations involved the bereaved agreeing a biography of their departed, and the life they lived, through conversation with others who knew the dead, or by speaking (or writing) to a generalised other who need not have known the deceased (Stroebe, 1997). This account accentuated the role of the grief community in negotiating the story of the dead, and the role of the social situation of the griever, and their relationships, in developing that biography.

However, following critique from Stroebe (1997) Walter rethought his emphasis on grief communities agreeing upon the 'truth' of a life, shifting a posthumous story's value from accuracy and agreement, to usefulness to the bereaved: it 'need not be true or agreed. All it needs is to be good enough for practical purposes' (1997, p. 263). Being 'good enough for practical purposes' introduced another relational layer; that survivors' posthumous accounts of their dead—key in bond continuation—were also in relationship with survivors' own ongoing, shifting and socio-culturally embedded experiences.

As to this, Árnason (2000) extended Walter's model, citing excerpts from counselling conversations to contend that survivors' accounts of their dead are profoundly relational and socially embedded. For Árnason, posthumous accounts of the dead involve weaving together a story of the dead that has some basis in their life and character—negotiated with others in the community of grievers—but that is malleable to survivors' ongoing self-narrative, needs, values, and experiences, which themselves are socially embedded and shaped. These are fluid, creative acts of storytelling, wherein grievers ongoingly narrate their deceased and their relationship to them in light of their unfolding experience, such that 'in constructing a biography of the deceased the bereaved simultaneously create a story of themselves and their relationship with the deceased'. Rather than biographies of the dead, these are "stories of the bereaved" Árnason (2000, p. 202).

In the early 2000's, there was growing traction to a broader, related contention; that if grief did not involve putting the dead behind us, it therefore must involve a way of making sense of the loss. The 'meaning reconstruction' theory of grief postulates that a meaning-narration, meaning-making or meaning-reconstruction enterprise is central to grieving (Neimeyer, Baldwin, & Gillies, 2006; Neimeyer & Gillies, 2006; Neimeyer, 2001). In this view, loss involves survivors finding meaning in their loss, forming an account of the lost person, an account of themselves now without their dead, and refashioning a bond with their dead (Attig, 2001; Hagman, 2001). These meanings are narrated, interpreted and constructed by individuals in the contexts and realities of their particular lives, relationships, communities and societies, which shape and are shaped by broad cultural systems of meaning.

The meaning-reconstruction account adopted an explicitly social constructivist orientation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), foregrounding "the variety of ways people interpret and find meaning within the everyday flow of events, speech and behaviour, or discursive activity, through which we define and structure our social reality" (Valentine, 2019, p. 42). A social constructivist account of grief questioned its classic individual-social boundaries, and research methods, grief models and bereavement support practice shifted to encompass grief as a "complex interplay of situational and global, micro and macro, individual and cultural dimensions" (Valentine, 2019, p. 42).

Empirical research also shifted to study grief in these "intricately social" (Neimeyer et al., 2014, p. 485) terms, by researching at the interpersonal level (families and grief groups, systems and communities as units of study) (e.g. Nadeau, 2001, 1998; Klass, 1999b; de Groot & Kollen, 2013); conducting in-depth qualitative explorations of meaning making within particular lives and relationships, interplaying with cultural meaning systems (e.g. Kawashima & Kawano, 2017; Steffen & Coyle, 2017; Wojtkowiak, Vanherf, & Schuhmann, 2019; Hamama-Raz, Shir, & Mahat-Shamir, 2019); and with reflexive, constructivist methodologies that view research and researcher as entangled in grief's construction (Valentine, 2006). Grief therapies are now also increasingly targeted at survivor groups, systems and families (e.g. Rolbiecki, Washington, & Bitsicas, 2017; Morgan, 2012).

Though individualistic grief accounts endure (Steffen & Coyle, 2017), in the main, contemporary theory, research and practice understands grief as interpersonal and socially situated, and calls for research that studies grief in these terms, toward understanding "grief grounded in relationship and culture" (Hedtke & Winslade, 2016, p. 36; Neimeyer & Hogan, 2001; Valentine, 2006).

2.1.5 Strand one: Conclusion

This first strand of this exploratory literature review established three bases of contemporary grief scholarship: (i) deceased-bereaved relationships can continue and change, and are best studied via longitudinal research (ii) grief is diverse and calls for approaches exploring it in survivors' terms and (iii) grief is socially situated, modulated and constructed, requiring research methods that encompass this.

2.2 Strand two: Grief and deceased-related material culture

The second strand of this exploratory literature review establishes the role of material objects relating to the dead in grief, in respect of the three bases of grief scholarship outlined in strand one; that material objects can have a role in grief that can continue and change, is diverse and social.

In material culture studies, relationships between people and physical objects has long been a topic of anthropological and sociological interest, with objects representing opportunities for studying people, relationships, societies and cultures (Miller, 2010; Tilley, Keane, Küchler, Rowlands, & Spyer, 2006). This is rooted in the idea that persons and objects are intimately interrelated. In his classic anthropological text, Mauss (1954 [1925]) contended that objects can become personified, taking on personalities, histories and identities of those who give, use, and own them, while subjects' identities can become bound to objects with which they are associated. Similarly, cultural anthropologist Gell (1998) held that people act through objects, involving the distribution of their personhood into things. This is similar to Strathern's (1988) notion of the 'partible person', wherein objects can become inscribed symbolically with those who have used, gifted or consumed them.

Contemporary 'new materiality' scholars argue that subjects and objects are in a symbiotic relationship: subjects not only ascribe meaning to objects, objects in turn define human action and meaning systems via the possibilities of use and meaning they afford (Chapman, 2006; Ingold, 2000). In the same vein, social anthropologist Miller (2010) argues that theoretical separation of objects and subjects misses out on the "fundamental materiality" (p.4) of humanity and our existence in, and part of, an "object world" (p. 2) where material mediates and shapes our experiences,

relationships and identities such that "we can no longer distinguish subjects from objects" (p. 10).

Complex interrelationships between people and material have been established in material culture primary research and theory. Material can become 'biographical objects' used to tell stories of people's lives and trace personal and collective biographies (Hoskins, 1998, 2006; Sutton & Hernandez, 2007), can become 'inalienable possessions'; so incorporated into personal or collective identities as to lose their commodity or exchange value and designation as usable objects (Weiner, 1992; Sutton & Hernandez, 2007). Persons can invest their own qualities and identities in objects, and objects can be said to take on the qualities and identities of owners (Hoskins, 2006, 1998). Objects have also been conceived as having biographies or social lives via involvement in human practices (e.g. transitioning from possession to gift to commodity to relic) (Hoskins, 2006; Appadurai, 1986). Objects can also come to stand for relationships, relational moments and histories, inscribed with layers of meaning and memory over time (Pollack, 2007; Dasté, 2007; Ajit, 2015). Inter-personal relationships can also be established, enacted, mediated and constituted through things, and objects can be testaments to relationships (Rubin Suleiman, 2007; Hoskins, 2006; Sutton & Hernandez, 2007; Rosenblum, 2007; Miller, 1998), and sites for groups to negotiate a relationships' meaning (Komter, 2001; Gibson, 2008). As tangible sites of intangible social relations, objects can represent "a knot in the network of invisible relationships" (Calvino, 2016, p. 33).

Because objects are embedded in, and mediate, biographies, histories, identities and relationships, the death of the other to which objects relate can bring new meaning, and potency of meaning, to material culture.

The following subsections establish that deceased-related material can have

continuing, diverse and socially embedded roles in grieving.

2.2.1 Twentieth-century conceptions of grief and deceased-related material culture

Anthropological, psychological, psychiatric and sociological literatures have charted the role of material objects (material culture) relating to the dead in grief. Prior to the grief-studies paradigm shift (Strand one), use of such material in grief was understood as 'normal' or 'healthy' in the post-bereavement short-term—to bridge attachment and detachment—but problematic thereafter. For example, psychoanalyst Winnicott's[8] *Object Relations Theory*, in which 'linking' or 'transitional' objects (e.g. toys, blankets) bridge children's connection to and detachment from mothers, was understood as repeating in later life stages (Winnicott, 1953, [1971] 1997). Volkan (1972) applied this to grief, identifying linking objects in clinical work with 'pathological' grievers, thus indicating unresolved or complicated grief. Though acknowledging the transitory significance of deceased-related objects (Volkan, 1981), continued or significant use inhibited bond relinquishment by "perpetuat[ing] the link with the dead individual" (Volkan, 1972, p. 215). Moreover, Volkan viewed grievers' ambivalence to such material—not wishing to engage with it or use it in its intended way (e.g. not wearing the deceased's watch)—as signifying ambivalence toward the dead, or death denial.

Similarly, Parkes (1986) (drawing on Bowlby, 1980) viewed widows keeping spouses' belongings as a dimension of 'searching' for the dead, a fruitless process preceding eventual deference to the reality of their absence, and bond relinquishment. Though standard-model theoreticians recognised objects as preserving memory of the departed e.g. "keepsakes" (Worden, 1991, p. 164) or

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[8]Student of Freudian, Melanie Klein, section 2.1.1

"relics" (Gorer, 1977, p. 110), they pathologised objects' active or continuing grief role.

2.2.2 The continuing and changing role of material culture in grief

However, the 1990's challenge to standard grief models questioned the assumption that objects played an unhealthy, passive or time-bound grief role. If grief could involve integrating the dead into survivors' ongoing lives, it followed that deceased-related objects could also continue to be meaningful. Empirical research lent weight to this. For example, Silverman, Nickman and Worden's (1992) longitudinal interview study reported 77% of recruited children used objects to connect with dead parents, enhancing their ability to construct and maintain posthumous parental relationships (e.g. talking to/about parents). Klass' (1993) ten-year ethnographic study of a grief self-help group suggested that deceased-related objects provided solace to bereaved parents as part of continuing interaction with inner representations of late children. Similarly, Shuchter and Zisook (1993) found that over 40% of widowed people kept spouses' personal effects as part of continued posthumous relationships.

Research data also contradicted standard model perspectives on objects' grief role. For instance, Wheeler's (1999) questionnaire study, testing dimensions of Volkan's theory, found 78% of bereaved parents surveyed used 'linking objects', but, contradicting Volkan, found no indication that this inhibited grieving. By contrast, "keeping me from going on with my life" was the least endorsed statement, and positive, comforting and linking interactions were reported e.g. "kissing it, talking to it, smelling it" (Wheeler, 1999, p. 294). Normand, Silverman and Nickman's (1996) interview study with children over two years following parental death found

contradiction to Parkes' (1986) construal of objects as party to the 'searching' that preceded reality-accepting and detachment. On the contrary, while accepting parents were dead, children used objects as means of anchoring parents more concretely in their material environment, thereby enhancing posthumous relationship development. Moreover, Normand et al.'s (1996) finding that 'accepting the reality of the death' coincided with 'refusing to accept the parent is gone' also undermined Volkan's (1972) contention that material's continuing use signals death denial.

The active, continuing grief role of deceased-related material objects has since been firmly attested to in empirical research, aligning, generally, with one or both prevailing post-paradigm shift grief models: *Continuing Bonds* and *Meaning Construction* (Strand one). One major category of deceased-related material with a grief role, clothing, illustrates this. First, clothing relating to the dead is a common facilitator of bond continuation (Simpson, 2014; Gibson, 2004; Stallybrass, 1999). Garments offer olfactory and tactile connections that foster continued relationships (Gibson, 2004; Simpson, 2014), can be worn and gifted to draw the dead into everyday life and conversation (Ashenburg, 2003; Stallybrass, 1999) and significant events (family reunions, weddings) (Miller & Parrott, 2009), cultivate new bonds by facilitating introduction of the dead to others (Curasi, Price, & Arnould, 2004), and confer continuing, active social presences upon both recently dead and ancestors (Hallam & Hockey, 2001; Miller & Parrott, 2009).

As well as this continuing role in grieving, the role of deceased-associated material culture is subject to change. For example, Gibson's longitudinal interviews with bereaved Australians (2004) showed how deceased-related objects (e.g. a deceased husband's jumper) were used to both 'hold on' (wearing and hugging jumper) and 'let

go' (putting jumper away), the same garments mediating shifting grief experiences over time. Miller and Parrott (2009) found similar phenomena at work in their fieldwork on loss[9] and material culture in South London, in which individuals accumulated and divested of diverse loss-associated objects in creative, personally appropriate and adaptable strategies to control (slow, extend, design) relational separation.

Similarly, Normand et al.'s (1996) longitudinal interview study with parentally bereaved children showed objects embedded in sustained relationships with the dead that evolved in form and content over time. For example, one 11 year old used her late father's baseball hat in an interactive relationship with him (talking to him, feeling him watching her), later stowing the hat away as she came to see herself as her dad's "living legacy" (Normand et al., 1996, p. 93). For another child in this study, the range of ways he related to his late father grew in variety and complexity over two years post-bereavement, from one-way conversation with his father, and no deceased-related objects of significance in the first year, to two-way conversation and his dad's cufflinks becoming focal in year two. Turley and O'Donohoe (2012) show how for author Joan Didion, in the weeks following her husband's death, the idea of material acting as bulwarks against forgetting him was foreign (she couldn't imagine forgetting), but became comforting with time.

As well as demonstrating objects mediating shifting grief experiences over time, Gibson's (2004) longitudinal data identified objects themselves transitioning in status, value and meaning over time. Material once intensely significant was later met with ambivalence. Through incorporation in grieving, objects became links to

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[9]Category of relationship breakdown that includes death.

grief experiences rather than persons or relationships, transitioning from "evocative" to "melancholy objects" (Gibson, 2004, p. 285).

Material culture's active and changing role in grief has been described as an "afterlife" (Simpson, 2014, p. 253) where objects can be "active partners" (Turley & O'Donohoe, 2012, p. 1333) and "animate objects" (Heessels, Poots, & Venbrux, 2012, p. 466), mediating (potentially) longitudinal, bond-sustaining and meaning-construction enterprises. This ongoing and changing nature is best suited to study via longitudinal methods.

2.2.3 The diverse role of material culture in grief

Material culture involved in grieving can be diverse in form, diversely available and meaningful to grievers and involved in diverse griefs.

Firstly, deceased-related material is diverse in form. It can include tangible, overtly deceased-associated objects (e.g. hair, teeth, skulls, cremains) (Heessels et al., 2012; Croucher, 2018) or tangible material so symbolically associated with a person as to seem physical extensions of them (Belk, 1988), stand for them (e.g. grandma's armchair referred to as grandma) (Stallybrass, 1999; Gibson, 2004, 2008), or becoming quasi-subjects with the deceased's characteristics i.e. "subjectification" (Heessels et al., 2012, p. 476). It can also include tangible objects with symbolic, memory and affective links to the death (e.g. a garment in which someone died) (Simpson, 2014; Turley & O'Donohoe, 2012), links to professions, passions and pastimes of the dead (Normand et al., 1996; Simpson, 2014) or to particular relational moments and memories (de Perthuis, 2016; Turley & O'Donohoe, 2012).

Objects can also entail complex, changing intersections of survivor possession, ownership and availability. Some are co-owned with the dead, gifted or bequeathed to individuals or groups, others bequeathed to no-one, or viewed as inapt to bequeathment (e.g. deceased's undergarments) (Gibson, 2008). Other material remains can be, or become, handed-down family wealth, accruing a totemic value that trumps individual grievers' personal or sentimental value, and transcending the possibility of possession (Parrott, 2010).

As well as literal, physical objects, varieties of intangible objects can also evoke individuals and relationships (e.g. sounds, smells, songs, films, numbers, words), entailing complex symbolic, emotional and memory value linked to the dead and deceased-bereaved relationships (Gibson, 2004; Turley & O'Donohoe, 2012; Hallam & Hockey, 2001; Gibson, 2008). This mix of material and immaterial objects are not only situated in private spaces but also occur in public (e.g. Didion's account of driving past a cinema she and her late husband visited, cited in Turley and O'Donohoe 2012). Such objects can be unexpectedly encountered or recalled (Simpson, 2014; Gibson, 2008), their ownership fluid, contested or ambiguous (Gibson, 2004).

As well as (tangible and intangible) objects with deceased-related symbolism preceding a death, arrays of previously mundane, unnoticed (tangible and intangible) material can *become* charged with meaning following a death (Hallam & Hockey, 2001; Gibson, 2008; Turley & O'Donohoe, 2012; Miller, 2010). Grievers' worlds can be populated with unfolding possibilities for association to the dead as material's 'invisible ink' becomes visible: "goods have *memento mori* written all over them, even if with invisible ink" (Bauman, 1998, p. 28).

Thus, deceased-related material can encompass complex, fluid and changing intersections of the tangible and intangible, literal and symbolic, metonymic and metaphorical, personal and shared, public and private, cherished and mundane, explicit and tacit, present and emergent.

A further layer of material's diversity is that, because objects mediate relationships—tracing "trajectories between persons" (Komter, 2001, p. 59)—and are connected to deceased individuals in the minds and shifting memories of their bereaved, diverse

and shifting arrays of material will be differently associated to the dead by their various bereaved. Margaret's Gibson's (2008) book *Objects of the Dead* explicated via longitudinal interviews with survivors, and Gibson's reflections on her own maternal grief, how objects entailed different and fluctuating meaning, and registers of meaning, for different people affected by the same death. Because objects' meaning, value and role is intimately tied to deceased-bereaved relationships, and survivors' unique and evolving meaning-making and bond-sustaining enterprises, their role in grieving is as diverse as the relationships and griefs in which they are implicated.

This represents a diversity of material culture in grieving that defies categorisation abstracted from particular, shifting griefs, and the individuals and relationships involved. The deep specificity of material's role in grief, and resistance to categorisation, is reflected in Gibson's use of the term "things" (p.5), echoing Miller's "stuff" (2010).

"the specificity of individual lives and relationships leads to a huge variety of things that trigger memories and emotions…I use the word 'thing' to represent the diversity of tangible and intangible triggers reported by my interviewees"

(Gibson, 2008, p. 5)

Rather than developing classifications of material abstracted from particular death and grief contexts, materiality scholars preserve this specificity by taking particular cases of death as study units, and exploring idiosyncratic, changing roles and meanings of death-specific arrays of deceased-related material to different people

affected by that death over time (Gibson, 2004; Hallam & Hockey, 2001; Gibson, 2008).

This subsection established that arrays of diverse deceased-associated physical material can play a role in grieving, with material diversely available and meaningful for survivors, and involved in diverse and fluctuating griefs. By taking the deaths of individuals as the starting points of research, and exploring arrays of material at play for those affected by deaths, research conserves this diversity.

2.2.4 The role of material culture in grief is social

Just as grief is socially constructed, embedded and modulated (section 2.1.4) the role of material culture in grieving is also inextricable from, and produced within, particular and shifting social groups and grief systems, and influenced by larger socio-cultural, historical, religious and political meaning systems.

First, material can offer physical sites for groups of death-affected people to communally narrate their dead. Physical effects can catalyse conversations in which grievers' individual relationships with, and narratives of their dead, come into dialogue, the material mediating competing and cohering survivor accounts (Gibson, 2004, 2008). Sifting through clothing of the dead (keeping, disposing of, gifting), for example, provides a vehicle for communal negotiation amongst grievers of posthumous identities and deceased-bereaved relationships, e.g. the parentally bereaved communally constructing their dead by keeping items associated with good parenthood (Gibson, 2004; Pollack, 2007).

Miller and Parrott's (2009) research into the ways residents of a South London street use material culture in separation and loss takes a dialectical stand on interpersonal relationships, contending that all relationships encompass 'actual' and 'idealised' categories. With this theoretical approach, the authors contend that objects related to the dead are natural sites for the communal resolution of this actual-ideal amongst grievers. Simpson (2014) connects this same phenomenon of sorting and keeping to a different theoretical model, contending that material is employed in communal negotiation of, and arrival, at Walter's (1996) 'durable biography' of the dead. For Simpson, in choosing particular objects as spurs to conversation and memory "mourners edit and condense the known life of the deceased…thus the complexity

and ambivalence of a whole life is reduced to an agreed storyline within the communal mythology" (Simpson, 2014, p. 4).

Others still have shown how material objects are involved in communities of grievers' "ancestralisation" of their dead; enabling them to transition from ordinary individuals to flawless ancestors, moral guides and aspirational characters (Parrott, 2011). In a similar vein, Curasi et al. (2004), in a multi-generational study of families' relationships to the possessions of their dead, showed how objects pass from being individuals' cherished possessions to families' 'inalienable wealth' ("items that cannot be gifted or sold but kept through generations within a family), finding that material can have imaginary power over a group (e.g. the caretaker of a kin group, its loss or damage forewarning bad luck).

Another layer of the social embeddedness of material's role in grieving is that it not only entails resonance with the dead to whom it primarily connects, but is embedded in webs of others survivors' resonances with that material, within complex and fluid networks of relational connections amongst the grief community (Gibson, 2004, 2008; Miller & Parrott, 2009).

The grief roles of deceased-related material goods are also shaped by, and reproduce, socio-cultural expectations and influences; material's meaning is entangled with grievers' socio-cultural contexts. For example, use of objects to establish the loss of 'real' stillborn babies (Layne, 2000, p. 321), to establish aborted foetuses as 'grievable' (Millar, 2016), or to reclaim posthumous identities of those who die in drug or alcohol-related deaths (Valentine et al., 2016), respond to socio-cultural messages wherein these griefs are delegitimised and stigmatised. In the

above examples, clothing associated with the dead are vehicles for resisting socio-cultural norms and expectations, and restoring griefs that norms deny.

Thus, material's role in grieving is socio-culturally embedded, and must be studied in these terms.

2.2.5 Strand two: Conclusion

This second strand of this exploratory literature review established that heterogeneous material culture relating to the dead can play a continuing, changing and diverse role in grief that is socially embedded. These qualities must inform research into grief and deceased-related material.

2.2.6 Preface to strand three: Foregoing strands as critical lens

Strand one established that grief is contemporarily considered to have the potential to continue and change over time, is diverse and is socially situated; qualities that must inform grief research.

Strand two drew out these same qualities in respect of material culture's grief role, ascertaining that diverse, varying deceased-related objects can play a role that continues and changes over time, is diverse, and socially situated. Strand two consequently concluded that empirical inquiries into material culture's grief role must be informed by these qualities.

These foundations in place, Strand three turns to this thesis' digital focus. In this strand, established concepts and methodologies of the grief and material culture literatures are applied to the territory of deceased-related digital culture and its grief role, the former used to critique the latter.

2.3 Strand three: Narrative review of empirical literature on grief and deceased-related digital culture

This final strand of this literature review reports on a systematically-conducted narrative review of empirical studies in the area of proposed exploration. It reviews existing, international, peer-reviewed empirical inquiries of any date relating to how bereaved people use and experience digital culture relating to their dead. Review objectives were:

(i) To assure the novelty of the proposed inquiry (Hawker, Payne, Kerr, Hardey, & Powell, 2002).

(ii) To critically evaluate the quality of existing research and identify deficits in method and content (Baumeister & Leary, 1997). In this case, critique was in respect of the principles of contemporary grief theory and research, and the role of material culture therein, established above.

(iii) To inform the design of the proposed inquiry (Grant & Booth, 2009).

Through informal literature searching, and my previous exposure to the topic area (Appendix A), I identified that literature in this nascent field is scant, disparate and multidisciplinary. I therefore adopted Hawker et al.'s (2002) framework for systematically searching and appraising multidisciplinary and disparate research. Drawing on this framework, I devised a literature search strategy (Appendix B). I then refined the literature found in this search via the process described in Appendix C, arriving at thirteen empirical studies. Three studies explicitly addressed the grief role of deceased-related digital culture, the remaining 10 were focused on deceased-

related digital culture with respect to related topics (e.g. inheritance, memory), with findings relating secondarily to grief. These studies emanated from diverse disciplines (Appendix D).

Narrative reviews are used to synthesise findings where methodological diversity renders other types of article synthesis, such as the meta-analytic aggregation in systematic reviews, inappropriate (Baumeister & Leary, 1997). As this review aimed to capture an eclectic range of evidence in service of an exploratory study in a novel area, this approach is appropriate. The following review distils these 13 studies into key themes, representing deficits in this literature identified in light of the principles of and methodologies of grief, and material culture literatures identified in the foregoing strands. These deficits are then used to inform this study's design (Baumeister & Leary, 1997).

2.3.1 Key theme 1: Cross-sectional research design

All thirteen studies displayed a methodological leaning toward studying bereaved people's interactions with digital material relating to their dead as once-off snapshots of the phenomenon. Kasket's (2012) study of "continuing bonds in the age of social networking" analysed posts on five 'in-memory-of' Facebook groups and interviewed bereaved Facebook users (p. 62). Analysis of Facebook posts and interviews were conducted at one time point. Bereaved individuals in this study reported visiting posthumous Facebook profiles frequently and considered posthumous profile deletion the removal of "the one last thread of him that I have" (Kasket, 2012 p. 66).

In their chapter *Transition and Letting Go*, Cumiskey and Hjorth (2017) use excerpts from qualitative interviews to establish how mobile media can over time be party to a 'letting go' process for survivors, invoking Klein's (1940) 'linking objects' that bridge detachment from the dead. However, this was based on once-off survivor interviews, reporting retrospectively, rather than serial or longitudinally engaging with participants. In Bassett's Constructivist Grounded Theory inquiry (Bassett, 2018), 31 'digital inheritors' were interviewed about heterogeneous digital culture relating to their dead. The resulting substantive *Theory of Second Loss* (Bassett, 2020b; Bassett, 2018; Bassett, 2019c) "describes the fear of losing precious data which contains the essence of the dead" (2019, p. 1). In this theory, biological death of the other is the first loss experienced by survivors, the second is loss of 'precious' data possessed of their deceased's 'essence', such that digital-age grief is marked by fear of this latter loss. However, again here engagement with interviewees was once-off and does not attend to grief's longitudinality.

Similarly, Clabburn et al (2019) conducted an interpretative phenomenological analysis of interviews with young people parentally bereaved by motor neurone disease, and in receipt of parents' 'digital legacies': heterogeneous material created ante-mortem for post-mortem consumption. In their proposed '*Model of Reciprocal Bonds Formation'*, the authors propose a development to Walter's durable biography theory (1996), with the addition of an 'autobiographical chapter' directly 'from' the deceased. However, this is again based on cross-sectional interviewing at one time point, and does not reflect the established continuity and change in grieving with deceased-related material.

Brubaker et al. (2013) conducted a study of Facebook users' experiences of and views on death as represented on the site, in which 16 interviews were conducted at one time point. Participants with dead Facebook friends frequently visited their posthumous profiles and reported a clash between their remembrances of the dead and incongruous online content. However, these studies' cross-sectional designs mean that they do not reflect if and how these processes and meanings develop or change over time. Given the dead can be integrated into the ongoing lives of the bereaved, often decades after the death (Klass and Walter, 2007; Klass et al., 1996), studies conducted at one time point underrepresents this enduring, processual nature.

Similarly, Odom et al. (2010) conducted interviews and a home tour at one time point in which bereaved people identified and discussed meaningful posthumous objects. Bailey, Bell, and Kennedy (2015) also conducted once-off interviews with people bereaved by suicide, Elsden and Kirk (2014) interviewed people once about their use of "personal informatics data" (p. 74) and Petrelli and Whittaker (2010, p. 156) and

Petrelli, Whittaker, and Brockmeier (2008) both conducted once-off "home memory tours" and interviews in which participants identified physical and digital mementos of their dead.

Conversely, Kirk and Sellen (2010) and Massimi and Baecker's (2010) respective studies of "home archiving of cherished objects" (p. 10) and "how the bereaved inherit personal digital devices [and] use technologies to remember the deceased" (p. 1821) involved data collection at two time points. However, these entailed two different methods of data collection (web survey and follow-up interview; home tour of sentimental objects and follow-up interview). No time lapse was specified between data collection points and there is no mention of its implications for findings, leading to the assumption that data were not collected sequentially. Therefore, though data were collected at two points, they were not designed to capture the phenomenon of interest over time.

Though the existing empirical literature gives insight into the experiences of survivors at discrete time-points post-bereavement with respect to digital material relating to the dead, it does not generate understandings of the longitudinal aspect of this phenomenon. To date, no study looks longitudinally at the part of deceased-related material in grieving, nor reflects in their methodological approach the established principles of contemporary grief and material culture scholarship: that time is a critical metric in researching grief and the part of deceased-related material therein.

2.3.2 Key theme 2: Single-perspective sampling

There is a trend in the empirical literature toward studying bereaved people's experiences of deceased-related digital material from the perspective of individual survivors, each bereaved of a different person. Massimi and Baecker's (2010) study of "a death in the family" examines "how the bereaved inherit personal digital devices [and] use technology to remember the deceased" (p. 1821). Though proposing a family-orientated method, family here refers to the familial relationship between participants and their deceased, with participants included in a web survey and follow-up interview. No other family member was recruited per death. Given the communal nature of grief, this single-perspective approach captures singular perspectives on a phenomenon that is socially embedded.

Kasket's (2012) paper analyses posts on five 'in-memory-of' Facebook sites, and therefore does look beyond the isolated survivor experience of engaging with the Facebook profiles of their dead. However, the five Facebook groups are not analysed as death-centred units with multiple survivors affected by the same death, but rather as a totality, making it impossible to deduce how multiple people connected to each death might share, talk about, use and experience the material, and how the interplay of individuals in the same grief community might figure. The potential for a multi-perspective understanding of the phenomenon is therefore diminished.

In Bassett's Constructivist Grounded Theory inquiry (2018), the 31 interviewed 'digital inheritors' are death-unrelated; each representing a different death case. Similarly in the contributions of Clabburn et al. (2019) and Cumiskey and Hjorth (2017), sampling is single perspective per death. These three contributions propose

new grief theory, and modifications to existing grief theory, based on inquiries that do not methodologically locate interviewees in their grief communities or social milieus. As strands one and two established, grief and material culture scholarship holds that social location is critical, particularly in research geared toward theory development.

Certain of the Human Computer Interaction (HCI) and Interaction Design (ID) studies identified for this review do conceptualise grief and remembering the dead as a social and communal phenomenon and nod to the fact that different bereaved people will have different material relating to their dead. For instance, Petrelli and Whittaker (2010) recognise that grief occurs at the level of social groups, recruiting families and conducting home tours and interviews with parents from 13 families. Similarly, Petrelli et al.'s (2008) study of the use and experience of physical and digital mementos also explored it at the family level. However, neither of these studies specifies the number of two-adult dyads recruited per family, nor do they analyse these related participant accounts in order to illuminate a dual or relational perspective. Thus, though they include more than a singular perspective on the role of deceased-related digital objects in grief, these studies did not place methodological or analytical emphasis on this element.

Kirk and Sellen's (2014) research in family homes investigated the "kinds of sentimental objects, both physical and digital, to be found in homes", which encompassed some "excavate[ing]" of the digital objects of the dead (p. 1). This was the only paper reviewed whose method carried the conceptualisation of the use of artefacts as a social endeavour that is not isolable to individual survivor experience. Odom et al's (2012) study of heirloom inheritance was similarly holistic in its design

in that it recruited multi-generational families and involved multiple family members in home tours and interviews.

However, neither of these studies was principally aimed at exploring the use and experience of digital material in the context of grief, and therefore their findings relating to this specific focus are limited. Their multi-perspective, holistic research designs do however inform my inquiry.

2.3.3 Key theme 3: Limited definition of deceased-related digital culture

The third pattern evident in the identified literature is narrow definition of, and focus on, particular types of deceased-related digital culture. Given the range and volume of digital culture relating to the dead that may persist after a death, focusing on certain types of material makes sense for research purposes. However, these approaches do not allow holistic explorations of the spread of material that may be of significance to the bereaved in the wake of a digital-age death. None of the thirteen studies reviewed involved an inclusive exploration of the deceased-related digital culture available at the end of a life. That is, the death-centred focus of the grief and material culture literature is not represented.

Facebook featured prominently in the literature as a way to study survivor experiences with material, as it provides a self-contained analytic unit where different types of material are represented (e.g. deceased's profile, likes, messaging, calling, multi-media content etc.). Brubaker et al.'s (2013) study of Facebook as a site of public mourning included findings on bereaved users' encounters with the in-life profiles of their dead, with reference to various types of deceased-related material within the site. Similarly Kasket (2012) reports on posts and group administrator interviews relating to 'in-memory-of' Facebook pages in which reference is made to various types of deceased-related material (deceased-generated content, in-life survivor-deceased interactions). Facebook is also the focus of Bailey et al.'s (2015) study of post-suicide memorialisation, in which the authors briefly mention participants' experiences with the deceased's digital leavings on the site. Although Facebook and individual social media platforms offer convenient microcosms of the phenomenon under investigation, it represents only a part of the deceased-related

digital material that may remain across a variety of sites, services and devices (Leonard and Toller, 2012, Mayer-Schönberger, 2009).

The HCI/ID articles reviewed take a wider view of deceased-related material. Though Elsden and Kirk's (2014) paper on one's "quantified past" is not primarily about the post-mortem experience of this quantified past for the bereaved, it touches briefly on it (p. 45). The article focuses on "personal informatics tools" (e.g. Fitbit), used to track "physical activity, sleep, diet, spending habits, mood and health status" (p. 46), the data from which can take on new meaning after users' death. Though this study moves beyond Facebook, its focus on these personal devices again represents only one aspect of what might remain digitally after a death.

Other HCI/ID papers reviewed use broader conceptualisations of deceased-related digital culture, allowing for both physical and digital artefacts to be chosen by interviewees and spoken about in home tours and interviews. However, the digital artefacts identified only encompassed hardware containing content relating to the dead (e.g. CD's, hard drives and mobile phones) (e.g. Kirk & Sellen, 2010; Petrelli & Whittaker, 2010). This is perhaps related to the 'home tour' design where hardware were more readily identified than non-physical digital artefacts (e.g. emails).

Clabburn et al.'s (2019) focused solely on one category of material: what the authors termed 'digital legacies': heterogeneous video-based material created ante-mortem by terminally ill parents with the intention of post-mortem consumption. The most inclusive spread of deceased-associated digital culture was represented in the contributions of Bassett (2018) and Cumiskey and Hjorth (2017), which encompassed material created incidentally during the life of the dead, with awareness of death, created during death, and with the intention of post-death

consumption. However, this material was spread across multiples of individual cases of death, rather than constellating around the death of an individual. This death-focused orientation, rooted in the grief and material culture literature, has the advantage of factoring in the interactions between material and the totality of material, as far as is possible, in the research endeavour.

Though the totality of existing empirical work does encompass a range of deceased-related material, no one study was designed to encompass the range of material that might relate to the life and death of a contemporary individual. No study reflects the grief-and-material-culture premise that pre-designating material types is less useful than exploring cases of death, looking inclusively at what material is significant. Unlike the studies cited here, this material-inclusive approach also includes the possibility for material to interact in the use and experience of survivors, a facet lost when the material is defined by researchers rather than participants. The current inquiry therefore takes this inclusive, death-focused and participant-defined approach to the study of deceased-related digital culture.

2.3.4 Conclusion of Strand three and chapter 2 conclusion

This narrative review found no existing research on grief and deceased-related digital culture consonant with the principles and methodologies of grief and material culture literatures established in strands one and two. This finding ensures this study represents a new contribution to knowledge.

In the following chapter I translate these empirical deficits into this inquiry's aim and objectives, and report on the methodology that I developed in response to them.

Chapter 3: Methodology and method

Chapter 1:
INTRODUCTION
Why this study?

Chapter 2:
EXPLORATORY LITERATURE REVIEW
Grounds to explore

Chapter 3:
METHODOLOGY & METHOD
How to explore

Chapter 4:
DATA OVERVIEW
All data

Chapter 5:
FINDINGS PREFACE
Data by case

Chapter 6:
CROSS-PARTICIPANT ORIENTATIONS
Looking across

Chapter 7:
CASE DEEP DIVE
Going deep

Chapter 8:
THEORY PRESENTATION
A theory, grounded

Chapter 9:
DISCUSSION
Contributions & reflections

Chapter 10:
CONCLUSION
Key takeaways

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological and procedural approaches in this inquiry. I begin with a statement of the study's aims and objectives. With these aims and objectives as starting points, I trace how they were flexed and negotiated in the iterative formation of this inquiry's bespoke exploratory methodology. I describe an emergent ethos within a sensitive terrain, undergirded by positions on reality and knowledge, flowing into method, ethics and data analysis.

The convention of reporting research methodology as a retrospective account of final, arrived-at techniques was incompatible with this inquiry's exploratory ethos. Reporting only successes would skim over details and decisions about the terrain valuable for other researchers. Given thesis constraints, an account of each methodological twist and turn is impossible. However, to avoid a situation where "failures in fieldwork, which are key to making new discoveries, are camouflaged in the process of constructing narratives" (Jungnickel & Hjorth, 2014, p.139), I preserve this unfolding methodology as much as possible.

3.2 Inquiry aim and objectives

3.2.1 Aim

Drawing on grief and material culture principles and methodologies, to conduct an exploratory inquiry into the longitudinal role of deceased-related digital culture for bereaved individuals within grief communities.

3.2.2 Primary objectives

(i) In multiple cases of death, to explore what deceased-related digital culture is of significance over time for multiple survivors of the same death, comparing within and across cases.

(ii) In multiple cases of death, to explore how multiple survivors affected by the same death use deceased-related material culture over time, comparing within and across cases.

(iii) To explore how survivors in multiple cases of death, and within communities of other survivors in each case, experience deceased-related digital culture over time, comparing within and across cases.

3.2.3 Secondary objectives

(i) To explore the fruitfulness of a conceptual and methodological approach to this research area informed by grief and material culture scholarship.

(ii) To explore feasible and ethically appropriate methods for longitudinally exploring the grief role of deceased-related material culture for bereaved individuals within particular contexts and communities.

3.3 Methodology

The aims and objectives of this study called for a research methodology that could longitudinally engage multiple cases of digital-era death, with multiple survivors per case specifying the digital material of significance to them. It also required an approach that could evolve over fieldwork in response to what was being found, what was working, and the ethics of longitudinally researching this sensitive topic. The following reports on the emergence of this inquiry's methodology over fieldwork.

3.3.1 From aims and objectives to design aspirations

To realise the study's aim and objectives, the grief and material culture principles informing them, and to address the deficits of existing empirical work, this inquiry had four design aspirations at its outset, tabulated below.

Table 3.1: Design aspirations at study outset

Design aspiration	Description
Longitudinal	Engage survivors serially and longitudinally
Participant-specified digital material	Rather than study-defined/limited
Multiple deaths, multiple survivors	More than one survivor affected by each of several deaths
Individual & grief community foci	Study individual survivors within groups of other survivors affected by the same death

The result of drawing together of disparate literatures, and limitations of existing empirical work, these aspirations had not been realised in a study on this topic. Indeed, their absence might owe to their inappropriateness, logistically or ethically, to this research area. Therefore, at study outset, it was unknown whether and how these aspirations would translate into research undertaking.

Designing social research involves identifying methodologies and methods apt to realising a study's aims and objectives. However, it is also done without exact knowledge of what will eventuate in particular fields (King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994; Robson, 2011). Ideal, abstract design aspirations are often refigured when met with unpredictable and complex real-world research (Robson, 2011), and building in room for refining aspirations in light of the field is critical (King et al., 1994; Tewksbury & Gagné, 1997). This is particularly true of new research areas such as the present, which are uncharted not only with respect to studied phenomenon, but as to effective and ethical means of studying it (Leavy & Hesse-Biber, 2008; Staller, Block, & Horner, 2008).

3.3.2 Design aspirations adapting to field: An emergent methodology

Throughout fieldwork, my supervisory team and I assessed the appropriateness of the study's design aspirations to the unfolding inquiry, modifying as appropriate. The methodology was therefore not known or fixed at the outset, but emergent. Emergent research methodologies are "methods in the making" (Lury & Wakeford, 2012, p. 6), formed and reformed while undertaking research in the "dynamic interrelation between the method problem, maker, context, respondents and so on" (Jungnickel & Hjorth, 2014, p. 137). Emergent methods are particularly well suited to studying dynamic uncharted phenomena (Charmaz, 2008b).

This inquiry's emergent methodology formed at the interface between these design aspirations and two key study qualities: (i) Exploratory approach and (ii) Sensitive topic area.

3.3.2.1 Quality I: Exploratory approach

Exploratory methodological approaches reside on the boundary of established methodologies, with researchers tailoring and innovating research endeavours in response to unanticipated questions, directions, data configurations and patterns (Eisner, 1997; Leavy & Hesse-Biber, 2008; Stebbins, 2001). Exploratory inquiries therefore involve dialogue between research design and field, whereby the approach most fitting to studying a given phenomenon is explored alongside, and in response to their undertaking (Stebbins, 2001; Jungnickel & Hjorth, 2014; Leavy & Hesse-Biber, 2008). This responsiveness and adaptability makes explorative approaches suited to new research areas, as, rather than designing inquiries around *a priori* conceptions of an empirical phenomenon's components, exploratory approaches first

look broadly, asking 'what is going on here', before honing in on particularities (Stebbins, 2001).

Realisation of this study's aims and objectives via its design aspirations was balanced against this ethos to follow leads and explore.

For example, the aspiration to recruit multiple cases with multiple survivors was reformulated when unanticipated survivor numbers were recruited to one case. Though studying one case from this many survivor perspectives was not aimed, the exploratory ethos enabled it and modification of the design aspiration.

3.3.2.2 *Quality II: Sensitive topic area*

Most research topics have potential to be sensitive (Corbin & Morse, 2003) and exactly defining sensitive research is difficult (Dempsey, Dowling, Larkin, & Murphy, 2016). Sensitivity is associated with intensely personal topics (Cowles, 1988), those which arouse emotion (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2008; Lee, 1993), may intimidate, discredit or incriminate participants (Renzetti & Lee, 1993), and risk or threaten researchers or researched (Corbin & Morse, 2003; Dickson-Swift et al., 2008). Grief inquiries are considered sensitive owing to their intimate and emotional nature, and potential risk for researcher and researched (Sque, Walker, & Long-Sutehall, 2014; Dickson-Swift et al., 2008; Visser, 2017).

The suitability of designs for bereaved participants is particularly difficult to foresee as their needs and wishes with respect to participation may be volatile (Parkes, 1995; Sque et al., 2014). Thus, involving the bereaved in research, and doing so longitudinally, demands care, sensitivity and flexibility to the particular needs of this group (Skinner Cook, 1995; Sque et al., 2014). Furthermore, conducting sensitive

research can be emotionally taxing for researchers (Lee-Treweek & Linkogle, 2000), and amplified for novices (Fahie, 2014). Though I had experience of sensitive interviewing (Caswell & O'Connor, 2015; Caswell & O'Connor, 2019) (one-off interviews with adults expecting to die alone), my capacity to longitudinally engage multiple survivor groups, with sensitivity and self-care, was unknown.

As the study evolved, this inquiry's design aspirations were therefore modified with respect to what was ethical and appropriate for me and my participants in this sensitive terrain. For example, a paternally bereaved participant nominated her mother to take part in the study, but later reconsidered, as bringing up the study might trigger old mother-daughter conflicts about the deceased's character. The aspiration to recruit multiple bereaved in every case was refined as it became clear this was best assessed case by case, and negotiated with participants.

3.3.2.3 Section summary

Using my judgement, that of my supervisory team, and in dialogue with participants, this study's emergent methodological approach formed over fieldwork in the interaction between design aspirations and these exploratory and sensitive inquiry qualities.

3.3.3 Philosophical orientation

As an emergent, field-responsive, longitudinal exploration of multiple perspectives on an experiential phenomenon, in which researcher judgement was central, this inquiry is situated within a particular knowledge tradition. That is, it entails a view on the nature of the reality it is researching, what constitutes knowledge about this reality, the researcher role and research products.

Social research entails a key difference from the physical sciences. Unlike the physical world, the social world is formed of individuals and groups with subjectivity, self-consciousness and agency, being studied by members of that social world (Benton & Craib, 2011; Lewontin & Levins, 1998). Therefore, in social science, a range of ontological (truth) and epistemological (knowledge) positions exist on the goals and products of research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Avis, 2003). These positions feed into the justification (methodology) and techniques (methods) of inquiries.

Amid disagreement about the definitions and remit of these concepts (Carter & Little, 2007), they are defined here as ontology: "What kind of being is the human being? What is the nature of reality?" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p.12); and epistemology: "the study of the nature of knowledge and justification" (Schwandt, 2001, p.71); methodology: "the description, the explanation and the justification—of methods, not the methods themselves" (Kaplan, 1964, p.18); and methods: research action, i.e. "procedures, tools and techniques" (Schwandt, 2001, p.158). Particular ontological and epistemological positions underpin, and are congruent with, particular methodologies and methods (Creswell, 2013; Staller, 2012). Therefore, awareness of philosophical paradigms evoked by methodological and methods choices is critical for philosophically robust and coherent inquiries (Howell, 2012; Blaikie, 2009; Crotty,

1998). This occurs when there is philosophical "logic" (Blaikie, 2009, p.8) or "internal consistency" (Carter & Little, 2007, p. 1316) running through the four interlocking inquiry elements, see Figure 3.1 below (Creswell, 2013; Crotty, 1998; Blaikie, 2009; Staller, 2012).
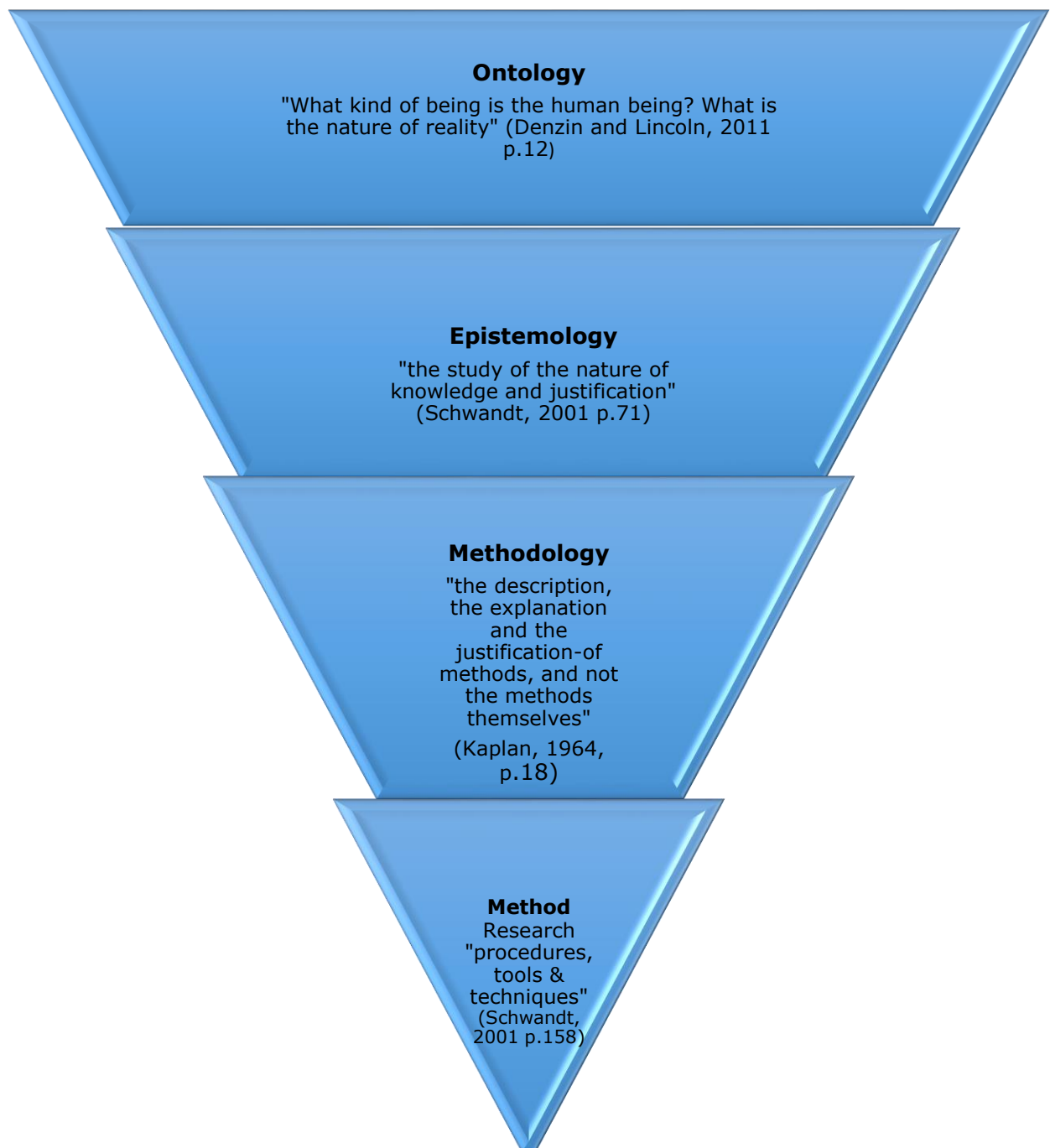
Figure 3.1: Four interlocking elements of social research

3.3.3.1 Interpretive-constructivist orientation

This inquiry aimed to longitudinally explore the process of, and meaning ascribed to, experiences of bereaved individuals and groups, with respect to digital material relating to their dead. It aimed to explicate potentially complex, nuanced and varying

survivor experiences, allowing for accord and discord in and across accounts, and a multiplicity of perspectives that might fluctuate over time. It was therefore not aimed at illuminating or verifying the 'reality' of this experience as something that exists externally to respondents and across temporalities and contexts. Rather, in alignment with prevailing constructivist grief approaches outlined in Chapter 2 (section 2.1), this study views participants' realities as a function of their unique, fluid perspectives on a phenomenon and meanings constructed from these perspectives.

This inquiry therefore subscribed to the constructivist ontological tradition: individuals construct their realities and interpret their worlds (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In this view, social realities are continuously constructed in interactions with others by culturally, historically and temporally situated individuals, and therefore people's realities, lives and experiences have various and shifting interpretations (Howell, 2012; Creswell, 2012). It follows that the constructivist paradigm embraces subjectivity from an epistemological stance, for researcher and respondents, such that multiple realities are accepted in the construction of knowledge during the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Sandelowski, 1993). In this view, no objective, fixed reality exists 'out there' extraneous to participants that might be uncovered by research, or for the purposes of research, only situated constructs of it.

With its roots in the constructivist position, the study's epistemology carries these assumptions into a view of knowledge, and research knowledge, as similarly constructed, fluid and a function of situated and shifting perspectives (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The inquiry therefore ascribes to the interpretivist epistemology in that it views the products of research not as accessing a reality extraneous to research and researched, but as forged in the "interpretive interplay"

between them (Giddens, 1984, p. xxxii; Blaikie, 2009). Research products are therefore steeped in the particular contexts of their construction; they are not value free but incorporate the norms, values and beliefs of a particular cultural and historical moment, and forged in the dynamic of individuals interacting in unrepeatable research encounters. This view contends that research data is "a product of participation in the field, rather than a reflection of the phenomenon studied" (McNamara, 2001, p.142).

Thus, another defining characteristic of interpretivism is its position on the role of the researcher as immersed in the research endeavour, from conception to reporting; co-constructing inquiry, data and knowledge (Ratner, 2002; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In the interpretivist paradigm, divisions between research object and subject have been problematised, as the subjectivities of researcher and researched are viewed as melding in the research endeavour (Van der Geest, 2007; Ratner, 2002). In other words, both researcher and respondent have subjective experiences that shape the research interaction, and the interpretation of researchers in their research output in their subjective understanding of the phenomenon. Thus social enquiry entails an intersubjectivity, such that the "research endeavor [is] interactive, intersubjective process, rather than the researcher being separate from the field" (Valentine, 2008, p.6).

Owing to its view of all experience, including research encounters, as embedded in particular lives, times and contexts, interpretivist epistemology expects differing and unique perspectives on phenomena under study. It is committed to the exploration of divergent and convergent accounts of phenomena that fluctuate over time, and a multiplicity of differing and nuanced perspectives, as opposed to the identification of

unifying data patterns that typifies positivism and post-positivism (Blaikie, 2009; Crotty, 1998; Baert, 2005). As put by Eisner, the interpretivist position "is a matter of being able to handle several ways of seeing as a series of differing views rather than reducing all views to a single, correct one" (Eisner, 1991 , p.49).

Interpretivism is therefore a natural choice in a study wishing to examine a plurality of perspectives within and across cases of death. It also aligns with the study's emergent methodology and exploratory ethos, wherein I, my supervisors, and inquiry participants were involved in the shape and direction of the unfolding inquiry.

3.3.3.2 My personal orientation

Just as this study's methodology is rooted in a particular philosophical lineage, it also draws on my personal, educational, disciplinary, institutional and cultural contexts. A hangover from the empiricism in prevailing positivistic and post-positivistic epistemologies, determining research methodologies is conceptualised as an impartial, intellectual choice of tools based solely on technical fit (Steinmetz, 2005; Davies, 2010). However, the postmodern turn contends that, as with all elements of social research, methodological selection is entangled with by the subjectivity of situated researchers (Ratner, 2002; Creswell, 2013; Pitard, 2017; Davies, 2010). Particular methodologies and their philosophical orientations can resonate with researchers' worldviews, disciplinary and institutional norms, educational experience and methodological exposure, and personal preferences, feelings and personalities (Nagel, Burns, Tilley, & Aubin, 2015; Markham, 2005). This aligns with the radical empiricist position, beginning with William James (1912), which recognises the relationship between people and methods, and rejects the modernist contention that methods are independent of the total personalities who use them. Acknowledging

such factors is not carte blanche to select methodologies based on what we feel,
prefer or know. Rather, awareness of them enables critical reflection on influences
feeding methodological selections, and conscious inspection of selections' suitability
(Charmaz, 2014; Davies, 2010). The inquiry approach (detailed below),
Constructivist Grounded Theory (ConGT), acknowledges researchers' *a priori*
paradigmatic orientations and experiences, and encourages use of reflexivity during
the research process.

Given this inquiry's interpretive-constructivist orientation and my role in shaping the
exploration, it is particularly appropriate that I orientate myself in this respect. Nagel
et al. (2015, p.379) advise novice ConGT researchers write an essay "declaring your
paradigm inclination" (also Markham, 2005; Visser, 2017; Pitard, 2017), presented in
Appendix E.

3.3.4 Methodological approach

Research methodology is distinct from methods (sampling, data collection,
management, analysis and reporting). Rather, methodology is the overarching ethos
guiding and justifying methods, converting inquiry aims and philosophical orientation
into the "research action" of methods (Carter & Little, 2007, p.1317; Denzin &
Lincoln, 2000; Creswell, 2013).

The methodology selected for this study was qualitative, Constructivist Grounded
Theory within a longitudinal, multiple-case study approach. The following outlines
these selections and my reasoning for choosing them.

3.3.4.1 Qualitative

A qualitative methodological approach was selected for multiple reasons.

First, qualitative methodologies are exploratory by their nature as they engage with the messiness and complexity of social phenomena with openness to what it turns up; "Discovery is our forte" (Wolcott, 2009, p. 72). A qualitative approach was therefore appropriate for this study as it is adaptable to follow leads, and particularly apt to exploration of social phenomena whose dimensions and foci are unknown (Silverman, 2000; Flick, 2014).

The constructivist-interpretivist orientation of this study also called for a qualitative methodology, as it enables generation and analysis of in-depth, multi-perspective, changeable and discordant experiential accounts, wherein researchers co-produce data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Blaikie, 2009). A qualitative approach therefore also aligns with the post-modern grief theories underpinning this inquiry, which promotes methodologies that preserve grief's particularity, uniqueness and contextuality to prevent universalising grief concepts (Neimeyer & Hogan, 2001; Valentine, 2006).

This inquiry's emergent methodology is also consistent with a qualitative methodological approach. Owing to the inchoate and intricate social phenomena and contexts they explore, qualitative investigations are pliable and responsive by definition (Tewksbury & Gagné, 1997; Stebbins, 2001; Leavy & Hesse-Biber, 2008):

"not explorations of concrete, intact frontiers; rather they are movements through social spaces that are designed and redesigned as we move through them" (Tewksbury & Gagné, 1997, p.72).

For sensitive research topics, qualitative methodologies are also most appropriate as they adapt to research fields, accommodate changeable participant accounts and needs, and engender researcher-participant rapport that eases sensitivity (Dempsey et al., 2016; Liamputtong, 2007; Lee, 1993). Qualitative approaches are appropriate for grief research for these reasons (Sque et al., 2014), and due to their epistemic openness to the particularities and changeability of survivor experiences (Neimeyer & Hogan, 2001).

3.3.4.1.1 Which qualitative approach?

Amongst qualitative approaches, variations exist in relation to: the purpose of the inquiry, the data collected, how data are interpreted, the role of the researcher, and the inquiry's products (Blaikie, 2009; Creswell, 2012). A number of approaches can be considered in the qualitative tradition (grounded theory, ethnography, phenomenological studies, narrative inquiries, discourse analyses, inter alia) (Creswell, 2012). In choosing amongst qualitative approaches, consideration of the applicability of research strategies to research aims and objectives, and attention to the kind of knowledge produced by different approaches, are critical (Blaikie, 2009; Crotty, 1998).

The following describes the adopted approach, Constructivist Grounded Theory, and my reasoning for its adoption.

3.3.4.2 Constructivist Grounded Theory

In 1967 Glaser and Strauss developed the qualitative mode of inquiry Grounded Theory (GT) as a counter to prevailing deductive and hypothesis-testing approaches to knowledge development. Instead, they proposed an inductive method where theory is built from, and grounded in, qualitative data (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In the half century following its inception, many iterations of GT have grown out of Glaser and Strauss' approach, in line with differing philosophical orientations. Though these iterations differ philosophically, there are GT hallmarks common to all: theoretical sampling, line-by-line data coding, constant comparison, concurrent data generation and analysis, multiple data sources and memoing (more on these later) (Nagel et al., 2015; Creswell, 2012; Glaser, 1992; Charmaz, 2014). These strategies are used to rigorously account for findings in data, aimed at generating theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014).

Being born out of a knowledge tradition, GT carries a philosophical orientation, though this varies (Fujimura, 1992; Clarke, 2003; Nagel et al., 2015). Unlike other philosophically agnostic frameworks for analysing qualitative datasets (e.g. thematic or content analysis), GT is a "theory/methods package" (Clarke, 2003 p.559) that is both philosophical orientation and research strategy (Clarke, 2003, p. 559; Nagel et al., 2015). Philosophical stance on inquiry form, products and researcher role flow into research undertaking.

However, GT was broadly criticised in the 1990's as having become a reified orthodoxy for conducting qualitative work, which embodied realist and positivistic values (Van Maanen, 1988; Charmaz, 2008a). Many argued for GT's constructivist potential beneath these modernist add-ons (Clarke, 2003, 2006; Bryant, 2002; Charmaz, 2000; Pidgeon & Henwood, 1995). Kathy Charmaz, who lead the constructivist renewal of GT in the late 1990's, sought to strip back this objectivist cast in her Constructivist Grounded Theory (ConGT) (Charmaz, 2008a), by "reclaim[ing] these tools from their positivist underpinnings to form a revised, more open-ended practice of grounded theory that stresses its emergent, constructivist elements" (Charmaz, 2000 p. 510). Charmaz' ConGT is constructivist in on two levels:

(i) Theories are constructs: accounts of phenomena situated in social, cultural and historical frames by similarly situated researchers.

(ii) Inquiries are constructs: forming while undertaken by situated researchers constantly comparing literature, patterns and relationships in incoming data, possible questions, directions and theoretical readings, via strategies that iterate in response.

3.3.4.2.1 Why ConGT?

Jeon (2004) suggests that choosing from the versions of GT must be governed by the ontological and epistemological orientations of proposed research. ConGT's constructivist grounding accords with this inquiry's interpretivist-constructivist position. ConGT also sits well with the constructivist grief theory (Chapter 2, Section 2.1) and grief material culture literature (section 2.2), underpinning this work, which

call for methodologies allowing of multiple, complex, idiosyncratic and changing grief accounts, co-produced by researchers.

In *Grounded Theory as an emergent method* Charmaz argues that ConGT's two-level constructivism also makes it emergent on these levels (Charmaz, 2008b). Completed grounded theories are emergent (rather than reified accounts of phenomena), and the method itself is emergent, i.e. not a set formula but one where researchers "use grounded theory methods as flexible, heuristic strategies" (Charmaz, 2000 p. 510). The mutability of ConGT designs, procedures and methods are apt to following leads and responding to the unforeseen, making it a good choice for exploratory inquiries into uncharted research terrains such as the present (Charmaz, 2014; El Hussein, Hirst, Salyers, & Osuji, 2014). This makes ConGT a good fit for this inquiry's emergent methodology, exploratory ethos and my wish to tailor inquiry to field.

Furthermore, a defining feature of ConGT is that it aims to develop theory, which is useful in new research areas such as the present, with little theoretical precedent. Via data generation and analysis that inform each other, and a series of strategies for making creative associations—and checking them in data—ConGT stimulates analysts to push past thematised descriptions of data. Researchers make conjectures and links traceable back to data, via back-and-forth comparison and memo-keeping to account for imaginative links and interpretive steps. In this way, ConGT strategies "prompt the researcher to reach beyond pure induction", to make data-grounded theoretical readings (Charmaz, 2008b, p. 156). This theory orientation was also a factor in my selection of ConGT.

A final factor in my choosing Charmaz' ConGT is that it is recognised as suitable to gaining insight into underlying social processes associated with experiential phenomena (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This would, as the grief theory advocates, move beyond studying grief at the individual level by bringing grievers' milieus into analytic frame. Particularly, ConGT has form where the research object is deeply subjective yet socio-culturally embedded, such as suffering, illness and loss (Charmaz, 2006b; Thannhauser, 2014; Charmaz, 1983, 1999). Furthermore, ConGT is particularly suited to thanatology research (Belgrave & Charmaz, 2014) and widely used in grief research (Charmaz & Milligan, 2006; Ray, 2017; Ducy & Stough, 2018). Lastly, Bassett (2018) used ConGT in respect of her study of a similar research terrain as mine, reporting positively on its suitability.

3.3.5 Multiple-case study methodology

This study aspired to study the use and experience of deceased-related digital material from the perspective of multiple people connected by the death of an individual, to do this in multiple cases of death, and compare within and across these deaths. Thus, a multiple-case study methodology was fitting. Case study inquiries enable focused studies of "bounded system[s]" over time through the collection of multiple data sources rich in context (Creswell, 2012, p. 61). This allows for an "holistic understanding of a phenomenon with real-life contexts from the perspective of those involved" (Boblin, Ireland, Kirkpatrick, & Robertson, 2013, p. 1268) suited to research that asks "how" and "why" questions (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009).

Cases can be bound by place, time, phenomenon or institution; can be single, multi-site or multiple; and instrumental, intrinsic or descriptive (Creswell, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). What constitutes cases is informed by the study's purpose (Boblin et al., 2013). Therefore this study employed:

- Cases bound by time (up to five years after the death of the individuals at their centre*), place (digital societies*) and phenomenon (grieving dead people with related digital material*). As deaths were core to defining cases, and that which connected case participants, I term them *death-centred case studies* (DCCSs). Cases bound by death reflects material culture approaches underpinning this research (Chapter 2, section 2.2) (e.g. Gibson, 2008; Miller & Parrott, 2009).

- A multiple-case study because the inquiry is exploratory, therefore maximum variety in the phenomenon under study was critical. This aligns with ConGT's requirement for maximum heterogeneity in studied phenomena, as variety strengthens resulting theory (Charmaz, 1996).

- Instrumental DCCSs chosen to facilitate understanding of the phenomenon, rather than representing an extreme example (intrinsic) or facilitating description (descriptive) (Stake, 2005). This fits the study's exploratory ethic as the phenomenon and what might typify it are unknown.

Though case study methodologies are not wedded to a philosophical stance (Luck, Jackson, & Usher, 2006), the commonly used appropriations of Yin and Stake carry divergent orientations (Boblin et al., 2013). Yin's (2009) use, where defined cases are employed to refute or reinforce a fixed set of propositions, is positivist (Boblin et

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* Defined later

al., 2013). Stake's (2005) use is constructivist as it allows for definitions of phenomena, and what constitutes cases, to be flexible to the field (Boblin et al., 2013). Therefore Stake's approach is more congruous with qualitative research (Baxter & Jack, 2008) and its responsivity to unknown research terrains apt to exploratory research. As ConGT can be employed with approaches that complement its constructivist orientation (Charmaz, 2014), it is compatible with Stake's multiple-case study approach.

This multiple-case study methodology was refigured over the inquiry course. As one death-centred case became larger than others, and I adapted the inquiry to explore it, the use of case study as *methodology,* and basis for cross-case analysis, was abandoned. However, I continued to use death-centred case studies as a *method* for generating, organising and analysing survivor data relating to the same death. Therefore, in the course of the study, the multiple-study approach transitioned from methodology to method.

3.3.6 Longitudinal

Though using time as a metric, and investigating change over time, are staples of social inquiry, longitudinal research is broad and loosely defined (Davies & Dale, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Generally, longitudinal, or *diachronic* inquiries, involve repeated generation of information about phenomena from analytic units (e.g. individuals, families, organisations, states) on a number of separate occasions (waves) at points (intervals) across time (Taris, 2000; Bijleveld et al., 1998; Ruspini, 2008). However, units, wave numbers, interval lengths and time encompassed vary enormously, from individual-level micro behavioural changes to macro social shifts over life courses, generations and historical epochs. Inquiry units, waves, intervals

and overall times can be calibrated alongside undertaking inquiries, and design selected to apply to particular topic and terrain (Denzin & Giardina, 2015; Ruspini, 2008).

There are three main orders of longitudinal design, which can be mixed and tailored to particular research terrains (Ruspini, 2008; Taris, 2000; Bijleveld et al., 1998). *Repeated cross-sectional* studies regularly ask the same questions of different samples, *prospective* studies periodically ask the same set of questions of the same sample, and *retrospective* studies regularly ask the same sample to report on past events.

The variability in definitions of longitudinal methodologies, and mutability of designs to research topics and terrains, makes it an emergent methodology (Ruspini, 2008). This responsivity, and the possibility of building researcher-participant rapport, also make longitudinal inquiries suited to researching sensitive topics (McCosker, Barnard, & Gerber, 2001; Dempsey et al., 2016; Ruspini, 2008).

Time, and the possibility of change, were critical factors of the current inquiry—rooted in grief, and material culture, principles and methodologies (Chapter 2 sections 2.1.2 & 2.2.2). I aspired to serially engage individual survivors, and groups of survivors, over time. However, the doctorate for which I undertook this inquiry allowed a maximum data generation period of 12 months. Within this parameter, I did not know how frequently, and for how long, participants might engage, nor what duration, waves and intervals would be ethically appropriate, both for me and respondents.

This study's design was oriented around an event: participant bereavement, with repeated study encounters after that event in each death case. It was therefore *event-oriented* (bereavement), *retrospective* (looking back to bereavement), and *prospective* (repeated engagement after bereavement), thereby generating *duration data* (Taris, 2000; Ruspini, 2008). As I wished to engage multiple cohorts of people, with individuals in each cohort grieving the same death, I chose a multiple-cohort design. Thus, this longitudinal study had an *event-oriented, retrospective-prospective, multiple-cohort design* generating *duration data* on the studied phenomenon. Selecting this approach was in response to the singularly retrospective (*looking back*) approaches of research in this terrain to date.

Thus, I selected a longitudinal methodological approach because it factored in time and change, while also according with an emergent ethos and sensitive, unknown terrain. Lastly, reviewers have noted a lack of longitudinal work in Digital Death research broadly (Gotved, 2014; Walter et al., 2012), and advocated for it in this research terrain specifically (Cumiskey & Hjorth, 2017; Kasket, 2019).

3.4   Methods and procedures

Having outlined this inquiry's methodology, the next section describes the methods and procedures through which methodology flowed into research action. I selected a suite of methods for generating an appropriate corpus of data about the studied phenomenon, both participant and researcher-generated. This was because both ConGT and case study methodology require multiple data sources (Charmaz, 2014; Creswell, 2012), because a multi-source approach lends robustness to findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and allows for a multitude of constructions of studied phenomena (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Having a suite of methods available also enabled me to tailor them as the study emerged.

I had a few motivations for selecting this particular methods suite. Of the participant-focused methods, some were suggested by the longitudinal, qualitative methodology: i.e. serial, semi-structured qualitative interviews, and serial participant diaries. Social network maps created by participants were in service of chain-referring participants to death-centred cases. Deceased-related digital objects referred to in participant data were collected, as previous studies reported participants offering them.

Three types of researcher-focused data generation methods were selected. Memos, field notes and a reflective diary were methods of, respectively: tracking my interpretations, richly describing cases, and reflecting on my experience.

In line with the emergent ethos of this inquiry, these methods and their procedures were starting points rather than targets, and modified as I explored this sensitive area.

The following details these methods and their procedures, first the participant-oriented methods, then researcher oriented.

3.4.1 Participant-oriented methods and procedures

3.4.1.1 Semi-structured, serial qualitative interviewing

Method

Semi-structured interviewing was a natural method for generating qualitative participant data in this study. Semi-structured conversations are respondent led, yet guided by interviewers (Atkinson, Coffey, Gubrium, & Holstein, 2002), and thus appropriate for this exploratory study where I wished to investigate participant experiences that cropped up. Thus, the flexibility and responsivity of semi-structured interviews where "the participant talks while the researcher encourages, listens and learns" sat well with this study's exploratory approach and emergent ethos (Orr, Ballantyne, Gonzalez, & Jack, 2020, p. 203). Accordingly, semi-structured interviewing is a core method in GT and ConGT inquiry (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2002; Belgrave & Charmaz, 2014). This malleability to the field also makes this method suited to researching sensitive topics (Dempsey et al., 2016).

With a twelve-month maximum for data generation, and wishing to negotiate with individual survivors about the number of serial interviews that felt right for them, I reasoned that a minimum of one and maximum of four interviews offered a range of participation levels and left sufficient intervals between interviews for time's potential effects to be a factor. This methodological wish to serially and longitudinally interview made semi-structured interviews a good method choice. This was true from the point of view of exploration: semi-structured interview topic guides could iterate from interview to interview for each respondent, to hone in on patterns and phenomena in

their unfolding experience. It was also true from an ethical point of view as, across serial interviews, guides could also be modified according to participant needs. All interview guides for this inquiry were therefore semi-structured, including closed and open-ended questions grouped into sections (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013), to guide rather than strictly structure interviews (Silverman, 2000), and to act as aides memoire for me as a novice interviewer.

Procedure

The topic guide for initial participant interviews (Appendix G) was informed by the study's aim and objectives and was a starting point that evolved over the inquiry. Per ConGT, the guide evolved to investigate patterns in incoming data with new first-wave interviewees, and, in an emergent ethos, I refined the guide to sensitively and productively study this phenomenon. Though initial interviews evolved over the study course, they had a persistent two-part structure.

Part one related to the life and death of the deceased in question, and participants' relationship to them, facilitated by a social network map of those affected by the death (detailed later) from each participant's point of view. Part one also drew on information gleaned from pre-participant screening (described later) and Participant Demographics and Information Forms participants completed at initial interview (Appendix U). In cases where I interviewed more than one survivor of the same death, I communicated my interest in each participant's unique perspective on the above.

Part two centred on digital material relating to this life, death and relationship, and its use and experience for bereaved participants. Part two questions centred on

digital material cited by participants in screening conversations, and typically they mentioned additional material at interview.

Initial interviews were lengthy (averaging two hours) and emotionally taxing for participants, as describing lives, relationships and deaths was complex, often painful and detailed. Follow-up interviews, which did not include part one, averaged 1.5 hours.

Second wave interviews involved asking interviewees about digital material mentioned in the previous interview, and in diary entries submitted in the interim, asking for updates on participants' use and experience of this, and any other digital material, in the intervening time. A similar technique was used with respect to conceptual topics discussed in previous data, e.g. participant anxiety about forgetting the deceased, or comparing digital and human memory. Thus, topic guides for follow-up interviews evolved out of previous data related to each participant, while also including questions exploring patterns and possible theories I was interpreting in concurrent data analysis. For example, an early pattern concerned participants' use of digital material to track their grief over time. Accordingly, I added questions about this to topic guides to investigate this inquiry line with new and existing participants. For third and fourth-wave interviews, I employed this same emergent technique.

Thus, topic guides for wave-one interviews were emergent over the study, as were guides for consecutive interviews for each participant, but both included questions investigating patterns and early buds of theory I was interpreting in parallel analysis of all data.

One-to-one interviews were in the majority in this inquiry (46 of 50). Due to interviews' sensitive nature, participants bereaved of the same individual had the option of interviewing together, resulting in four joint interviews (two dyads, one interview with two friends, and three with a couple). Group-generated data differ from one to one, involving interweaving respondent perspectives, communication styles and relational dynamics (Atkinson et al., 2002), facets that can be intensified for people grieving the same person (Hooghe, Neimeyer, & Rober, 2011). However, joint participation was appropriate given the grief intensity and mutually supporting dynamics of these dyads, and I factored this data difference into analysis (described later).

The majority of interviews (35 of 50) were conducted in person, in private, quiet places of participants' choosing such as their homes and University of Nottingham buildings. Video-calling software of participants' choosing was used to remotely interview geographically-removed participants (15). All interviews were audio recorded with a University Dictaphone, with participants' permission. Remote interviews were not video recorded.

After each interview, I sent follow-up emails thanking participants for their time, checking with their wellbeing since our conversation, and following up on other study details discussed (detailed later). Where I saw fit, I offered lists of bereavement support services in participants' local area (Appendix H). After initial interviews, participants were invited to follow-up interviews (Appendix I) via their preferred contact method (all email). Numbers and frequencies of follow-up interviews thereafter was email-negotiated with survivors and dependent on study time remaining.

Method

Social network maps were a participant-data generation method supplementing initial participant interviews, where participants drew a map of those affected by the death in question.

Maps were a form of visual, graphic or arts-based data-elicitation technique, commonly used in conjunction with semi-structured interviewing, to stimulate and focus research conversations around studied phenomena (Orr et al., 2020; Bagnoli, 2009; Glegg, 2019). Visual techniques take many forms (e.g. mapping, drawing, collage, cartoon captioning) and are espoke to the purpose of particular research endeavours (Teachman & Gibson, 2013; Orr et al., 2020). This bespoke quality, and visual methods' openness to individual participant interpretations and associations (Bagnoli, 2009) mean they fit with this field-responsive, discovery-oriented inquiry. This study's bespoke social network mapping exercise had a two-fold purpose: (i) a visual aid for Part one of the initial interview, where respondents' described the life and relationships of the dead, and (ii) to support in-case chain-referrals where participants suggested the participation of others grieving the death in question (described later). Maps thus supported recruitment of multiple survivors per death-centred case and the multiple-case study methodology.

Maps also grounded this exploration in relationships and contexts, informed by grief and material culture precedents, to study survivors within communities and contexts. The maps supported the inquiry's relational and contextual focus by framing initial interviews in these terms, and assisting participants' articulation of complex networks of survivors and relationships per death.

As with other visual methods, maps fostered participant rapport at initial interviews (Orr et al., 2020), beginning with a task less threatening than direct dialogue with vulnerable participant groups (Pyer & Campbell, 2012), which can be intimidating particularly for sensitive topics (Glegg, 2019). Maps also offered a starting point for potentially overwhelming descriptions of the life, death and relationships of the dead in Part one of interview one. The mapping exercise therefore also coalesced with this sensitive topic.

For me as a novice interviewer, maps were stimuli for generating questions and participant elaboration, and critical visual aids for keeping track of the complex and changing networks and relationships described. Maps also helped me reacquaint with social networks per case in preparation for follow-up interviews.

Procedure

At the beginning of initial interviews, with audio recording in progress (where permitted), participants used paper and coloured pens to create a map of the network of people, including themselves, affected by the death in question, with the dead placed in the centre. I offered examples of how maps might be structured e.g. clustering death-affected individuals together to indicate social groupings, or using distance to indicate strength of social ties. These were possibilities, and individual map-making techniques were encouraged. Participants used a great variety of methods, using symbols and colour to express groups and relationships in the network, and a variety of approaches e.g. mapping affected people along the deceased's lifetime, by locations where the decease lived, by their activities (work, sport, education etc.). As preferred, participants either talked me through maps while

creating them or, created them and talked through afterward, all audio recorded (where permitted).

For remotely-conducted initial interviews, participants were asked to prepare map-making materials, or to make their map prior to interview (Appendix N). In either case, participants talked me through maps at interview, according to their approach, often stopping to add individuals or other details. Oftentimes, talking through maps overlapped substantially with Part one of the initial interview, and lead naturally into it.

I collected maps at in-person interviews. For remote interviews, participants either photographed or scanned maps, and emailed them to the study address: digital.memories@nottingham.ac.uk. See Appendix O for map examples.

3.4.1.3 Participant diaries

Method

I chose participant diaries to generate data between serial interviews, therefore enacting this study's longitudinal, retrospective-prospective methodology and supporting analysis of the role of time in the studied phenomenon. Diaries also countered some effects of retrospective interviewing: i.e. time between interviews affecting recall of intervening events and experiences (Ruspini, 2008); *backward* and *forward telescoping*, where distant events are remembered as occurring more recently than they did, and the reverse of recent events (Taris, 2000; Schwarz & Sudman, 1994); and participants' re-interpretation of past experiences over time to accord with present (Taris, 2000; Bijleveld et al., 1998). This last effect might be heightened in this study as grief entails survivor constructions shifting in light of

unfolding experience (Neimeyer et al., 2014; Valentine, 2008). Diaries offset these effects by anchoring experiences and phenomena in times between serial interviews. Participants' diary entries also fed into topic guides of subsequent interviews, thereby supporting the inquiry's emergent ethos.

Diaries also suited this sensitive topic as participants could use them at times flexible to their grief (Baer, Saroiu, & Koutsky, 2002); they were alternatives to speaking to a researcher about something personal (Ross, Rideout, & Carson, 1994); and they recognise grief as taking forms other than verbal (Neimeyer & Hogan, 2001; Valentine, 2006; Howarth, 2000; Bradbury, 1999). Lastly, diaries were chosen to generate data of an intimate and everyday nature that other methods do not (Alaszewski, 2006; Worth, 2009), to complement communicative interview data (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003). Participant diaries are also an established ConGT method, Charmaz espousing "collecting respondents' written personal accounts" (2006a, p. 14).

Procedure

At initial interviews, I invited participants[10] to keep a study diary, explaining it was optional. There were three diary options: pen and paper, online and audio. Participants choosing the online option received an email invitation (Appendix J) to a private, password-protected diary space for mobile and desktop platform 'Box', a file-sharing service commissioned by the University of Nottingham.

Participants were emailed a Box set-up guide (Appendix K) with information about accessing and naming unique Box diary folders, where participants submitted dated

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[10] 5 were not invited as they were recruited too near to study close.

diary entries and digital objects (detailed later). Invitation emails also included diary guides with prompts reflecting study aim and objectives, and which evolved over the inquiry's course to reflect its emergent foci. Appendix L shows the diary guide at study outset, the basis for iterations over the study course.

Participants opting for pen-and-paper diaries received bound books of blank pages for dated entries (Appendix M), accompanied by the diary guide (Appendix L). Bound diaries were either given or posted to participants, returned to me at serial interviews and, once intervening entries were copied and depending on study time remaining, posted back to participants. Participants also received evolving diary guides via this procedure, and it meant diaries were in participants' possession at study close, and kept by them. No participant opted to keep an audio diary.

At study design, I devised a schedule to remind participants to diarise: no less than four weeks between reminders, and maximum of ten reminders over participant study durations. However, met with the realities of participants' griefs, this felt insensitive and rigid. Instead, diaries were generated at a frequency of participants' choosing and at any time during their participation. I reminded participating individuals of the diary element at interviews and in emails arranging interviews.

Method

Deceased-related digital objects mentioned by participants in their interviews and diaries were the final participant-generated data source, which was optional for participants. This was informed by previous studies reporting that bereaved participants volunteered digital artefacts relating to their deceased as study data (Brubaker et al., 2013; Kirk & Sellen, 2010). In Brubaker et al.'s (2013) interview study with the digital-era bereaved, "related artefacts, including e-mails, obituaries, news articles, public Facebook groups and blogs" (p. 115) were collected as data. I reasoned this material might be useful analytic supplements to interview and diary data, and the collection of multiple data sources aligned with ConGT (Charmaz, 2014).

Procedure

At the end of interviews, and in post-interview follow-up emails, I invited participants to submit any deceased-related digital material referred to at interviews in diaries. This was a suggestion and participants submitted at their discretion. I did not suggest submission when I judged it to be inappropriate or potentially burdensome, based on the interviews and material mentioned. Where I saw fit, I suggested a particular object(s) participants might submit, e.g. object around which a diary entry was focused. Material was either uploaded to 'Box', or emailed to the study address.

3.4.2 Researcher-oriented methods

The following details this study's researcher-oriented methods, with procedures interwoven, as they were less formal than participant-oriented methods.

3.4.2.1 Field notes

Gathering of "rich data" (Charmaz, 2014) or "field notes" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 556) in ConGT provides contextual richness to other data sources, and grounds data within their broader social and cultural settings. In producing field notes, researchers engage in thick description (Geertz, 1973) providing "background about the participants, processes and settings" (El Hussein et al., 2014, p. 5). The field note method was consistent with this study, as it gave breadth for reporting deep and intricate detail about the deceased and their lives and deaths, participants' relationships with the deceased, and the relationships between participants in each case. This order of data was critical in locating individual survivors in relationships and contexts, per the study aspiration. Moreover, generation of contextualised, rich accounts of participants' social and cultural embeddedness was in keeping with its constructivist orientation.

Field notes were also compatible with this inquiry's multiple-case method, in that they created accounts of inter-relationships and interweaving histories of case participants, particularly complex when cases involved multiple participants with long-standing relationships, participating longitudinally. This was important for analysis, and helped me to remember these intricacies in follow-up interviews.

Field notes also supported sensitive participant experiences, in that they included important details and dates that were not analytically germane but would

communicate care if I remembered them and brought them to bear in participant encounters and contact e.g. not sending diary reminders at times noted as particularly difficult for individuals. Field notes also supported a sensitive investigation in that they included details about lives, deaths and relationships that I learned from case participants, which were unknown to other case participants, or which they might find painful. Notating this particularly sensitive information in field notes helped me to take care when they were mentioned by other case participants.

Throughout fieldwork, I kept detailed and extensive field notes richly describing participant encounters, and observations I made at interview beyond that captured by audio recordings. Field notes also entailed my broader observations and associations about each case of death, the individuals and relationships comprising it, and the wider social and cultural settings of cases, beyond the data encounters and themselves. I created field notes following every interview, in text, audio and poetry. I kept a master file for each case with general field notes for the case, as well as a file for each case participant, with notes for each interview and general notes per participant.

3.4.2.2 Reflective diary

I maintained a reflective diary throughout fieldwork, in which I reflected on my own thoughts, feelings and perspectives as I conducted the study. This practice is critical in sensitive inquiries, where reflective writing functions as an important processing experience for researchers that can offset upset and externalize difficult experiences (Cook, 1995). Reflective writing also enables an active reflection on the subjectivity of the researcher throughout the work. This is especially important in death studies, where, being mortal and therefore 'subject to death', all researchers are insiders to

some extent, as individuals with experiences and expectations of death, and as people who will die (Visser, 2017).

Methodologically, reflective writing sits well with the inquiry's constructivist position, as it locates the researcher as central to inquiry. Like any other research tool or technique, our informing worldviews, aspirations and suppositions warrant critical reflection (Markham, 2005).

3.4.2.3 Researcher memos

Researcher memos are kept in GT as a means of systematically accounting for the analytic process and production of theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The researcher takes frequent and detailed notes of comparisons between data, emerging categories and articulates developing theories. Memos "catch your thoughts, capture the comparisons and connections you make and crystallize questions and directions for you to pursue" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 72). The frequent maintenance of memos creates an audit trail that enhances findings' credibility (Baxter & Jack, 2008) and aligns with the constructivist co-production of findings. Researcher memoing is particularly important in Charmaz' ConGT to take account of the emergent processes and decisions fundamental to the inquiry's evolution, and the researcher's role in guiding the study's course (Charmaz, 2014; El Hussein et al., 2014). As ConGT researchers with opinions, predilections and contexts, memos are purposeful reflections on decision-making in the unfolding study and opportunities for checking back with the study's aims and objectives. Detailed logs are critical for emergent research more generally, as they track the growth of the inquiry, detail interpretive junctures, and mark the trail from data generation to reporting (Stebbins, 2001).

I kept a memo from the outset of fieldwork through to write-up of findings and theory presentation chapters. As a visual thinker, I kept memos in map form, creating copious maps of the forming interpretations and associations as I generated data, analysed and wrote. In a memo document I logged, and articulated my rationale, when map-based memoing resulted in inquiry decisions and changes in interpretive direction, e.g. to investigate a perceived pattern by sampling theoretically for it (detailed later), adding items to interview topic and diary guides, or justifying why one forming theory rather than another would become the focus of write-up. I offer some examples of memos in the data analysis section (later).

3.5 Section summary

Thus far, this chapter has established four elements that interlock and cohere in social research design. I then described the selection and justification for these elements of the current inquiry, summarised in Figure 3.2 below. The next section describes where, how and with whom this design was realised.
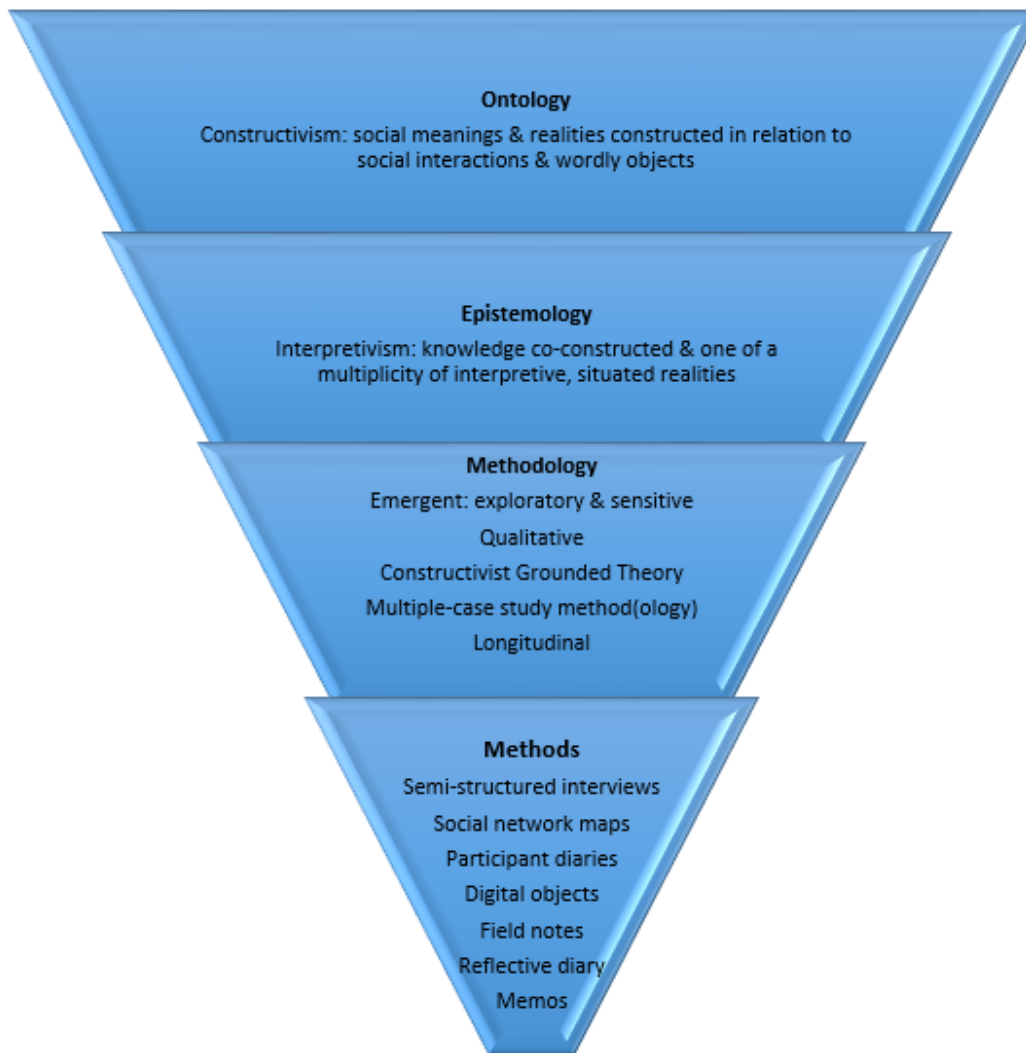
Figure 3.2: Interlocking elements of current inquiry

3.6   Setting, sampling and recruitment

3.6.1   Study setting

The study was based in Nottingham, United Kingdom. However, it was not confined to this physical base and, as well as publicity being in Nottingham city and suburbs, calls for participation were focused amongst the general public online. A study website www.digitalmemories.info (now closed) offered study information and downloadable Participant Information Sheet (website text in Appendix Q and homepage screenshot in Appendix T). As participants could interview remotely, I sought participants in any location who satisfied eligibility criteria (detailed later). Moreover, heterogeneity in respondents' and cases' geographical, social and cultural contexts would heighten the robustness of theory resulting from data (Charmaz, 1996, 2014). The study recruited respondents from England, Scotland, and U.S.A.

I considered setting the study in digital societies, i.e. countries with an Internet Penetration (IP) rate of 82% or over (at the time) (International Telecommunication Union, 2015), by specifying that deceased and bereaved inhabited a digital society for a minimum time pre-recruitment. This would increase the range and volume of digital material relating to the dead and likelihood of its use and experience by participants. However, though the volume and range of material would be logically increased in high-IP settings, range and volume were not the inquiry focus. Rather, the study sought case heterogeneity in digital material, and it is likely that countries with lower IPs would generate death cases with varying types and ranges of related digital material. Moreover, this IP designation would exclude many low and middle-income countries, indigenous groups and marginalised viewpoints, thereby designing them out and perpetrating the Western, Global North and Eurocentric focus of

sociological inquiry (Van Maanen, 1988) and social science research (Denzin & Giardina, 2013). Accordingly, I opted to let the focus on digital material in the study publicity select participants, rather than a setting-based designation based on IP.

3.6.2   Sampling: purposive, theoretical and in-case chain referral

In qualitative and case study research, cases and participants are sampled purposively with respect to inclusion criteria (Flick, 2014), i.e. chosen for their appropriateness to answering research questions (Schwandt, 2001); "to serve an investigative purpose" (Carter & Little, 2007, p.1318). In exploratory inquiries, investigative purposes evolve over fieldwork in response to concurrent data production and analysis. As a methodology aimed at theory generation, ConGT begins by sampling purposively, then hones sampling over fieldwork based on analysis of incoming data, to seek out cases and participants that permit investigation of forming theories (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser, 1978). Sampling to examine forming theories is termed theoretical sampling, and is a ConGT hallmark.

This study began by purposively sampling per eligibility criteria for a bereaved person in a case of death, the case key contact (KC). It then used purposive chain-referral within each case to recruit additional individuals bereaved by that death. This was done by inviting KCs to nominate others grieving the individual to participate in the study, and then asking the same of nominees, and so on. This was done with reference to the social network map of those affected by the death created by participants at initial interview. Chain referral therefore relied on social networks of key contacts and their nominees to sample, placing the definition of who was affected in the hands of networks of grievers rather than being study-defined. This was critical as defining grief-affectedness external to grief networks and on the basis

of relationship type is normative and is highly problematic (Fowlkes, 1990). Chain referral is a sampling technique that "relies on the behaviour or 'trait' under study being social and participants sharing with others the characteristic under examination" (Browne, 2005, p. 48). The binding trait here was being affected by the death at the centre of each case. Chain referral is commonly employed in studies of sensitive topics, with recommendations to participate from trusted members of a social circle inviting the participation of others, and lending credence to the study (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997; Eland-Goossensen, Goor, Vollemans, Hendriks, & Garretsen, 1997).

As the study progressed, the study began to theoretically sample for key contacts, i.e. calls for participants amended to explore avenues of emerging interest being identified in data analysis, to investigate forming theories both about the phenomenon, and the methods to explore it. Key contacts recruited via theoretical sampling also satisfied the eligibility criteria and, as with those sampled purposively, were then invited to chain refer others in their case. This sampling process is summarised in Figure 3.3.
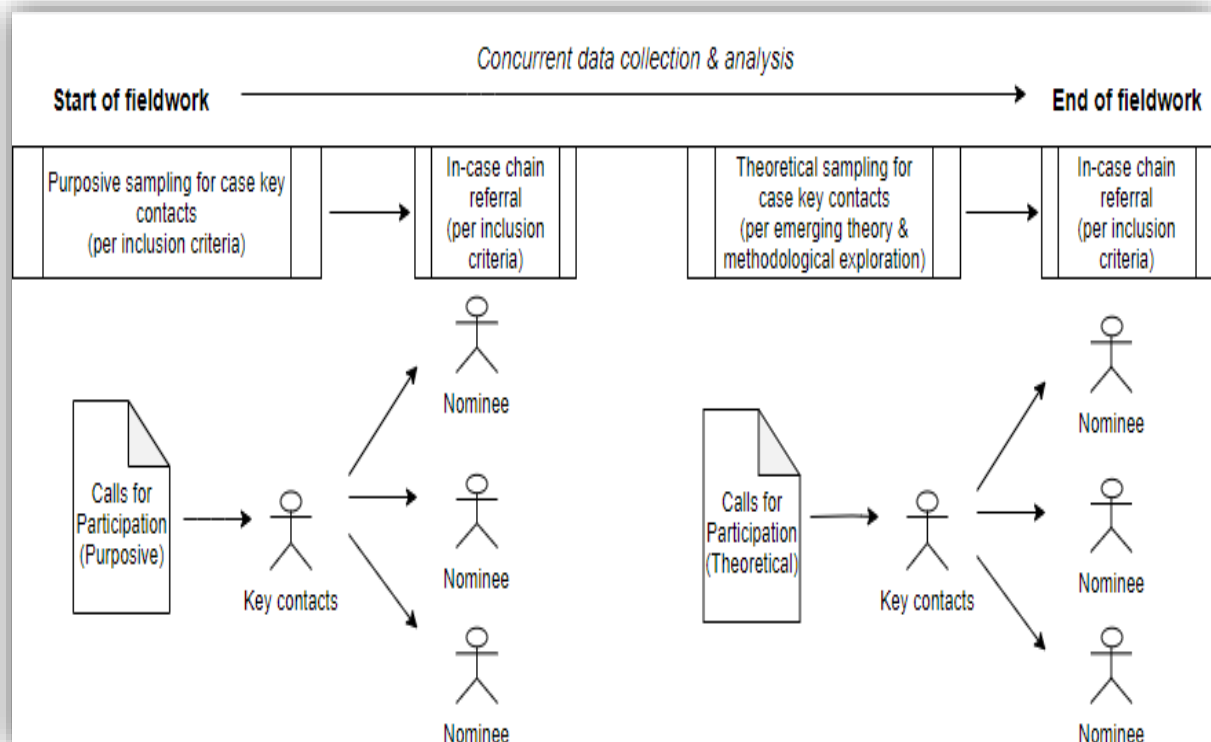
Figure 3.3: Participant sampling process, KCs & nominees

In the first fieldwork months, purposive sampling was focused on generating any case that met the inclusion criteria. As the volume of cases grew, theoretical sampling sought cases that would investigate possible theories and explore methods. It was also informed more broadly, by the overall shape of data collected, and the types of new cases that might complement or compare well with existing cases; "with an eye on the dimensions that are relevant for the comparison" (Flick, 2014, p.125).

Though the study sampled for particular key contact and case types (first purposively, later theoretically), it accepted all participants and cases meeting inclusion criteria. This was owing to the unknown recruitment terrain, which meant I was cautious about sampling too selectively. For instance, I considered purposively

sampling for a range of death causes across cases, to increase heterogeneity. However, absent precedent for this approach in this field, I chose against this selective, risky method and accepted death types as they presented. As the study progressed, it became evident that cases, even those with the same death cause, were sufficiently idiosyncratic, multi-factorial and complex as to be heterogeneous.

Whether and how many times participants were asked to chain refer others to their case study depended both on how inclined individual participants were to do so and on the level of recruitment to cases. Where study participants indicated interest in identifying prospective recruits, they were invited to nominate as many as they wished, whereas other participants were not so keen to partake, and therefore not asked to do so at all. I assessed this case by case, and with the utmost care and attention to participants' needs and perspectives. It was therefore difficult to forecast how frequently within-case recruitment would occur as it relied on the perspectives and motivations of individual participants.

3.6.3 Sample size and justification

Forecasting sample sizes is problematic in qualitative inquiry because participant quantity does not equate to data quality. Rather, sample size depends on the strength of incoming data in developing analytic categories with sufficient variety and richness to produce varied, nuanced accounts of studied phenomena (Charmaz, 2014; Flick, 2014). In applying for ethical approval for this study, I estimated recruiting a maximum of 20 cases, with a total of 60 participants across all cases. Each case would entail a minimum of one participant, with no maximum number of participants per case. Within these parameters, I did not aspire to particular numbers

of participants or cases, rather the type and quality of incoming data were assessed throughout fieldwork with the goal of generating varied, nuanced accounts of the phenomenon. This flexibility was fitting, as it invited cases that were differently configured and heterogeneous. It also did not constrain the recruitment of unexpected participant numbers in one particularly productive case (detailed later).

3.6.3.1 Eligibility criteria: Deceased individuals

Eligibility criteria for the deceased at the centre of each case were that they were adults (18+) at time of death. Adult deaths were chosen as the deceased were likely to have created digital content over the course of their lifetimes (Leonard & Toller, 2012). This distinction allowed both for individuals who were "digital natives" (those born into the digital era [after 1995] who "live with" the digital media and generate digital material as a matter of course), as well as and "digital immigrants" (those born before the digital era who use digital media less fluently and therefore are likely to generate less or different types of material) (Prensky, 2001, p. 1). Including deceased individuals across this divide was done to increase the heterogeneity of cases.

Deceased in the study had digital material relating to them that existed after their death and which available or accessible to their bereaved. What specifically constituted this material was difficult to define given that (i) what encompasses digital material is greatly variable, mixing material that is private and public, one-to-one and shared and created by, for or about the deceased, represented across a potentially great variety of digital platforms, sites, services and devices (ii) what is available and significant for each of the bereaved is unique to them and their digital connection to the deceased (iii) digital material available and accessible to the bereaved is likely to

change across their study involvement (ii) the heterogeneity of cases would likely heighten the variability of digital material in each case. Therefore, to remain exploratory and not limit or predefine types of digital material, case key contacts and nominees defined the material that was playing a role for them and the suitability of this to the study's remit was assessed by case, both in participation screening and as the study unfolded.

Deceased individuals in this study died a minimum of three months prior to recruitment, with no maximum time post-bereavement at study outset. The three-month minimum was chosen for two reasons: (i) Gaining access to the deceased's accounts and devices is reportedly a feature of the first months post-bereavement (Hu, 2004; Dormehl, 2014; McCallig, 2014). The challenges of gaining of access to the deceased's accounts, profiles and devices was not the focus of this study, therefore the three-month minimum was chosen to avoid it. It was also an ethical decision, with the three-month minimum in place out of respect for the early period of mourning (Sque et al., 2014). Though this is not long after bereavement, the literature suggests that time elapsed post-bereavement is not a guide to emotional stability (Rosenblatt, 1995) and what is considered the appropriate time to recruit post-bereavement varies in the literature (Odom et al., 2010; Kasket, 2012; Sque et al., 2014). Though the study excludes participants in the three months following bereavement, beyond this participants were entrusted to assess their own ability to participate, thereby situating them as capable agents rather than passive participants (Corbin & Morse, 2003; Dyregrov, 2004).

Therefore, at study launch, there was no maximum time stipulation post-bereavement for participants. Though others suggest that in bereavement research

the passing of time can reduce the salience of the bereavement account (Sque et al., 2014), this changes when the inquiry's focus is not on the bereavement itself but on ensuing grief, which can continue over survivors' lifespan. In such cases, choosing an appropriate time post-bereavement is dependent on these parameters' fruitfulness for the particular investigation. This inquiry's focus on digital material's role in grief meant that variety of time-points post-bereavement might represent differences in the quality of the experience, both because time might be a variable in the grief, and because deaths occurring at different times would generate different types of digital material connected to the lives and relationships in question. A greater spread in time post-mortem across the cases would therefore likely increase case heterogeneity. Moreover, calling for survivors with experience of digital material relating to their dead limited the possible maximum time post-death to between ten and fifteen years, when digital and mobile media proliferated.

The study accepted any deaths of any cause. This allowed for variability in the digital material, as those who know they are dying often leave digital material purposefully for posthumous consumption (e.g. deathbed blogging and post-dated messaging) (Taubert, Watts, Boland, & Radbruch, 2014; Bassett, 2015), whereas the posthumous artefacts of individuals who die without anticipation can be less organised and intentional (Bassett, 2015).

The deceased at the centre of cases did not include children or young people aged eighteen or less at death. This was based again on the potential emotional impact on me as a novice researcher of conducting research with those undergoing a particularly complex grief form, the loss of a child or young person (Smyth, 2012).

Eligibility criteria for bereaved participants were that they were adults (18+) at the time of recruitment, with no maximum age limit. This was to generate a mixture of digital natives and immigrants, and the potential range in digital material that individuals of different generations would use and be aware of.

Bereaved participants were those affected by the death as the centre of each case. What constituted being affected by the death was assessed on a case-by-case basis in a screening call with each case key contact. Key contacts then identified others affected by the death and so on in a chain of referral. This in-case method of identifying survivors was employed as using relational categories as predictors of grief experience homogenises relational complexity and reinstates grief hierarchies that disenfranchise those not satisfying conventional relational categories (Fowlkes, 1990). Therefore, once the case key contact was established as affected by a death via a screening conversation, they then nominated other survivors via chain referral, and so on, such that identifying affected others was in the domain of the social group.

Children and young people (under eighteen years of age) were excluded from participating in this study because their inclusion in sensitive research may represent an additional stressor at an already difficult, unstable and stressful time (Lin, Sandler, Ayers, Wolchik, & Luecken, 2004). Though I acknowledge the importance of including the often-overlooked perspectives of children and young people in research (Cree, Kay, & Tisdall, 2002), the potential impact on and burden for children in longitudinally speaking and diarising about the recently deceased raises ethical concerns. Furthermore, I had no background or experience of research with

children and young people, nor specifically with bereaved children and young

people. Therefore, their involvement would also challenge my capacity and personal

welfare.

3.6.3.3 Summary of inclusion and exclusion criteria

The inclusion and exclusion criteria at study outset are summarised as:

Inclusion criteria

- Participants were adults (18+) at recruitment, no upper age limit.

- Participants were bereaved of the deceased individual at the centre of the case study and affected by this death.

- Participants were a minimum of three months post-bereavement at recruitment, with no maximum time post-bereavement.

- Participants were aware of digital material relating to their dead and have the means to access it.

- The deceased individual with respect to whom participants were involved was 18 years or over at the time of death, no upper age limit.

- Participants were capable of giving informed consent.

- Participants could speak and write English proficiently.

Exclusion criterion

- Where a prospective participant displayed great emotional difficulty, vulnerability or other cause for concern, their participation was negotiated with them and in liaison with the supervisory team, with participation assessed case-by-case.

3.6.4 Participant recruitment

3.6.4.1.1 Procedure for key contact recruitment and in-case participant-referral

Participant recruitment occurred between March 2017 and March 2018. To recruit multiple individuals affected by a case of death, recruitment was targeted at a case key contact (KC), who would then refer other survivors to that case (details below). Calls for recruitment were therefore aimed at KCs, with prospective KCs screened for eligibility based on inclusion criteria.

3.6.4.2 Eligibility assessment: Key contacts and nominees

I assessed the eligibility of prospective participants, both KCs and their nominees, via a phone conversation, with reference to eligibility criteria. Individuals fulfilling criteria were emailed the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix R), directed to the PIS on the website, and asked to read it and contact the study again should they wish to participate. Those contacting the study again indicating continued interest were invited to initial interview. Many prospective participants, particularly those chain referred, contacted the study having already accessed the PIS online. These were screened for eligibility as above and, if eligible, confirmed they had read and understood the online PIS before being invited to initial interview (without being sent/directed to PIS and asked to re-contact). Individuals ineligible to participate were thanked for taking the time to contact the study.

Across three recruitment drives (detailed below), fifteen prospective KCs responded to participant calls. Screening identified 12 as eligible, one becoming unresponsive[11].

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[11] Individual experiencing intense grief following recent parental bereavement, a likely factor in their eventual unresponsiveness.

The remaining eleven KCs participated, two withdrawing following initial interview but consenting to use of data. All chain-referred participants screened were eligible to participate.

At initial interview, KCs were invited to nominate the participation in this study of other survivors of the death in question, with reference to the social network map they created. These nominees were, in turn, invited to nominate other survivors, and so on. In-case participant referrals continued until either the chain broke (i.e. nominees not transferring into recruits/declining to nominate), or fieldwork close was imminent[12]. In-case participant referrals were made by:

(i) Participant asking nominee(s) if they were interested in participating, and, with their agreement, passing contact information to me. I then sent nominees invitations to participate (Appendix Y) via their preferred contact methods (all email).

(ii) Participant giving study nomination pack(s) to nominee(s), including nominee invitation letter (Appendix Y) and PIS (Appendix R). One participant chose this method.

3.6.4.3 Emergent key contact recruitment process

Three KC recruitment drives occurred at approximately four-month intervals. In keeping with the inquiry's exploratory ethos, recruitment was iterative and field-responsive. Each drive evolved in terms of KCs (and therefore death cases) sought, in response to: characteristics of recruited cases and participants, configurations of

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[12] I did not ask chain referral of one recently bereaved couple (case two, interviewed jointly), judging it beyond their capacity following a lengthy, emotional initial interview.

participants and data per case, and emergent data patterns. Continuous assessment

of these factors was underpinned by consideration of the strength of any theory

resulting from incoming data, and refining recruitment to heighten this. Unfolding

ethical considerations, and the shift from purposive to theoretical KC sampling

across fieldwork, also influenced the focus and approach of drives. Figure 3.4 below

summarises this emergent KC recruitment process, which I narrate in the next

section.
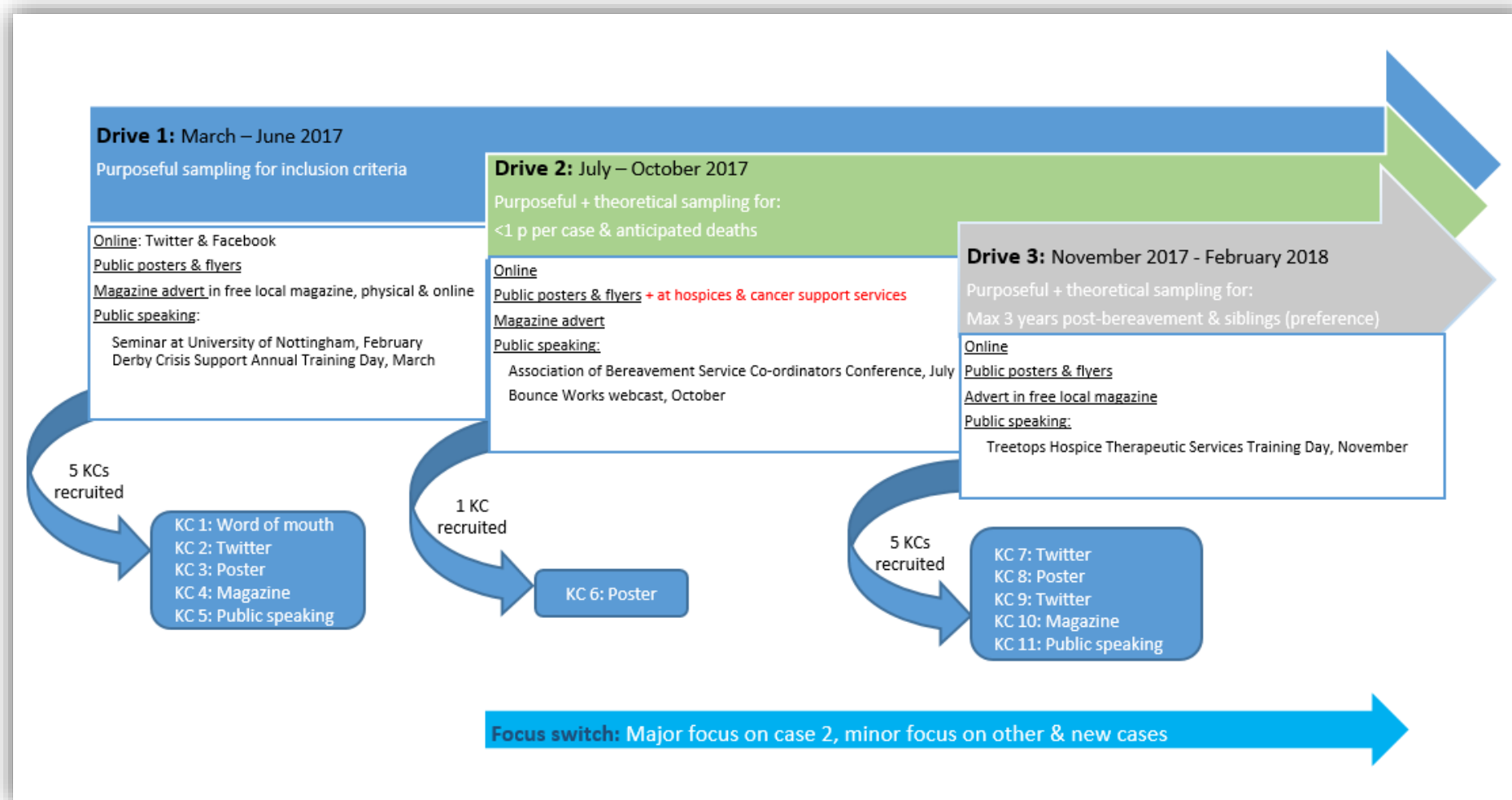
Figure 3.4: Emergent key contact recruitment process, March 2017 to March 2018 — drives, avenues and recruits per drive

Recruitment drive one, March - June 2017

Multiple recruitment avenues were used at study launch, sampling purposively for KCs and death cases, in line with inclusion criteria, using study publicity. Appendix P was the base for publicity, tweaked per recruitment avenue (e.g. abridged into a tweet), and amended to reflect the emergent focus of each recruitment drive.

Within six weeks, KCs for five cases were recruited. While continuing to seek new KCs, I also focused on recruiting participants within cases. One case (case two) became the primary site for this, with in-case recruitment immediately productive. Four months into fieldwork, an unexpected nine participants were recruited to this case, with more anticipated. In the other four cases, there were no successful in-case nominations (reasons detailed in Chapter 5). An imbalance in case size was emerging.

Recruitment drive two, July – October 2017

To address this imbalance, drive two more deliberately sought cases with more than one participant, though not excluding sole respondents. I kept both avenues open due to the hitherto mixed success of in-case recruitment, and uncertainty about the feasibility of recruiting multiple cases with multiple survivors.

Drive two also sought more cases of death anticipated by deceased and/or survivors. This was based in the potential for anticipated deaths to entail digital material with awareness of death, or pre-death preparation or curation of material, with intention of post-death consumption (Kasket, 2019; Bassett, 2015). At this point, one case (four, cancer) was anticipated by deceased and survivor, but a lack of digital engagement on the part of both meant material was not informed by or

created in light of or preparation for death. Another case (five, suicide) was anticipated by the deceased but with an apparent wish for the death to be unanticipated by survivors meant the digital material was without apparent post-death awareness or intent. The study's commitment to case heterogeneity led me to seek additional cases where the digital material might be death-informed and/or death-preparatory. Hospice and cancer support services were therefore added recruitment avenues.

Drive two recruited one additional case (six, homicide), with in-case referral again unsuccessful. The productive case two was intensely fruitful in this period, with five more recruits bringing the case total at that point to 15, and 17 data-generation points in this period.

Though the inquiry did not envisage one case with this many survivors, my supervisors and I viewed this as a unique opportunity with a potentially novel contribution to the field. I made the decision to explore this singularly productive case, so far as it would sustain, by (i) continuing data generation with existing case participants (ii) inviting chain referrals until they became unproductive, or at study close.

However, I continued seeking new cases, and continued data generation in the other recruited cases. This determination was based on concurrent data analysis, suggesting that differences in, for example, time post-bereavement, deceased-related digital material cited, cause of death, deceased age and survivor-deceased relationship type, made for interesting contours in the studied phenomenon. Additionally, the longitudinal, multi-perspective data in the productive case two would benefit from analysis in relation to different cases, their particularities offering

alternate aspects on the phenomenon and points of comparison. Case heterogeneity would also heighten resulting theory's robustness (Charmaz, 2006a). This route also allowed continued exploration of the feasibility of recruiting multiple survivors per case, with the following amendments based on successes and lessons thus far:

(i)   Three-year post-bereavement limit

In recruited cases where deaths occurred more than three years prior (cases one and six), KCs cited time post-bereavement as inhibiting chain referral. Additionally, recency of the death in case two (six months at KC recruitment) seemed to ease nominations.

(ii)   Siblings of deceased

Siblings were productive nominators in case two, as they had relationships with family and friends of the dead. Moreover, chain-referrals from these siblings carried weight for their nominees, indicating the family's approval of the study and my bone fides, which nominees cited as encouraging participation. Additionally, the bereaved mother in case three had little contact with her late son's friend network and felt she did not know them well enough to nominate, suggesting her daughter (sibling of deceased) as a better route into this network.

In this final KC recruitment drive, whereas the three-year post-death maximum was an eligibility criterion, the call for siblings was as a preference. This would explore the siblings theory, but not at the exclusion of other relationships and potential exploratory avenues. The drive-two preference for anticipated deaths and more than one survivor per case also continued in drive three.

Drive three generated five more recent death cases (between seven months and three years prior). Though no sibling KCs were recruited, KCs included a first cousin, grandchild (cases eight and nine), relationships to the dead hitherto unrepresented. Nomination requests in these cases indicated possibilities for recruiting amongst the deceased's social and familial networks. However, though KCs in three of these five new cases (eight, nine and ten) made successful nominations, there was insufficient time before study close to chain-refer further.

In this last fieldwork block, case two recruited three further participants, bringing the case total to 18. In this time, data were being generated with these 18 participants, in concurrent waves of up to four interviews, initial interviews with new recruits, continuing chain-referrals, participant diaries and processing and concurrent data analysis. There were 21 data-generation points for case two in this period. Therefore, though drive three had success in generating chain-referrals in new cases (three cases with two participants), case two dominated activity and focus.

3.6.5 Data analysis

3.6.5.1 Introduction

This section describes how I managed, organised and analysed the various forms of data generated in this exploratory, longitudinal and qualitative study. The ConGT approach made a set of techniques available to me, i.e. coding phases, the constant comparative method, concurrent data generation and analysis, rigorous checking against data, and the goal of theory generation. However, in the spirit of GT broadly, and ConGT particularly, where "suggested guidelines and procedures allow much latitude for ingenuity and are an aid to creativity" (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 273), I was not hidebound by specific techniques. Rather, to maintain my emergent, exploratory methodology, I formed an analytic approach informed by ConGT principles in response to this particular endeavour and data.

Many have critiqued the reification of qualitative methodologies, and their application as 'off-the-shelf' tools to heterogeneous datasets. This methodological "McDonaldization" (Brinkmann, 2012, p. 56) leads to "fetishism" (Mills, 1959 [2000], p. 224) and "methodolatry" (methods idolatry) (Janesick, 1994, p. 215); preoccupation with fixed, 'proper' methodological formulae, and their enactment, over their aptness to data. However, a balance must be struck, as Brinkmann advocates, between "the dangers of 'methodolatry' on the one hand, and a mysterious reliance on subjective intuition on the other" (2012, p. 65). To show how I struck this balance, I offer an account of my ConGT approach tailored to this inquiry and data, and development of my theory.

Application of ConGT to my data was complex as it included (i) a preponderance of data in multiple forms, (ii) multi-perspective data (participants in death-centred

cases), and (iii) cross-sectional and longitudinal data. The complexity and dynamism of longitudinal qualitative data makes its analysis time and effort consuming (Ruspini, 2008). Combining longitudinal and multi-perspective data adds complexity. Vogl, Zartler, Schmidt, and Rieder (2018) and Holland, Thomson, and Henderson (2006) suggest analysing MPQL (multiple-perspective qualitative longitudinal) data entails an order of intricacy and multidimensionality requiring researchers to innovate analysis strategies.

This was true of my MPQL data; analysis was a protracted, involved, messy, recursive and iterative process, in which I often felt overwhelmed and stuck. I had to innovate ways of analysing in response to the incoming data and its configurations; bringing ConGT principles to bear, while flexing them to what I was collecting and finding. These qualities make describing my analysis within thesis constraints difficult. This considered, I here endeavour to give an account sufficient to instil confidence in the larger process. Figure 3.5 visualises my analytic process. Though a necessarily streamlined and simplified rendering of this complex endeavour, it captures broadly its form, elements and stages.
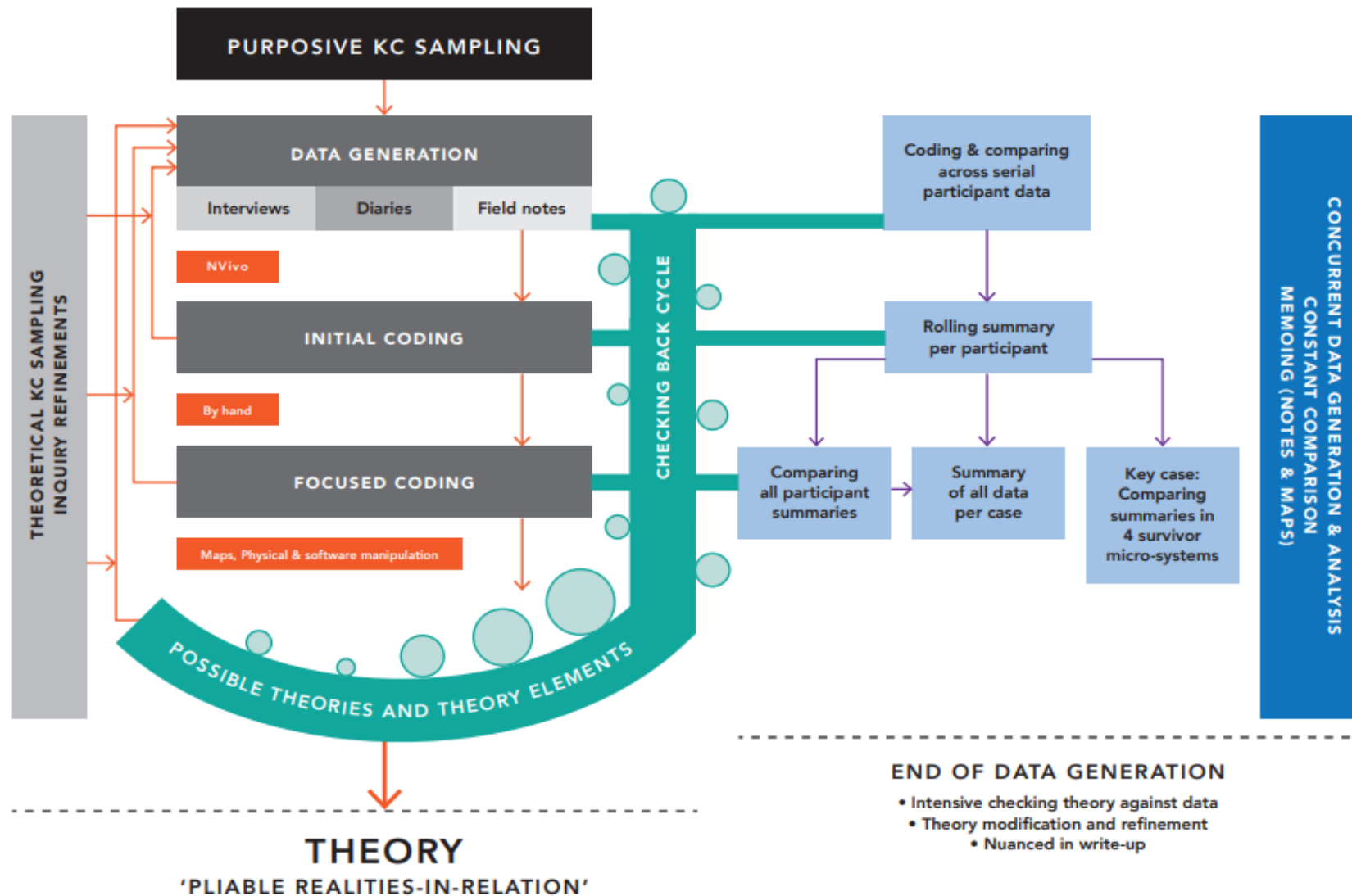
Figure 3.5: Analysis process

As the figure above shows, as key contacts (KCs) were purposively recruited and data began accruing, per ConGT, I analysed concurrently, and throughout fieldwork. Analysis first involved a quick pass through incoming data noting deceased-related digital material mentioned per participant, the use or activity involved, whether and how material was accessed, and the approximate timeframe its mention accorded to. Chapter 5 presents this information. I then subjected three data forms[13]—transcribed interviews, diaries and field notes—to two ConGT coding phases, initial and focused (Charmaz, 2006a).
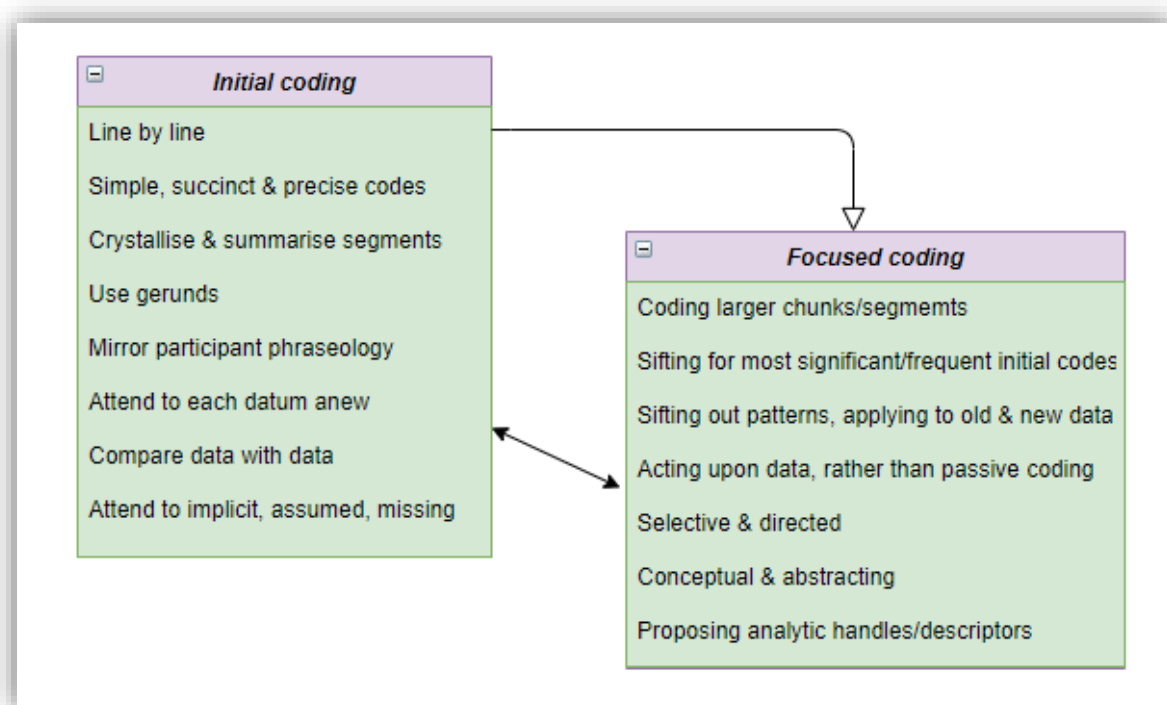
Figure 3.6: Data coding phases

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[13] Other data types not coded: (i) digital objects described in field notes which were coded (ii) memos and social network maps aided analysis but were not coded, and reflective diary was not coded.

Initial, line-by-line coding was a means of keenly attending to data with an open, exploratory ethos, treating each datum on its own terms, and deeply acquainting with the data corpus. Focused coding was more selective and fine-grained, using repeating and seemingly significant initial codes to sift through data, while also seeking new patterns missed in initial coding, or becoming apparent in new data or across serial data, and then reanalysing previous and new data with this focus. A driving force was the constant comparative method, comparing data segments and codes with each other, and with past data recursively.

The process of initial and focused coding was therefore neither linear nor one directional, rather, coding phases leaked back and forth, via a recursive process of open, exploratory and comprehensive engagement on the one hand, and a more pointed sifting out and distilling on the other. This is in keeping with ConGT's wish to not fix or reify too soon or without ample basis, and to remain close to data while reaching beyond thematised description, and toward theory.

My MPQL data made coding more complex. It meant applying coding phases to serial respondent data, and thus using constant comparison across, as well as within, data per respondent. I managed this by creating rolling summaries for each participant. Summaries distilled initial and focused codes recurring in each data encounter with a participant, compared these with previous data encounters for that participant, and I memo-noted when I surmised subsequent data-gathering should be directed toward patterns I was interpreting in summaries.

3.6.5.3.1 Cross-participant analysis

As data generated and the dominance of one case (two) became clear, I pivoted away from the planned multiple-case analysis, and began exploring how best to analyse this unexpected data configuration. In response, I opted to conduct a cross-participant analysis regardless of death case, because in the rolling participant summaries I was interpreting clusters of focused codes spanning across survivors of heterogeneous cases, with respect to heterogeneous deceased-related digital material. I reasoned that though some participants were grieving the same deaths, there was variety and uniqueness in the grieved relationships and digital material at issue sufficient to warrant analysis across individuals irrespective of death connection.

Thus, I compared the rolling participant summaries across all 32 participants irrespective of death case. This ran alongside analysing incoming data, updating rolling participant summaries as needed, and memo-noting when I fed forward theory-oriented refinements to the inquiry (e.g. theoretical sampling, adaptations to interview questions/diary prompts) based on this analysis. Chapter 6 reports findings of this cross-participant analysis.

3.6.5.3.2 In-case analysis of key case

This pivot from multiple-case methodology to method also changed my analytic aspiration. I switched from aspiring to compare multiple, approximately similar cases, to using longitudinal multi-perspective data from one key case as my analytic base (case two), and the other smaller ten cases as fragments of survivor networks to

check emerging theories against. My rationale was to capitalise on the originality and contribution of this extraordinarily productive case to the field of study; not only the first to explore this phenomenon in a grief community over time, but with such an extensive, data rich and longitudinal case[14].

I therefore conducted an in-case analysis of this 18-participant key case, comparing case participant summaries as generated. However, I found comparing the summaries of all participants in this key case unwieldy and the data—and potential findings emanating from it—too voluminous. In the data, and the social network maps particularly, there were clear groupings of survivors within this key case. By aggregating across the maps, I began to see survivors in smaller micro-systems connected with respect to how they knew the deceased, who referred particularly to each other in study accounts. Using social network maps in this case, I made lists of recurring individuals, and groupings of individuals, in social network maps, and drew aggregate maps. Figure 3.7 is an aggregate map showing four case two survivor micro-systems.

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[14] 18 participants, 33 interviews, 32 social network maps, 23 diary entries and 6 digital objects, generated over 11 months.
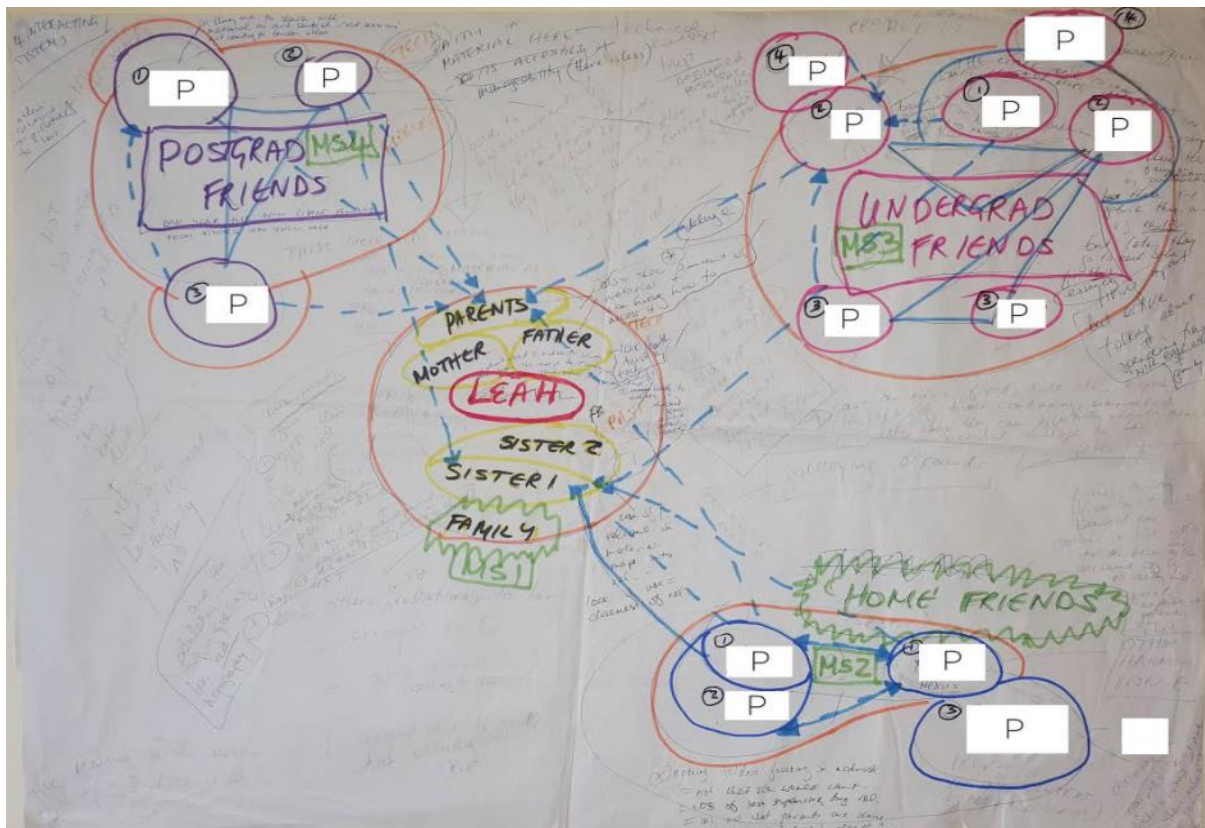
Figure 3.7: Aggregate map of four survivor micro-systems in case two

By breaking case two into the four micro-systems visible in the figure, I managed and analysed the voluminous data in this key case. Of its 18 participants, 14 were friends of the deceased, making it was necessary to express differences in these 14 friendships, both for analysis and context about the inter-survivor dynamics of friend-only micro-systems. As to this, I devised a light-touch friendship tiering method (Appendix V), and allocated a friendship tier to each of the 14 friends.

I then conducted an analysis within each micro-system, comparing participant summaries for participants in each. In the friend-only micro-systems, I used the friendship tiers to compare and contrast those at the different tiers. This analysis forms the basis for the case two deep dive (Chapter 7). I also wrote summaries for the other ten, non-key cases, in which I compared the rolling summaries for participants in each case, and used these to compare with, and play against, the interpretations and the theory I was building in the key case (next section).

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For initial, line-by-line coding, I used qualitative data analysis software (NVivo Pro 11) to manage the data corpus per participant, and by death-centred case, and to search and collate initial codes. However, to code in a focused way, I found the tactility and mobility of printed transcripts more conducive; I used coloured pens to codify, and made colour-coded lists of focused codes, and families of focused codes that were recurrent and seemed important.

As I began to build a body of focused codes and interpreted connections between them, I began memoing intensively in map form. As a visual thinker, I found mapping focused codes—with sample initial codes and some data exemplifying them—useful in investigating connections and hierarchies between initial and focused codes. This was a level of abstraction that led me into thinking theoretically. I memo-mapped prolifically (81 in total) and had theory-building sessions where I spread memo-maps across tables in a university room, formed clusters, relationships and hierarchies, tacking clusters to the walls, and arranging and rearranging playfully and openly.

I also involved my supervisors, School staff, and fellow doctoral candidates in this practice, inviting them to view theory clusters, and reading them data excerpts to ground abstractions. I then moved back to my raw data, continually playing possible theories and theory elements against existing and new data, and sensitising data generation to these possible theories. This was my version of Charmaz' incitement of ConGTs which "prompt[ing] early analytic thinking and keep researchers interacting with their data and nascent analyses" (2006a, p. 10).

As Figure 3.5 shows, I undertook cross-participant and in-key-case analyses concurrent with analysis and generation of new data. Thus, though I was forming theoretical renderings of data in memo-mapping, I was also checking these against new data, while sensitising focused coding to possible theories and theory elements interpreted in memo-mapping. I took care not to narrow my theoretical focus, remaining open in initial coding of incoming data, while focused coding for any emergent theoretical readings.

As the study progressed, I accrued a series of memo-maps and focused coding families relating broadly to the relationship between digital material and the 'reality' of the people and relationships to which they pertained. I identified a number of families of focused codes linked to this master category, and it ran beneath 40 or so memo-maps. Focused code families and memo-mapping clusters relating to this category centred on, for example, 'digital material purveying objective truth', 'the authenticity of in-person relationships', 'material as proof of deceased-bereaved relationships', 'contesting other survivor realities via digital material', 'material as appearance or reality', 'digital material suspending death's reality', and 'material mediating which

survivor reality counts'. Figure 3.8 below shows a cluster of memo-maps on this

forming theory.

Figure 3.8: Cluster of memo-maps on forming theory

At close of data generation I had interpreted focused code families (such as the

examples listed above) that I felt were important in this forming theory, but I did not

know how they might sit together in a theory. The end of data generation began a

process of intensive analysis, wherein I checked the possible theory elements

against the raw data. At this point I found it useful to move and manipulate the

forming theories and theory elements on presentation software Prezi. This enabled

me to visually investigate relationships between possible theory elements, while

checking back with the data, and start to build a visual representation of a theory. After two months, I had the structure of the theory I propose in this thesis, which has a two-element structure. I mapped its two elements repeatedly on A2 sheets, again refining maps via interplay with data. These early iterations of the theory also benefitted from presentation to my supervisors and multiple audiences, including the 4th Symposium of the Death Online Research Network (DORS4), August 2018. The theory further nuanced in write-up, echoing Geertz' "backward order of things—first you write and then you figure out what you are writing about (2000, p. vi).

Figures 3.9 and 3.10 below respectively show the evolution of the each of the two theory elements, from early mappings to final versions.

Theory element 1: Early mapping

Later

Final

Figure 3.9: Evolution of theory element one in maps

Theory element 2: Early mapping

Later

Final
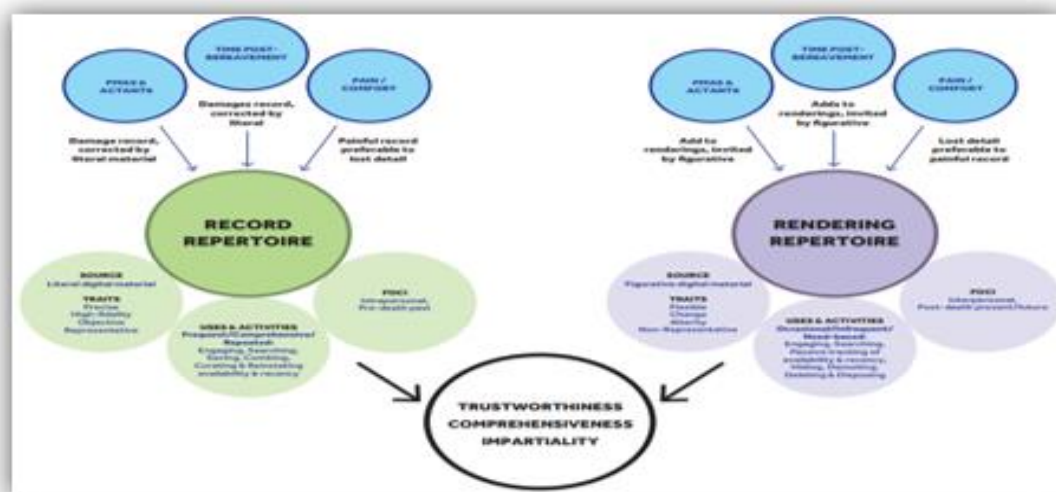
Figure 3.10: Evolution of theory element two in maps

Via the above-described analytic process, I interpreted the two-part grounded theory entitled '*Pliable realities-in-relation*', presented in Chapter 8. This theory is emergent, i.e. a rendering of these data that I expect to morph and evolve in other data contexts. It is also a substantive (rather than formal) theory i.e. grounded in research on one substantive area and applicable to this, representing a link in a larger scholarly effort toward formal theory (Glaser & Strauss 1999).

I hope to have the confidence of the reader in the care, thoroughness and commitment to the data that produced this theory, and to build on this in the findings and theory presentation chapters, as products that speak to the analysis.

3.6.6 Ethical considerations

The Digital Memories Study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles originating from the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2018) and the UK Policy Framework for Health and Social Care Research (Health Research Authority, 2017). This study was subject to review by the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (REC), with full approval following minor amendments on January 30th 2017 (ref: D16122016, Appendix S). Approval in place, I formed a patient and public involvement (PPI) advisory group, comprising three individuals with experience of digital-era bereavement, and two bereavement support professionals. The PPI group provided emailed commentary on the ethical undertaking of the study, and materials e.g. participation calls and interview topic guides.

3.6.6.1 Overarching ethical position

However, this study took the broad ethical the position that, though others' suggestions are instructive, there is no pre-formed ethical formula for conducting human sciences research. This is particularly true in grief research, where one must, for each piece of grief research, "be open to co-constructing a set of ethical guidelines" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 155). In qualitative research, and in qualitative grief research particularly, meeting ethics committee standards is only the beginning (Skinner Cook, 1995; Rosenblatt, 1995; Pollock, 2012; Markham, 2006) with ethics instead "actually produced, reinforced or resisted through practice" (Markham, Tiidenberg, & Herman, 2018, p. 2). Pollock (2012) identified two contrasting paradigms undergirding research ethics practice: (i) procedural approaches that deliver on pre-formed committee-approved research protocols and (ii) process

approaches which negotiate ethical conduct while undertaking research in response to complex, fluctuating and unpredictable real-world situations. Pollock's latter situational, process-oriented approach is most compatible with this inquiry's emergent, exploratory and qualitative methodology.

I therefore adopted a process ethics approach where, as field-embedded researcher, I used my judgement and integrity, negotiating with participants, research team, ethics committee and PPI group, to respond to arising ethical issues. The centrality of researcher judgement here has congruence with this study's epistemological stance, and fits an exploratory approach that expected to form ethical practice in response to the unexpected; what Markham called 'produsing ethics' (2015).

Absent simple formulae, I undertook this study with an "ethical attitude" (Josselson, 2007, p.538); "a stance that involves thinking through these matters and deciding how best to honour and protect those who participate in one's studies while maintaining standards for good scholarship". This attitude was also informed by what Markham called 'heart': an amalgam of consciousness, mindfulness, honesty, and sensitivity," which entails "being knowledgeable and prepared; present and aware; adaptive and context sensitive; and honest or mindful" (Markham, 2006, p. 44).

As a sensitive, longitudinal study with groups of death-connected individuals, ethical reflections emanating from this inquiry are plentiful. Specifically, the ethics of longitudinally studying death-centred cases, and the 18-participant case particularly, is a unique ethical contribution I intend to publish on in the Sage: Research Ethics series publication (see Appendix Z). Though full explication of this inquiry's ethical considerations is not possible here, in the following section, I chart how I navigated

key points with the above-stated ethos. I have also endeavoured to demonstrate this attitude throughout this write-up.

3.6.6.2 Limits to confidentiality

In representing both the bereaved and the deceased in this study, diligence was exercised in assuring their anonymity and confidentiality, particularly at analysis and dissemination. However, though I de-identified information and descriptors relating to participants and their dead in the data, anonymisation does not ensure absolute confidentiality (Wiles, Crow, Heath, & Charles, 2008). Moreover, individuals in death-centred cases might recognise each other's accounts in research output, regardless of anonymisation. With respect to this issue, I emulated the approach taken in couples and families research, with a similar possibility of participants recognising each other's accounts. These studies advocate being clear with participants at recruitment about these limits to confidentiality (Forbat & Henderson, 2003; Mellor, Slaymaker, & Cleland, 2013; Harden, Backett‐Milburn, Hill, & MacLean, 2010). Therefore, the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix R) made clear that participants might recognise, or be recognised by, others in their death-centred case, giving individuals the opportunity to consider their participation in this light.

3.6.6.3 Representation and confidentiality in research output

A concern in writing up this study was preserving participant privacy while retaining the particularities of the lives and relationships described. In describing the digital aftermath of a life, from multiple survivor perspectives in some cases, one begins to build a picture of the deceased: the life they lived, the sports they played, the countries they lived in, their likes and dislikes etc. This creates issues for write-up as

these details, along with death specifics (some reported in the media) and the exhaustiveness of online search engines, increased death cases' identifiability.

To deal with this, drawing on Markham's (2012) framework for 'fabrication as ethical practice', I wrote cases and findings as semi-fictionalised accounts of lives and relationships. This involved adaptations to networks of detail and background information, especially in the key case, but retaining the data content and meaning. This meant making case-based decisions about what details and information to transfigure—and what to change it *to*—to retain the account but fictionalise the identifiable. This position is ethical in that it allows for the inclusion of these rich, multi-perspective data. It is also consonant with this inquiry's philosophical position and methodological framing, which holds that all research accounts are constructions of social worlds with data as base material, forming "a story that is disciplined by your data" (Karp, 2011, p. 349).

3.6.6.4 Safeguarding and wellbeing in sensitive topic area

Bereaved participants

Conducting research with bereaved people can be a delicate enterprise and due attention must be paid to the involvement of the bereaved in research (Parkes, 1995), the wellbeing of bereavement researchers (Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2007) and those at the periphery of the inquiry, e.g. supervisory team and interview transcribers (Fahie, 2014). In the past, the bereaved were considered a vulnerable group that ought not be involved in research (Skinner Cook, 1995). However, today's thinking is that bereaved people can find research involvement positive and therapeutic (Beck & Konnert, 2007), are not deterred even when they anticipate participating may be distressing (Lowes & Gill, 2006), and that individuals

should be given the autonomy to assess their own capacity to participate (Corbin & Morse, 2003; East, Jackson, O'Brien, & Peters, 2010). Involving bereaved people in research however demands sensitivity to the particular needs of this group. (Skinner Cook, 1995; Parkes, 1995). Frameworks and guidelines for conducting ethical bereavement inquiries from Parkes (1995); Rosenblatt (1995), Skinner Cook (1995) and Sque et al. (2014) were consulted in developing this inquiry's bespoke ethical approach.

For example, I worked to ensure participants had the opportunity to participate but took care not to badger or burden them, within what they themselves described as complex relationships with time, difficulty concentrating, and out-of-character occurrences, such as forgetting to respond to me, or thinking they had when they hadn't. I was also informed by research suggesting that participants in sensitive interviews can find them positive and empowering (Pollock, 2012). This was reflected in the participant comments in my study, many remarking on the rare opportunity to speak at length about the death and their experience, something that would be taboo in other social contexts. Many commented on the interviews being difficult but positive and relieving, and even looked forward to them.

3.6.6.4.1 Researcher wellbeing

I found data generation more difficult than anticipated. The sensitive and upsetting interview content had a residual impact on my personal and emotional wellbeing that was cause for concern in the first weeks of data collection. I felt very nervous, and prepared thoroughly before interviews, especially in interviews with bereaved family and parents. I was so aware of my every step and word, trying to be professional but

also find ways to communicate my care and listen deeply. This took an emotional toll over time.

My supervisors offered support and opportunities for discussion and suggested mechanisms to minimise this effect, i.e. maximum of two interviews per week and frequent supervisor contact. However, it became clear that a regular meeting with an independent party outside the research team was required, as the content of the discussion was of a personal nature better suited to an independent setting. A psychologist and clinical supervisor was identified who I met regularly throughout data generation. This served as a critical support, offsetting the emotional impact of the work and helping me to develop techniques to navigate it. However, as others have reported (Visser, 2017), and the excerpt from my reflective diary below shows, I also found the experience brought presence, awareness, connection, and an energising awareness of my own and others' mortality.

> *"Feeling like a layer of my emotional epidermis has been scrubbed away, as I try to relate and connect with so many people about their losses. I am feeling things more keenly and immediately in my own life, as though by continually entering into the intimate worlds of others, I have become more open hearted or ready to turn toward the feelings, thought and experiences of others. I feel very present. I called my mom after an interview and told her how much I love her. I feel I know in a more direct way that I will die and that I need to live fully"*

> Reflective diary excerpt, 29.8.17

3.7 Chapter summary

This chapter gave an account of the emergent, longitudinal and qualitative

methodology this inquiry used to sensitively and flexibly explore. Paying close

attention to the epistemological and ontological, I addressed methodological,

method, analytical and ethical inquiry elements.

Chapter 4: Data overview
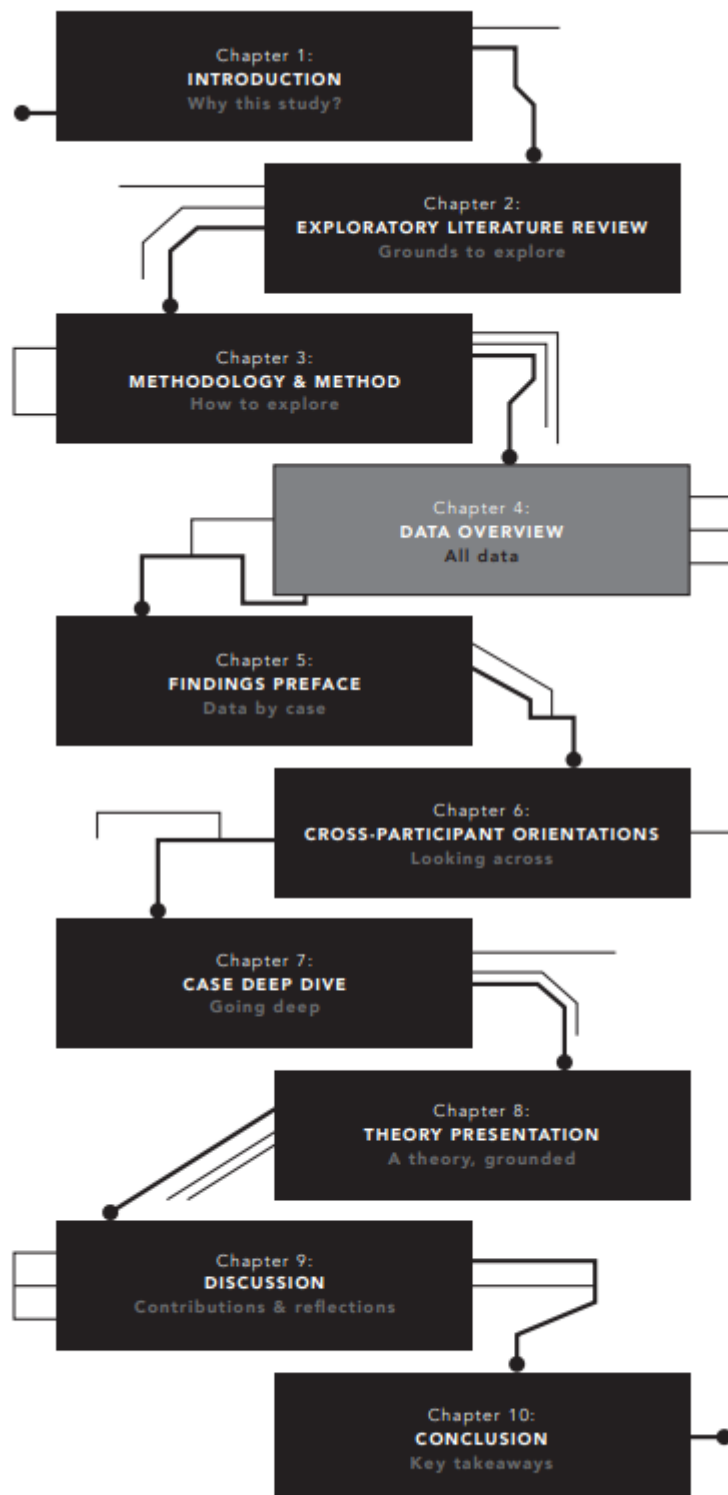
4.1 Introduction

This brief chapter overviews the data generated in this study, and the death-centred cases and participants recruited. It shows descriptive data for deceased individuals and bereaved participants (both key contacts and nominees) per case, and an overview of in-case participant referrals. Finally, this chapter overviews study engagement per case, showing the type, frequency and duration of data generation over fieldwork for each participant.

The following information was reported by participants in the Demographics and Information Form (Appendix U), or deduced from participant data, e.g. whether deaths were anticipated.

4.2 Descriptive data

4.2.1 Deceased individuals

The 11 deceased individuals at the centre of each case were six men and five women, ranging in age at death from 20 to 81 (mean=55). Causes of death (COD) were suicide (3), accident[15] (3), brain haemorrhage (2), homicide (1), cancer (1), and Parkinson's disease (1). Deaths occurred on average 30 months prior to case recruitment[16], ranging from four months to seven years.

In most cases 64% (7/11) the COD was violent (accident, homicide, suicide), with 36% (4/11) non-violent (brain haemorrhage, Parkinson's disease, cancer). The majority of cases 55% (6/11) were deaths unanticipated by both deceased and

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[15] This term can be offensive when survivors perceive culpability for, or preventability of, death (Breen, 2007). Though culpability was debated in one accidental death (case 8), participants viewed the death as ultimately accidental and reported it thus.
[16] Where case recruitment is key contacts' signing of study consent.

participating survivors (accidents and brain haemorrhages), 27% (3/11) were

anticipated by the dead but unanticipated by participants (suicides), and 18% (2/11)

were cases of progressive, life-limiting conditions where deaths were anticipated[17] by

both deceased and participating survivors (cancer and Parkinson's disease). The

majority of the deceased were White British (8/11), the others White Scottish (1/11),

White Austrian (1/11), and White New Zealander (1/11).

4.2.2 Case key contacts

The study's 11 key contacts (KCs) were nine females and two males, age range 24

to 58 (mean=45). The dominant ethnicity was White British (90%) with one White

Scottish (10%). KCs had the following relationships to the dead: friend (2), spouse

(2), daughter (1), sister (1), mother (1), aunt (1), second cousin (1), first cousin (1)

and granddaughter (1).

4.2.3 All bereaved participants

Including the 11 KCs detailed above, 32 bereaved individuals participated in this

study, connected to the 11 deaths. The majority (56.25%) of study participants were

connected to case two, the remaining 43.75% spread across the other cases: case

one (3.12%), three (3.12%), four (6.25%) five (3.12%), six (.123%), seven (3.12%),

eight (6.25%), nine (6.25%) ten (6.25%) and eleven (3.12%).

The 32 bereaved participants were six males and 26 females, aged 22 to 61 years

(mean=36). Bereavements occurred on average 27 months [2 years, 3 months] prior

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[17] To varying degrees for each case participant and deceased, but more anticipated by these
survivors and deceased than in cases with no preceding illness or death expectation.

to case recruitment, (range=4 to 52 months post-bereavement[18]). Participants had

the following relationships to the dead: daughter (1), sister (2), friend (18), parent (3),

spouse (2), aunt (1), first cousin (2), second cousin (1), and grandchild (2) of the

deceased. The survivor-deceased relationship most represented in this study was

friend (56.25%, 18/32). Participant ethnicities were White British (17), White Scottish

(8), White American (5), Hispanic American (1) and Asian American (1).

Table 4.1 below tabulates the above information per participant and case (D=

deceased, P = participant).

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[18] Discrepancy between time post-death (average and range) for the dead, and time post-bereavement (average and range) for survivors is due to case six, where the homicide was unknown to the participant until three years later.

Case #, Pseudonym of deceased	Deceased age, gender	COD	Time PB (at KC consent)	Deceased ethnicity	Death type	Study P#	Case P#	Participant-deceased relationship	P age, gender	P ethnicity	Total case Ps
1. Adam	69, M	Brain haemorrhage	4 yrs, 4 months	White British	Non-violent, Unanticipated (D+P)	1	1 (KC)	Daughter	47, F	White British	1
2. Leah	24, F	Accident	6 months	White Scottish	Violent, Unanticipated (D+Ps)	2	1 (KC)	Sister	29, F	White Scottish	18
						3	2	Sister	25, F	White Scottish	
						4	3	Friend	29, F	White Scottish	
						5	4	Friend	23, F	White Scottish	
						6	5	Friend	25, F	White British	
						7	6	Friend	24, F	White American	
						8	7	Friend	23, M	White British	
						9	8	Friend	22, F	White Scottish	
						10	9	Friend	23, F	White American	
						11	10	Friend	24, F	Hispanic American	
						12	11	Friend	24, F	White American	
						13	12	Friend	23, F	Asian American	
						14	13	Mother	58, F	White Scottish	
						15	14	Father	58, M	White Scottish	
						16	15	Friend	23, F	White British	
						17	16	Friend	34, M	White Scottish	
						18	17	Friend	24, F	White American	
						19	18	Friend	23, F	White American	

Case	Deceased Age, Sex	Cause	Time since death	Deceased Ethnicity	Death type	Participant No.	Key	Relationship	Participant Age, Sex	Participant Ethnicity	No.
3. Charlie	21, M	Accident	2 yrs, 10 months	White British	Violent Unanticipated (D+P)	20	1 (KC)	Mother	54, F	White British	1
4. Deborah	51, F	Cancer	3 yrs, 1 month	White British	Non-violent, Anticipated (D+Ps)	21	1 (KC)	Spouse	55, M	White British	2
						22	2	Friend	54, F	White British	
5. Eva	32 F	Suicide	1 yr, 10 months	White British	Violent, Anticipated by D not P	23	1 (KC)	Aunt	58, F	White British	1
6. Irene	43, F	Homicide	4 yrs	White British	Violent Unanticipated (D+P)	24	1 (KC)	Friend	52, F	White British	1
7. Paul	28, M	Suicide	3 yrs, 10 months	White British	Violent, Anticipated by D not P	25	1 (KC)	2nd cousin	57, F	White British	1
8. Oscar	20, M	Accident	7 months	White British	Violent Unanticipated (D+Ps)	26	1 (KC)	1st cousin	23, F	White British	2
						27	2	1st cousin	24, F	White British	
9. Ella	81, F	Parkinson's disease	18 months	White British	Non-violent, Anticipated (D+Ps)	28	1 (KC)	Granddaughter	29, F	White British	2
						29	2	Grandson	28, M	White British	
10. Bill	60, M	Brain haemorrhage	1 yr, 10 months	White Austrian	Non-violent, Unanticipated (D+Ps)	30	1 (KC)	Spouse	57, F	White British	2
						31	2	Friend	61, F	White British	
11. Hugh	44, M	Suicide	4 months	White Australian	Violent, Anticipated by D not P	32	1 (KC)	Friend	42, M	White British	1

Table 4.1: Descriptive data for deceased individuals and bereaved participants per case

4.3 Overview of case and participant study engagement and data

With reference to the key in Table 4.2 below, Table 4.3 breaks down participant data generated by case and participant, showing the number, type, frequency, timing and totals of data per month over the fieldwork year. Though all participants were screened pre-participation, due to space limitations only KC screening dates are shown as they represent cases' initial study engagement.

Table 4.2: Key for Table 4.3

KCS	Key contact screening
IVP#	Interview + case participant number
DP#	Diary entry + case participant number
OBP#	Digital object + case participant number
WD	Withdrew participation

Case #, Deceased Pseudonym	2017 March	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	2018 Jan	Feb	March	Data totals
1. Adam	KCS, IVP1											IVP1		2 interviews
2. Leah	KCS, IVP1			DP1 (2)	IVP1, DP1				IVP1			IVP1		33 interviews (3 joint) 23 diary entries 6 digital objects
		IVP2		DP2 (2)	IVP2						IVP2			
			IVP3				IVP3							
			IVP4	DP4, OBP4 (4)	DP4 (2)	IVP4			IVP4, DP4					
				IVP5				IVP5			IVP5			
			IVP6			IVP6								
				IVP7									
					IVP8				IVP8					
					IVP9					IVP9				
						IVP10, DP10	DP10 (2)		DP10	IVP10				
						IVP11								
									IVP12					
							IVP13+14 (joint)		IVP13+14 (joint)			IVP13+14 (joint)		
									IVP15					
									IVP16, OBP16					
										IVP17	DP17, OBP17			
										IVP18				
3. Charlie	KCS			IVP1, WD										1 interview
4. Deborah	KCS	IVP1	DP1				IVP1	DP1 IVP2, DP2	DP2	DP2	DP2			3 interviews 6 diary entries
5. Eva	KCS	IVP1					IVP1							2 interviews
6. Irene				KCS			IVP1							1 interview
7. Paul									KCS, IVP1		WD			1 interview
8. Oscar									KCS, IVP1			IVP1 IVP2		3 interviews
9. Ella										KCS	IVP1 IVP2			2 interviews
10. Bill										KCS	IVP1+2 (joint)			1 interview (joint)
11. Hugh												KCS	IVP1	1 interview
Data totals	2 interviews	3 interviews	3 interviews 1 diary	3 interviews 3 diary 4 digital objects	4 interviews 3 diary	4 interviews 1 diary	5 interviews 1 diary	2 interviews 2 diary	9 interviews 3 diary	4 interviews 1 diary	5 interviews 2 diary 1 object	5 interviews	1 interview	50 interviews (4 joint) 29 diary entries 6 digital objects

Table 4.3: Data-generation instances, type, frequency and totals per case and participant, March 2017-March 2018

The table shows study engagement—duration and extent of study involvement—per case and participant over fieldwork. The least engaged cases consisted of one participant's single study interaction (i.e. cases three, six, seven and eleven), and the greatest engagement was 62 data-generation instances with 18 participants spanning 12 months (case two).

The monthly breakdown of data generation in Table 4.3 shows the intensity of activity in case two, as compared to others, at its height in November, 2017 with seven interviews, two diaries and one digital object generated in this case alone. This is without additional activities of participant screening and facilitating in-case referrals. Across the 11 cases, participant data totalled 50 interviews (four joint), 29 diary entries and eight digital objects. As the table shows, case two accounted for the majority of interviews (66%, 33/50), diary entries (79%, 23/29) and all digital objects (100%, 6/6).

4.4   Chapter summary

This brief chapter presented descriptive data for deceased individuals and bereaved participants involved in this inquiry, and a tabulated breakdown of study engagement and data generation per participant and case over fieldwork. Whereas this chapter overviewed all cases, participants and data, the next chapter breaks this information down into the 11 cases.

Chapter 5: Findings preface

Chapter 1:
INTRODUCTION
Why this study?

Chapter 2:
EXPLORATORY LITERATURE REVIEW
Grounds to explore

Chapter 3:
METHODOLOGY & METHOD
How to explore

Chapter 4:
DATA OVERVIEW
All data

Chapter 5:
FINDINGS PREFACE
Data by case

Chapter 6:
CROSS-PARTICIPANT ORIENTATIONS
Looking across

Chapter 7:
CASE DEEP DIVE
Going deep

Chapter 8:
THEORY PRESENTATION
A theory, grounded

Chapter 9:
DISCUSSION
Contributions & reflections

Chapter 10:
CONCLUSION
Key takeaways

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents preface information to findings chapters six and seven. This information is in two parts.

Part one: Case profiles addresses inquiry objective (i), reporting what deceased-related digital material is of significance over time for multiple survivors affected by the same death, comparing between, and aggregating across, case survivors.

Part two: Participant activities and uses details how participants accessed items of digital material. This is important background to the forthcoming findings chapters.

I conclude the chapter by commenting in overview on the presented information.

5.1 Part one: case profiles

For each of the 11 recruited cases, profiles give the following information: death details; study involvement extent, duration and timing post-bereavement; in-case participant-referral processes, final case participants and per-case data[19] totals.

Profiles also list all deceased-related digital material mentioned per participant, and related access information. Rather than show changes over time in digital material significant to a participant across multiple encounters; detail too voluminous and beyond this thesis' scope, I list digital material mentioned across all data per participant.

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[19] Participant-generated data: interviews, diaries and digital objects.

Relatedly, reporting participant access to material is complicated by changes in access across serial data, material existing across multiple digital spaces and devices, participants' knowledge of material's housing and origins, and digital literacy to specify it. In cases with more than one participant, access information was sometimes contradictory. Acknowledging these issues, I report access information per digital item at final participant encounter, based on reports of all case participants, my viewing of material at interview, and surmising access based on all available information.

As well as the above information, profiles also offer descriptive vignettes about the dead at the centre of cases, in-life survivor-deceased (S-D) relationships, digital engagement of survivors and deceased, and in-life digital relationships. Amid voluminous data—and, in some cases, serial, multi-perspective accounts of lives, deaths and relationships—vignettes are interpretive, i.e. anchored in case data[20], but told from my perspective as embedded researcher, and mindful of providing context for the coming chapters.

Figures and a table visually summarise each case profile. Figures show study-close totals of recruits and generated data per case, with reference to the diagram key in Appendix W (p. 542). Appendix X (p. 543) shows the full participant-referral process in each case, including unsuccessful nominations, also with reference to the Appendix W key. In cases with more than one participant, figures[21] show material unique to participants, and in common with other participants, in that case.

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[20] Screening notes, interviews, diary entries, digital objects, social network maps, field notes, researcher reflective diary.
[21] A table is used in case two due to participant numbers.

As described in the ethics section of the Methodology (section 3.6.6), to preserve the agreed participant confidentiality, case and respondent details have been altered at my discretion.

5.1.1 Case 1: Adam

5.1.1.1 Case overview

Adam was a 69-year-old British man who died following a brain haemorrhage in 2012. Theretofore healthy, Adam's death was sudden and unanticipated. The sole participant in Adam's case was daughter Bella (43, KC[22]), recruited four years and four months post-bereavement.

5.1.1.2 Case vignette

Adam was a secondary teacher until his retirement, four years before his death. He was married for approximately forty years, with three children and several grandchildren. Bella described her father as a complex, difficult character. A few years before his death, Bella discovered marital infidelity on Adam's part. When Bella informed her mother, both parents stopped speaking to Bella. When Adam died unexpectedly, he and Bella had not had contact, other than a few emails, for about two years. In his will, Adam left Bella a nominal sum and generous amounts to her siblings. This was a difficult coda for Bella, and posthumously recast her concept of Adam and their relationship.

Deceased's digital engagement

Adam used technologies liberally in his teaching, hobbies and communications. He was active on Facebook, also keeping a page for his cat. He maintained websites for a local history group and for his wife's business, both featuring his digital

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[22] Case key contact

photography. He also travel-blogged, had a YouTube channel with videos of himself teaching, and communicated via text messaging and email.

Survivor-deceased digital relationship

There was historical email contact between Bella and Adam. After they stopped speaking, they had some email contact, which was confrontational in tone. They texted infrequently and were not Facebook friends.

Nomination process and final case configuration

Bella nominated her mother to take part in the study, opting to speak to her about it. However, given the pre-death estrangement and their clashing accounts of Adam's life and character, Bella found it difficult to bring up the study and did not communicate the nomination to her mother.

Figure 5.1 shows the final participant configuration and data for Adam's case, with full participant-referral process in Appendix X. Table 5.1 synopsises the case, and lists deceased-related digital material in all participant data, and its access details.

Figure 5.1: Case 1, Adam: Final participants and data

Table 5.1: Case 1 synopsis – Adam

Deceased age	69	
Cause of death	Brain haemorrhage	
Death type	Unanticipated	
Time post-bereavement (at KC recruitment)	4 years & 4 months	
Case duration (all Ps & data)	11 months (from 4 years, 4 months to 5 years, 3 months PB)	
Participant total	1	
Participants & data	P#: pseudonym, relationship to deceased (gender, age)	Data
	P1: Bella, daughter (f, 43) [KC]	2 interviews
Total case data	2 interviews	
Digital material (In all data per P)	**Material**	**Access details**
P1: Bella	Deceased's Facebook page	Active & public, visible as non-FB friend
	Deceased's cat's Facebook page	As above
	S-D email correspondence	In P's email a/cs (personal & professional, latter inaccessible)
	Local history website maintained by deceased feat. his photography	Public, known to P
	Deceased's wife's professional website, maintained by him & feat. his photography	Public, known to P
	YouTube videos feat. deceased teaching	Public, found Internet-searching deceased's name
	Deceased's travel blogs w/ his photography	Public, known to P
	Student comments re. deceased on ratemyteachers.com	Public, found searching name
	Deceased's mobile phone, iPod, laptop & two digital cameras	Unavailable to P (in mother's possession)
	Videos featuring deceased on his laptop	As above
	Hundreds of photographs & tens of videos featuring deceased	On P's devices, online storage & social media.

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5.1.2 Case 2: Leah

5.1.2.1 Case overview

Leah was a 23-year-old Scottish woman who died in 2016 following an accident. In a coma for a few days, Leah did not regain consciousness. Her death was sudden and unanticipated, until it was decided to withdraw life support. The key contact [KC] in Leah's case was sister, Sarah (29), recruited six months post-bereavement, and the first in a participant-referral chain totalling 18 survivors at study close.

Note: The case presentation method is adapted for this exceptionally large case. Rather than listing all deceased-related digital material per participant, for brevity this information is tabulated across case participants (Table 5.3). Tabulation excludes material mentioned by two or fewer participants, and excludes some access detail. Chapter 7, focused on this case, offers much of this detail as material's provenance, and material unique to respondents, are noted.

This tabulation method has analytic value it itself, providing a case-wide view of all digital material associated with the dead across 18 respondents—divided by service, platform, device and material type—showing frequency and overlap in material across participants.

5.1.2.2 Case vignette

Leah's survivors described her as outgoing, gregarious, playful, warm, kind and wise. Leah's loud, booming laugh was frequently evoked to articulate elements of her personality; she was quick to joy and mischief, socially adept and inclusive of others. Leah made friends easily and had friends in the three countries she had lived

in. She was a life-long athlete, partaking in many sports and competing at international level in athletics. Leah made visual art and was interested in the environment and sustainability, spirituality and loved music and dancing. She undertook her undergraduate degree at an American university and was studying for a Master's degree in architecture in the UK when she died.

Deceased's digital engagement

Leah was a liberal user of digital technologies and employed a wide range of platforms, services and devices in the course of her university work, daily life and communications with friends and family. Digitally communicating with distant others was a feature of Leah's technology use, due to her peripatetic sporting and educational life. Since leaving the family home for university five years before her death, Leah lived at geographical removes from family and had friends in different parts of the world. Leah used social media (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) liberally, posting and commenting often, with posts jovial or silly in tone, as well as motivational or artistic. Leah did not post about her sporting accolades, but enjoyed reading and commenting on her friends' and family members' posts. Leah particularly enjoyed making silly videos of herself on her laptop and mobile device phone, and others' devices. She also kept a sports blog and created Spotify playlists for different occasions and people. She used her laptop for her architecture work as well as a store of digital images of her visual art.

Survivor-deceased digital relationships

Leah's digital relationships were described as unreliable but creative. She would be in touch in 'punctuated' bursts rather than regularly but her communication was very

rich and she found ways to communicate care and interest from afar, e.g. making videos and playlists for people, or sending photos of her diary in which she celebrated the recipient's friendship. She maintained close relationships with many friends and family members across three countries in this way. She had many one-to-one and group relationships with friends and family on a variety of messaging platforms (Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, SMS, Instagram and Twitter) and email. She also communicated with friends and family via Skype and Snapchat and co-wrote Instagram posts with friends.

Nomination process and final case configuration

Figure 5.2 depicts this case's uniquely productive referral process, recruited participants and data. Appendix X shows the full participant-referral process, including unsuccessful nominations. Table 5.2 synopsises this case and Table 5.3 tabulates total deceased-related digital material mentioned in all participant data.
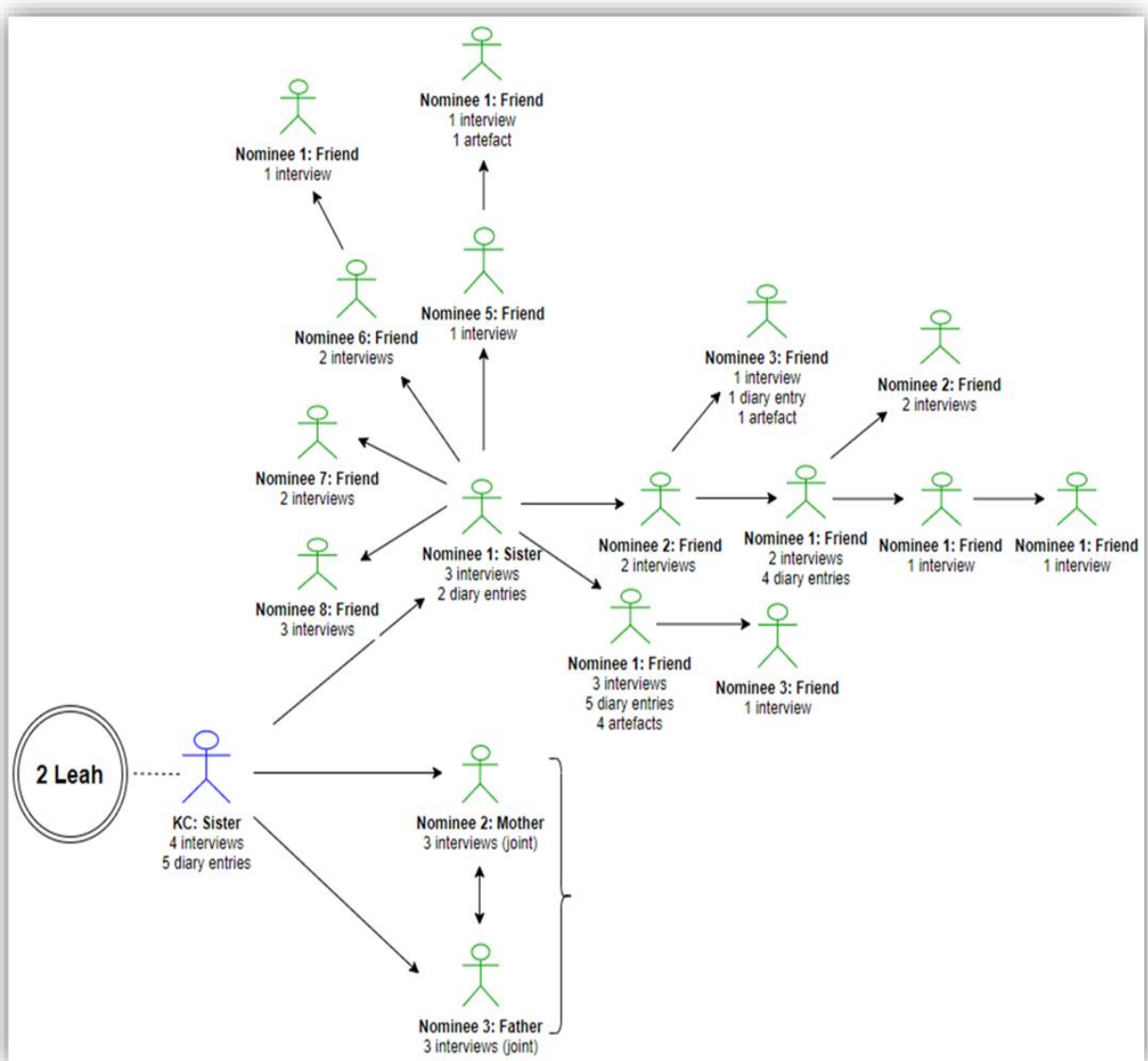
Figure 5.2: Case 2, Leah - Final participants and data

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Table 5.2: Case 2 synopsis - Leah

Deceased age	23	
Cause of death	Accident	
Death type	Unanticipated	
Time post-bereavement (at KC recruitment)	6 months	
Case duration (all Ps & data)	11 months (from 6 to 17 months PB)	
Participant total	18	
Participants & data	P#: pseudonym, rel. to dead (gender, age)	Data
	P1: Sarah, sister (f, 29) [key contact]	4 Interviews, 5 diary
	P2: Betty, sister (f, 25)	3 Interviews, 2 diary
	P3: Laura, friend (f, 29)	2 Interviews,
	P4: Susie, friend (f, 23)	3 Interviews, 5 diary, 4 objects
	P5: Vera, friend (f, 25)	3 Interviews,
	P6: Ellie, friend (f, 24)	2 Interviews
	P7: Chris, friend (f, 24)	1 Interview
	P8: Fiona, friend (f, 24)	2 Interviews
	P9: Helen, friend (f, 23)	2 Interviews, 4 diary
	P10: Jude, friend (f, 25)	2 Interviews
	P11: Matilda, friend (f, 24)	1 Interview
	P12: Kate, friend (f, 23)	1 Interview
	P13: Gareth, father (m, 58)	3 Interviews (joint)
	P14: Sally, mother (f, 57)	3 Interviews (joint)
	P15: Phoebe, friend (f, 23)	1 Interview, 1 object
	P16: Peter, friend (m, 34)	1 Interview
	P17: Dee, friend (f, 24)	1 Interview, 1 diary, 1 object
	P18: Becca, friend (f, 23)	1 Interview
Total case data	33 interviews (3=joint) 23 diary entries 6 digital objects	

Table 5.3: Case 2 - Deceased-related digital material per participant

Case P#			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	*13 & 14	15	16	17	18
	Service, platform, device or material type	**Interaction/access info**																	
Social media & services w/ social dimension	**Facebook** Deceased profile active & public																		
		Access to deceased's profile (logged in on deceased's phone)		✓															
		Deceased's page (visible as friend)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
		Public activity of deceased, & public deceased-bereaved correspondence (on deceased, bereaved & others' pages)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
		Messenger correspondence w/ deceased (1-1)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
		Messenger correspondence w/ or incl. deceased (groups)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	
	Instagram Deceased profile active & public																		
		Deceased's page (visible as follower)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	
		Deceased-bereaved interactions on pages of both		✓		✓			✓			✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	
	Twitter Deceased profile active & public																		
		Deceased's page (visible as follower)		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓				✓	
		Deceased-bereaved interactions on pages of both							✓				✓	✓				✓	
		Direct messaging (1-1)											✓						
		Access to deceased's profile	✓																
	Spotify Deceased's account active																		
		Deceased's page, activity & playlists (visible as friend)	✓	✓	✓	✓													
		Playlists created by deceased for bereaved		✓		✓													
		Playlists co-created by deceased & bereaved		✓															
Messaging, emailing & calling services & applications	**Mobile text messaging** (incl. media)																		

Category	Platform/Item	Detail	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
		Deceased-bereaved SMS correspondence	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓		
	WhatsApp (incl. media)																			
		1-1 deceased-bereaved correspondence		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							
		Groups including deceased	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							
	Snapchat																			
		Deceased's profile visible to Snapchat friends	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓				
	Email																			
		Deceased-bereaved correspondence on personal email account(s) of bereaved	✓	✓				✓				✓			✓					
		Deceased-bereaved correspondence on professional/student email account(s) of bereaved	✓																	
	Skype, FaceTime																			
		History of interactions (calling & messaging) w/ deceased on bereaved's account		✓		✓		✓				✓				✓		✓		
Devices of deceased	**Mobile phone** (no PIN) SMS, internet browsing history, videos, photos. Signed into Facebook, Spotify, WhatsApp, Snapchat, email.																			
		In possession of		✓																
		Opened/ accessed/powered on	✓	✓												✓				
		Currently using		✓																
	Laptop (PIN known to family) Incl. uni work, photos, webcam videos, lists, sticky notes, personal writing, music & misc. files																			
		In possession of														✓				
		Opened/ accessed/powered on	✓	✓			✓									✓				
		Currently using														✓				
Material across platforms, services, devices	**Images** Digital/digitised images featuring/taken by deceased		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Videos Featuring/taken by deceased		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Misc. Material (≤3 Ps)	**2 GoPro videos**		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓								✓	
	'Happy Birthday' video (from deceased to P6)		✓					✓			✓				✓					
	Digitised self-portrait		✓	✓	✓	✓					✓				✓					
	Deceased's undergrad dissertation (online)												✓	✓					✓	

5.1.3 Case 3: Charlie

5.1.3.1 Case overview

Charlie was a 21-year-old British man who died following an accident in 2014, having lived for a few days in a coma. The participant in Charlie's case was his mother, Ellen (43), recruited two years and ten months post-bereavement.

5.1.3.2 Case vignette

Ellen described her son as a bright, logical, sensitive, and high-achieving person. He was introverted and not very communicative or gregarious, finding it difficult to express emotions, but loving in a quiet, gentle way. Charlie studied maths at university and was passionate about water sports and the outdoors. He spent summers working abroad and died in an accident while away.

Deceased's digital engagement

Charlie used email, SMS and Snapchat to keep in touch with family and friends while away at university, at resorts and hiking. He used Facebook to keep in touch with his university group, resort friends and sister. He also used Twitter and used his phone and camera to take photos of his travels and hiking. Charlie and his friends wrote, made and performed short films which they posted on YouTube.

Survivor-deceased digital relationship(s)

Ellen and Charlie's digital communication began in earnest when he went to university, approximately four years before his death. He was not the type to call daily but there was infrequent one-to-one contact between them, mostly via

Snapchat and email, and weekend family Skype calls. Ellen described Charlie's communication as infrequent and factual; 'nothing flowery'. He was in touch if he had something specific to tell her or his father. Charlie and Ellen were not Facebook friends.

Nomination process and final case configuration

Ellen nominated a number of Charlie's university and resort friends to participate. However, Ellen withdrew from the study due to a difficult grief experience, thereby ending the nomination process.

Figure *5.3* shows the final participant and data for Charlie's case, with full nomination process in Appendix X. Table 5.4 synopsises the case, and lists all deceased-related digital material mentioned in participant data.
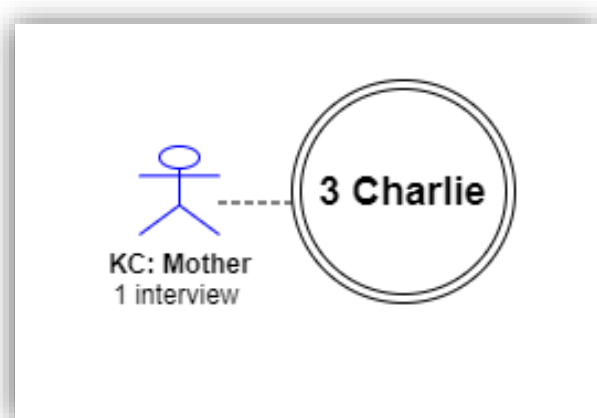
Figure 5.3: Case 3, Charlie: Final participants and data

Table 5.4: Case 3 synopsis - Charlie

Deceased age	21		
Cause of death	Accident		
Death type	Unanticipated		
Time post-bereavement (at KC recruitment)	2 years & 10 months		
Case duration (all Ps & data)	N/A, one study encounter		
Participant total	1		
Participants & data	P#: pseudonym, relationship to dead (gender, age)		Data
	P1: Ellen, mother (f, 54) [KC]		1 interview
Total case data	1 interview		
Digital material (In all data per P)	**Material**		**Access details**
P1: Ellen	Deceased's Snapchat profile picture		Visible on P's account
	Screenshots of Snaps from deceased		Taken by P pre-death, on laptop
	Survivor-deceased SMS history		Accidentally deleted peri-mortem
	Survivor-deceased email history		In P's email account
	Deceased's Facebook page		Active & on "friends of friends" setting. P & deceased not FB friends. Page visible as P FB friended deceased's friends PB.
	Images, video & interactions by & featuring deceased's on his friends' Facebook pages		As above
	Twitter activity		Public & active profile
	Survivor-deceased (& family) Skype calling record		On P's account
	YouTube amateur movies by deceased & friends		Public
	Deceased's laptop, including: Signed-in email account Miscellaneous folders Folders of music & playlists Hundreds of photographs & tens of videos Internet browsing history, incl. gambling		Received post-death & knew password
	Deceased's mobile device, including: Image & video library Signed into messaging apps & social media; Internet browsing history SMS & calling history		PIN known by sister of deceased
	Deceased's iPod		Received post-death
	Deceased's digital camera & photos on SD card		Received post-death

5.1.4 Case 4: Deborah

5.1.4.1 Case overview

Deborah was a 51-year-old British woman who died in 2014 following a two-and-a-half-year cancer illness. She spent the final months of her life in a hospice and died there. Participants in this case were Deborah's husband, Brian (55, KC), recruited three years and one month post-bereavement, and Deborah's friend, Brenda (54).

5.1.4.2 Case vingette

Deborah was a fifty-one year old British nurse. Following a Master's degree, Deborah worked as a lecturer until her death. Deborah had passions for hiking and badminton, which she shared with her husband, Brian. The couple had a happy twenty-five year marriage, engaging in sports, travelling and sharing friends. Deborah was career oriented and loved her work. Brian and nominee, Brenda (54), Deborah's friend for approximately thirty years and bridesmaid, described her as friendly, sociable and driven. Deborah's illness with an aggressive cancer progressed, despite interventions, during which time Brian saw her daily and Brenda helped with her care.

Deceased's digital engagement

Deborah had a mobile phone she used to send text messages and make calls. A reader, music lover, and amateur photographer, Deborah downloaded books to her Kindle, music to her MP3 player and had a digital camera and multiple memory cards. She had a tablet, which she used to browse the Internet, read the news, and use Facebook, but not much else. Deborah used digital technologies in her

professional life and in her Master's degree, working and saving files on the couple's shared PC. Deborah had not had been on Facebook long when she died and used it infrequently.

Survivor-deceased digital relationships

Deborah and Brian were digitally entwined; they had a joint email account; shared use of their home desktop computer and both used Deborah's digital camera. Deborah and Brian did not use digital means to communicate on a personal level, Brian describing their digital communication as predominantly organisational and 'business-like'. Deborah and friend Brenda's digital relationship was limited; they corresponded predominantly via letters and landline calls. They were Facebook friends but interacted infrequently, emailed a little and texted to co-ordinate meet-ups.

Nomination process and final case configuration

Initially ambivalent about nominating, Brian suggested Brenda at interview two. Brenda in turn nominated her daughter, Deborah's godchild. However, concerned about upsetting her daughter, Brenda did not follow nomination through.

Figure 5.4 shows the final participants and data for Deborah's case, with full participant-referral process in Appendix X. Table 5.5 synopsises the case and details deceased-digital material per participant across all data, and Figure 5.5 shows material unique, and in common, to case participants.
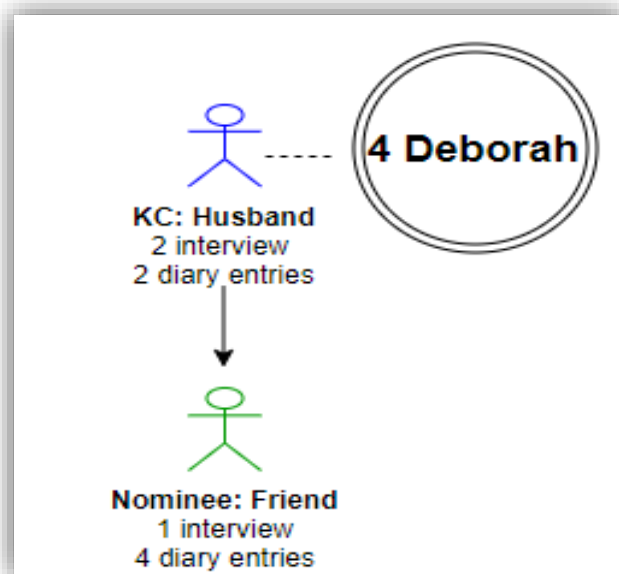
Figure 5.4: Case 4, Deborah - Final participants and data

Table 5.5: Case 4 synopsis - Deborah

Deceased age	51	
Cause of death	Cancer	
Death type	Anticipated	
Time post-bereavement (at KC recruitment)	3 years & 1 month	
Case duration (all Ps & data)	12 months	
Participant total	2	
Participants & data	P#: pseudonym, relationship to deceased (gender, age)	Data
	P1: Brian, husband (m, 55) [KC]	2 interviews, 2 diary
	P2: Brenda, friend (f, 54)	1 interview, 4 diary
Total case data	3 interviews, 6 diary entries	
Digital material (In all data per P)	**Material**	**Access details**
P1: Brian	Deceased's Facebook page	Active, viewed as FB friend
	S-D text message correspondence	On P's mobile device
	Joint email account	Shared w/ P
	Voice messages from deceased	Deleted by P

	Couple's shared desktop computer, including:
	  Deceased's personal, university & work files
	  Shared image library
		Shared access

	Couple's shared tablet, including: Webpages bookmarked by deceased	Password to deceased's profile on tablet unknown to P
	Deceased's phone	In P's possession, password known, powered off at death
	Deceased's e-reader (Kindle) w/ book library	As above
	Deceased's MP3 player w/ music library	As above
	Deceased's digital camera & images on SD cards	In P's possession & accessed
	Photographs by deceased on XD cards	In P's possession but format inaccessible
P2: Brenda	Deceased's Facebook page	Active, as FB friend
	S-D email correspondence	In P's email account
	Deceased & P1's joint email address	In P's email contacts
	S-D text message correspondence	In P's device
	Deceased's mobile phone number	Contact in P's device
	SMS & email contact w/ P1 re. diagnosis & care	In P's device & a/cs
	Images featuring & taken by deceased	On P's FB page, devices & SD cards
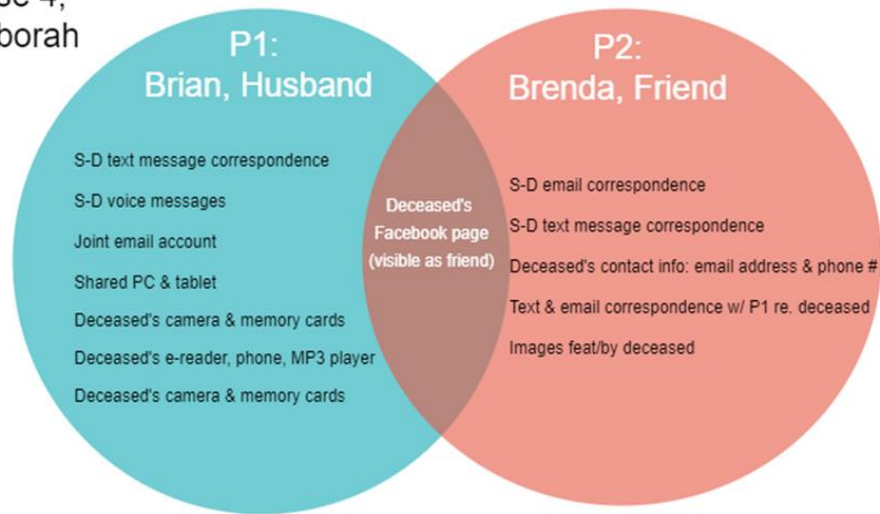
Figure 5.5: Case 4, Deborah - Digital material overlapping & unique to participants

5.1.5 Case 5: Eva

5.1.5.1 Case overview

Eva was a 32-year-old British woman who died by suicide in 2017. Though Eva had long-standing mental health difficulties, her suicide was unanticipated to her survivors. The respondent in Eva's case was her aunt, Avril (58, KC), recruited one year and ten months post-bereavement.

5.1.5.2 Case vignette

A happy and confident child and young adult, as a late teenager, Eva experienced difficulties travelling, overnighting away from home and eating. When Eva completed her undergraduate university degree, she did not take up employment for a few years and lived with her parents. She later took up part-time, public-sector work. At the time of her death, Eva had been on work leave due to anxiety. Her death was unanticipated and a shock acutely felt by the family. Eva was interested in crafting, art and photography and had pet mice. Eva took a lot of photographs of her family particularly. Avril described Eva as a quiet, sensitive and extremely caring person.

Deceased's digital engagement

Sole case respondent, Avril, described herself as 'very anti-technology'. She therefore did not know much of Eva's digital life beyond Facebook, where she posted and commented liberally, often about crafts, art and mice.

Avril knew Eva and others in the family interacted on Facebook but did not wish to 'do Facebook'. A few months before Eva's death, Avril joined Facebook to communicate with another group and was added to a family group Eva was part of. At the time of Eva's death, she and Avril were not Facebook friends and Avril had not viewed Eva's profile. Around the time of Eva's suicide, Avril sent her a friend request but Eva was likely dead before receiving it. The request was accepted (likely by Eva's mother). Therefore, since her death, Avril could view Eva's in-life Facebook profile. Eva emailed Avril on a number of occasions to send family photographs she had taken.

Nomination process and final case participants and data

Avril wished to nominate Eva's sister-in-law and siblings, but not without the go-ahead from Eva's mother. Following months waiting to speak to her, Avril did so and Eva's mother was ambivalent. Without her blessing, Avril did not wish to nominate, thereby halting nominations in this case.

Figure 5.6 shows the final participant configuration and data for case five, with full participant-referral process in Appendix X. Table 5.6 synopsises the case, and lists deceased-related digital material mentioned by the participant in all data, and its access details.
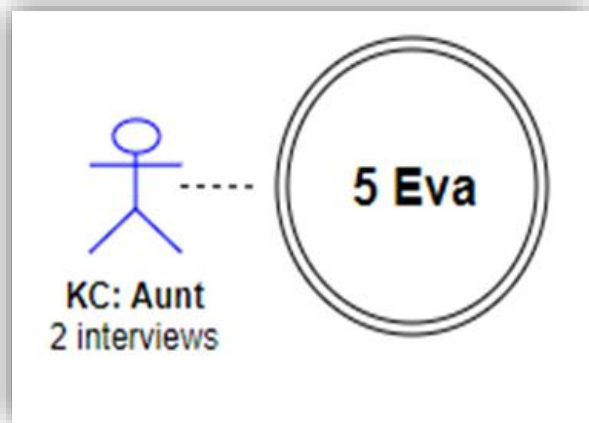
Figure 5.6: Case 5, Eva - Final participants and data

Table 5.6: Case 5 synopsis – Eva

Deceased age	32	
Cause of death	Suicide	
Death type	Unanticipated	
Time post-bereavement (at KC recruitment)	1 year & 10 months	
Case duration (all Ps & data)	5 months	
Participant total	1	
Participants & data	P#: pseudonym, relationship to deceased (gender, age)	Data
	P1: Avril, aunt (f, 58) [KC]	2 interviews
Total case data	2 interviews	
Digital material (in all data per P)	**Material**	**Access details**
P1: Avril	Deceased's Facebook page	Active, visible as FB friend
	S-D email correspondence, including: Photographs by deceased sent to P	In P's email a/c
	Hard disc of photographs taken by deceased	In temporary possession of P to copy
	Deceased's mobile phone number	In P's mobile device
	Digitised VHS recording feat deceased & P	In deceased's parents' possession, seen by P
	VHS recordings of deceased's birth and family events (not digitised)	In possession of deceased's parents
	Digitised photographs featuring deceased	On P's personal computer & that of her father (who she cares for)

5.1.6 Case 6: Irene

5.1.6.1 Case overview

Irene was a 43-year-old British woman who was murdered in 2010, her death unanticipated. Irene's murder was unknown for a number of years, her bereaved led to believe she was alive[23]. Irene's body was not found and there was no funeral. The participant in Irene's case was her friend, Gina (52, KC), recruited approximately four years post-bereavement[24].

5.1.6.2 Case vignette

Irene lived in a number of UK cities and in various types of employment; retail, social care and secretarial work. At the time of her death she was running her own online business. Irene spent long periods travelling abroad, interspersed with periods of employment in the UK. She died in the UK. Gina (key contact, 52) and Irene were friends for approximately fifteen years. They met at a religious group and worked in a connected business for many years. The women met and socialised frequently, later moving in together. When Irene travelled, they stayed in contact. In the years when Irene's murder was undiscovered, Gina believed she was travelling, growing disappointed about the lapse in contact. This lapse took on a different quality when Gina learned of Irene's murder.

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[23] Details withheld to preserve anonymity.
[24] Since participant learned of bereavement.

Deceased's digital engagement

Irene used digital technologies in her work and personal life. She had a Facebook profile, used email, and had a phone which she used to send texts. She also kept a travel blog, including photographs. She maintained a website for her online business.

Survivor-deceased digital relationship

Irene and Gina's digital communication changed over their fifteen-year relationship. Initially, they emailed 'quite extensive[ly]', particularly when Irene was travelling. Exchanging emails of 'volume and length', they discussed their personal lives, experiences and struggles. Later, they moved to SMS messaging and contact became more frequent but less substantial, even when Irene travelled. They emailed, but less frequently. Irene began a detailed and extensive travel blog, the private link for which she shared with Gina. This maintained a link between the women when Irene was away.

Nomination process and final case configuration

Gina nominated and contacted Irene's friend, but did not receive a response. Gina considered other nominations but was afraid to cause pain to nominees particularly give the substantial time post-mortem and death circumstances.

Figure 5.7 shows the final participant configuration and data for case six, with full participant-referral process in Appendix X. Table 5.7 synopsises the case, and lists deceased-related digital material mentioned by the participant, and its access details.
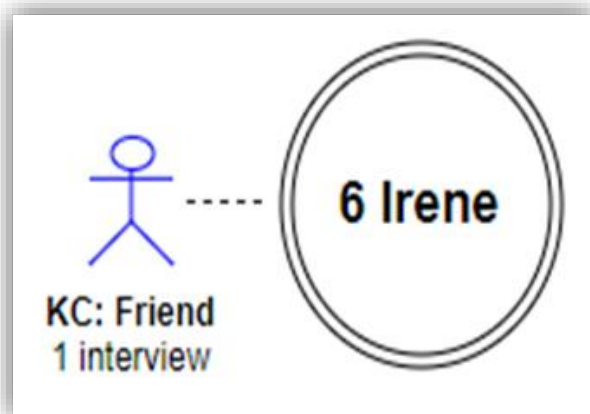
Figure 5.7: Case 6, Irene - Final participants and data

Table 5.7: Case 6 synopsis - Irene

Deceased age	43		
Cause of death	Murder		
Death type	Unanticipated		
Time post-bereavement (at KC recruitment)	Approx. 4 years		
Case duration (all Ps & data)	N/A, one study encounter		
Participant total	1		
Participants & data	P#: pseudonym, relationship to deceased (gender, age)		Data
	P1: Gina, friend (f, 52) [KC]		1 interview
Total case data	1 interview		
Digital material (in all data per P)	**Material**		**Access details**

P1: Gina	Deceased's travel blogs, including:
	     Photography by deceased
	     In-life comments by deceased's friends
			Private, shared w/ P by deceased

	S-D email correspondence		In P's email a/c
	Deceased's Facebook page		Active, visible as FB friend
	S-D text messaging correspondence		Lost in P phone change
	Deceased's business website		Public & active
	Deceased's email address		In email contacts
	Deceased's mobile number		In phone contacts

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5.1.7 Case 7: Paul

5.1.7.1 Case overview

Paul was a 28-year-old man who died by suicide in 2014. Paul experienced mental health difficulties and alcoholism for many years, which are thought to have been factors in his unanticipated death. Participating in Paul's case was his second cousin, Alice (57, KC), recruited three years and 10 months post-bereavement.

5.1.7.2 Case vignette

Paul was an only child and was bright and sociable, with many friends and interests, particularly football, politics and history. Paul was dyslexic and struggled at school. He undertook a degree at university but struggled to complete it. Paul worked in catering, involving late nights and a drinking culture. Paul was living with his parents at the time of his suicide and signed into a number of social media accounts on his parents' PC. His Internet browsing history was also visible. Absent a suicide note, this material became important in making sense of Paul's death, which Alice undertook on behalf of Paul's parents. Paul did not appear to have curated this material pre-death.

Deceased's digital engagement

Alice reported on Paul's digital engagement based on retracing his activities on his parents' PC. From this, it was clear Paul used digital media liberally, in personal and professional capacities. He had a wide network of Facebook friends, posting frequently about politics and current affairs. He had a large Twitter following as a political commentator and also another personal Twitter account. Paul had a

LinkedIn account, a YouTube channel and he visited and was active on online

mental health support groups. He also had a mobile phone and profile on a shared

iPad, both inaccessible without passwords.

Survivor-deceased digital relationship

Alice and Paul did not have a one-to-one relationship outside of family gatherings.

This was also the case with their digital relationship, with minimal communication.

Alice knew of Paul's political commentary on Twitter and had begun following him

around the time of his death. They had not been Facebook friends, Alice requesting

this posthumously (accepted via his signed-in profile by Paul's parents).

Nomination process and final case configuration

Alice nominated Paul's mother to participate and planned to speak to her in person.

With the mother's blessing, Alice wished to nominate Paul's friends. However, before

speaking to Paul's mother, Alice withdrew participation due to another bereavement.

Alice therefore remained the only case participant.

Figure 5.8 depicts the final participants and data for case seven, with full participant-

referral process in Appendix X. Table 5.8 synopsises the case, and lists deceased-

related digital material mentioned by the participant, and its access details.

Figure 5.8: Case 7, Paul - Final participants and data

Table 5.8: Case 7 synopsis - Paul

Deceased age	28		
Cause of death	Suicide		
Death type	Unanticipated		
Time post-bereavement (at KC recruitment)	3 years & 10 months		
Case duration (all Ps & data)	N/A, one study encounter		
Participant total	1		
Participants & data	P#: pseudonym, relationship to deceased (gender, age)		Data
	P1: Alice, second cousin (f, 57) [KC]		1 interview
Total case data	1 interview		
Digital material (In all data per P)	**Material**		**Access details**

P1: Gina	Parents' desktop computer, including:
	    Signed-in accounts (FB, Twitter [1 of 2], LinkedIn)
	    Internet browsing history
	    Mental health support group activity
	    Music listening history
			P accessed on behalf of deceased's parents

	Deceased's Twitter page (1 of 2)		Active & public, P is follower
	Deceased's Facebook page		Active, P is FB friend (post-death request)
	Deceased's YouTube channel		P followed links on deceased's Twitter
	Deceased's profile on iPad shared w/ parents		Password unknown
	Deceased's mobile device		As above

5.1.8 Case 8: Oscar

5.1.8.1 Case overview

Oscar was a 20-year-old Welsh man who died in an accident in 2017, while living overseas. A young athlete in peak physical condition, Oscar's death was unanticipated. Participants in this case were Oscar's first cousins Tina (23, KC, recruited seven months PB) and her sister, Lisa (24).

5.1.8.2 Case vignette

Oscar was an only child who lived in Wales and the North of England. He left education to pursue a professional martial arts career abroad, where he lived for approximately two years at his death. Oscar's first cousins were close in age to Oscar and were, in Tina's words, 'kind of brought up together', Oscar and Tina particularly close. Oscar's interest in fighting created distance in the cousins' relationships, the sisters disapproving of it and Oscar's partying lifestyle. The cousins described Oscar as clever and talented; he excelled at sport, taught himself guitar and could sing and dance. Fond of pranks, Oscar had a deadpan sense of humour and was excitable to the point of being annoying at times.

Deceased's digital engagement

Oscar's digital engagement began in earnest when he moved abroad. He was extremely active online, posting up to fifteen videos a day across Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat. Videos were mostly of workouts and fights, as well as of him playing the guitar, singing silly songs or playing pranks, often while intoxicated. He was extremely active on others' social media profiles. He had one-to-one and

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group messaging relationships with many people and used Skype and Facebook Messenger to call family.

Survivor-deceased digital relationships

When Oscar moved away, he and Tina were in frequent but irregular contact across a number of platforms, communicating one-to-one on Facebook Messenger. Every few weeks Oscar video-called Tina 'out of the blue', often intoxicated and at night. Tina often posted to Oscar's Facebook wall and commented on his posts. She saw him sending Snaps but did not always view them as they were so frequent and often of him fighting. Lisa and Oscar were not in one-to-one contact, but she kept abreast of his Facebook activity and they had Facebook interactions every once in a while.

Nomination process and final case configuration

Key contact, Tina, nominated her sister Lisa to take part in the study. Due to a lapse in Lisa's contact and impending fieldwork close, she was not invited to nominate.

Figure 5.9 shows final participants and data totals for Oscar's case, with full participant-referral process in Appendix X. Table 5.9 synopsises the case, and lists deceased-related digital material per participant, and access information. Figure 5.10 shows digital material unique to and in common between case participants.
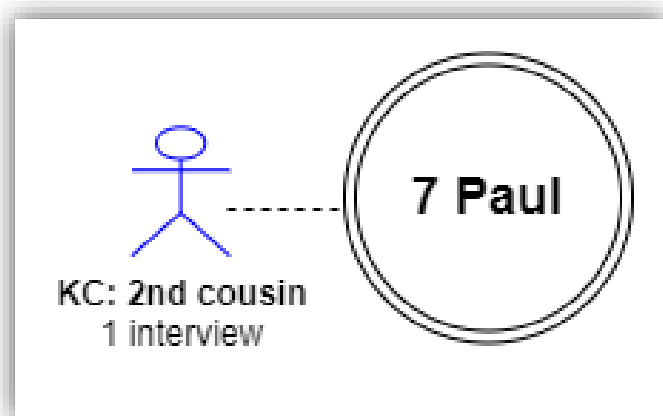
Figure 5.9 Case 8, Oscar - Final participants and data

Table 5.9: Case 8 synopsis - Oscar

Deceased age	20	
Cause of death	Accident	
Death type	Unanticipated	
Time post-bereavement (at KC recruitment)	7 months	
Case duration (all Ps & data)	3 months	
Participant total	2	
Participants & data	P#: pseudonym, relationship to deceased (gender, age)	Data
	P1: Tina, first cousin (f, 23) [KC]	2 interviews
	P2: Lisa, first cousin (f, 24)	1 interview
Total case data	3 interviews	
Digital material (In all data per P)	**Material**	**Access details**
P1: Tina	Deceased's Facebook page	Memorialised, seen as FB friend
	S-D Facebook interactions, including: On each other's walls 1-1 & group Messenger correspondence S-D calling history	On P's Facebook & memorialised page of deceased
	Deceased's Snapchat profile picture	In P's contacts
	Deceased's last Snap (video)	Available for hours PB before deletion by app
	Video: Hundreds featuring, with & by deceased	Across: - FB of deceased, P & friends of both - YouTube, public - Sport & news sites - Google searching - P's mobile & PC
	Images: Hundreds featuring, with & by deceased	As above
	Bebo account of P w/ S-D interactions & images	Deleted by P
P2: Lisa	Deceased's Facebook page	Memorialised, viewed as FB friend
	S-D Facebook interactions, including: On each other's walls 1-1 & group Messenger correspondence	On P's Facebook & memorialised page of deceased
	Images: Tens featuring, with & by deceased	As above & Internet image-searching
	Videos: Tens featuring deceased	YouTube, public Sports websites
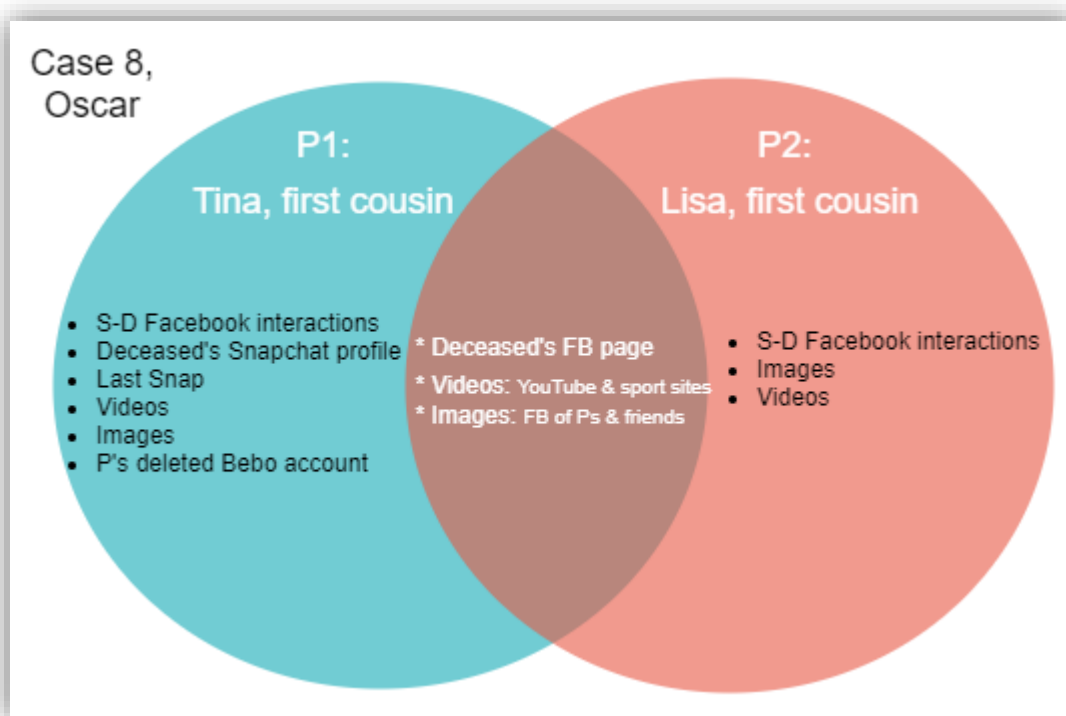
Figure 5.10: Case 8, Oscar - Digital material overlapping & unique to participants

5.1.9 Case 9: Ella

5.1.9.1 Case overview

Ella was an 81-year-old British woman who died in 2016 of Parkinson's disease. Ella spent her last years in a care home and died there. In advanced years and deteriorating health, Ella's death was anticipated. Participants were Ella's grandchildren, Louise (29, KC, recruited eighteen months PB) and Paul (28), who were siblings.

5.1.9.2 Case vignette

Ella had a career as a teacher and was married with three children. Following her son's divorce, Ella helped bring up his two children Louise (29) and Paul (28) and they formed close relationships. After Ella's husband's death, she lived alone, and with Louise for a period. Ella received a Parkinson's diagnosis six years before her death, precipitating a gradual physical decline and move into a care home. Ella remained aware and communicative until the last six months of her life. A former educator, Ella had a sharp mind and great intellect and encouraged her grandchildren's academic endeavours. She was passionate about reading, travel and fashion.

Deceased's digital engagement

Despite difficulties getting to grips with digital technologies, Ella persisted with Louise's help. She used email frequently before coming ill and it became her main way of communicating with family when in the care home she could no longer speak

on the phone. Ella had a laptop, which she used to email, buy clothing online, watch YouTube videos, and read granddaughter Louise's blog.

Survivor-deceased digital relationships

Ella and Louise kept in contact via email, this increasing when Ella was in the care home and Louise could not visit her often. The text of these emails was erratic and hard to decipher due both to Ella's struggle to use the technology and her declining health. When they lived together, Louise often helped Ella to use her laptop, email and the internet, which Louise found frustrating at times. When Louise moved out, Ella kept abreast of Louise's activities and book-reading via her blog. Louise sometimes blogged about her grandmother, knowing Ella would get a thrill from this. Louise also posted photos of her grandmother on Instagram and made videos featuring her, posting some online. Grandson Paul did not have a one-to-one digital relationship with Ella but posted many digitised photographs of his childhood, featuring Ella, to his Instagram and Facebook while she was alive.

Nomination process and final case configuration

Key contact, Louise, nominated brother, Paul, to participate. Due to impending fieldwork close, Paul was not invited to nominate.

Figure 5.11 shows case participants and data totals for Ella's case, with full participant-referral process in Appendix X. Table 5.10 synopsises case nine, and lists deceased-related digital material per participant, and access information, and Figure 5.12 shows digital material unique to and in common between case participants.
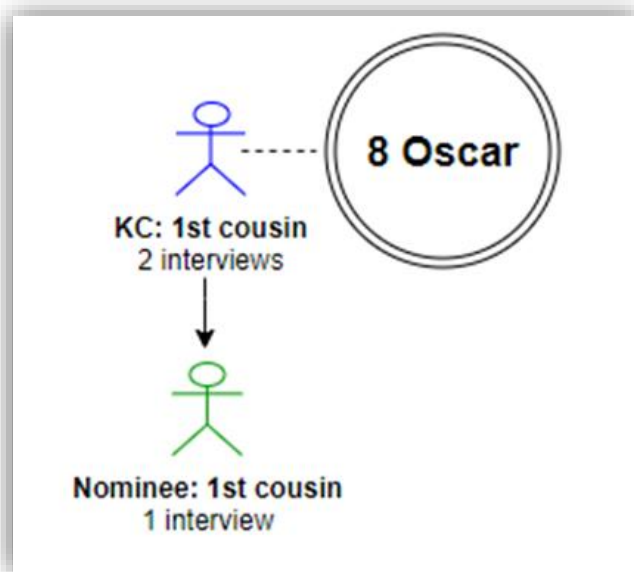
Figure 5.11: Case 9, Ella - Final participants and data

Table 5.10 Case 9 synopsis - Ella

Deceased age	81	
Cause of death	Parkinson's disease	
Death type	Anticipated	
Time post-bereavement (at KC recruitment)	18 months	
Case duration (all Ps & data)	Two weeks	
Participant total	2	
Participants & data	P#: pseudonym, relationship to deceased (gender, age)	Data
	P1: Louise, granddaughter (f, 23) [KC]	1 interview
	P2: Paul, grandson (m, 28)	1 interview
Total case data	2 interviews	
Digital material (In all data per P)	**Material**	**Access details**
P1: Louise	S-D email communication	In P's email account
	P blogs about/featuring deceased (text & media)	On P's blog
	P Instagram content about/featuring deceased (text & media)	On P's Instagram
	YouTube videos of/featuring deceased	Created by P, on her YouTube channel
	Webcam videos featuring deceased	Taken by P, saved to personal laptop
	Video interview w/deceased about her life by P	Location unknown, possibly lost
	Hundreds of digital images & digitised photos featuring deceased	On P's personal devices & external storage; On P's blog; In P's email; Across FB & Instagram of P1, P2 & other family.
P2: Paul	Video interview w/deceased about her life by P1	In P1's possession (P2 unaware of possible loss)
	Digitised photographs from childhood & early adulthood	On P2's Facebook & Instagram & on laptop, mobile device & cloud storage
	Digitised analogue video of P christening featuring deceased	On DVD, saved to P's laptop & external drive
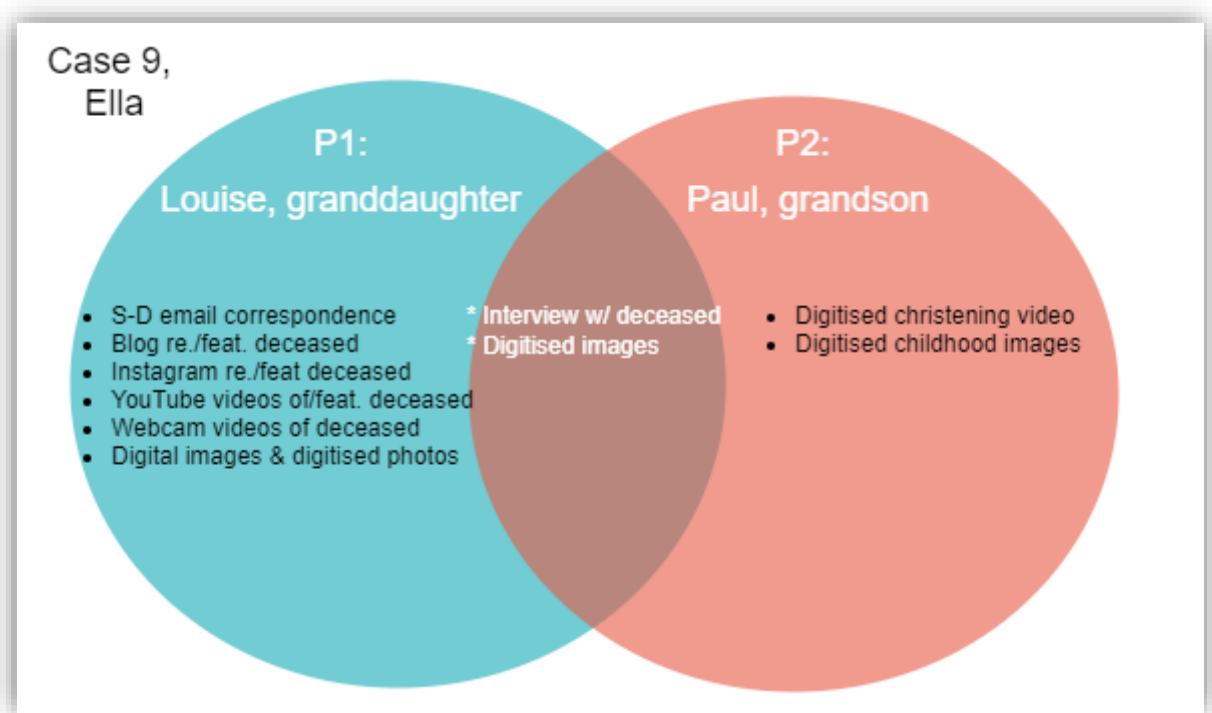
Figure 5.12: Case 9, Ella - Digital material overlapping & unique to participants

5.1.10 Case 10: Bill

5.1.10.1   Case overview

Bill was a 60-year-old Austrian national who died in the UK in 2016. Disabled following a brain injury four years before his death, Bill was cared for by wife Anna. For reasons unknown, Bill fell into a coma, and after a few days in ICU, died at home. Anna viewed Bill's death as avoidable and the hospital as culpable, and was preparing a court case to that effect. Though disabled, Bill was stable and his death was unanticipated. Participants in Bill's case were his wife, Anna (57, KC, recruited eighteen months PB) and friend, Orla (61).

5.1.10.2   Case vignette

Bill lived for almost thirty years in the South of England. Following a career in the navy, Bill taught yoga for over twenty years. After his first wife's death, Bill met key contact, Anna and they were married for fourteen years. A decade into marriage, following a hospital admission during which he was deprived of oxygen, Bill acquired a brain injury and was disabled. Thereafter, Anna cared for Bill at home. Four years later, an unanticipated hospital visit precipitated complications resulting in Bill's death. Bill had many friends and yoga students, one of whom was friend, Orla (61), who knew Bill for about eighteen months before he died. Orla, Anna and Bill became close friends in this time, holidaying and spending leisure time together. The participants described Bill as social, warm and outgoing. He loved the outdoors and practising and teaching yoga.

Bill had two Facebook accounts, which were managed by his wife following his disability. Bill did not create content or communicate much digitally in the four years since becoming disabled. Prior to this, Bill made videos of himself doing yoga as a teaching aid, and used LinkedIn in his professional life.

Survivor-deceased digital relationships

Since Bill's brain injury, Anna and Bill did not communicate digitally. In the years following the injury, Anna used Facebook to document and share Bill's medical progress and their relationship, posting videos, photos and text almost daily. Though Anna undertook this Facebook 'diary of our lives', she viewed it as a dual effort by her and Bill. Prior to his brain injury, Anna used to make videos of Bill doing yoga for him.

Orla and Bill met on LinkedIn but after this did not communicate much digitally. Following Bill's injury, Anna communicated with Orla on the couple's behalf. A self-described 'avid Facebook person', Orla took near-daily photos and videos featuring Bill and Anna, posting some on Facebook.

Nomination process and final case configuration

Key contact, Anna, nominated friend Orla take part in the study. Due to impending fieldwork close, Orla was not invited to nominate.

Figure 5.13 shows case participants and data totals for Bill's case, with full participant-referral process in Appendix X. Table 5.11 synopsises the case, and lists

deceased-related digital material per participant, and access information, and Figure

5.14 shows digital material unique to and in common between case participants.
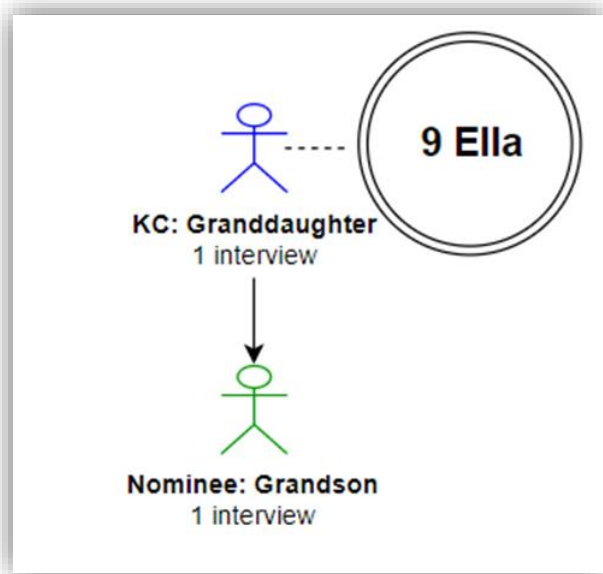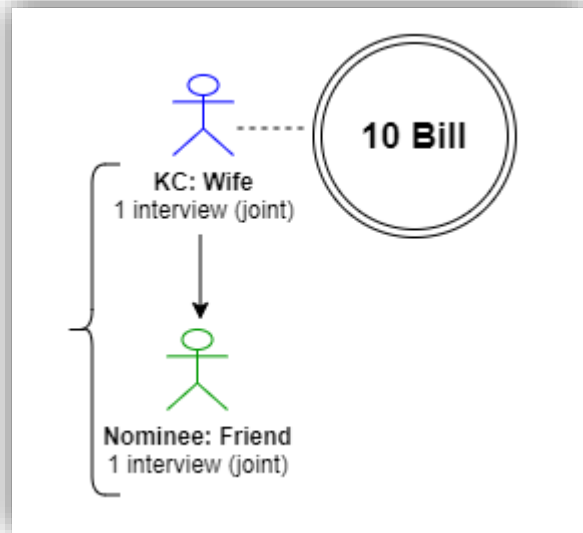

Figure 5.13: Case 10, Bill - Final participants and data

Table 5.11: Case 10 synopsis - Bill

Deceased age	60	
Cause of death	Brain injury	
Death type	Unanticipated	
Time post-bereavement (at KC recruitment)	18 months	
Case duration (all Ps & data)	N/A, one study encounter	
Participant total	2	
Participants & data	P#: pseudonym, relationship to deceased (gender, age)	Data
	P1: Anna, wife (f, 57) [KC]	1 joint interview
	P2: Orla, friend (f, 61)	
Total case data	1 joint interview	
Digital material (In all data per P)	Material	Access details
P1: Anna	Deceased's two Facebook accounts	Pages active, viewed as friend & P has passwords to both
	Images of deceased	On P's devices & online storage & Facebook, & on Facebook pages of deceased, P2 & other friends.
	Videos of & by deceased	As above
P2: Orla	Images of deceased	On P's devices & online storage & Facebook, & on Facebook pages of deceased, P1 & other friends.
	Videos of deceased	As above
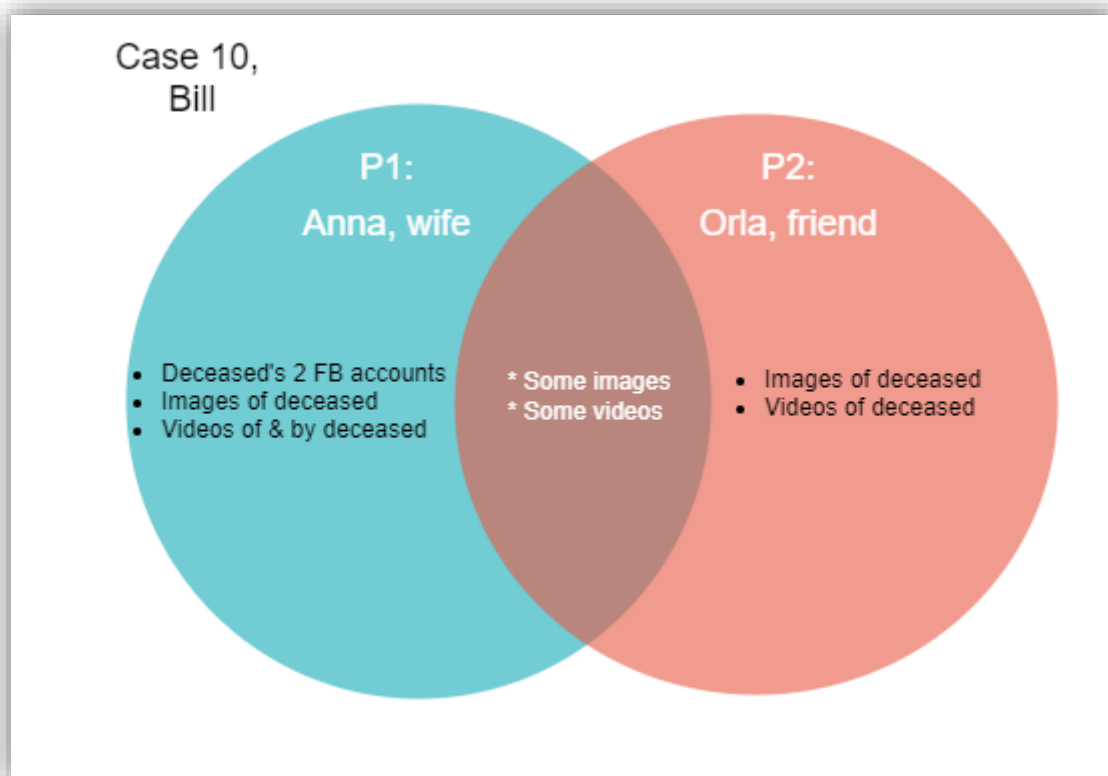
Figure 5.14: Case 10, Bill - Digital material overlapping & unique to participants

5.1.11 Case 11: Hugh

5.1.11.1   Case overview

Hugh was a 42-year-old New Zealand national who died by suicide in 2018. Hugh

had mental health difficulties for many years and these were likely factors in his

unanticipated death. Participating in Hugh's case was friend, Harry (42, KC),

recruited four months post-bereavement.

5.1.11.2   Case vignette

Harry worked in the entertainment business in the U.K. for approximately ten years

in his twenties. During this time, he met and eventually moved in with friend Harry,

beginning an approximately 15-year friendship. After around five years, Hugh moved

back to New Zealand and the friends had regular digital contact and regularly

travelled together and visited each other. Harry described Hugh as a very close

friend with whom he was 'quite connected on many levels'; their friendship

deepening over its course, despite geographical distance. Hugh spoke often and at

length on the phone with Harry about this his mental health. At the time of his death,

Harry felt Hugh was improving and the death was a great shock.

Deceased's digital engagement

Hugh had a Facebook page, where he posted infrequently, using it primarily to keep

in touch with friends around the world. He used digital platforms to have long calls

with friends (Skype, Facebook calling, Google Hangouts and WhatsApp). He

emailed liberally and at length to friends. He was active across many messaging

platforms (Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, SMS and Skype).

The participant spoke predominantly about his and Hugh's digital relationship in the ten or so years spent living apart. They made a concerted effort to remain in touch, via regular and lengthy email correspondence and calls (Skype and Facebook calling). They also chatted intermittently on messaging services and social media. Harry marvelled at the proportion of their friendship spent apart; the digital communication made it feel unlike a long-distance friendship.

Nomination process and final case configuration

Harry was not invited to nominate due to imminent close of fieldwork.

Figure 5.15 shows the participant and data total for Hugh's case. Table 5.12 synopsises the case, listing the deceased-related digital material and access information for the participant.
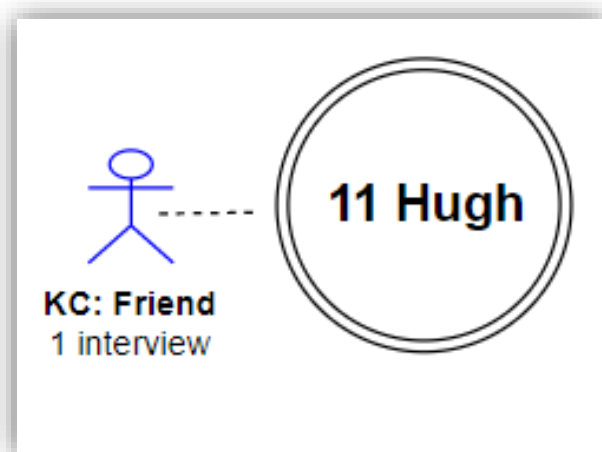
Figure 5.15: Case 11, Hugh - Final participants & data

Table 5.12: Case 11 synopsis - Hugh

Deceased age	42	
Cause of death	Suicide	
Death type	Unanticipated	
Time post-bereavement (at KC recruitment)	4 months	
Case duration (all Ps & data)	N/A, one study encounter	
Participant total	1	
Participants & data	P#: pseudonym, relationship to deceased (gender, age)	Data
	P1: Harry, friend (m, 42) [KC]	1 interview
Total case data	1 interview	
Digital material (In all data per P)	**Material**	**Access details**
P1: Harry	S-D emailing history	In P's email a/c
	S-D messaging history (WhatsApp, FB Messenger, SMS & Skype)	In related accounts & profiles of P
	Calling history (Skype & Facebook)	As above
	Deceased's Facebook page	Active, viewed as FB friend

5.2 Part two: Aggregated participant activities and uses diagram

Part two of this findings preface chapter shows patterns of participant use of, and activity with, the heterogeneous deceased-related digital material listed across all cases in Part one.

The next two findings chapters focus on the studied phenomenon's experiential dimension. Though this focus means that fuller explication of the relationship between utility of material and experiences with it is beyond this thesis' remit, particular activities and uses were critical in certain experiences, e.g. searching for deceased-related digital material provided content sufficient to 'encapsulate' the dead (Chapter 6, section 6.1.2, p. 229).

Via the method described in 3.6.5 of Chapter 3, I interpreted patterns of participant use and activity with the heterogonous digital material listed above, across the 32 participants, beginning peri-mortem[25]. The figure shows these patterns in aggregate. Patterns in bands nearer the top of the figure occurred closer to the bereavement, those in bands further down occurring further away. However, timings are not indicated as patterns' timing differed greatly across participants, and were complicated by participants recounting earlier experiences and their inability to specify when patterns occurred.

Therefore, Figure 5.16 below shows an aggregate of participant use and activity patterns as context for the coming chapters, but without the suggestion of sequence, anchoring in time, nor reflecting the activities and uses of any individual respondent.

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[25]At bereavement or, in cases of anticipated death, in the days or hours when death was imminent.

Peri-mortem period

Viewing all known/accessible deceased-related material
- Viewing all known & accessible material across platforms, services & devices
- Exhaustive, chronological viewing of deceased's activity & deceased-bereaved communication from beginning
- Joining platforms/services used by deceased & sending deceased friend/follow requests

"I just want to find anything that's a trace of her out there...anything about her that's out there I want to consume"
(Leah's friend Ellie, Int. 1: 8 months PB)

Searching for unknown deceased-related material
- Internet (text & image) searching deceased's name & life/death details
- Searching social media of others digitally linked to deceased
- Using platform/device-specific searching
- Asking other bereaved re. services/platforms used by deceased

"I decided to go onto [Charlie's friend's] Facebook page and into her photograph albums...I was tracking to see a part of Charlie in her life"
(Charlie's mother Ellen, Int. 1: 2yrs, 10 months PB)

Saving all/most known & found material
- Screenshotting, photographing, downloading, printing, copying to document, writing by hand
- Saving by sending to self & others via messaging /email/social media
- Multiple saving methods & buying extra space (external & cloud)

"I've backed it [video of deceased] up in three places"
(Ella's granddaughter, Int. 1: 18 months PB)

Revisiting particular saved & unsaved material
- Seeking particular content using keyword, date, relationship, related media
- Casual scrolling, stopping at random
- Prompted by platform/service notification or others' activity
- Incidentally during unrelated activity (e.g. searching by initial of dead)

"[on Facebook] you can search just pictures of me and someone, so I just did me and Leah and then I looked through those"
(Leah's friend Jude, Int. 1: 18 months PB)

Sifting out and saving particular material
- Purposefully sifting for particular content (saved & unsaved)
- Sifting material viewed casually/when prompted/incidentally
- Sending sifted-out material to others
- Saving to 'deceased name' folder

"A few precious bits; a representative sample"
(Deborah's friend Brenda, diary entry: 3 yrs & 7 months PB)

Curating sifted-out material
- Editing out material unrelated to deceased
- Collating into doc/folder for specific purpose (e.g. evoke aspect of dead)
- Creating slideshow/physical book of sifted material

"I...spliced out the video [of Leah]... like cutting it down to just her piece and extracting that"
(Leah's friend Ellie, Int. 1: 8 months PB)

Repeat engagement w/ sifted-out material
- Purposefully (e.g. to stir emotion)
- Ritually (e.g. on deceased's birthday)

"I've backed it [video of deceased] up in three places"
(Ella's granddaughter, Int. 1: 18 months PB)

Combing for new material
- Internet (text & image) searching deceased's name & life/death details
- Searching social media pages of deceased & other bereaved
- Adding to saved/sifted/collated material

"Any of those personal remnants...maybe she had...a Flickr account and I didn't know...maybe there was something that I might have missed"
(Leah's friend Matilda, Int 1: 11 months PB)

Ensuring availability & reinstating recency
- Contacting deceased to reinstate in 'most/recently contacted'
- Not filing/marking material as 'read' & Resending/reposting
- Creating links/shortcuts to material & keeping deceased's devices nearby

Just that kind of periodically looking and checking it's still there"
(Irene's friend Mary, Int.1: 4 yrs PB)

Checking but not engaging
- Checking (links to) material are working/saved but not engaging
- Checking devices are present/charging/working but not exploring

"Even though [Leah's mobile phone] does nothing...before I came I checked if it had enough battery...I check it religiously, all the time"
(Leah's sister Betty, Int 2: 10 months PB)

Occasional searching, sifting & saving
- On significant occasions e.g. anniversary
- Prompted by platform notification/activity of others
- Incidentally during other digital activity

"We're not searching for anything now...I don't think there's anything else left to be found but on his birthday I have look"
(Charlie's mother Ellen, Int.1: 2 yrs & 10 months PB)

Infrequent recency tracking but not intervening
- In material's recency/rank/position
- In deceased's position in 'most/recently contacted' lists

"Sometimes, I go onto the [Google] images...and you see the progression of her pictures going down"
(Leah's sister Sarah, Int. 2: 10 months PB)

Hiding from view
- Moving files/shortcuts/links from immediate/everyday view
- Moving devices of dead from everyday view

"Lately, [Mary] shifted this [link to Irene's blog] from her home screen to a document... to 'quieten down' the material"
(Screening notes: Irene's friend Mary, 4 yrs PB)

Occasional checking/engaging
- Only highest-value sifted item(s)
- Occasionally (e.g. to show others), ritually (personal/shared) or incidentally

"Going back to some of those things and...paying homage to our relationship"
(Leah's friend Helen, Int. 1: 10 months PB)

Need-based deletion/use/getting rid
- Deleting due to limited space/obsolescence (e.g. phone number of dead)
- Using/wiping/getting rid of devices due to need/space
- Loss in update/upgrade/platform change

"We didn't want to use her computer...then our own packed in, so we got it"
(Leah's father Gareth, Int. 3: 17 months PB)

Figure 5.16: Aggregate of activities and uses of deceased-related digital material

5.3 Chapter summary

Parts one and two of this preface chapter gave background information for the forthcoming findings chapters, and fulfilled inquiry objective (i). Here, I comment in overview on the presented information.

Part one: case profiles, showed a range of diverse deceased-related digital culture significant[26] to 32 bereaved individuals grieving 11 deaths. Deaths were heterogeneous in: cause and type, deceased and bereaved demographics, time post-bereavement, survivor-deceased relationship type, quality and duration, digital engagement of deceased and bereaved, and in-life survivor-deceased digital relationships.

The deceased-related digital material cited across all cases encompassed a range of digital and social platforms, apps and media, multimedia content, metadata and hardware; one-to-one, group, public and private correspondence, interactions and material; material historical and recent, personal and professional; analogue material digitised, and digital material made physical; and material variant in its deceased association (generated in life by, with, about and featuring the dead, owned or shared with or by them).

No two study participants cited the same array of significant deceased-related material. This was true even of cases with more than one participant (5 of 11 cases), and the eighteen-participant case. Certain material was unique to case survivors,

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[26] Mentioned in response to questioning about significance at screening, interview or diary entries.

other material overlapping with other survivors, resulting in each survivor listing an idiosyncratic set of digital material relating to their dead.

Of note is that material common to more than one case participant is likely to differ in specific content, e.g. the deceased's social media profiles viewed from each participant's purview, with uniquely visible interactions with, involving and about the deceased. In most cases, the material overlapping between case participants was images and videos. Such content was too voluminous for a process of identifying uniqueness and overlap between participants and therefore is listed as overlapping. That these images and videos emanated from survivor-deceased dyads suggests that, though there was overlap with other survivors, unique arrays of images and videos related to survivor-deceased dyads. This was also clear from interview and diary data (next chapters).

The idiosyncrasy in deceased-related digital material for each study participant was due to interlinked factors. Some material was uniquely technically available to survivors (e.g. private deceased-bereaved correspondence), uniquely known (e.g. knowledge of deceased's in-life use of particular platform) or uniquely in their possession (e.g. possessed of deceased's device). These factors were, in turn, connected to particular in-life survivor-deceased relationships (e.g. type, duration, quality, geographical distance, co-habitation), and the interaction of the in-life digital engagement of both deceased and survivor (use of particular platforms and devices; and digital engagement type, style, duration, extent, literacy, personal, professional).

Together, these factors made for survivor-deceased digital relationships with unique sets of digital material emanating from them.

Additionally, sets of digital material significant to participants were in flux. Use and activity patterns showed participants influencing, over time, the material available, known to and in their possession, and, therefore, of significance at a given time (e.g. keyword-searching or hiding material from view). The access information in Part one provides further insight into this.

Read together, the Part one access information, and Part two Uses and Activities diagram suggest degrees of survivor agency in respect of what digital material was available and significant to them at a given time. Degrees of survivor agency encompassed material available to them by default on existing platforms and devices, shared with survivors by others, accidentally encountered, deliberately sought out, unintentionally lost or unavailable, and deliberately hidden, unaccessed or disposed of. Survivor agency in respect of available material was not unfettered, but interacting with changing technical realities that enabled and curtailed availability. These include in-life privacy and post-death settings of the deceased's social media accounts, survivor knowledge of PINs and passwords, device and platform obsolescence; settings and regulations of platforms and devices (e.g. Snapchat deletion of group Snaps when viewed by all recipients or after 24 hours); platform and device-specific functions (e.g. Instagram hashtag searching) and algorithms (e.g. ranking of deceased's image in Internet image-searching).

Therefore, read together, this preface information shows that there was a unique set of digital material relating to each survivor-deceased dyad, and that survivor agency and technical realities, both subject to change, intersected to produce changing arrays of material significant to participants at a given time.

This chapter offered *what* and *how* information on the studied phenomenon; what deceased-related digital material was of significance and how it was available.

The next two chapters deal with the why; i.e. the experiential dimension of the phenomenon.

Chapter 6: Cross-participant orientations
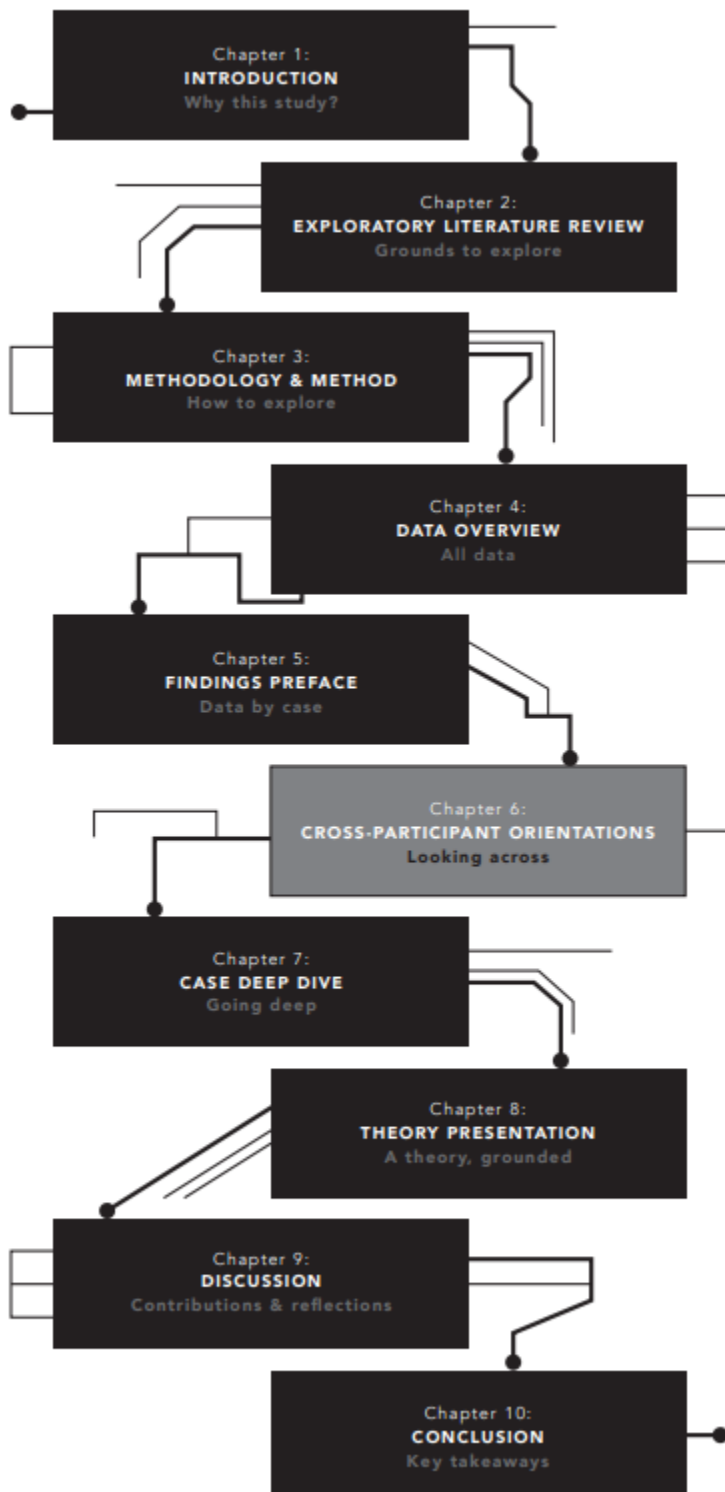
6.0 Introduction

This chapter presents findings from analysis of data generated with 32 participants connected to 11 deaths. Using the analytic process described in the Methodology (section 3.6.5), individual participant data (both serial and cross-sectional) were compared and contrasted, regardless of connection to the same death.

I present four orientations toward deceased-related digital material that I interpret across individual participant data. Orientations were recurringly drawn upon by heterogeneous participants across diverse griefs contexts, which I have clustered together for the purposes of describing them.

These four orientations did not occur at identifiable times post-bereavement. Neither did they manifest in all participant accounts, nor occur in a particular sequence in accounts. I use the term orientations to express patterns interpreted across participants but without implication of orientations occurring progressively, in a universal sequence, or occurring at specific times post-bereavement.

As described in the methodology chapter, these are retrospective-prospective data, and thus data presented in this chapter refers to both current (at data collection) and retrospective participant accounts. Therefore, though times post-bereavement are shown with participant quotes, excerpts may describe previous activities and perspectives.

6.1 Orientation one: Faith in the digital material

The first orientation is bereaved participants' faith in digital material relating to their dead as (i) jogs to memory about the deceased and survivor-deceased (S-D) relationship (ii) encapsulating the deceased and authenticating the S-D relationship, and (iii) offering accurate, real and close evocations of deceased and S-D relationship.

6.1.1 Jogs to memory about deceased and S-D relationship

Six months after the death of Leah (23[1], Case 2), her sister Sarah (29) spoke of a fear of forgetting details about her sister and their relationship, as her memory fades over time. This fear of forgetting pervaded Sarah's early study encounters.

> *"I hope that I'll be able to look at the digital content someday* [sic]*…to make sure I don't forget"*

> (Leah's sister, Sarah, 29. Diary entry 1: 9 months PB[2])

Referring to material seen when Googling Leah's name, looking through Leah's still-active Facebook profile as her friend, videos featuring her, and the possibility of reading back through the sisters' SMS correspondence sisters on Sarah's old phone, Sarah said:

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[1] Age of deceased.
[2] Time post-bereavement.

"sometimes I Google her and em when I'd be on it I'd be like 'no I don't want to'…I know that when I look at it it's just really emotional feeling…I just don't feel able now but I am very comforted by the fact that it will be there…when I do need it…like you know that I'd forget how her laugh sounds or I'd forget what she looks like or…and I'll need it then"

(Id[3]., Interview 1: 6 months PB)

Sarah positions the digital material as suspending and holding these precious details about her sister. Though she remembers these details now, Sarah describes her own memory as having begun an anxiety-provoking process of degradation. The digital material contrastingly represents an external repository of information accessible in an imagined future and resistant to fading over time. Given how painful she finds engaging with this material now, Sarah is ambivalent about actually engaging with it in this imagined future. Rather, she takes comfort in the material's existence, its promise and its potential to help her remember precious details about Leah in time.

The shock of the sudden, accidental death of Oscar (20, Case 8) caused distressing memory loss for his first cousin. Tina (24) described how, in the hours following his death, she visited Oscar's still-active Facebook page and went through their one-to-one Facebook Messenger history to recover these lost memories.

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[3] Same participant as preceding excerpt, different data collection point.

"I looked at it a lot. Because of the shock of it, my brain wouldn't allow me to process it. Then I was trying to remember these happy times to try and comfort myself, but my brain just wouldn't let me think about them at all. It was the weirdest thing…I was looking back at the old [Facebook Messenger] *messages and trying to get my memories back"*

<div align="right">(Oscar's first cousin, Tina, 24. Interview 1: 7 months PB)</div>

Tina recalled knowing there were particular, funny stories about Oscar, but she could not remember specifics. Knowing the cousins referred to these stories on Facebook, Tina scrolled back to the beginning of Oscar's Facebook profile, and the cousins' one-to-one Messenger correspondence, reading chronologically to help recover these specifics.

"I had so many stories, he was just stupid [laughs] *and I knew I would have these funny stories and stuff like that, but I just couldn't remember them, so I would go through my messages with him, because I knew I'd told him about* [a funny story about Oscar as a child]. *In fact, I'd posted it on his wall and he had a load of people taking the mick out of it…being able to go on there* [Oscar's Facebook page] *and see pictures of him when he was younger and see stuff he had posted and my messages* [on his page and in Messenger], *it kind of helped me bring those memories back."*

<div align="right">(Ibid.)</div>

Similarly, Helen (24), upon hearing about her friend Leah's imminent death (Case 2), described "immediately" poring through digital (and physical) material relating to her friend and their relationship.

"Immediately. Even after I found out the news that she [had the accident that would end Leah's life] *basically I just wanted to take in as much as I could and so yes went back to the beginning of any conversation we ever had and had been recorded and I looked at the pictures we had shared with each other. It's mostly personal messages over Facebook or personal messages with the WhatsApp or email…I just remember tearing through all of our old conversations, text messages, Facebook and reading old letters…just anything that made that relationship feel even more concrete and tangible"*

(Leah's friend, Helen, 24. Interview 1: 10 months PB)

Helen's "tearing through" material was geared toward finding concrete, tangible representations of Leah and their relationship. This was in the context of Helen's memories of Leah having a conceptual, abstract quality, which the digital material helped to anchor in episodes and honed-in particulars.

"I often think of Leah in really bright colours and big swathes of things that are really hard to describe. But when…there was a fun picture of a time when Leah was pushing me on a swing set or something like that [laughs]*, those honed in on memories"*

(Ibid.)

Helen also described her memory of Leah and their relationship as having a general quality. Revisiting the friends' one-to-one WhatsApp correspondence lent specificity to this generality.

"sometimes my memory fades into generals...Yes, switching from general to specific especially, I think because in my memories I just have like a harder time remembering the specifics like that. It made it [WhatsApp messaging] *even more important for me"*

<div align="right">(Ibid.)</div>

For the first year following the traumatic, unexpected death of her husband Bill (60, Case 10), Anna (57) frequently watched the many videos featuring Bill, but in a surface manner, as looking in depth was too painful. However, in the second year after Bill's death, Anna described beginning to use these videos less frequently but with a greater eye for detail. This was to remember what she called "the little…ways of being": the way Bill stood, the sound of his voice and his idiosyncratic turns of phrase as a non-native English speaker.

"Probably now I would look at them a little bit less, but longer and from a more detailed perspective, and then allowing myself to remember the little…the ways of being…He had these ways; the way his voice sounded, the way he spoke the way, the little things he used to say…saying "Niccce"…The way he used to stand, his feet at ten and two, things like that"

<div align="right">(Bill's wife, Anna, 57. Interview 1: 1 year & 10 months PB)</div>

The videos enabled Anna to "swoop in" on fine details about Bill that she would not otherwise remember. Referring to a video of Bill doing yoga, she said:

"I wouldn't have remembered that last year, because I was more still looking at it as an overview, like from a bird's-eye perspective, I suppose. Looking down. Rather than swooping down and looking at all the detail. You're seeing the field, but you're not seeing the blades of grass. Now I can look at the blades of grass and the flowers in that field, if I can use that sort of metaphor"

<div align="right">(Ibid.)</div>

Anna likens her own memories of Bill to a bird looking down broadly over a field, from a distance. The videos of Bill however, enable this metaphorical bird to swoop in, enabling a gimlet-eyed view at the blades of grass and flowers; otherwise-forgotten details and idiosyncrasies about Bill.

6.1.2 Encapsulating the dead, authenticating deceased-survivor relationships

In this second aspect of orientation one, 'Faith in the digital', participants depicted the digital material relating to their dead as faithfully encapsulating their character, and authenticating the fact, and quality, of the deceased-bereaved relationship.

In the case of Charlie (21, Case 3), his mother Ellen (54) depicted the paucity, and therefore preciousness, of digital material relating to her son as mapping onto his in-life character. Ellen described Charlie as 'loving in his way but not overtly' and 'not a person who regularly communicated his thoughts'. The sparseness of Charlie's in-person communication made what he did say more precious.

Ellen described the digital material relating to Charlie as carrying these same qualities and encapsulating this defining element of his character. After leaving home for university four years prior to his death, Charlie's digital communication with Ellen was infrequent, to-the-point and factual.

> *"[Charlie] didn't [laughs] communicate [digitally] a whole lot. He wasn't going to send you a message if there wasn't a reason…he wasn't a great writer so they're [emails from Charlie] not…Well, they're just to the point. They're mainly fact…there weren't much flowery stuff in there"*
>
> (Charlie's mother, Ellen, 54. Interview 1: 2 years & 10 months PB)

For Ellen, the infrequent, spare quality of Charlie's digital communication made any substantive material she did receive more precious. On snaps[1] she had taken screenshots of upon receipt from Charlie, Ellen said:

> "Because I didn't get many from him. If I got one, I'd know it would be worth taking a picture of it"

(Ibid.)

For Ellen, the infrequent and therefore greater value of digital material sent by her son communicated something core about who he was; he did not say much, but what he did say was precious.

> "I would Snapchat him and what I didn't know again until after [Charlie's death] em when I met [Charlie's university friend] for the first time he was like 'Oh, I'm so glad I met you now because all I've seen are your Snapchats' which Charlie obviously used to show everybody. And he'd say 'Oh, look what my mum's done now' and take the mickey out of me but obviously really loved it"

(Ibid.)

As Charlie was not someone who communicated his enjoyment of his mother's snaps to her, or much about his life at university, hearing about his use of her snaps with his friends, even to 'take the mickey out of her' was important external authentication of their relationship for Ellen. This was especially significant in the context of Charlie and Ellen having a 'quiet, special relationship', which did not leave many digital traces.

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[1] Images created and sent via Snapchat.

> *"All I can say is that Charlie's digital footprint is precious, especially as he was not a person who regularly communicated his thoughts or how he felt about you"*

<div align="right">(Ibid.)</div>

In Helen's (23) descriptions of her friend Leah (23, Case 2), her sense of mischief and humour were foremost, digital material functioning to encapsulate this.

> *"In our text messages, oh, my god, she's just such a hoot* [laughs]*… just so fun just like such a witty, playful girl"*

<div align="right">(Leah's friend, Helen, 23. Interview 1: 10 months PB)</div>

After graduation, Leah left the university country, while Helen stayed. Geographical distance meant the friends did not see each other during the last year of Leah's life. Their communication was sparse: in Helen's words, 'we weren't texting a bunch'. Therefore, the shock of Leah's sudden, unanticipated death was exacerbated by the fact that the most intense, defining parts of their friendship had occurred a year previously. Helen described how, given this context, looking back through her and Leah's university WhatsApp messaging helped authenticate the fact and quality of their relationship; how much time they had actually spent together and how close they had actually been.

> *"like this is what happened on this day or we were both thinking about each other* [laughs]*, that being able to go back to that time and just basically, have some external proof that it happened… having something like a primary-source document basically"*

<div align="right">(Ibid.)</div>

In the days following Leah's death, a memorial webpage was set up where survivors shared memories. Helen described how reading the constant stream of messages from Leah's many friends made her doubt her own bond with Leah. It also caused her to wonder whether the contributors were overstating their relationships with Leah; that survivor-deceased relationships can be romanticised or exaggerated. Given this consideration, and the time elapsed since her and Leah's active, in-person relationship, Helen placed great value in the digital records as objective corroboration of their relationship, offsetting potentially exaggerated claims about their relationship.

> *"like personal…proof to me like that this wasn't…something that I made up in my head"*

(Ibid.)

In other cases, the use of digital material as 'personal proof' of the relationship described by Helen was extended to 'proof to others'. Leah' sister, Sarah (29), described using digital material that encapsulated her sister to introduce Leah to a new partner:

> *"I'd say I mention Leah to him maybe five times a day, but never a prolonged thing, never a 'let's sit down and look at Leah's Facebook', but I'd like to because* [partner] *met Leah only twice, because she was away…*[partner] *and I had only been going out a year when Leah died"*

(Leah's sister, Sarah, 29. Interview 2: 10 months PB)

Sarah also imagined using a range of digital (and physical) material to introduce Leah to her future children, and communicate a central aspect of Leah's character as a wit and an 'absolute messer'.

Sarah: *"If I do have kids, that kind of stuff I'd say will be really important, you know. The stuff is there, you'd talk about Leah and show those pictures, those things*

Mórna: *ah ok what things do you mean?*

Sarah: *So you'd go through her Facebook and show her pictures* [art]. *When I was looking at the Instagram the other day, the comments she has written under them are so funny, really witty, so that's just as important"*

Mórna: *So you'd imagine there being a range, her art, her Facebook and Instagram that you might draw on?*

Sarah: *Yeah, absolutely. Do you know, all those things are things I would show to people now if I felt they would be interested. The only thing I keep saying or hearing in my head is 'this is your Auntie Leah'* [cries] *but using pictures and Facebook and things like that. You know, you always create scenarios in your head and you're having conversations and showing pictures of her being an absolute messer"*

(Ibid.)

For Louise (29), reading back on emails received from her grandmother Ella (81, case 9) encapsulated Ella's struggles to use technology – a quality that shaped many of their interactions as they lived together and Louise acted as Ellla's technological support and tutor. The difficult-to-decipher, staccato text of Ella's emails to Louise captured how she struggled with technology, but persisted.

"the ones where she tried to type stuff, then she's done it wrong and can't work out how to delete so she keeps going, keeps ploughing on regardless, actually hopes it makes some sense somewhere…it reminds me of what she was like…she wasn't very tech-savvy…when you see it written out like that, it's kind of a lasting reminder of the way she was with technology and it just makes me smile"

(Ella's granddaughter, Louise, 29. Interview 1: 18 months PB)

Louise also described how these emails represented an enactment of her relationship with Ella that proved and communicated their unique bond. Ella wrote virtually indecipherable emails that Louise was uniquely placed to decode, as she had taught her grandmother to email and, with knowledge of the mistakes Ella might make, could reverse engineer them to decipher the meaning.

"I can see her thought process. I can see her going 'oh no, I've hit the…'…I know exactly what she was doing. I know that she'd moved the cursor and couldn't work out how to get it back again or she couldn't find the delete key or she'd hit something by accident, like the caps lock key, and couldn't work out how to undo it"

(Ibid.)

For Louise, these emails testify to the close, distinctive relationship she had with her grandmother. Louise's ability to decrypt her grandma's emails—as well as Ella's confidence in this ability, apparent to Louise as she reads the emails—speak to this relational quality and authenticates it for Louise. Reading out one particularly cryptic email to me as an example, Louise narrated Ella's imagined thought process as she wrote, wherein she trusts her granddaughter's ability to understand.

"I can see her sending it and hear her saying 'oh darling, what have I done now?...she can't work out how to go back and forth, so she just carries on, thinking 'she'll [Louise will] *understand what I'm saying' "*

(Ibid.)

6.1.3 Evoking the 'real' deceased and survivor-deceased relationship

In this third aspect of orientation one, 'Faith in the digital', participants depicted the digital material relating to their dead as offering the most real, precise, authentic and close evocations of their dead and survivor-deceased relationship now possible.

Throughout his interview, Chris (24), Leah's friend (23, Case 2) showed me digital material relating to Leah on his phone, in place of, or to supplement, describing her and their relationship to me.

> *"Videos are the pinnacle for Chris, the closest to the 'real' Leah possible now. As we spoke he had his phone to hand, scrolling through material, stopping to show me ten or more videos of her and them, photos, Instagram posts, memes they loved. These were more real, accurate, vivid, and true than what he could tell me. On one video you could hear Leah laugh. Chris said he could describe her laugh to me but why would he when I could hear the 'real' thing"*
>
> (Leah's friend, Chris, 24. Field notes, 22.7.17, Interview 1: 9 months PB)

Chris described videos featuring Leah and her Instagram posts as the most direct, efficient ways to communicate what she was really like, superseding long-form interview descriptions.

> *"I think like an Instagram post can tell a lot about a person. More than like…more than two hours of recording* [points to tape recorder]*…if I had spent the entire time describing Leah I still think it would have been easier to show you two Instagram videos. And for you to go 'Oh, yeah'. "*
>
> (Id., Interview 1: 9 months PB)

Chris' evocation of the digital material as containing or communicating 'the real' Leah was echoed in his imagined use of the material to communicate Leah and their relationship to future children. He positions the digital material as a step up from his parents' reliance on photographs and remembered stories about their dead, which require the recipient to use their imagination 'to make up the person'. Chris views the digital material as the most exact, precise and close capturing of the 'reality' of Leah now possible. The digital affords a 'reality' that trumps verbal description, or what the imagination could conjure; 'the reality is better'.

Chris: *"if I had kids then …you know hypothetically 'Dad, you always talk about this girl called Leah' and I'm just like 'yeah, this is what we did together'*

Mórna: *Using Instagram or using…?*

Chris: *Yeah…and to be able to like have them not necessarily need their imagination to make up this person but to actually…because like I feel like she deserves everyone to know exactly what…how funny her laugh was and what the sort of crazy stuff we got up with…as opposed to being like trying to imagine it…I think like the reality is better especially in this case. I think the real Leah is better than anything you can conjure up in your head. The closest to her when she was alive.*

(Ibid.)

Chris' view of digital material as the principal means of communicating a more 'real' or exact Leah was also evident in his choice to include verbatim messages, tweets

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and posts by Leah in a memorial speech he delivered about her. This was the 'best way to show her'.

> *"I went through my entire text message conversation with her, my entire WhatsApp conversation with her, Instagram, Twitter, every connection we had online and I picked out the funniest things that she'd said or done and situations we'd been in and I essentially just read them out…as my speech… she definitely sent her character out during messages...it was definitely captured in text form so essentially this it was the best way to show her"*

(Ibid.)

In a similar vein, a central theme in Mary's (52) interview was evocation of email correspondence with and travels blogs by her friend Irene (43, Case 6) as enabling access to a 'real' version of her friend and their relationship. This was in the context of Irene's murder having remained unknown to Mary for a number of years after it occurred. During this time, Mary believed that Irene was alive but had ceased contacting her, causing Mary to form judgements about Irene and their friendship. Moreover, Irene's body was not found and there was no funeral. Absent a body and its confirmation of the fact of Irene's death, and a blurred end to their relationship, four years after learning of the Irene's death, it felt 'still slightly unreal'.

The unreal-ness of this death, and the judgements about Irene and their friendship that its circumstances fostered meant that Mary's grief was marked by efforts to reconnect with the 'real' Irene and their 'real' friendship via digital material. Describing frequent re-reading of the friends' extensive email correspondence in the weeks after learning of Irene's murder, Irene's words, turns of phrase and character in these emails were a means of accessing 'the real her'.

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"it was definitely accessing her and her voice and when she'd ask me things, or, you know, she was quite funny at times and, you know, being reminded of that kind of…just the way she'd put a thing in writing, her terms of expression kind of… just asking me about stuff and yeah it was accessing her, the real her…her words"

(Irene's friend, Mary, 52. Interview 1: 4 years PB[1])

Upon learning that Irene had not, in fact, abruptly cut contact, Mary began to deconstruct the account of Irene and their relationship she had formed, rewriting the story of her and their friendship as it really was. The digital material, particularly the women's email correspondence and Irene's travel blogs, were central in paring the back falsehoods that had grown around her idea of Irene and their relationship, in 'undoing' that story to 're-find' their friendship.

"those two years of not having the contact, you know, took a lot of undoing…[reading] *the emails and the blog was undoing that story of her distancing from me and the loss of our friendship"*

…

"I was having to re-find our friendship and reading those helped that. So, 'oh yes she was my friend' I'd kind of maybe cut off a little in my kind of hurt or disappointment thinking she's abandoned me kind of. And actually having to go 'that's actually not what's happened'. You know 'actually she didn't'. You know, kind of, and reading the emails helped kind of reconnect with…that friendship"

(Ibid.)

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[1] PB indicating time elapsed after participant became aware of bereavement, approximately two years post-mortem.

The evocation of digital material as a reality corrective was also evident in Mary's use of Irene's travel blogs to reclaim her friend from a victim narrative. Media reportage surrounding her death portrayed Irene with respect to her victimhood rather than her life or character, which, for Mary, was a shallow rendering of the woman she knew. Mary used the digital material in this time to destabilise this victim narrative and fill Irene out, the travel blog and the reader comments in particular helping to restore 'Irene, in her fuller sense'.

> "*I quite liked reading the* [travel blog] *comments too, you know, those obvious connections that she made with people and people's appreciation of her, the kind of warm person, friendly person, she was…actually just reconnecting with her as a person in a more full sense…for my own self…Irene in her fuller sense rather than being the victim of this horrific murder*"

(Ibid.)

For Louise (29), a surreptitious webcam video she made of her deceased grandmother, Ella (81, Case 9), represented a portal into how Ella 'really' was and the 'reality' of their relationship. The twenty-minute video depicts Ella trying to send an email and seeking Louise's help to do so, as she often did.

> "[the video is] *literally just her sitting there in her dressing gown, trying to send an email, saying 'How do I go backwards? How do I do this? How do I send it?' I'm sitting there and I'm going 'yes, that's fine, no, you delete it, Grandma, yeah, you just press the delete key, Grandma' It's just her at the computer, sending an email*"

(Ella's granddaughter, Louise, 29. Interview 1: 18 months PM)

For Louise, the candid video offers a rare, uncontrived view of her grandma.

> *"she didn't know she was being filmed…that kind of makes it more special in a way, because it's just her, completely natural, completely unaware"*

<div align="right">(Ibid.)</div>

The video also portrays an unremarkable moment in their everyday relationship. For Louise these mundane, small moments are of the greatest importance, containing the daily enactment and texture of their relationship. Moreover, for Louise, because such natural everydayness is not often or easily captured digitally, this video's unstaged representation of their relationship's mundane reality is all the more special.

> *"People know they're being filmed… you don't get a lot of candid things…it's how mundane it is that makes it more special…It was a really normal evening, just what we did every evening and there's nothing else to it. That's what our life was like and I managed to capture that"*

<div align="right">(Ibid.)</div>

Conversely, in the case of Adam (69, Case 1), his daughter Bella (43) referred to digital material relating to him as frustrating as it propagated a falsely positive version of her father that masked how and who he 'really' was. This was most acute on her dad's public and still-active Facebook page, where Bella saw in-life interactions that were incongruous with the person she knew.

> *"I think it's an accurate digital version of what he put out to those people and what you don't get online is anyone going actually 'he did this or actually…' "*

<div align="right">(Adam's daughter, Bella, 43. Interview 1: 4 years & 4 months PB)</div>

This incongruity between Bella's 'real' Adam and his online persona was particularly grating when these interactions were with people whom Bella had heard Adam mock or belittle.

However, though Bella is frustrated by digital material that, in her view, inaccurately represents her father, she also refers to it as a belying the 'real' Adam; in plain view if, you knew what to look for. On student reviews of Adam on teacher ratings website, Bella says:

> *"the reviews of him are really funny because they're all like really really really really positive except that they say things like 'had a bit of a temper though if you couldn't get it right' or you know 'wasn't the most patient person in the world' but they loved the fact that he told funny stories and bah-de-blah but there's…you can see because I knew him, I know what they're talking about"*

> (Ibid.)

Bella repositions the digital material here as accurately representing her father in a tacit way; if you really knew him, you could read between the lines and glimpse the 'real' Adam.

6.1.4 Orientation one: Summary

This section presented data in support of the first cross-participant orientation, "Faith in the digital", which encompassed (i) Jogs to memory about deceased and deceased-bereaved relationship (ii) Encapsulating deceased and authenticating deceased-bereaved relationship (iii) Evoking the 'real' deceased and deceased-bereaved relationship.

6.2 Orientation two: Pain in engaging with the digital

In this second orientation, I describe patterns in participants' reasoning for not engaging with material as frequently as before, or at all. Though once cherished and frequently used to jog memory, encapsulate the deceased and authenticate the survivor-deceased (S-D) relationship, and evoke the 'real' deceased and relationship, the digital material is now experienced as (i) too real and (ii) highlighting loved ones' deadness, with participants describing (iii) comfort in unseen material.

6.2.1 Digital material as too real

In this first aspect of orientation two, participants begin to describe the digital material relating to their dead as entailing encounters with the deceased, the relationship and dimensions of the loss that are too detailed, vivid, nuanced, lifelike and close; too real. These previously cherished qualities of the material have become sources of pain.

Ten months after Leah's death (23, Case 2), her sister Sarah (29) deliberated about turning on an old phone containing SMS conversations between the sisters, and honing in on particularly significant messages she knows are on the phone. Leah and Sarah attended a music festival together two years prior to Leah's death. The following year, unable to attend the festival, Leah had messaged Sarah during it:

> *"she wasn't able to come home for festivals and stuff, so she texted me at* [festival name] *last year at the exact same date and said 'Do you remember this time last year, we were running round the field? We'd taken mushrooms and were pretending to be horses.' It was just like 'yeah, we'll do it again next year'"*

The significance of this message for Sarah is layered. It is connected to Leah having written the message and its enactment of the sisters' relationship; Leah remembered this time fondly too and had taken the time to communicate this to Sarah:

> *"it was just her remembering and sharing it with me"*
>
> (Ibid.)

It is also a vivid encounter with how she and Leah once were; the plans they made and futures they imagined, which never eventuated, and a past version of Sarah before the weight of Leah's loss.

> *"you're making plans about things and talking about stuff like now, I feel so heavy and it's kind of remembering back to a time when you didn't feel heavy"*
>
> (Ibid.)

Having unpacked the layers of significance entailed in this message, Sarah then articulated a growing feeling that not having access to such fine-grained records of Leah, their relationship, and therefore her loss might be a good thing. She begins to position forgetting this granular detail as preferable to the pain it evokes. On her previously articulated fear of forgetting Leah and the sisters' relationship, and the role of the digital in offsetting this, Sarah now says:

> *"I don't think I have that* [fear of forgetting] *anymore, like I've thought about that and sometimes I think 'fuck, it would be better to forget than this, it might make it easier'…I hope I do forget some, not forget but like, forget the nuances of her, because they're really just so hard"*

Previously prized for its 'realness' and attendant capacity to allay fear of forgetting,

Sarah now describes this same material as too nuanced and real. This painful

realness is at its height in the digital material, more than in others' recollections

about Leah.

> *"when you look at the pictures or look at the videos, that catches a*
> *moment, that shows it's life or it's real, it's the most real she is right*
> *now… rather than like if you heard something, rather than somebody*
> *telling you something about her, that's more lifelike…harder to take,*
> *harder to see"*

Similarly, material that Leah's other sister Betty (25) previously engaged with

frequently now, seven months post-bereavement, were too-vivid expositions of the

dimensions of her loss. Leah and Betty made Spotify music playlists for each other

and together, one of which they made together a week before Leah's death. Co-

making this playlist, which they named 'Sister Seestar', they lay on Leah's bed

together simultaneously adding songs to the playlist on their devices, chatting about

the future:

> *"literally the week before she passed away, we were lying on her bed*
> *talking about* [gets upset] *what sort of mothers we'd be, what sort of*
> *aunties we'd be. She'd be the fun one. I'll lop my kids off to her during*
> *the summer and she'd be so happy like doing all these crazy hippie*
> *shit with them* [laughs]*…how we're going to have to find some tall*
> *groomsman for my husband em to match her as my bridesmaid"*

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Having inherited Leah's phone (not PIN-protected), in the weeks after Leah's death, Betty played this co-made playlist from Leah's phone. Doing this brought a comforting closeness to Leah and their relationship.

Betty: *"I've got a lot of different devices I could play it off. I could play it off my tablet, which it's already downloaded on, but with Leah's [phone] when I've turned on the internet, I then play it. She used to do that. It was on that phone we started making lists, 'Sister Seestar' is one. We were just lying in bed together…we were right next to each other. She was on her phone, I was on mine, we were adding things to the same list*

Mórna: *It's something about playing it from the phone on which she was doing that, that day?*

Betty: *Yes. She made all those playlists off that phone as well. It feels like a hug"*

Later, however, Betty describes this playlist having become a source of pain for her. Though she keeps it downloaded on her own phone (despite limited space), she now cannot listen to it and seeing its name as she scrolls by evokes a cascade of painful memories. The playlist now functions as a painful record of the enactment of the sisters' relationship entailed in its co-creation, a now-gone past and imagined future that will never be, which contrasts starkly with the actual future Betty now faces.

"I'll see it [the co-made playlist] *as I'm scrolling down* [in Spotify]*…and then…I'll get so sad and…I'll start to remember that was the last night that we were doing our thing and we spoke about...about our kids, we were getting married, what would the future be like for us* [gets upset]*…so I think even more now, it's just so wrong, and what the future is like…look at my future it's just like, 'Oh, my God'… it's just so...It's so difficult to think of"*

(Id., Interview 3: 1 year, 4 months PB)

6.2.2 Digital highlighting deadness

In this second aspect of orientation two, participants describe digital material as a painful highlighting of their loved ones' deadness: their inertness, frozenness in time and the context and relevance of material decreasing over time.

In an earlier interview, Ellie (24) spoke about frequently revisiting her friend Leah's (Case 2, 23) Facebook still-active page, and their one-to-one WhatsApp correspondence, in order to:

> *'trigger specific memories'*
>
> (Leah's friend, Ellie, 24. Interview 1: 8 months PB)

Three months later, however, there is a discomfiting inertness to this material. As time passes, and Ellie's life and lives of their other contemporaries move on, material relating to Leah, and records of her and Ellie's interactions, feel increasingly static and frozen in the past and underscores how Leah's life is not 'being updated'. Once comforting jogs to memory, Ellie is now disengaged from this frustratingly fixed material.

> *"looking back on pictures or Facebook…I almost get frustrated, or disappointed that there's nothing new there. So I find myself just kind of like, 'Oh well, I've re-read this WhatsApp chat several times now, and I've looked at these pictures'…I almost get frustrated like there should be new things that are being updated, like how all of us are progressing. All of her friends…are kind of continually adding things to our chats, and are continuing to make memories in that way. And just find myself getting frustrated that all of my interactions with her are static, obviously…finding that not being as comforting anymore…like I've really sort of disengaged"*

This is similar to a concept described by Avril (58), whose niece Eva's (32, Case 5) last Facebook post prior to her suicide was:

"like a cliff edge"

Previously critical in piecing together the final hours of Eva's life, Avril later describes how this final Facebook post became a painful allegory for the sharp, unexplained end of Eva's life. Like Ellie above, Avril described this last piece of digital activity becoming increasingly difficult to engage with as it accentuated the final point of Eva's life, with no more material beyond it.

"that's the edge of the cliff and then where's it all gone after that?"

This painful 'cliff edge' experience was also evoked by Leah's (23, Case 2) sister Sarah (29). Text messages once portrayed by Sarah as 'as real as she can be now' now painfully juxtapose a past when Leah could send a text, and now, when she no longer exists.

"it brings you into that negative thought of…'How could it be that she was able to text and now she's not even in this planet?'...there's no need for that."

Like Eva and Ellie above, Sarah disengages with this material on this basis.

Likewise, Tina (24), cousin of Oscar (20, Case 8), described how a particular video of Oscar singing as:

> *'the epitome of how I would like to remember him'*

Later, however, the video is a too-stark evocation of a painful dimension of Oscar's deadness; that Tina will never again hear his voice.

> *"…weird, to hear his voice and that, because it's been that long now. I haven't heard his actual voice… I've kind of like, accepted now that he's not here, but it's not like I kind of sit and go, 'Oh, God I'm never going to hear him speak again' and the video makes that sink in too hard"*

In a post-interview conversation, Betty (25) described Leah's (Case 2, 23) in-life Facebook and Instagram profile activity—previously frequented and valued highly by Betty—as unsatisfying and dead. The material's fixedness in the past and false promise of interacting with Leah led Betty to liken this material to an empty corpse.

> *"Betty used the metaphor of a 'carcass without organs' to describe Leah's social media pages. They appear alive but closer inspection reveals them to be hollow and dead. Betty was really upset describing this material's unsatisfying and painful semblance of life"*

In a previous interview, eight months post-bereavement, Ellie (24) described frequently re-watching a to-camera video message that Leah (Case 2, 23) made for Ellie's birthday. Then, the video was:

> *"how I'm able to feel the closest to her…in her absence… I can um*
> *just kind of remember like the essence of her"*

<div align="center">(Leah's friend Ellie, 24. Interview 1: 8 months PB)</div>

Three months on, however, Ellie is viewing the video less frequently; it is beginning to feel less relevant and less comforting to her life as it moves on; a remnant of a relationship frozen in a time that feels increasingly far away.

> *"it's been more frustrating than anything…last year, when I was*
> *starting this* [university course]*, was right as she was passing away.*
> *And it really carried over with the experience that I had last year, and*
> *it was a very sort of central part of that. And now...I'm moving on, and*
> *it's frustrating for me that she's not. Our relationship is not continuing*
> *on in that same way, and that's why I find myself…less comforted by*
> *some of those remnants of her then, than I have been previously"*

<div align="center">(Id., Interview 2: 11 months PB)</div>

The digital material now entails a frustrating confrontation with Leah's inertia compared to Ellie's ongoing life and changing experience; once prized and a source of comfort, this video now feels increasingly stale, less relevant to the present and difficult to weave into her ongoing experience.

Leah's other friend, Fiona (24), described Leah's still-active Facebook page in a similar way. Leah's page—now including eleven months of post-bereavement postings—serves as a painful measure of how far away the 'real' Leah is.

> *"now there's none of Leah on her own Facebook page, there's nothing*
> *to do with her, you know when you go into that, it looks nothing like*
> *what she'd have posted. I don't know how far back you have to scroll*
> *to find the last thing that has her stamped on it"*

For Fiona, the volume of post-death material sitting on top of Leah's own content serves as a painful measure of how long ago she was active on it. Additionally, Fiona describes the once-comforting experience of reading her and Leah's WhatsApp correspondence as now involving a painful encounter with how far away Leah is. Now, in order to reread this conversation, Fiona must scroll down a 'most contacted' list that Leah is slipping further down over time.

> *"She's nowhere on my screen at all. You'd have to go way down. She's not on my 'suggested contacts' so she's completely out of it…who you contact most would come up and she's not there"*

(Ibid.)

Such experiences disincline Fiona from engaging with material; doing so is like bearing witness to Leah fading away.

> *"It's like seeing she's slowly vanishing"*

(Ibid.)

As put by Charlie's mother (21, case 3) in reference to her son's in-life Facebook activity;

> *"as time goes on it's history rather than feeling very present…and that's hard to see"*

(Charlie's mother, Ellen, 54. Interview 1: 2 years & 10 months PB)

6.2.3 Comfort in unseen material

In this final aspect of orientation two, participants describe unseen and not-yet-engaged-with digital material as comforting, untapped sources of potential insight into, and closeness to, the dead and survivor-deceased (S-D) relationship. Rather than the earlier faith in material (as routes into memories, means of capturing dead and relationship and getting closer to the 'real' deceased and S-D relationship), participants here place value on the non-consumption of material. Unseen material is positioned as a trove of possibility for new insight into, and connection to, the dead, and maintaining a still-living link to their deceased, which is killed by accessing material.

In the case of Charlie (21, Case 3), his mother Ellen (54) characterised the days and weeks after his death as involving:

> *"Looking through all his everything…just lost myself in Charlie's world"*
>
> (Charlie's mother, Ellen, 54. Interview 1: 2 years & 10 months PB)

Though the thoroughness of this initial 'looking through all his everything' means there is not much more to see, Ellen has accidentally turned up new material relating to Charlie.

"We're not searching for anything now because I don't think there's anything else left to be found. Because I think we've fairly extensively search…except that you might suddenly find…what did I find recently? I must have gone onto somebody else's…I must have decided to go into [Charlie's university friend's Facebook page] *recently. A few weeks ago, I decided to go onto her Facebook page and into her photograph albums. I've never done that before. I'd forgotten you could do that. And so she says 'uni second year, uni third year'…so then I was tracking to see a part of Charlie in her life. So, I was actively doing that out of curiosity, out of 'just tell me a bit more' "*

<div align="right">(Ibid.)</div>

Though here, finding new material relating to Charlie entails the possibility of new insight into her taciturn son, Ellen later describes this as deadening the possibility of future experiences like it. She describes an ambivalence with respect to this; though encountering 'new' material relating to Charlie is comforting and brings him into the present, she is keenly aware that doing so depletes the possibility of this occurring in future. She balances her desire to digitally experience more of her son with the difficult thought that finding these digital gems lessens their number. Turning up new material is 'a death too'.

"the person's not there to ask you or to tell you about it and particularly for a person like Charlie who is not going to be ringing me every day and telling me what he did. So, you want to know…I just want to know a little bit more about…because I want to know…I want to be part of your life. But then…the more you know and find out…the less there is to find and that's like another…a death too…no more 'what were you up to' "

<div align="right">(Ibid.)</div>

In the same vein, Brian (55), husband of Deborah (51, Case 4), described material relating to his wife that he had not viewed as entailing a 'specialness' that was growing over time. Speaking about material on the couple's shared desktop computer, which he had not yet engaged with, Brian said:

> *"I think there is a specialness to it really. As time goes on, it perhaps builds up even more. A specialness, you want to consider those things really, take time over sorting them out"*

> (Deborah's husband, Brian, 55. Interview 1: 3 year & 1 month PB)

As the specialness of unseen material builds with time, not engaging with it not only leaves open the possibility of future encounters with material, there is also a sense of these 'treasured artefacts' being part of a future 'sacred act of reverence'. Therefore the material offers both the comforting possibility of something more to look at, as well as kindling imaginings of yet-to-come rituals with material.

> *"To know there's something there to look at, physical evidence still there really, also you do perhaps build it up into this sacred act, which is a bit silly probably, this sacred act of reverence, the treasured artefacts"*

> (Ibid.)

Brian uses this treasure metaphor to characterise this yet-unseen digital material relating to his late wife. There is a shift here from the value of the material itself—what it is known to contain and offer (orientation one)—to comfort in the possibility of what material *might* contain and offer; 'there might be little gems'. For Brian, some of the comfort imparted by these undiscovered gems is their capacity to keep his wife in the present, a presence that engaging with material in its totality would end.

"the same for the digital files [on the shared desktop]*, so there still is a comfort in having them there, to think there might be little gems and things I want to save…wherever there's something else to look through, there's still an element of her around. If I took a week and went through it all that would be it…I might feel it was all behind me"*

<div align="right">(Id., Interview 2: 3 year & 6 months PB)</div>

In the above, unseen digital material gives rise to a comforting potential for fresh, future deceased-related encounters, rituals and insights. The unseen has the qualities of being rich in possibility and entailing an open-endedness, conveying continued presence and aliveness to the dead. Rather than exhaustively engaging with material in its totality, as was their earlier focus, these respondents find comfort in a state of future possibility and continuity of presence that the unseen bestows, the shutting down of which would be a painful ending.

6.2.4 Orientation two: Summary

This section presented data in support of the second cross-participant orientation, "Pain in engaging with the digital", in the sub-sections: (i) Material as too real (ii) Digital highlighting deadness and (iii) Comfort in unseen material.

6.3 Orientation three: Undermining the digital

In this third orientation, 'Undermining the digital', participants minimise and downgrade the significance, reach and capacity of the digital material relating to their dead. The following section presents data clustered around three patterns in this orientation: (i) The dead, and survivor-deceased (S-D) relationship, as more than their digital parts (ii) Digital as partial and unbalanced, and (iii) Significance of the unrecorded.

6.3.1 More than their digital parts

In this first aspect of orientation three, participants describe a larger, ineffable essence of their dead, which is more than the sum of its digital parts. Though still portraying digital material as important triggers to memory and emotion, and means of sharing the deceased and S-D relationship with others, they are now viewed as triggers to something bigger, that is already known and exists irrespective of digital prompting. The digital material, though useful as routes into this greater knowledge, is now viewed as incapable of communicating, evoking or containing this greater essence of the dead.

Val (24), describes historical Facebook activity by her cousin Oscar's (20, Case 8) on his still-active page as a useful tool to showcase his character and tap into memories about him. Ultimately, however, they cannot stand for, or adequately represent, his personality or her memories of him.

Val: *"[Oscar's Facebook page] is a good showcase of memories, teasing them out so you can watch them and prompt your own emotions, but all they are at the end of the day is a tool. Things that are on there aren't his personality and aren't his memories, they're just showcasing and they're the tool to do so.*

Mórna: *So like prompting you to think of like his actual character or personality rather than being it?*

Val: *Yes. You're not going to find that on the internet"*

(Oscar's first cousin, Val, 24. Interview 1: 11 months PB)

Asked about the hypothetical deletion of this material, Val felt that though losing it would be difficult, it is no more than a tool to activate something she and her family already know and remember. She construes the digital material as avenues into a repository of 'real memories' where losing the means of 'bring[ing] up' memories leaves the repository itself unaffected.

> *"although it's not him, it's still a very useful tool to go back on, so it would be upsetting to lose that, but…whether we'd lose any real memories, I don't think we would. I think we might feel like we had because we've been using them to bring up memories and that, so I think we would feel there are a lot of memories deleted, but I don't think really there would be and I think we would all see that eventually… I think it's good to have, but nothing of Oscar would be lost if they were deleted"*

(Ibid.)

In this conception, Val depicts Oscar as more than the sum of his digital fragments. The fragments are no doubt useful, but ultimately Oscar cannot be contained or represented 'on the internet'.

Ellie (24), friend of Leah (23, Case 2,) also employs language of tools and triggers. Ellie described previously viewing a birthday video message from Leah frequently to:

> *"Really get who she was for a few minutes"*
>
> (Leah's friend, Ellie, 24. Interview 1: 8 months PB)

As with Val above, however, Ellie describes later using this same material as a tool to trigger, supplement and share a knowledge of Leah, and their relationship, that Ellie already holds.

> *"it'll be me sort of with another group of people, and maybe sharing a story about her. And then bring up a photo of...'See, look how silly we were', or something like that. So it's almost, it's more of a tool of sharing her with other people than kind of reminding me and triggering me"*
>
> (Ibid.)

This is further manifested in Ellie's description of a shift in focus from collecting and retaining digital details of Leah and their relationship, to retaining a connection to something larger that is beyond digital capture —'her spirit and laugh…her essence'—which even the most 'vibrant [digital] details' cannot comprise.

"I don't know what shifted there but…that was something that really concerned me…'oh, I'm going to lose all the vibrant details'…I think I'm less concerned with that. And more concerned with sort of, losing her spirit and laugh, and those kinds of things…more intangible things… that's definitely a shift that I've seen…being more worried about losing her essence than these weird details of her memories"

(Ibid.)

Once held dear for their encapsulation of Leah and the friends' relationship, these 'weird details' are now inferior to this higher, intangible essence of her. This downgrading of material's value and its pejorative depiction (weird), chimes with Sarah's (29) undermining of one-to-one text conversations with her sister Leah (23, Case 2), which Sarah has not viewed since Leah's death[1]. Previously, this extensive messaging history promised precious encapsulations of the sisters' relationship. Now, Sarah minimises their imagined content.

"It was probably stupid conversations around arranging things, or just general chit-chat or sharing info or whatever"

(Leah's sister, Sarah, 29. Interview 4: 17 months PB)

Like the above participants, this undermining of once-cherished material is bound into a sense of their dead as more than their digital leavings. For Sarah, this is a sense of Leah's presence as 'all around'; the 'online stuff' just one of a range of ways in which Leah is 'everywhere'.

"Especially in the last few months, she was always remembered, everywhere, in songs, online stuff, even something in my own mannerisms, she's all around"

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[1] Messages on Sarah's recently-changed, powered-off mobile phone.

Likewise, referring to one-to-one WhatsApp conversations with Leah she once frequently re-read, Susie (23) describes having moved away from these 'minute details' that do not make Leah up. Instead, she now laments the inability of these details to adequately convey Leah's 'spirit', 'presence' or 'being'; Leah 'as a whole' rather than unsatisfying digital fragments.

> *"I physically haven't been looking at them* [one-to-one WhatsApp correspondence]*… I know she isn't made up of those…and I suppose it's just thinking about her more as a…not needing to see all the minute details, right now anyway, I think it's like, just being around her is the real thing at the moment…it's kind of just about her as a whole...I don't like the word 'spirit'…but just her presence and her being"*

> (Leah's friend, Susie, 23. Interview 3: 14 months PB)

6.3.2 Digital as partial and lacking balance

In this second aspect of orientation three, 'Undermining the digital', participants describe digital material as conveying partial and unbalanced representations of their deceased and the S-D relationships, compared to what they, and the grief community, know and remember.

Avril (58) described her frustration that in-life activity on her niece Eva's (32, Case 5) still-active Facebook page did not reflect her and Eva's relationship. They were not Facebook friends[1] and Avril is not represented on Eva's page. This was particularly frustrating in light of others' dominance on Eva's in-life page, others to whom, in Avril's view, Eva had not been as close as they were. Avril described Eva's Facebook page as an archive of her life, and Avril's own absence from this archive as non-representative. In particular, Avril lamented that a VHS recording of a formative moment in their relationship—niece teaching aunt to play violin—is not in Facebook's currency (as Avril understands it) and therefore never appeared on Eva's in-life page. Construal of Eva's in-life Facebook page as an archive of her life leaves Avril feeling left out.

> "It's a bit like, yes, you know I was Eva's auntie. And I have played a part in her life, you know, I haven't totally been on the outside of things. There have been times where we have sort of shared things. But it isn't just about having an account to show other people. I suppose it's to bring it on a level platform with everything else. It's making it as special as all the other things that are on there…the way things were recorded pre-digital age, it's almost like they're sometimes not deemed as important"

---

[1] Avril joined Facebook not long before, sending a friend request in the days surrounding Eva's suicide (date unknown), which was accepted, but most likely post-death.

However, in a later interview, Avril has turned away from this construal of Eva's page as an all-encompassing archive, now describing it as an important but partial rendering of Eva and her relationships. Referring to the same videotape, Avril now sees its value as lying in the fact that was *not* shared or digitised, and links the video's 'specialness' to the fact that it is beyond Facebook's reach. Thus, Avril repositions Facebook as a mere slice of Eva's life and relationships, which were greater, richer and longer-standing than Facebook's remit. She no longer finds her under-representation on Eva's Facebook page frustrating because she now views it as a partial record.

> *"it's special because personally I think once you share something with the whole world, you lose that closeness of it and it's about…a whole lot of things and what we did…that wasn't on Facebook. Facebook isn't the full story…it misses a lot"*

Similarly, Brenda (54) undermined Facebook's reach and ability to evoke her friend Deborah (51, Case 4) and their relationship, describing its narrow aspect on their longstanding friendship. Brenda described laughing upon receiving a Facebook notification while Brenda was alive, which she came across again on her own page since Deborah died, informing her that they had been Facebook friends for seven years. It had in fact been thirty-odd years.

> *"No, Facebook, dear, it's a lot longer than that"*

Similarly, in the case of Oscar (20, Case 8), his cousin, Tina (24), initially described feeling regret and sadness when she revisited Facebook Messenger correspondence with Oscar after his death, as the last interaction had been a missed call from Oscar. Tina did not answer, assuming, because of the time, that it was a joke call Oscar often made to her while intoxicated. For Tina, the record of this last, ignored call was a painful link to her regret at not answering, and the difficult thought that Oscar knew she sometimes found him annoying and ignored him. This caused Tina to avoid revisiting this channel of their communication.

> *"that's probably one of the reasons why I don't go on my messages, because I know that's the first thing that comes up, is like, 'you've missed a call'… I wish I had answered, but I didn't…I'm not going to find out why he called or what he was going to do on that call, but I think that's part of the reason why, because I know that will be an instant negative trigger…the last ever thing is me missing a call"*

<div align="right">(Oscar's cousin, Tina, 24. Interview 1: 7 months PB)</div>

However, three months later, Tina describes this missed call as having become much less prevalent and less difficult to encounter. She now views it—and the regretful aspect of the cousins' relationship it represents—as a small component of a wider relationship. Though Tina sometimes found Oscar annoying, and the missed call is a reminder of this, she now sets it into the wider perspective of their twenty-odd year relationship, which was more rich and multi-dimensional than this one aspect. Tina now casts Facebook as over-representing certain aspects of relationships and persons, resolving that greater balance and a more realistic representation—'the rounded…whole thing of our relationship'—is achieved by looking beyond it.

"he was annoying, so I'm quite happy to be reminded of that as well as like when he was being funny so it wouldn't be very realistic if I didn't have that but…we grew up in each other's pockets and I did love him and he knew that…Facebook just shows the nicey-nicey of a person and people put on a show and there's things that make you cringe that you've said cos people aren't perfect they're going to annoy you but I think to myself that's only part of the rounded… whole thing of our relationship…that's not on Facebook"

(Id., Interview 2: 10 months PB)

Set into this broader knowledge that 'I did love him and he knew that', this ignored call loses its sting. Moreover, it is now a testament to their warts-'n'-all relationship, and Tina's wish for her memory of it to be realistic, rather than the 'nicey-nicey' aspects that abound on Facebook.

Similarly, when asked about the prospect of encountering unsavoury digital material about her sister Leah (23, Case 2), Sarah (29) responded that it would be welcome. It might temper what Sarah sees as an overly flattering and unbalanced posthumous narrative of her sister; not 'the complete picture'. Sarah described more negative dimensions of Leah's life and character for which, by the nature of 'social media and digital stuff', there is no digital record, but which are important in staving off posthumous adulation of Leah, which has been especially hard for her other sister, Betty.

"I almost wish it wasn't as great about her. I'm not scared there would be anything bad, it would almost be good, because…obviously, no one knew that bitchy side of Leah more than us at home. Mum and her crashed heads loads and she was an awful bitch at times and I think all the good stuff is hard, especially for Betty [other sister]*. That's almost a fear. Betty is all good now, but at the start it was shit there was so much, how much fun she was, how brilliant she was and all this. It wasn't the complete picture and I think that's just the way of social media and digital stuff, you get a view that's controlled"*

…

"it's easy to kind of adulate someone or glorify someone and it's all the good times…"

(Leah's sister, Sarah, 29. Interview 2: 10 months PB)

6.3.3 The significance of the unrecorded

In this final aspect of orientation three, 'Undermining the digital', participants described growing interest in that which was *not* recorded digitally.

In an earlier interview, Helen (23) described one-to-one WhatsApp messages with her friend Leah (23, Case 2) as a 'primary source document' of their friendship, undiluted by subjective, fuzzy memory.

> *"external proof that it happened…a primary-source document"*
> *…*
> *"reminding me that we had a real friendship"*

(Leah's friend, Helen, 23. Interview 1: 10 months PB)

Five months later, however, Helen described the inverse. Now, gaps between the friends' correspondence have eclipsed the messages' significance. Previously the function of the messages themselves, now gaps *between* messages attest to relational intensity and quality.

> *"having those bookends of even just…like 'where are you right now?'…and then a week later, it's like 'where are you right now?' I remember us like literally being together the whole time"*

(Id. Interview 2: 15 months PB)

Helen has demoted messages from reminders of the 'real friendship', to an organising structure that facilitated this real relationship's enactment, which occurred in person, offline and is digitally undocumented. Now, communicative black spots are when the real stuff of the relationship happened. In the context of an intense

friendship, where time apart and therefore communicating digitally was limited, gaps are richer than content: 'silence almost speaks louder than words'.

> *"Particularly with relationships…when you're with someone all the time. I think that* [digital] *silence almost speaks louder than words…so those gaps are always really significant to me, because that's where the real relationship building happened…those personal encounters"*

> (Id., Interview 2: 15 months PB)

The messaging intervals attest to time spent together offline, and a corresponding lack of need for digital communication, both of which go to the strength of their bond.

> *"the fact that we needed to co-ordinate that frequently was significant in its own right…it doesn't mean less to me because we weren't communicating digitally but it almost means more because we didn't need to be"*

> (Ibid.)

Furthermore, gaps interspersing messages create space for Helen to imagine and remember what the friends were doing. The 'reality' of what was happening, supplied by the messages, can be suspended in these gaps, inviting forays, using memory and imagination, into what *might* have happened.

> *"in between the messages I can sort of suspend reality of what we were really doing…and get to thinking what we might have been doing, half-remembering it sometimes and then seeing down to the next message to see if that tallies so it feels like it…might have happened it's not totally my imagination"*

> (Ibid.)

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Messages and gaps work in complement; gaps provide room for imagination and memory, while messages provide anchoring in times and contexts, lending credence to the imagined or remembered account.

Relatedly, another friend of Leah's, Susie, (23), in her third interview, fourteen months post-bereavement, described unrecorded conversations between the friends as having a quality that trumped the recorded. Despite voluminous digital material related to Leah at her disposal, across her interviews, Susie described mounting dissatisfaction about the inability of even this substantial material to impart her friend.

> *"I don't really need all the messages and stuff; there's so much but what's it good for really I just want her to be here in the present, in the now"*

<div align="right">(Leah's friend, Susie, 23. Interview 3: 14 months PB)</div>

> *"…but obviously when we speak, that's it and it's gone, but you can just kind of imagine small things like 'I miss you!' and 'When are you home next?' and all the good, real conversations that are once off and not there...not digital"*

<div align="right">(Ibid.)</div>

Susie placed value on what is *not* part of this digital record and the ephemerality and unknown-ness of in-person encounters. Like Helen above, the absence of digital specifics invites imagination; not knowing exact words in a spoken exchange leaves room to imagine what might have been said. Susie imagines the 'good, real' conversations that were 'not digital', the unrecorded creating space for imagination that is shut down when things are recorded.

6.3.4 Orientation three: Summary

This section presented data showing the third cross-participant orientation,

"Undermining the digital", comprising sub-sections: (i) More than their digital parts (ii)

Digital as partial and unbalanced, and (iii) The significance of the unrecorded.

6.4 Orientation four: Ongoing stories over digital history

In this final orientation, participants describe a turn toward personal and communal posthumous accounts of the deceased and survivor-deceased (S-D) relationships. These accounts are imprecise, subjective and involve forgetting, with diminishing reference to, or interest in, deceased-related digital material.

Previously viewed as less real, precise, authentic or comprehensive than digital material, personal and shared accounts of the dead and S-D relationships are now more nourishing as they are alive and continuingly relevant in a way that static digital material is now not. This is webbed into building trust in personal and communal accounts as supplying what one needs to know and remember, and cultivating relationships with other bereaved wherein these accounts live, change and continue.

6.4.1 Leaning into forgetting, imprecision and story

In the first aspect of this final orientation, respondents describe how digital material that previously offered a direct line to their dead and S-D relationship has, over time and involvement in grief, lost that directness, now evoking grief rather than their dead. This added layer disinclines participants from engaging with material, such that they instead lean toward knowingly imprecise, non-digital accounts, and organic personal and communal memories.

Leah's (23, Case 2) sister, Sarah (29), described unseen one-to-one messaging correspondence—previously prized for detail about the sisters' relationship—as unwanted encounters with the finer points of her loss.

"I miss her enough as it is. You don't need to go into the details of things that you're missing"

(Leah's sister, Sarah, 29. Interview 4: 17 months PB)

Sarah now feels that losing these painful, nuanced evocations of her loss is preferable to the pain of forgetting details about her sister they might afford. On her previously expressed fear of forgetting Leah and their relationship, Sarah now says:

"I don't think I have that anymore, like I've thought about that and sometimes I think 'fuck, it would be better to forget than this, it might make it easier…I hope I do forget some, not forget but like, forget the nuances of her, because they're really just so hard"

(Ibid.)

Correspondingly, Betty (25), Leah's sister (23, Case 2) describes having stopped once-frequent rereading of one-to-one WhatsApp conversations with her late sister. Previously furnishing comforting closeness to the sisters' relationship, the messages are now difficult reminders of the bereavement.

"the conversations are so personal…she was just so… she was very much alive and stuff, and we spoke the day she died, like, we spoke on WhatsApp that day. It's just awful and…I don't need that reminder"

(Leah's sister, Betty, 25. Interview 3: 16 months PB)

Leah's friend Helen (23) termed this phenomenon described by Sarah and Betty as an added 'emotional wrapping'. Re-reading one-to-one WhatsApp correspondence with Leah now reminds Helen of when she reread them upon learning of her friend's imminent death. No longer direct connections to Leah's character and their friendship; the messages are now encased in painful evocation of bereavement.

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"they're so beautiful and wonderful to have and look back on, but they are a little painful to go back to…thinking about well those are the WhatsApp messages that I looked at when I was really realising that. I don't really want to dive into those and that emotional wrapping that they entail"

<div align="right">(Leah's friend, Helen, 23. Interview 2: 15 months PB)</div>

Respondents described that non-engagement caused by this added layer involves softening the precision and objectivity in their accounts of deceased and S-D relationship provided by the material. However, they now view this as the path of least pain, and knowingly turn toward knowingly imprecise accounts. Leah's sister Sarah (29) describes another difficult layer of this emotional wrapping: the possibility that unseen messaging correspondence between them would afford unwanted views of her relationship with Leah.

"imagining some of them and I was like, 'Oh, god, don't even look at it, what if you said something bitchy'…Because I'm an awful bitch sometimes and I'm their big sister and I'm so bossy to them. Yes, so for my own kind of sense of self I was like, 'Don't look at them'…rose-tinted memories, yes"

<div align="right">(Leah's sister, Sarah, 29. Interview 3: 14 months PB)</div>

Sarah consciously opts for a 'rose-tinted' rendering of her role in the relationship, which, though perhaps inexact, offers clemency to her 'sense of self'. This knowingly idealised account of the relationship, and the active suppression of digital detail that might upend it, shows a shift away from Sarah's earlier faith in digital material as repositories of the 'real' Leah and their relationship, and inclination toward forgetting, imprecision and story when these impart preferable versions of the deceased and S-D relationship.

Conversely, in the case of Adam (69, Case 1), daughter Bella (43) described using digital material to actively counteract her tendency to posthumously romanticise Adam and their relationship. Actively resisting the propensity to recall him or their relationship fondly, Bella called to mind hurtful emails from Adam (to which she no longer has access) and reread his Facebook activity to remind herself of his difficult character and the minutiae of their fraught relationship.

> ”I look at my dad's [Facebook page]…It's a bit like picking at a scab, isn't it? Because it's almost a thing that stops me romanticising my own past with him, because I do have a compulsion to do that…it's a temptation to reconstruct but I'm not a fan of reconstruction"
>
> (Adam's daughter, Bella, 43. Interview 2: 5 years & 4 months PB)

For Bella, digital material is a means of reinstating 'reality' and periodically correcting false reconstructions.

> "periodically you have to get it out and polish it a bit, because it's important that you do that"
>
> (Ibid.)

This was also in a context where Bella felt like the only one of Adam's bereaved unwilling to posthumously adulate him; she saw herself as the sole custodian of this 'real' Adam, undiluted by imprecision, forgetting and story.

"Bella feels like the only one unaffected by the 'instinct to praise' her dad after death. She sees her role as preserving the truth of him. She can remember the wording of emails Adam sent her after he disowned her; she described, frame by frame, her experience of receiving one— where she was and how she felt. Though she no longer has access to these emails, she described using the memory of them, and receiving them, to clarify any sepia tone developing around her conception of Adam, resisting the onslaught of gentler memories"

(Adam's daughter, Bella, 43. Field notes, 30.3.17. Interview 1: 4 years, 4 months PB)

Though Bella appears to contradict the other respondents' embracing of forgetting, imprecision and story, there is a common evocation of digital material as means of staving off these effects. While deceased character and relational quality cause Bella to push against these effects, they cause the other respondents to turn toward them, in both cases non-engagement with digital material is seen as inviting softer renderings of deceased and S-D relationships.

6.4.2 Trust in personal accounts

Hand in hand with the previous aspect is a sense of trust in respondents' personal accounts of their deceased and S-D relationships over those afforded by digital material.

In previous orientations, participants located the memory, reality and proof of their deceased and S-D relationships in digital material, construing personal and shared accounts as subject to partiality and inexactness. In this second aspect of the final orientation however, respondents challenge the very existence of absolute or impartial truths about their deceased and S-D relationships. Now they describe confidence that personal accounts (truths, memories, stories), though partial, imprecise and subjective, provide what one needs. Moreover, these same qualities are now marks of how individually tailored these personal accounts are; bespoke to survivors' individual and changing needs and lives, and functions of particular relationships with their dead. Conversely, digital material is depicted as not malleable or bespoke in this way.

Louise (29), granddaughter of Ella (81, Case 9), previously described a candid webcam video, featuring Louise helping Ella send an email, as the closest possible evocation of her and their relationship. Later however, Louise describes the video as lacking a quality of intimacy, and a preferred rendering of their relationship, that her own memory of the same scenario entails.

> *"my memory of her using the computer is different to the video…I remember it in a more intimate way, there's something in that, isn't there? I remember her sitting next to me on the bed, going through the laptop together, whereas on the webcam, she's facing away from me, doing it on her own"*

…

> *"What I remember maybe isn't how it was really cos the video shows something different…but I prefer my memory"*

> (Ella's granddaughter, Louise, 29, Interview 1, 18 months PB)

In the case of Adam (69, Case 2), daughter Bella (43) was previously frustrated by a posthumous account amongst his bereaved that unduly idolised him, causing Bella to use digital material to reinstate the truth of her father. Later, however, Bella feels there is no single, universal account of her father, only relative truths, memories and stories. These relative truths are constructs wrought by his individual survivors, reflecting how they need to remember him and their relationships. Rather than evoking the digital material as sources of unassailable, universal truth, Bella now articulates confidence in personal accounts as proffering versions of the dead, and in-life deceased-bereaved relationships, that the bereaved can move forward with. Speaking about her mother's flattering account of Adam, Bella now says:

> *"she does know what he was, and it's hard for her. She's needs to say he was a gentleman 'cos that leaves her in a better position"*

> (Adam's daughter, Bella, 43. Interview 2: 5 years & 4 months PB)

Bella now understands her mother needing this gentler rendering of Adam and the preferred position it affords her. Bella likens this to her own account of Adam as one

of many, relative, constructed truths built around her own needs, rather than a superior truth verifiable via digital material.

> *"Everything is a construction. There's no such thing as anything…any truth. Everything that we do is constructed, and what we're always trying to do is construct a positive self and social identity for ourselves and how we construct other people around us. That's what we do as humans"*

<div align="right">(Ibid.)</div>

Further, Bella describes her experience of digital material relating to Adam as filtered by this relative, personal construct of him, rather than supplying unmediated truth. Bella now views her account of Adam as rooted in her wish not to repeat his behaviours and qualities. She places confidence in her own construct of her father as tailored to this wish, and to actively counteract his tendencies in herself.

> *"a lot of it comes down my own fear of being too much like him. The ways my dad behaved and the relationship we had informs how I live my life…I use him almost as my barometer, where I go, 'Okay, I don't want to do that because that's what my dad would do'"*

<div align="right">(Ibid.)</div>

Bella no longer describes her periodic returning to digital material related to Adam as means of connecting with incontrovertible truths about the 'real' Adam, but reconnecting with the construct of him that she needs at this time that helps her from repeating his mistakes.

Similarly, Leah's sister Sarah (29) was previously frustrated by an account of her sister amongst other survivors that she felt only represented Leah's flattering

dimensions. Sarah wished that unflattering digital material would bring balance and reinstate the truth. As with Bella, later Sarah challenges this idea of a single, monolithic truth about her dead, now describing a multiplicity of truths amongst the bereaved set into particular relationships, where her truth is one of many. Relatedly, Sarah also describes confidence in her own remembered, imagined and storied account of Leah, which does not need to refer to digital material. She now embraces the subjectivity, fallibility and relativity of her own truth and undermines the role of the digital material in this. On reading back through messaging correspondence between the sisters, Sarah says:

> *"when you just think about who's it for, like, everyone has their own truth…I just think I need to form my own sort of personal like, what she was, whether that's the truth either or not. Like, my own truth about it"*

<div align="right">(Leah's sister, Sarah, 29. Interview 3: 14 months PB)</div>

Sarah is no longer interested in whether her account is the absolute truth, and embraces the possibility that it may involve forgetting and softening of detail. Moreover, she places trust in her own account as uniquely nourishing to her, as it is rooted in her unique relationship with her sister, as she remembers, imagines and stories it. This personal account entails an instinctive, tacit knowing that accords to what she needs to know and remember, which the digital material does not.

> *"I'm starting to come to an understanding, that I don't think you'll ever forget and whatever you remember, that's what you need really…..I'm definitely not scared of it* [forgetting] *now…I don't need that stuff to remember I have what I need of her myself…up here* [points to head]*"*

<div align="right">(Ibid.)</div>

6.4.3 Our continuing stories

The above trust in personal accounts of deceased and S-D relationships over that afforded by digital material is here accompanied by an orientation toward communal accounts forged in conversation with others (who knew the deceased and did not). Here, personal and communal accounts of the dead and S-D relationships are in dialogue, personal stories and memories are communally negotiated, built upon and refigured, shifting with the continuing relationships in which they are told, and survivors working to cultivate relationships in which this occurs.

Participants contrast these continuing, dynamic, living and continually relevant communal posthumous accounts with the digital material, which by comparison and over time, is increasingly static, inert, fixed in time, known and retrospective.

Tina (24), speaking about cousin Oscar's (20, Case 8) historical Facebook activity, described this once-nourishing and frequently visited material as now stale, fixed and known. Eleven months after his death, revisiting it is now frustrating, as it cannot give her anything new. On looking through the great number of videos of Oscar on his Facebook page, Tina says:

> *"If there was one I thought I hadn't seen I would have probably had a look at it. But mostly now it's 'seen that, seen that, seen that'…I've seen them all and there's nothing new to see"*
>
> (Oscar's cousin, Tina, 24. Interview 2: 7 months PB)

Given this material's stasis and known-ness, Tina does not revisit it as much, instead increasingly talking to her sister (also Oscar's cousin) about memories sparked during conversation or other activities.

> *"it's* [revisiting Oscar's Facebook page] *definitely not as much now, because from back then when I was looking through, that did remind me of a lot of stuff. I think me and my sister talk a lot about stuff now that I remember that might be about something we are doing or talking about, so that probably helps"*

<div align="right">(Ibid.)</div>

Having gleaned important memories from Oscar's Facebook page in the wake of his death, Tina trusts what she remembers of it and does need to look back, accepting that this may involve forgetting. She is interested now in sharing these less exact memories 'in her head' with others who knew Oscar, and the added layers of perspective and memory brought by others. Whereas the digital material offers 'looking back', talking involves 'remember[ing] new stuff together'.

> *"I have now got a lot of funny and nice memories that I got from back then* [when she went through Oscar's Facebook page] *so I'm not as kind of worried about it* [forgetting] *now. Now you're not looking back for those, they're kind of in your head. It's more if I talk to people, and they remind me of stuff and we remember new stuff together…"*

<div align="right">(Ibid.)</div>

Dialogue between survivors' posthumous accounts, shared in conversation, has a continuity, vitality and dynamism that the digital material now lacks. Though perhaps involving forgetting, Tina chooses this over the increasingly historical, fixed and known digital material.

Similarly, Leah's (23, Case 2) friend Ellie (24) described having disengaged from previously frequented material because of its increasing stasis and discontinuity with her life and the lives of their friend group. Now, she finds greater nourishment in speaking to these friends who can relate, and add to, her account of Leah. Here again, there is continuity and vitality in these shared accounts that is increasingly lacking in the digital material.

> *"looking back on pictures or Facebook…I almost get frustrated, or disappointed that there's nothing new there…I've re-read this WhatsApp chat several times now, and I've looked at these pictures and I almost get frustrated like there should be new things that are being updated, like how all of us are progressing…"*

> *…*

> *"I'm finding that best if somebody can relate and say, 'oh, right, yes, it's amazing how her laugh made you feel', or 'how powerful her hugs were', or something like that"*

> (Leah's friend, Ellie, 24. Interview 2: 11 months PB)

In place of frustratingly static digital material, Ellie goes on to describe how building relationships linked to Leah now brings the greatest comfort, enabling the sharing of stories about her, the creation of new stories linked to her, and ongoing relationships rooted in the friends' connection to her. This ongoing, shared storying of Leah has a living, mutable quality that is lacking in the stagnant digital material.

"it's not like every conversation [with another of Leah's bereaved] is sharing memories of Leah and sometimes she'll come in there…but it's somehow still a comfort knowing that...that's kind of why we're friends, and I wouldn't really have been as close with Phoebe otherwise…it's just kind of finding more comfort in getting closer in that relationship and…obviously Leah being the reason, the central reason, why we're drawn together...that bringing more comfort now than just sort of the very static images and other [digital] things that I used to really rely on"

(Ibid.)

As with Tina above, Ellie recognised that some precision or faithfulness to the 'real' Leah and her relationships may be lost in this shared storying. But, like Tina, Ellie now places greater trust in organic, communal storying, and is more comforted by the morphing of Leah's story that occurs with others than by exact but inert digital material. Comparing sharing stories with others to rereading a 'memory document' where Ellie had copied significant digital correspondence with Leah and typed important memories relating to her—Ellie says:

"I find myself not really needing to go back and read like every intricate thing, where I described memories of our time. It's almost more fulfilling and more comforting to think through them, or re-remember them as they come to me, even if they're a bit fuzzy now…Even if I can't remember the exact context…I'm more comforted by calling up someone who might've had that same experience"

(Ibid.)

Ellie says that blending of others' accounts is a way of turning up more 'small details', yet she also describes the digital material as a superior avenue into these details. It seems therefore that the comfort she describes is not in the generation of

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these details alone, but additionally, in the sharing, remembering and reforming of these details in consort with others.

Leah's other friend, Helen, described talking about Leah with new friends who never met her as a way of bringing continued life to her story and their relationship, and moulding this story into Helen's ongoing life. For Helen, weaving Leah her into her ongoing experience in conversation has a fluid, forward-facing quality in which the story of Leah and their relationship can flex and change. The digital material is conversely evoked as fixed 'pillars': 'important foundations' to refer back to, but lacking the dynamism, flexibility and ongoing relevance of sharing stories.

> *"It's that sort of dynamic like future of moving on and bringing her along with me as opposed to some of these more fixed* [digital] *objects that are nice pillars to have…they are important foundations…they're important things to be able to refer back to. But yes, in terms of finding ways to move forward, there is a lot more, I think, a lot more life in sharing the stories with other people and so that's been good"*

> (Leah's friend, Helen, 24. Interview 2: 14 months PB)

6.4.4 Orientation four: Summary

This section presented data showing the fourth cross-participant orientation, "Ongoing story over digital history", comprising sub-sections: (i) Leaning into forgetting, imprecision and story (ii) Trust in own truth, memory and story, and (iii) Our continuing stories.

6.5 Chapter six: Conclusion

This chapter presented data patterns interpreted across all participant accounts. I coalesced these patterns around four orientations: (i) Faith in the digital (ii), Pain in engaging with the digital, (iii) Undermining the digital and, (iv) Ongoing stories over digital history. I presented participant data in illustration of these four orientations, drawing on data from thirty-two participants connected to eleven cases of death.

Conversely, the next chapter restores the relational, contextual and socio-cultural dimensions of these orientations.

Chapter 7: Case deep dive
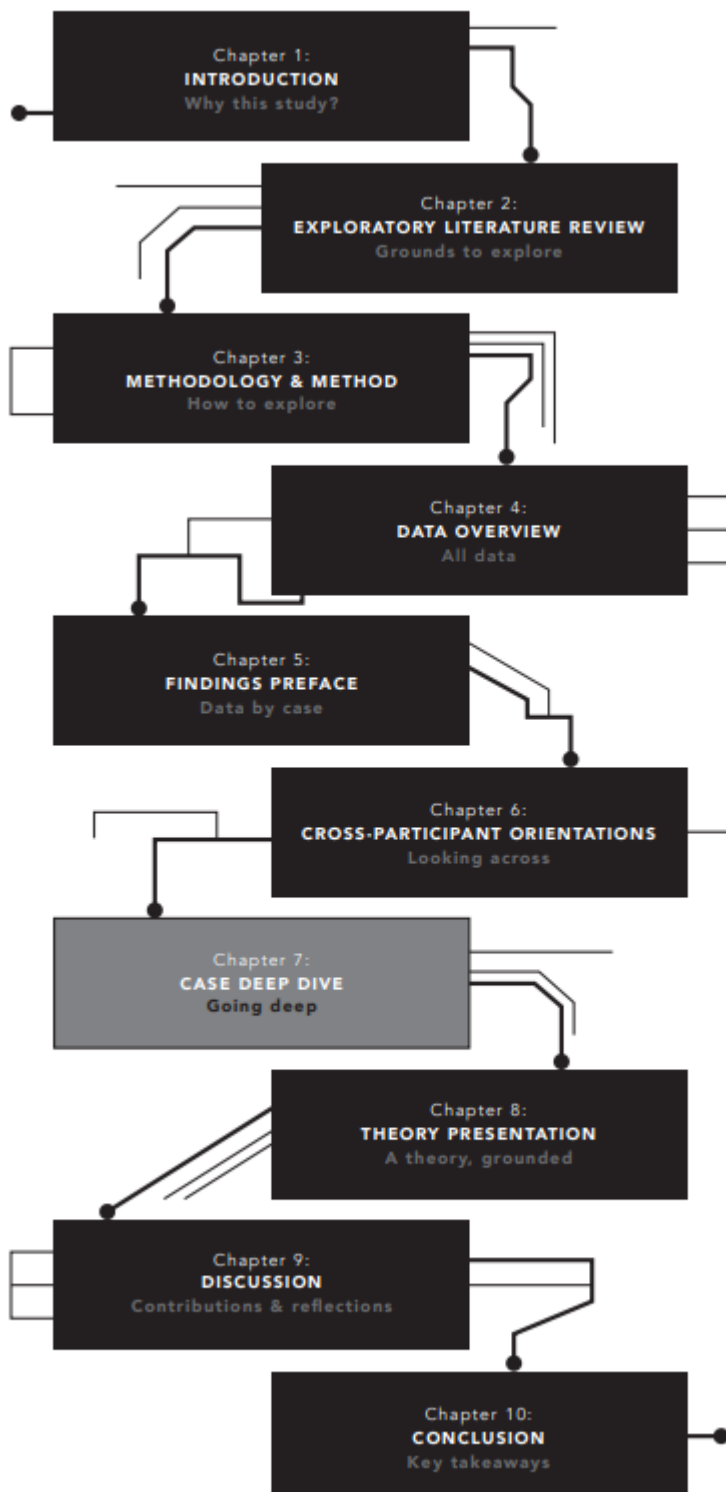
7.0 Introduction

Chapter 6 presented four cross-participant orientations toward deceased-related digital culture for individuals over time, converging across diverse material, particular participants and contexts, and irrespective of survivor relationships. This addressed the individual-level, longitudinal component of inquiry objectives.

This chapter presents data on the role of relationships and grief context in producing orientations identified in chapter six. This addresses the component of inquiry objective (iii) (p. 75) to study bereaved individuals within communities of other bereaved.

This is realised via a deep dive into one case—the accidental death of a 23-year-old woman, Leah—and a network of survivors grieving over time in respect of diverse deceased-associated digital material. The deep dive draws on extensive case data (serial and cross-sectional), encompassing 33 interviews, 26 diary entries and six artefacts, generated over 11 months (six to 17 months PB) with 18 survivors from three countries, including three males and fifteen females, ranging from Leah's first-degree family to casual acquaintances, ages 23 to 58 (mean=28.5).

7.0.1 Chapter approach

As described in the Methodology chapter, I analysed the voluminous data in this case by breaking it into four micro-systems of connected participants. I present my analysis of this extensive case in these four micro-systems, detailed in Figure 7.1 below.
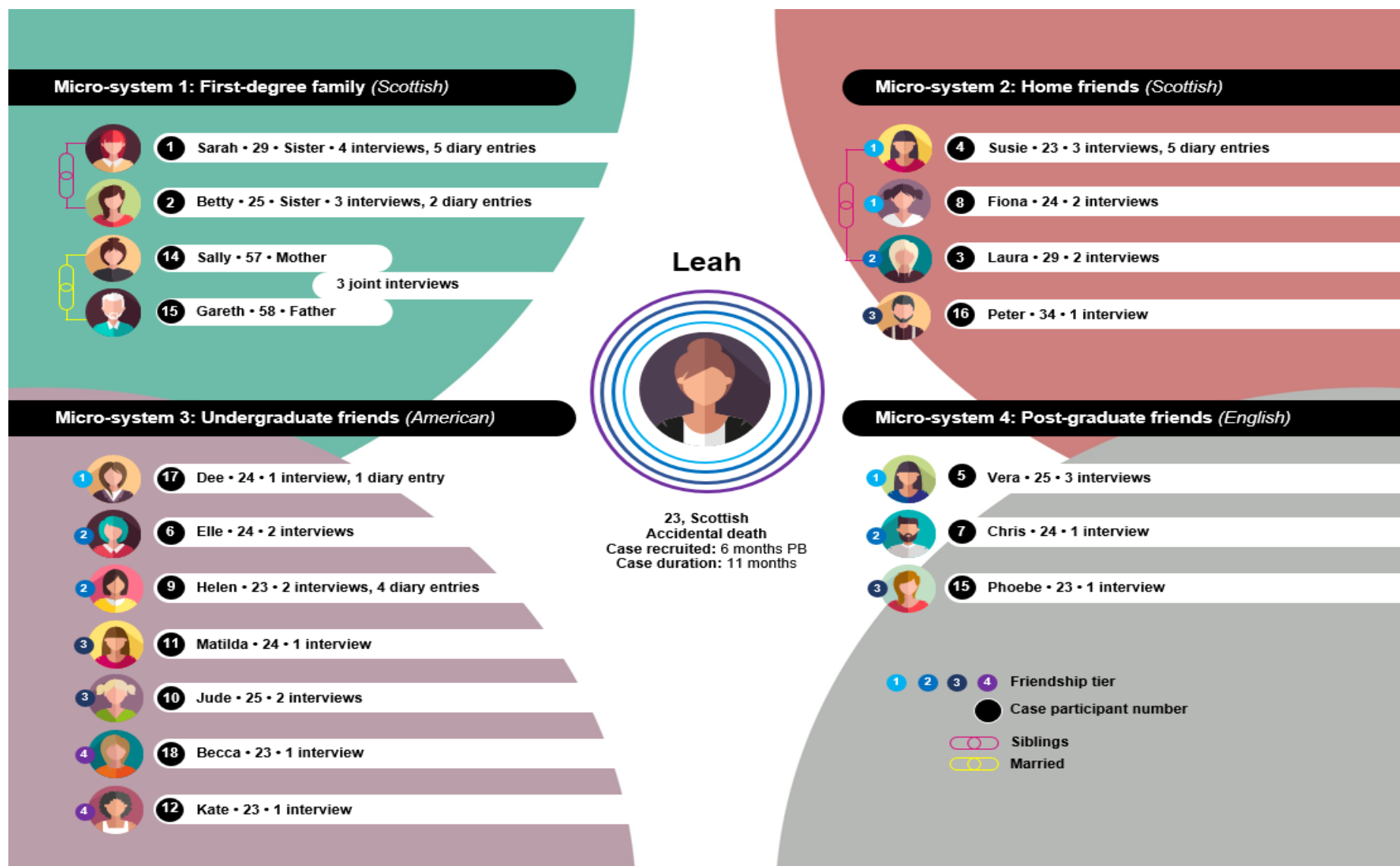
Figure 7.1 Leah case participants in four micro-systems

In each of the four micro-systems, survivors are connected both by relational commonality to Leah (how and/or where they knew her), and by inter-survivor relationships. Micro-system one consists of first-degree family (Leah's siblings and parents). Micro-systems two, three and four are different groups of Leah's 14 friends.

It was necessary to express differences in these 14 friendships with Leah, both for data analysis and for context about the inter-survivor dynamics of these friend micro-systems. As to this, as described in section 3.6.5 of the Methodology chapter, I devised a light-touch friendship tiering method, and allocated a tier[34] to each of the 14 friends in micro-systems two, three and four.

In the following chapter, I attribute the survivor orientations identified in Chapter 6 to a survivor in each of these four micro-systems. I then identify the relational, contextual and cultural influences shaping this orientation within that participant's micro-system. As I move through each micro-system, I begin to illustrate the influence of participant orientations and influences from previous micro-systems interplaying with those in latter micro-systems. This builds to illustrate how participants' orientations toward Leah-related material are shaped by micro- and macro-level forces at play in this community.

I select orientations and their influences in the following based both on prominence in data, and because they are interesting or novel manifestations of the point of the chapter: that survivor orientations toward digital material are products of this particular grief community and context.

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[34] Between one and four; one=close friend, four=casual acquaintance.

7.1 Micro-system one: First-degree family

7.1.1 Participants and context

The first micro-system consists of Leah's first-degree family, comprising two older sisters, Sarah (29) and Betty (25), and parents Gareth (58) and Sally (57). During fieldwork, Gareth and Sally co-habited in the family home in Scotland. Eldest sister, Sarah, lived with her partner in a city near the family home for her study duration. At initial interview, middle sister Betty lived with her parents, having moved back to Scotland from England after Leah's death. At her second interview, Betty had moved into a shared house, having begun a new job in a nearby city. At her final interview, Betty had moved back to England, co-habiting with her partner.

7.1.2 Section approach

The following three sections focus on each of Leah's sisters, and her parents (participating jointly). Each section illustrates, with reference to longitudinal data, inter-survivor dynamics, social factors, digital contexts and cultural influences shaping participant orientations toward diverse Leah-related digital material.

7.1.3 Sarah: Undermining digital material to counter harmful hagiography

Across her study encounters (four interviews, five diary entries), eldest sister Sarah (29) expressed a building distrust in the ability of digital material to faithfully represent Leah. She became increasingly cynical about other survivors' apparent belief in, and reliance upon, this material to evoke the 'real' Leah. Others' construal of digital material as one-to-one representations of Leah was even more troubling as, in Sarah's view, it entailed a falsely positive representation of her.

> *"it's a tough one, Facebook, because people only put up what's their control of what's on there, you know, it's easy to kind of adulate someone or glorify someone and it's all the good times…she was a messer and she was an awful bitch at times as well"*
>
> (Leah's sister, Sarah, 29. Interview 3: 14 months PB)

For Sarah, others' use of digital material—which tends toward a controlled, flattering view of Leah—to represent, remember and evoke her fuels an uneven narrative, wherein positive representations of Leah dominate, and the less favourable are underrepresented. This trend is analogous to an offline pattern, particularly amongst Leah's friends, who, in Sarah's view, did not know the 'real' Leah.

> *"I spoke at the funeral and I like was wondering if should I have said stuff about that like 'the world saw Leah in a very specific way' you know, everyone who came to us had a very similar theme of the way that they spoke about her how brilliant she was. But y'know like at home, she was different"*
>
> (Ibid.)

For Sarah, others' (particularly Leah's friends') lack of exposure to the full complexity of Leah's character, and their focus on digital material that underrepresents these unflattering aspects, is resulting in a false posthumous hagiography of Leah.

> *"people* [are] *like 'an angel in heaven'. Oh my god, give me a break"*

This hagiography is not only disconcerting because of the disparity between the Leah Sarah knew and the angelic woman portrayed. More concerning is how harmful this post-death airbrushing is to Sarah's remaining sister, Betty. Sarah described Betty as very reliant on digital material relating to Leah, and a strong voice in her posthumous adulation.

> *"I don't think I have as much interest in it that Betty would. She doesn't want to let go of a thing"*
>
> …
>
> *"Everybody always talked about how great Leah was and how brilliant she was and a couple of months after she died, Betty would say 'Do you know, the shit sisters are left' "*

The singularly positive posthumous account of Leah fostered by the digital material, and Betty's reliance upon it, was leading to a diminutive comparison with the remaining 'shit sisters'. Though hurtful to both sisters, in Sarah's telling, this narrative is particularly damaging for Betty, as it failed to acknowledge Betty and Leah's checkered historical relationship, and qualities of Leah's that fuelled this. Sarah worried that this posthumous whitewashing undermined Betty's capacity to recognise

the full complexity and dimensionality of Leah, and the sisters' relationship, and grieve the real Leah rather than an exalted account of her. Asked about the possibility of finding negative digital material while Googling Leah's name, Sarah responded:

> *"Leah was horrible to Betty at times. Betty had an awful time growing up and was severely bullied and Leah didn't do anything to help that and she could have. She was really powerful and they were in the same school. Leah really distanced herself from Betty and I think if there is anything bad* [digitally]*, it would almost be a good thing…I almost wish it wasn't as great about her….because everyone, obviously, no one knew that bitchy side of Leah more than us at home…I think all the good stuff is hard, especially for Betty…That's almost a fear. Betty is all good now, but at the start it was shit there was so much, how much fun she was, how brilliant she was and all this. It wasn't the complete picture and I think that's just the way of social media and digital stuff, you get a view that's controlled"*

(Ibid.)

Sarah's undermining orientation toward Leah-related digital material takes root in the perceived negative impact of its aggrandizing effects on her remaining sister. Sarah's orientation toward the material at her disposal is therefore not just at the interior, individual level, it is relational, i.e. formed in relation to Betty and protection of her against the deleterious effects of a falsely glorifying account.

7.1.4 Betty: Faith in digital to authenticate now-lacking relationship

Across her first two (of three) interviews and first (of two) diary entries, Leah's middle sister, Betty (25), described an intense interest in, and reliance upon, all available Leah-associated digital material; she searched for it, saved, collated, curated, shared and engaged with it 'religiously' (Diary entry 1: 9 months PB). In interview one, Betty expressed gratitude at the sheer volume of material:

> *"just how devastated I am that she died. I'm just…what's she's left behind* [digitally]*…just incredible…just so incredible"*

<div align="right">(Leah's sister, Betty, 25. Interview 1: 7 months PB)</div>

In early study encounters, the most treasured of this material and was that which evoked the 'real' Leah, which was, for Betty, purely positive.

> *"I look at her Instagram when I can…it is full of beautiful pictures that show her spirit and not a pouty pose to lure the lads in. She truly is a wholesome being and the most honest and grounded person I have ever come across"*

<div align="right">(Id., Diary entry 1: 9 months PB)</div>

> *"I haven't seen anything negative about her at all…it's just all love and positivity"*

<div align="right">(Id., Interview 1: 7 months PB)</div>

Betty acknowledged earlier issues in the sisters' relationship, describing the sisters' change of school when they were younger:

"I was picked on from the start. Leah was amazing from the start and then I think from there she didn't want to be seen with me em you know 'god, that loser'…I think from there we just got really drifted apart"

(Ibid.)

In the year before Leah died, however, the sisters had moved to the same city and were kindling a new, close relationship.

"Things completely flipped with us in that year I just wanted to be with her all the time. You know, I'm socially awkward and she's just a big butterfly and it was great being around her. I just loved doing things with her and we spent so much time and got so close"

(Ibid.)

In early study encounters, Betty expressed great faith in digital material as means of encapsulating Leah and connecting to this newfound relationship. Referring to two Spotify playlists Leah made, Betty wrote:

"I listen to almost daily – I feel a connect with her…the one who was amazing and the best…wild, free but, my God, determined"

(Id., Diary entry 1: 9 months PB)

However, at interview two, ten months post-bereavement, Betty's faith in the digital material had shifted toward its capacity to authenticate her and Leah's relationship. This shift was tied to a changing relational context, in which Betty felt increasingly unsupported in her grief by friends and family, and a change of work and living situation, wherein Betty was around people who did now know Leah, nor how to support her grief.

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"That's [reading one-to-one WhatsApp conversations] *the only time I can get that bit of release. I suppose, just being on my own, living with someone up here who didn't know her"*

<div align="right">(Id., Interview 2: 10 months PB)</div>

In the initial months after Leah's death, Betty experienced a swell of support from her social network, and closeness to family brought about by shared loss. However, at her second interview, this support had dissipated, friends seemed unable to meet her emotionally and became awkward at the mention of Leah, and Betty felt an expectation to be 'over it'.

"it's hard to talk about it and a lot of our friends don't want to talk about it at all. It's one of those areas when it's 'oh shit, what do we say?' "

…

"I think a lot of people think I should be over it by now"

<div align="right">(Ibid.)</div>

Moreover, the earlier familial support had also changed. Leah's absence in the family had precipitated shifting dynamics, leading to difficult conversations with remaining sister Sarah. Referring to Betty's plan to move back to England shortly, Betty described this conversation with Sarah:

"She's like 'Yeah, when you go away, you'd better be back in 10 years or 15 years' I'm like 'why?' And she's 'because when Mum and Dad get sick and I've got to look after them, I'm going to resent you' "

<div align="right">(Ibid.)</div>

Feeling isolated, emotionally unmet by friends and embroiled in family politics where she feels accused rather than supported, Betty yearns for the genuine connection she felt with Leah. Betty now rereads one-to-one WhatsApp conversations to authenticate the short-lived, but keenly felt, relational depth with Leah, especially nourishing in this time of relational dearth.

> *it's just nice to see because we didn't have any nasty messages, they're either fun or supportive or full of love. It's kind of warming and comforting, especially being up there [new city] on my own…it feels like I'm looking at a sensible conversation and a deep conversation, not the airy-fairy shite that people talk about…I think I'm just comparing them…it's comforting to go back and know I did have a real friendship. I don't know if I've got that with anyone"*

<div align="right">(Ibid.)</div>

Betty's within-orientation shift—from digital material as encapsulating Leah's positive character, to a means of authentication the sisters' relationship—is born of changing family dynamics and a shifting relational context. Amid comparatively unfulfilling relationships, Betty seeks out connection to, and proof of, the relational nourishment she lacks, showing her that such relational profundity was real. Betty's orientational shift is therefore shaped by this shifting social and relational context.

7.1.5 Parents: Orientation rooted in previous grief and digital incapacity

This section illustrates how Leah's parents' orientation toward digital material relating to their late daughter, which ran through their three interviews, had the twin influences of previous grief experience and a lack of technical nous.

Across three joint interviews, neither father Gareth (58) nor mother Sally (57) accorded much significance to digital material relating to their late daughter, strongly oriented from the outset toward continuing stories rather than digital history. At their third interview, they had begun to use Leah's laptop, as their own machine had died. However, they had not explored the many files and folders on the machine; doing so could only confirm what they already knew as involved parents.

> *"You might get one or two more details of what you already knew, because like we had so many big long Skype sessions with Leah that you generally…knew everything that was going on…So I think in our knowing that we did a good job all the way through would mean that when you would look at some of those things in the future that you say OK it just confirms what you knew"*
>
> (Leah's father, Gareth, 58. Interview 3: 17 months PB)

Similarly, Gareth described deciding to delete a video filmed by Leah on the parents' iPad; he did not need this video to communicate the aspects of her character that it showed.

> *"I know…that's how she carried on to us. So quirky and fast and just spontaneous. But I'll always remember her like that…I really knew what she was like all the time, so just because I had a video it didn't emphasise it any more"*
>
> (Ibid.)

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This position on the material relating to their daughter is influenced by two factors. The first is this couple's previous experience of an analogous grief, the sudden, accidental death of Sally's sister approximately 20 years before, and a grief approach the couple established together in this experience.

This approach involves a belief that there is a pattern to life, which death, though painful, is part of. For Gareth and Sally, coping with such a shocking, unnatural death involves daily rituals that acknowledge the pain and absent person, yet filling one's day with purpose and living in the present.

> *"today is the only day that's important, you know, because you're in it and you're doing stuff and you don't think about what you missed too much or…about what you're going to miss in the future too much like…you just have to say OK and charge into it…there is a pattern to life. It's not of your choosing so you have to, whatever one is dealt to you, that's it"*

> (Ibid.)

They described this approach as something, you can 'log into' when needed. It is a comfort because it is unshaken by external information, no matter how upsetting, including digital material.

> *"no matter what comes up in front of me that I know I'll get emotional either way, but that the depth of it and the fear of it affecting me negatively is reduced…Because you do, a lot of your quiet time you're just, you almost create a story of what your beliefs would say to you. And that, and we've always said 'you can't change it', so you log into all of your, what your beliefs would say…Even though you definitely would never have chosen a path like this, that's what's dealt out"*

> (Ibid.)

Gareth and Sally therefore view engaging with digital material relating to Leah as running counter to a strategy that saw them through a similar grief before. In this approach, engaging with digital material entails an unhealthy looking back that clashes with a focus on the present, and concentrating on 'your day-to-day stuff' (Gareth, Interview 2: 14 months PB). This approach also disempowers the digital material, both by downplaying its potential impact (their belief system remains, regardless), and therefore its importance to them. Though they are grateful that others are using Leah-related digital material, neither they nor their daughters need it; it only reminds them of things they already know, and will not change their core beliefs nor 'what's dealt out',

> *"At…such an early stage it's that she's not forgotten. But ultimately that doesn't matter because we won't and her sisters won't* [forget]*. So I think every time you see a picture or even a new picture it doesn't matter...I'm just grateful that she's remembered like that but we don't need that"*

> (Leah's mother, Sally, 57. Interview 2: 14 months PB)

The second factor shaping these parents' orientation is that they are "not very tech savvy" (Sally, Interview 3: 17 months PB). At interview one, I asked Sally whether she often viewed a video of Leah she had just shown me (with my help):

> *"No, maybe to show somebody else. Yeah, I'd never look at it on my own or…I wouldn't know how to get it up on the phone"*

> (Id. Interview 1: 1 year PB)

Sally's uncertainty about 'how to get it up on the phone' indicates an important technical context at play in these parents' orientation, dictated by their inability to

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access material at will or without assistance. As I noted following interview one, this material's accessibility is dependent on others and its comings and goings are somewhat mysterious to Gareth and Sally:

> *"…*[Gareth's] *daughters will show him stuff but it comes and goes and…he doesn't have the same ability to get it without them…it's just kind of there one second and gone the next, and he doesn't quite know how to get it back or why it went. It's precious but mysterious"*
>
> (Leah's parents, Researcher voice note, 19.9.17. Interview 1: 1 year PB)

Thus, these parents' orientation toward digital material associated with their late daughter is webbed into a previously established, analogue grief approach, in which engaging with digital records runs counter to how they know to get through a grief like this: focusing on the present and logging into beliefs unaffected by new information. This is bound into a technical context where accessing digital material relating to their late daughter is confusing, mysterious and unreliable, and requires others' help. These twin influences of grief approach and technical context are at play in these parents' orientation toward ongoing stories rather than digital history in respect of their digital material relating to Leah.

7.1.6 Micro-system one: Summary

This first deep dive section demonstrated the influence over time of relational, contextual and technical factors on orientations toward digital material of members of this family micro-system. Relational factors illustrated were in relation to others within this micro-system.

7.2 Micro-system two: Home friends

7.2.1 Participants and context

Micro-system two comprises friends from Leah's home town: Fiona (24), Susie (23), Laura (29) and Peter (34). All four initially met Leah and each other through athletics. Fiona and Susie both had tier-one friendships with Leah spanning approximately 15 years, and were both part of a friend group of five women of similar age. Laura is Susie's older sister and a tier-two Leah friend, having casually known Leah through Susie and become friends five years before Leah died. Peter was ten years older than Leah and a tier-three athletics friend for approximately 15 years.

During fieldwork, Fiona lived abroad and away from Leah's family and other bereaved, while sisters Susie and Laura lived close by and spent time with Leah's family. Peter also lived in the locality.

7.2.2 Section approach

Section two of this case deep dive tracks the longitudinal experiences of one member of this second micro-system, Fiona. Using this tier-one friend as the system nexus, I show Fiona's orientation to Leah-related digital material interplaying with members of both her own micro-system and the family micro-system. Data from two interviews, four months apart, show Fiona's orientation shaped by (i) Leah's parents' grief, (ii) countering Laura and Susie, and (iii) grieving Leah as Leah would want.

Though drawn apart for articulation here, these influences interwove in Fiona's orientation. To accord with this, once outlined, influences are then shown interweaving in subsequent influences.

7.2.3   Fiona: Orienting to Leah's parents

Across both interviews, Leah's tier-one friend, Fiona, was largely uninterested in the digital material of significant volume, variety and duration relating to Leah and their approximately fifteen-year friendship. From the outset, Fiona's prominent orientation, 'Ongoing story over digital history', placed trust in her own memory and account of Leah, and valued talking, rather than digital material, about her.

> *"there's nothing I can physically hold on to that would change Leah and I's relationship. I don't remember her in any different way. I don't depend on photos or videos to remember who she was…"*

<div align="right">(Tier-one friend, Fiona, 24. Interview 1: 10 months PB)</div>

However, this orientation was not standalone. In both interviews, Fiona frequently cited Leah's parents' grief for Leah as guiding her own, and shaping her valuation of the role of digital material therein. In her first interview, Fiona noted that Leah's parents are active and outward in their focus since Leah's death; not at home ruminating on the past. Fiona sees a disconnect between Leah's parents' grief style and the idea of sitting and poring through related digital material; she cannot imagine them doing this. Viewing them as principally affected by Leah's death, and among the few whose grief dwarfs her own, Fiona takes her cues—about the primacy of conversation rather than backward-looking digital material to keep Leah alive—from Gareth and Sally.

> *"I don't think digital media is the way of keeping her alive. It's the conversations. Maybe pictures or whatever can prompt conversations, but I can't imagine them* [Gareth and Sally] *sitting round and watching a video or looking at photos together"*
> *…*

"I think if you're living like that you're living in the past…and I think Sally and Gareth are living proof of that from how much they've tried to do. They're not at home all the time. They're busier than ever trying to do so much. So yeah you take your cues from them"

(Ibid)

In interview two, Fiona still orients to Leah's parents' grief, but in a different manner. Fiona described a decline in Leah-related on- and offline activity in the four months between interviews; the funeral, memorials and other ceremonies concluded and the initial swell of online remembrance and support (on Leah's Facebook page and dedicated memorial site) had dissipated. Though Fiona imagined that many friends were using Leah-related digital material in private grief practices, she worried about the impact on Gareth and Sally of this activity decrease. Imagining, based on their age, lifestyle and digital engagement with her, that they are not technologically savvy and in a rural, religious local community where Fiona predicts people view digital technologies with caution, Fiona imagines them having no concept of the volume of material at Leah's friends' disposal, nor any frame of reference for their grief role. Unable to imagine these alternate grief ways, Fiona fears Gareth and Sally might assume Leah's friends have 'moved on'.

"I don't want her family to think we've just all moved on…It's not like they're really active on social media Gareth and Sally all the time and they have no idea people have these digital bits and pieces of her and are looking at them rather than actually…talking about her"

(Id. Interview 2: 14 months PB)

Fiona orients away from privately engaging with Leah-related material, and toward in-person conversations about her. This ensures her grief for Leah is in the parents' grief language (talking), and is visible to them, particularly when others' digitally-focused grief is not. Fiona demotes the digital material in favour of a practice that communicates her continued care for Leah to her parents.

Fiona also described her posthumous account of Leah as rooted in Gareth and Sally's account of their late daughter. In Fiona's view, Leah's parents strove to conserve an authentic, multi-dimensional account of their daughter, rather than focusing on her accolades.

> *"they'd be thanking people and they'd say like 'for loving our crazy daughter'…because they think it went without saying that she had accomplished so much in every aspect of her life…But what they loved so much about her was…how unique she was and she was more than just this person who was an athlete. That there was something so different and bright and wild about her"*

<div align="right">(Id. Interview 1: 10 months PB)</div>

The parents resisted partisan accounts of Leah, chiming with Fiona's own resistance to glorifying Leah or their relationship; some of their most memorable moments were too 'awful' to record digitally. Mirroring Gareth and Sally, Fiona undermines the ability of digital material to faithfully represent Leah, instead viewing personal and communal accounts and memories as more balanced.

"There are no photos of the times I remember the most, the times I wanted to strangle her…No one was taking photos because it was so awful…Only the good times were captured on photos and the relationship like we had, there were just as many times that weren't great"

(Ibid.)

7.2.4 Fiona: Orientation as resistance to Laura and Susie

Fiona's orientation was also a counter to two members of this micro-system, sisters Laura and Susie, and their use of Leah-related digital material in their grief.

In interview one, Fiona described not needing digital records as she grieved her close friend; memories and continuing conversation were better. Fiona drew a contrast between her non-reliance on digital material, and problematic, unhealthy reliance ascribed to nobody in particular:

> *"I do not think you should stop talking about her by any means and I think that's the best way to kind of like keep talking [about her]…you can't obsess over her and she can't become part of everything"*

> (Tier-one friend, Fiona, 24. Interview 1: 10 months PB)

However, in interview two, Fiona connected this dependence to micro-system members and sisters, Susie (tier one) and Laura (tier two) Robinson. These sisters' (perceived) reliance on material does not tally with how Fiona feels one should grieve a close friend. The Robinsons' practice of posthumously screenshotting messaging conversations with Leah is described as unhealthy 'going back and cling(ing) to certain things she said'. By comparison, Fiona has 'never felt the need', intimating that the sisters' focus on specifics is inferior to her own practice of 'remembering her, the memories with her or physically'.

> *"some of the other girls…the Robinsons like they took* [screenshots of messaging conversations with Leah] *quotes and stuff Leah had said but I've never felt the need…"*

> (Id. Interview 2: 14 months PB)

Fiona associates her own use of messaging correspondence (to hear Leah's voice in her head rather than revisit specific utterances) with the strength of her and Leah's bond. By extension, she implies that the Robinsons' 'need' to 'cling to' these messaging specifics indicates their looser tie to Leah. Fiona would find such specifics 'boring almost' because, unlike the Robinsons, she does not need digital reminders.

> *"it means more to hear her saying it in my mind…not like the message itself, the content but the way she'd say it or like her…the tone or inflection...not what she had to say to me because I don't need to read something to be reminded of what I had with Leah…it would probably be boring almost"*

<div align="right">(Ibid.)</div>

Thus, tier-one friend Fiona's orientation toward Leah-related material is in relationship with the perceived practices and grief role of similar material for micro-systems members of the same or similar friendship tier.

Furthermore, at interview one, Fiona stated that, though she and Leah were extremely close, Leah had many close friendships and that this was a quality appreciated by Fiona and Leah's parents.

> *"…splitting her* [ashes] *up and giving everyone the chance to say goodbye, to celebrate her life, because they* [parents] *knew she had so many really good friends and that was such a thing they knew was such a big part of her"*
>
> …

In light of the inclusivity of Leah's in-life relationships, others' use of digital material as evidence of relational exclusivity felt inappropriate. The Robinsons' use of digital specifics in a competitive, exclusive discourse was further basis for Fiona's resistance to it.

> *"Some of the discomfort and awkwardness with Susie comes up because there is such a dependence on physical* [digital] *evidence of their time together. We're* [friend group] *a little bit uncomfortable sometimes…we…feel their* [the Robinsons'] *posts or discussions are about this special, one-on-one time they had* [with Leah]*…it's not a competition"*

(Ibid.)

Fiona, and other tier-one friends lived abroad and were unable to attend Leah's funeral, leaving the Robinson's Leah's chief friends at the funeral. Therefore the (perceived) competitiveness of the Robinson's digital material use agitated an existing feeling of exclusion and disenfranchisement for Fiona and her friends based on proximity to the death.

Moreover, in Fiona's view, 'obsessing' about digital material leads to 'scripted' posthumous accounts inflexible to arising memories, which underrepresent the unremarkable, day-to-day realities of people and relationships that are not recorded. To Fiona, the Robinson's overreliance on digital material can corrupt personal memory and 'make this more scripted person'.

"I listened to an old playlist the other day and there were different songs, I was like 'Oh my God, I remember Leah saying this one line from the song and it was so funny…it wasn't something I'm remembering, that big, special time we took these photos or won this big race, it was of her being obsessed with Beyoncé at the time. I completely forgot about it. It was just she kept repeating one line, and obsessing about the digital material I had would almost damage my memory of her more, because they do start to make this more scripted person"

(Ibid.)

Tier-one friend Fiona's orientation toward Leah-related digital material is informed by resistance to the perceived orientations of two micro-system members of the same or similar friend tier. This resistance is itself relational; connected to her relationships with other bereaved (in this and the family micro-system). Fiona's orientation fortifies her posthumous account of her and her other tier one friends' in-life relationships with Leah from competing discourses, and protects a characteristic of Leah's (inclusivity) held dear by Fiona and by Leah's parents (perceived). This resistance is also born of Fiona's geographical circumstances and group dynamics stoking Fiona's resistance to Laura and Susie.

7.2.5 Fiona: The 'right' way to grieve Leah

Fiona's orientation to the digital material relating to her late friend was also set into a strong sense of the 'right' way to grieve her friend, comprising three strands: (i) previous grief (ii) local grief script (iii) imagined voice character and wants of the dead.

Previous loss of a close family member pervaded Fiona's grief for Leah, and her assessment of the role of digital material therein. In both interviews, Fiona spoke about how, as a child, she learned from adults in her family to grieve by talking about the dead.

> *"we had…had something similar I suppose with…with my cousin who was like my sister in the past…so maybe because of that I'm used to…maybe because I was so shaken because I was only nearly nine and everyone shaped how to do that* [grieve] *and we would always talk about her as if she was still here but not in a creepy way and like maybe that was my approach"*

> (Tier-one friend, Fiona, 24. Interview 1: 10 months PB)

> *"that's how I've always mourned people, by talking about them"*

> (Id. Interview 2: 14 months PB)

In this received grief approach, talking about the dead with other survivors is healthier than obsessing about, clinging onto, and scrolling through digital traces of lives lost and relationships past.

"it's wrong to say it was the right way [to grieve] but in my mind it was healthier and I think you can obsess and obsess and…that's maybe why I'm so hesitant with Facebook and all and of trying to cling to when she's not there rather than being with the people that are here that knew her and talk to you, like why would you do that?"

(Ibid.)

Being years into this grief brings a consideration of the future of her grief for Leah. Fiona's perspective on digital material relating to Leah is set into an imagined future and future relationships. 'Talking about them' has been effective in continuing the memory of her long-dead cousin and Fiona's appraisal of the digital material is framed by this.

The second component in Fiona's sense of the 'right' way to grieve Leah was her reference to a local grief script; handed-down knowledge in their athletics club about grieving the similar death of another member. Fiona described her and her contemporaries knowing about a young member of their athletics club, Albert, who died two decades before. The story of his life and death was received knowledge in this community; members were deliberate about speaking about Albert, named a trophy after him, displayed photographs of him at the club and drew him to new members' attention.

"everyone knows his face and knew the story…you couldn't not know all about it they make sure it's known and they named a trophy after him so there's no way…they made sure he…has a presence still"

(Ibid.)

Moreover, as Albert's death occurred in the 1990's, this continuation of his memory and presence was achieved without recourse to digital material. Fiona's experience of how this community has continued the memory and presence of another young club member—who died in a time before digital traces—provides a tried-and-tested script for grieving an analogous death in this same context, wherein talking about the dead is key and digital material is not.

> "[friend, non-participant] *was saying like what if we forget her or start repeating stories and you might need her Facebook to remind you but we all know about…stories of Albert and then there was nothing like that people didn't need it then to be reminded*"

> (Ibid.)

The handing down of this community's pre-digital grief script was also described by Peter (34), the fourth member of this micro-system, as he estimated the importance of Leah-related digital material for him. I show Peter's description here to illustrate the pervasiveness of this script in this social context, as Peter described his own experience of older community members connecting Albert's death to Leah's, and his own consequent framing of her death in this way for younger club members, i.e. Fiona, Susie and Leah's other contemporaries, who are ten years Peter's junior.

> "*a fella passed away in the '90s…and the older lads said 'Leah is your Albert'. I know those lads have great memories of Albert and they all speak about him. They had no social media. Some people will fear that if the social media side is gone, they would forget the person and knowing what those guys went through and seeing, I know you wouldn't I think it's a fear of the unknown for people, that if it wasn't there, they think they wouldn't remember it but I said to* [Leah's contemporaries] *there's no fear…they won't*"

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The final strand in Fiona's sense of the 'right' way to grieve Leah, shaping her orientation to related digital material, is Leah's imagined voice and opinion about her survivors' use of such material, and its fit to her in-life character.

In her first interview, Fiona made frequent reference to how Leah would want people to grieve with respect to her digital traces. Interestingly, Leah's imagined opinion also draws on the local grief script described above.

> *"Leah would not want any of us sitting down at a computer crying and looking at old messages…she would think we name trophies in memory and we went through all these things before and that's the way to remember"*

<div align="right">(Ibid.)</div>

Fiona also cited a mismatch between the fun individual Leah was and the 'kind of person' involved in backward-looking, melancholic revisiting of digital traces. This is not what Leah was like, not what she would want for her survivors, nor what she would do.

> *"I would…like actually make…a distinct decision to not be that kind of person…if you're living like that you're living in the past and she* [Leah] *wouldn't do it and that's not a fun way to live and for someone that's a fun person it's not the life she would wish on any of us"*

<div align="right">(Ibid.)</div>

Four months later, at interview two, Leah's imagined opinion, voice and commentary still influence Fiona's position on the digital material relating to her friend, though the passing of time and changing context has shifted its articulation. In the intervening

months, Leah's Facebook page turned into a 'mourning page'; there is little of Leah left, only a romanticised version of her that Fiona feels Leah would not like.

> *"her personality is no longer on that page. It's now turned into a mourning page and if Leah Allen could see that that's not her. And now we're starting to like glorify her…make her some kind of angel which she also would not like that"*

Leah's imagined opinion is in dialogue with Fiona's position on the Facebook page and she orients away from it, even though it includes historical material and interactions previously treasured. In this second interview, Fiona also channels Leah, supporting her position that sharing digital material with others to catalyse conversation is healthy, whereas to pore over material about her alone is to 'obsess'.

> *"the way to remember someone through a series of photos, a way to laugh with people and look how ridiculous her photos were, but not to have a folder* [of Leah-related material] *to sit and look at. I am just imagining Leah making fun of me for doing that, making some comment like 'Are you stalking me? Why are you so obsessed with me?' She would definitely make fun of me"*

7.2.6 Micro-system two: Summary

The second section of this case deep dive focused on micro-system two, comprising four home friends, tier-one (n=2), tier-two (n=1), and tier-three (n=1). Using one tier-one friend as the nexus, this section showed her orientation to digital material forming in dialogue with others' posthumous accounts; deferring to Leah's parents' accounts and resisting those of friends of similar relationship tier. Her orientation was also in dialogue with imagined others (the dead, future children, her future self) and influenced by shifting social and geographical contexts. Local grief conventions are also influential, including previous participant grief, Leah's parents' grief style, and a community grief norm from an analogous death (coming from the participant, other micro-system members, and Leah's imagined voice).

7.3 Micro-system three: Undergraduate friends

7.3.1 Participants and context

Micro-system three consists of Leah's friends from her undergraduate degree, which she undertook in the U.S. This system comprises seven females, one tier-one friend, Dee (24), two tier-two friends, Ellie (24) and Helen (23), two tier-three friends, Matilda (24) and Jude (25), and two tier-four friends, Becca (23) and Kate (23). All seven women met Leah during undergraduate degrees, via classes, accommodation and athletics.

All seven micro-system members knew each other, with friend clusters within the system. Upon completing her degree, Leah left the U.S. for Europe, and only Dee and Ellie saw her in person again before she died a year later. During fieldwork, these seven women were separated across the U.S. and Europe. Many spent time together regularly, and were in digital communication of varying degrees with each other, with Leah's family (micro-system one) and home friends (micro-system two).

7.3.2 Section approach

This seven-member micro-system is separated into three sections. The first shows data from tier-one friend Dee, the second groups together four latter-tier friends (tiers three and four), and the third groups together the two tier-two friends.

7.3.3 Dee: Orientation drawing on sister Betty's faith in digital material

Tier-one friend, Dee (24), described Leah as her closest university friend. The great majority of time was spent together, studying, training and building a deep, intense friendship over four years. Members of this micro-system referred to Dee and Leah using a portmanteau of their names.

Dee described a deluge of digital traces of her friend and their relationship across many sites, platforms and devices. With so much material available, Dee struggled with the question of what material best represented her friend and their friendship.

> *"That's the thing of our generation, like 'what is the good representation of what we had'?"*

> (Tier-one friend, Dee, 24. Interview 1: 15 months PB)

Dee liberally cited Leah's sister, Betty (micro-system one), and Betty's orientation toward digital material in her posthumous account of Leah. Dee cited Betty's apparent assertion that many of Leah's bereaved did not really know her, and that a falsely positive account of Leah proliferating amongst them misrepresented her. For Betty, this misrepresentation was shored up by overwhelmingly positive digital remnants of Leah's life and relationships.

> *"I was talking to Betty as well about this because obviously she probably knew Leah more than anyone. It's just there's a point at which she realised…like 'they didn't even know her'. She didn't mean it in the fact she didn't want people to give all this love, but…like in order to remember a person properly…in order to honour their memory, you have to honour both the good and the bad just because that speaks all the more to who they were…I think you don't get the whole picture, like on Facebook"*

Echoing Betty, Dee describes revisiting Leah-related digital material to offset a focus on her highlights and remember her friend in this more rounded way.

> *"I think it's incredibly important that people's lives are remembered not just as a highlight reel, but a complete movie, a complete package of how they interacted with challenges and with friends and family throughout that"*

Dee described revisiting material she finds upsetting as a means of offsetting overrepresentation of the positive, funny and easy-to-remember aspects of their relationship; to reinstate the 'real', multi-dimensional Leah that Betty invoked. Referring to a voice message Leah left on Dee's phone in which Leah is upset, Dee said:

> *"oh my gosh, hearing her crying on the phone, I was like 'this is terrible, I can't believe this is still in my phone'. That's one of the digital materials, I would say, that made me feel bad"*

Despite being painful to hear, Dee would listen back to it because it embodies an important wholeness and realness.

> *"I would listen to that again…you don't want to isolate those moments, obviously. It was a whole thing, you know, a whole person and as happy and amazing as she always is, that's the part that sticks with me"*

The message evokes a 'whole thing', and 'whole person', and 'that reality' of a relationship in its full breadth, which for Dee—drawing on Betty—must be conserved. Dee's orientation to the digital material as a means of more wholly evoking Leah and their relationship is also shaped by her feeling that transparency and authenticity are core values for Leah's family, the Allens, and something Dee learned from Leah.

> *"There's something positive in her having called me and being willing to be that vulnerable. That's something I was never before I met her, quite honestly. I didn't grow up in a family that ever was vulnerable and you don't really like talk it out and cry. The Allens are the complete opposite in terms of transparency…letting someone see the good and the bad and the sad and the happy. That's what she showed me. It's the whole. I keep doing this* [circle gesture]*"*

<div align="right">(Ibid.)</div>

For Dee, this voice message showcased Leah's capacity for vulnerability and sharing the totality of her experience, good and bad. Similarly, though this is a painful message, it represents important dimensions of Leah's character and their relationship, the acknowledgement of which chimes with Leah's in-life honesty and transparency.

Dee's orientation toward digital material relating to her friend—placing faith in the digital material to evoke the 'real' Leah—is in relationship with the orientation of Leah's sister Betty in particular, and Leah and the Allen family broadly.

7.3.4 Friend tiers three and four: Authenticating relationships with respect to tier-one friend, Dee

In contrast to the abundant Leah-related material Dee used to represent Leah and their friendship, material was limited for tier-three friends Matilda (24), Jude (25), and tier-four friends Becca (23) and Kate (23). These micro-system members' orientations toward material was coloured by comparison with material they imagined Dee had and her use of it, with Dee and Leah's relationship and Dee's grief.

Tier-one friend Dee and these four lower-tier friends had the same orientation toward Leah-related digital material, but their drivers were different. In a micro-system where Dee's grief for Leah was seen as eclipsing others', these women's faith in the digital material was to establish their own relationships with Leah as distinct from Dee's, and to validate their grief in the face of Dee's perceived greater loss.

Tier-three friends, Matilda and Jude knew Leah through athletics. Neither saw Leah in person since she left the U.S. a year before her death, their digital communication with her in that time spare and infrequent. This context caused Matilda to question the friendship after Leah died, and revisiting interactions on Leah's still-active Twitter page served to authenticate their relationship.

> *"I think the fact that I can see she was making me laugh then and that that was how we were...I didn't make that part up"*
>
> (Tier-three friend, Matilda, 24. Interview 1: 11 months PB)

This authentication was also related to tier-one friend, Dee, and Matilda's sense that Dee did not have a Twitter history with Leah, nor was aware of this aspect of Leah's

digital life and leavings. That such a close friend—who likely had much more Leah-related digital material than Matilda—might not be privy to this material adds to its authenticating capacity. This authentication is therefore not just about what the material confirms about Leah and Matilda's relationship, it is also authentication-in-relation; i.e. yet more authenticating because it is unknown to those perceived as closest and principally affected.

> *"people were on Instagram, people were on Facebook going through her stuff. A lot of people probably even Dee and* [other tier-one friend, non-participant] *who have so much weren't going on her Twitter. It's fun to just to share that, to be able to share that with people so they can see the things that she said and our stuff together on there…that was our place with nobody else…because they don't have Twitter"*

> (Ibid.)

Other tier-three friend, Jude, expressed guilt at not having contacted Leah frequently in the year before her death. In interview one, she said:

> *"that was something I had been feeling very guilty about after Leah passed away, is that I didn't try hard enough to communicate with her, stay in touch and that maybe she didn't know that she was really important to me* [cries]*"*

> (Tier-three friend, Jude (25). Interview 1: 11 months PB)

Revisiting Facebook Messenger conversations and University photographs assuaged this guilt, affirming the quality of their relationship, and that Jude had communicated love to Leah.

"…for proof for me that we were good friends. I was important in her life and she was important to my life so…That was very important…in my grieving process, because I didn't feel as guilty, I felt like she knew. She went knowing that she was very loved"

<div align="right">(Ibid.)</div>

In interview two, Jude described digital, 'solid pieces' of her and Leah's relationship as encapsulating uniqueness in their relationship distinct from Leah's other friendships, particularly Susie (tier one, microsystem two) and Dee (tier one, this micro-system). Again here, affirmation of the relationship using digital material is gauged against, and in dialogue with, the in-life relationships of friends viewed as most affected from within and without the micro-system.

"capturing like who Leah was to me and affirm it. I guess 'my' Leah or the Leah that I knew versus…cos she had so different meanings to different people. Like there were people closer like definitely Susie and Dee and so these [digital] *things, solid pieces that help me feel confident in our relationship"*

<div align="right">(Id. Interview 2: 15 months PB)</div>

Dee's influence also loomed large in the experiences of tier-four friends, Becca (23) and Kate (23), who knew Leah through athletics groups but had limited one-to-one contact with her. Both Becca and Kate described the capacity of digital material to verify their relationship with Leah, defined and located with respect to Dee's (and others') perceived greater bond with and grief for Leah.

Becca described her and Leah as 'friends but not super close', her interview revolving around a candid image of them hugging and chatting.

*"There isn't anyone else in the photo…she has one arm around me…
looking at me, you can tell we're talking… It was great, just because
it wasn't a posed photo…was extra special, us just interacting, doing
our thing"*

(Becca, 23, Interview 1: 15 months PB)

This image was 'extra special' for Becca because it showed the two friends, in an unstaged, everyday moment. In a social context where Becca's right to grieve Leah felt threatened by the perceived greater griefs of others, this photo of Becca and Leah—mundane, unposed and just them—helped set their relationship apart from these others. It validated that, though Leah 'wasn't her best friend', Becca had the right to grieve.

*"I keep going back to Dee and Leah, but everyone knew they were
great friends and…I would call her a friend, more than a team mate,
but it was like I felt such a deep loss, I was like 'I was friends with her,
I'm allowed to feel that loss, we spent a lot of time together', but at the
same time, I wasn't Dee, I wasn't her best friend, so I think having that
picture…it was like 'yes, this was a friend, her loss is affecting me', so
maybe a little bit to validate our relationship"*

(Ibid.)

Kate, the second tier-four friend in this micro-system cited similar characteristics of digital material in validating her and Leah's friendship. Because Leah 'wasn't necessarily in my first [friend] circle', Kate also cited the importance of digital images in proffering 'solo memories' of her and Leah. These verified their relationship and set it apart from Leah's many others, Dee chief amongst them.

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> *"having these reminders, like 'yes, we were actually good friends'.*
> *Maybe not as close as like Dee or Helen* [tier two, this micro-system,
> next section] *but we had our own memories"*

This second sub-section showed how the orientation toward digital material of this micro-system's tier-three and -four friends was shot through with comparison against tier-one friend Dee and her (perceived) in-life relationship with Leah, her grief, digital material at her disposal and its grief role. These women's faith in digital material was relational; bound to its capacity to authenticate friendships and losses relative to, and set apart from, Dee's.

7.3.5   Ellie & Helen: Orientation forming in digital and social contexts

This last sub-section groups together tier-two friends Ellie and Helen to illustrate these women's overarching orientation toward Leah-related material, 'Ongoing story over digital history', forming in converging digital and social contexts.

Friends Ellie (24) Helen (23) were Leah's close friends at university; Ellie and Leah cohabited, and Helen and Leah were athletics club members. Both friendships transcended these origins and, during university, these women were in near-constant in-person or digital contact with Leah. However, after university Leah left the U.S., Ellie and Helen remained. Both began long-distance friendships with Leah the year before her death. As with many friends, Ellie and Helen described Leah's communication while away as inconsistent.

> *"when we were long distance, I've mentioned that Leah was horrible at keeping in touch, and all kinds of communication…she's the kind of person you don't hear from for two weeks and then you have a chat over WhatsApp for two hours back and forth, very long…then you don't hear from her for another two weeks again…that kind of a punctuated relationship when it was over distance…she was absent for maybe a month at a time"*

(Tier-two friend, Ellie, 24. Interview 2: 11 months PB)

After attending Leah's funeral in Scotland, Ellie and Helen returned to the U.S., living apart from each other and anyone else grieving Leah. Both women described this as surreal. With nobody around to affirm Leah's death, and given Leah's frequent digitally absence while alive, it was as though they had resumed long-distance, 'punctuated' relationships.

> *"at the times that we were sort of apart, there wasn't a huge component of relying on digital presence or messages, or things like that…before, it was like...whatever, we'll catch up when we catch up…I think because I was that way in sort of our relationship when she was alive, now that she's passed there's definitely...I've now been able to sort of believe that, 'Oh, I'll just see her in a little bit'"*

<div align="right">(Id., Interview 1: 8 months PB)</div>

Additionally, since recently graduating, these women and their friends had moved to new places, thus the majority of Ella and Helen's relationships at this time were long distance and principally on-screen. This further suspended the reality of Leah's death; though the reason for Leah's absence was different, she was one of many long-term physically absent people.

> *"now that all of my relationships are long distance, it feels much more normal to have, like…all of my interactions with a person be on a screen. And so, in some ways, it is like, you know, my conception of her* [Leah] *now can sometimes be lent to maybe that suspension of reality"*

<div align="right">(Tier-two friend, Helen, 23. Interview 2: 15 months PB)</div>

At first, Ellie and Helen found comfort in this suggestion of Leah's continued existence on another continent. On emails from Leah received just before her death that Helen had not filed away as she normally would, Helen said:

"it probably keeps it easier for me to go back to the time before…going to Scotland definitely made it feel really 'she's passed'…but coming back here, it's easy to exist in the same way that we were before. In the year after I graduated, like a long-distance friendship. I think I probably leave it there [emails unfiled in inbox] *because it's…it feels…'Cool, we just communicated' "*

<div align="right">(Id., Interview 1: 10 months PB)</div>

However, over time, this blurring became painful, as the digital suggestion of Leah's continued existence, and communication with her, clashed increasingly with reality.

"Pictures and even the video are more static now it's just taunting you like with texting you could just message her, there's a flashing cursor in the box…below her name like always but it's just…you know it doesn't go anywhere it's not something...that helps anymore"

<div align="right">(Ellie, 24. Interview 2: 11 months PB)</div>

In light of this, across interviews these women gravitated away from remnants of their digital relationships with Leah. Though both took steps to ensure material's continued accessibility.

7.3.6 Micro-system three: Summary

This deep dive section focused on the case's third micro-system, and seven undergraduate friends across four friendship tiers: tier one (n=1), tier two (n=2), tier three (n=2), tier four (n=2). It first demonstrated a tier-one friend's orientation as forming in dialogue with that of Leah's sister, Betty (micro-system one). It then demonstrated four latter-tier friends employing digital material to carve out their link to, and grief for, Leah, as distinct from this same tier-one friend. Lastly, grouping two tier-two friends together shed light on digital and social conditions intersecting to form shifting orientations toward Leah-related digital material.

7.4 Micro-system four: Postgraduate friends

7.4.1 Participants and context

The final micro-system in this case deep dive consists of three friends Leah made when she moved to the U.K. for her postgraduate degree, in the last year of her life: tier-one friend, Vera (25), tier-two friend, Chris (24) and tier-three friend, Phoebe (23). At the time of Leah's death, she was in almost daily in-person and digital contact with these three friends, living with Chris and minutes away from Phoebe, and spending much time with Vera as they were paired together in athletics training and competition. As well as cohabitation and sports, Leah dined, socialised, travelled, and hung out with these friends during this final year of her life. Though these three micro-system members knew each other, they were not close and had minimal communication after Leah's death.

7.4.2 Section approach

This final micro-system is divided in three sub-sections, each focused on a micro-system member. In each, serial and cross-sectional respondent data illustrate how micro-system member orientations toward Leah-related digital material are born of digital and social factors.

7.4.3   Vera: Orientation born of social isolation

Leah's death created a unique situation for tier-one friend Vera (25), shaping her orientation toward digital material relating to her late friend. Though the friends had only known each other for a year when Leah died, in that time they forged a deep connection transcending even the 'accelerated friendship' of being athletics teammates (Tier-one friend, Vera, 25. Interview 1: 9 months PB).

> *"how our friendship started was through running, but it was like…we were friends despite this, outside of this…we really were an integral part of each other's lives that year"*
>
> (Id, Interview 2: 13 months PB)

However, this short-lived, mostly one-to-one relationship meant Vera had not yet introduced Leah to most of her friends or family. Moreover, a few months before Leah died, Vera quit athletics and was not regularly contacting anyone from athletics acquainted with Leah or their friendship.

> *"another reason I like find it odd is that like there are very few of my friends from like outside running ever actually met Leah…like the friend I am now living with, she'd never met her…I do find it difficult when people don't know her or like my dad met her but my mum never did…my sister never did. And so it's like they don't get it. And my mum was like 'Oh, was she a close friend?' And I was like 'Yeah!'"*
>
> (Id., Interview 1: 9 months PB)

In the wake of Leah's death, Vera found herself without others who shared her loss or understood its gravity. Over three interviews, Vera described an orientation toward

Leah-related digital material born of this isolated grief context: faith in material to jog memory about, and authenticate their brief but intense relationship.

In interview one, Vera described a panicked scraping and saving of digital material relating to Leah in the hours after her death, driven by fear of forgetting relationship specifics.

> *"I had this panic of 'what if I start forgetting?'…and 'what if I can't remember what we used to do?' and 'I can't remember all of like this stuff'. And so I like went through my phone and like saved…WhatsApp conversations…and like made sure I had like the photos of us together"*

<div align="right">(Ibid.)</div>

Fear of forgetting was particularly acute given Vera's social context; without others to help remember, Vera felt like the sole custodian of the memory of their relationship, its quality and meaning. This amplified Vera's faith in the digital material as external containers of this memory, unaffected by forgetting, thereby sharing the burden of remembering and reducing fear that details of this significant relationship might otherwise be lost.

Vera's custodianship of this friendship's memory was exacerbated by a sense that Leah's many other, longer-standing friends might not recognise it. Post-death activity on Leah's Facebook page exposed Vera to Leah's extensive friendship base; 'all these different friends from other worlds' (Ibid.), fuelling a feeling that these other friends might not even know Vera, nor rate their friendship as highly as she. Vera imagined she might not even figure on the study social network maps of Leah's other

friends. Others' imagined assessment of their friendship makes her question her own.

> *"I feel like we were incredibly close, but I don't know that many people do and then sometimes that makes me think 'maybe we weren't that close'"*

<div align="right">(Ibid.)</div>

This perceived lack of recognition of their friendship fed Vera's feeling that it fell to her to remember and verify it. This intensified her faith in digital material as proof of this friendship, when others, and even she, might doubt it.

In interview two, four months later, Vera had developed a regular, solitary ritual with digital and physical material relating to the friendship. These 'sad sessions' (Interview 2: 13 months PB) involved Vera going through a digital folder of sifted-out material, consisting of images, videos and particular messages from downloaded one-to-one WhatsApp correspondence.

Occurring approximately every few weeks at this point, these sessions had the dual purposes of jogging Vera's memory in the absence of others, and triggering outpourings of emotion.

"properly reading and remembering and delving into it is…normally more of a planned thing…This is going to sound very weird, but it's almost like, 'No sorry, I'm busy this evening'… I'm going to sit in my room, I'm going to read through messages and I'm going to…give myself the time and private space to just cry and read and have an outpouring of emotion that I generally don't do…I'm going to open the floodgates. I need to have the time to do that…it can prompt a memory of something that…I'd thought I'd forgotten or wouldn't have remembered unprompted"

(Id., Interview 2: 13 months PB)

Vera compares this ritual with sharing memories about Leah with Dee (tier-one friend, micro-system 3), whom she met for the first time at the funeral and since met with again twice. Vera and Dee had tier-one friendships with Leah in common. Vera found sharing memories of Leah with Dee nourishing, causing her to bemoan her lack of Leah-related relationships and seek a way to regularly remember Leah alone via these 'sad sessions'.

The driver for Vera's faith in digital material to jog memory and authenticate the relationship changed with shifting social contexts. First it was rooted in Vera's sole responsibility to remember and affirm this brief, contested friendship. Later it was driven by a wish to regularly remember Leah and grieve in the absence of other survivors and a dissipating inclination to share her grief with death-unacquainted others. Vera's orientation toward Leah-related digital material is inseparable from these changing social conditions.

7.4.4 Phoebe: Orientation born of material loss and comparing with another survivor

Tier-three friend, Phoebe's (23) interview was marked by regret at the accidental loss of the majority of the digital remnants of her and Leah's one-year relationship. Phoebe's mobile phone broke around the time of Leah's death, resulting in loss of the friends' SMS correspondence, videos and images, including tens of particularly precious Face Swap images of the friends.

> *"I did have some videos and pictures and stuff, but my phone died around that time so I lost all of my stuff and I hadn't backed it up…I wish I had been better at doing that"*
>
> (Tier-three friend, Phoebe, 23. Interview 1: 14 months PB)

The loss of this material and Phoebe's regret about not backing it up was exacerbated by the volume of meticulously archived Leah-related digital material available to another Leah friend (non-participant).

> *"she's* [other friend] *very good at documenting everything she's got, her folder is all her videos and photos and everything* [Leah-related]*. I haven't been very good at doing stuff like that…I do personally wish I had more of it recorded, because* [other friend's] *got like a huge stockpile of videos and things that she can go through"*
>
> (Ibid.)

In particular, Phoebe envied material in this friend's cache that defined their relationship with Leah: the small, forgettable details and moments of a friendship that make it up.

"When I go through it with her [other friend] *and seeing all these things they did, the little things…I think it's nice to go back and actually see those things. It's not like you forget the general things, it's just those little bits of how you were really make up how they were"*

Contributing to Phoebe's sense of having lost defining detail of their friendship was a feeling that the uniqueness and quality of their friendship was under threat. Like Vera above, Phoebe's relationship with Leah felt minimised by other survivors' post-death activity on Leah's Facebook page. This caused Phoebe to perceive imbalance in her and Leah's weighting of this friendship; Phoebe was one of Leah's many close friends, whereas Leah was one of Phoebe's closest. This perceived relational disparity played into a diminutive comparison with others' friendships with Leah.

"…in a weird way, I thought it made your grieving seem less important. Like I felt Leah was probably one of my best friends and the person who really made an impact in my life and then to hear like how many people she'd actually affected, I was like 'actually, I'm not the only person here'"

Loss of much of her Leah-related digital material, coupled with awareness of material available to another friend, and a post-death re-evaluation of the significance of their friendship, created conditions for Phoebe's orientation toward material still available to her. For Phoebe, the value of this limited material was to encapsulate these women's particular connection in small but defining details and moments. Phoebe found one surviving Face Swap image in cloud storage linked to her broken phone. Phoebe submitted to the study this funny image of the women's smiling, warped and

interchanged faces. Though wishing she had more of these images, Phoebe described this one as a metonym for 'how our friendship was'.

> *"I'm happy to have it. I just wish I had more…but that one I find quite important. It looked really funny and just laughing about it, you can see the laughing, it just reminds me of most of the time what we were like, ridiculous things, kind of to me, little things of how our friendship was"*

(Ibid.)

Thus, Phoebe's orientation—faith in material's capacity to encapsulate her and Leah's friendship—occurs within a context where little material is available to her. Thus, what is available becomes freighted with meaning. This meaning is steeped in Phoebe's relationship to Leah, her assessment of others' relationships with Leah, and the digital material available to others. Phoebe is oriented toward encapsulation because she sees others' digital material functioning to encapsulate their friendships with Leah in ways she yearns for, and because her brief relationship with Leah feels imperilled by others' seemingly greater connections to her. These influences combined create a context where, in the absence of other material, this image becomes emblematic of their friendship.

7.4.5 Chris: Orientation born of single-platform relationship and pop-culture script

The final participant in this last micro-system, tier-two friend Chris (24), cohabited with Leah in the last year of her life, and at the time of her death. The friends met in shared accommodation and had a shared sense of humour. Much of their yearlong friendship focused around having fun and making each other laugh via Instagram. The friends made silly videos and images together, shared material made together and for each other, tagging each other in posts and sharing memes on this platform.

Chris and Leah often co-authored funny posts and hashtags on each other's pages, and discussed posts with the other prior to posting.

Chris: "*for most of the* [Instagram] *posts she asked me what to write about it or em the other way around as well. So, some of them are my posts which included her*

Mórna: *How do you mean?*

Chris: *As in like if she'd have a picture and she'd be like 'Chris, what you do you think?' 'What do you think I should hashtag?' Or 'What do you think I should write about this?'…and most of mine went through her first, and the other way around"*

(Tier-two friend, Chris, 24. Interview 1: 9 months PB)

These friends' creative, intermingled and near-exclusive use of Instagram generated a detailed trail of their digital relationship on one platform. In the wake of Leah's death, this rich, multi-media, single-source account of their brief friendships was, for Chris, the most 'real' representation of Leah and their friendship.

> *"I think that's why I like Instagram because of the videos and the posts…They're…a lot more real to me than just words like on WhatsApp or Messenger or Facebook or anything. I think the videos are the like the top-notch quality and I'd rather have loads of video cos below that is…like the posts with what we wrote with them and what you can see of us talking and making each other laugh…and remembering us making up…a hashtag…even remembering like what we didn't…decided not to write* [giggles]*"*

<div align="right">(Ibid.)</div>

Chris' view about the ability of posthumous material to faithfully represent Leah is also related to a television programme popular at the time, to which he referred at screening call and interview. This episode of British science-fiction anthology series 'Black Mirror', entitled 'Be Right Back' (Brooker, 2013), depicts a widow who buys a 'living' prosthetic representation of her deceased husband, whose personality is based on his in-life digital activity. Chris made reference to this programme when explaining his relationship with Leah-related digital material as proffering, as depicted in the programme, a faithful facsimile of her.

> *"It's the best copy of her and like us that's there now. Nothing could replace the real Leah like really do her justice but like that Black Mirror…technology gives us the nearest…closest thing…the next best thing"*

<div align="right">(Ibid.)</div>

Allied to this is Chris' faith in material to remain accessible into his future. He liberally referred to plans to use Instagram material to illustrate Leah to future significant others and offspring.

> *"being like you know hypothetically 'dad, you always talk about this girl called Leah' and I'm just like 'Yeah, this is what we did together' "*

(Ibid.)

The assumed persistence and stability of Leah-related digital material for Chris was linked to his own use of the platform as a near-exclusive channel for his digital expression, communication and life archive. Chris described his own Instagram page, including the Leah-related material on it, it as a record of his own life, which he regularly used to 'generally look back'; to reflect on, consolidate and remember his own experiences.

For Chris, Instagram is an enduring record of his and others' lives that he can rely on.

> *"what I love about Instagram is that it's always there"*

(Ibid.)

Another component of Chris' orientation toward material as evoking the 'real' Leah and relationship is alignment with his social group. Chris described him and his friends employing Instagram to explain and verify that being described verbally. Using Instagram in this way was this group's lingua franca, otherwise a story's veracity was in doubt.

"I do use it to explain stuff as well and I know other people do it as well for me. They go 'Oh, did you see this?' and I'll go 'No' and they go on Instagram and they go 'Ah, this…' and I go 'Oh, ok'

…

"if that [Instagram] *was taken away then sort of like you'd only have my word for it"*

(Ibid.)

In sum, Chris' view of Leah-related digital material as mapping onto the 'real' Leah and their 'real' relationship is a function of a digital context where enactments of their short relationship are on a single digital channel, which Chris sees as an enduring archive, and which he and his social group associate with a truth-value that trumps memory or story. This links with a popular culture script in which technologies faithfully represent the dead.

7.4.6 Micro-system four: Summary

This final deep dive section focused on the case's fourth micro-system, comprising three postgraduate friends with one-year relationships with Leah, representing the top three friendship tiers. It first explicated a tier-one friend orientation as born of isolation from deceased-acquainted others, and imagined contesting of their brief, intense friendship. Similarly, others' imagined view of a short but impactful friendship, including the imagined view of the dead, formed the orientation of the tier-three friend, compounded by loss of most digital material attesting to it. Finally, a blend of digital, social and cultural factors shaped the tier-two friend orientation; the entirety of their friendship on one apparently enduring channel, aligning with the participants' personal use of that platform and that of his social group, and an available popular-culture script.

7.5   Chapter seven: Conclusion

This chapter presented a deep dive into a network of 18 people across two generations, three countries and a range of relationships types and tiers, grieving the accidental death of a 23-year-old Scottish woman, Leah, in respect of heterogeneous associated digital material.

The deep dive identified four micro-systems of survivors, with orientations toward digital material forming in real and imagined dialogue with a community of others from in and outside their micro-system, and others past, present and future, dead and alive. This revealed survivor orientations as profoundly relational rather than individually constituted. This relationality was embedded in complex, changing inter-survivor dynamics and group politics. Survivor orientations were in particular dialogue (clashing and cohering) with others of similar relationship type or tier from in and outside micro-systems. Furthermore, some survivor orientations were more influential in and across micro-systems (those perceived most grief-affected), resulting in these orientations (of first-degree family in this case) reverberating across the macro-system.

Dynamic social and digital contexts also shaped orientations, with individuals steeped in particular and fluctuating pre- and post-death conditions around which they formed orientations.

Survivors in this network also calibrated their orientations toward digital material against local and broad cultural influences and conventions (e.g. the right way to grieve), reinstating or resisting them in their posthumous accounts, and in dialogue with these influences in the accounts of others. Cultural influences came from within

and without micro-systems, and the strength of influences was also entangled in inter-survivor dynamics and group politics: influences of those at the (perceived) grief centre reverberated out, and the influences of those of similar relationship type and tier were in particular dialogue.

By diving deeply into this data-rich, multi-participant and longitudinal death-centred case, this chapter demonstrated that participant orientations toward deceased-related digital material are inextricable from the relationships, social and digital contexts, and cultural influences of this particular grief ecology. This addresses the component of inquiry objective (iii) to study grief and deceased-related digital culture in respect of survivors within grief communities.

Chapter 8: Theory presentation
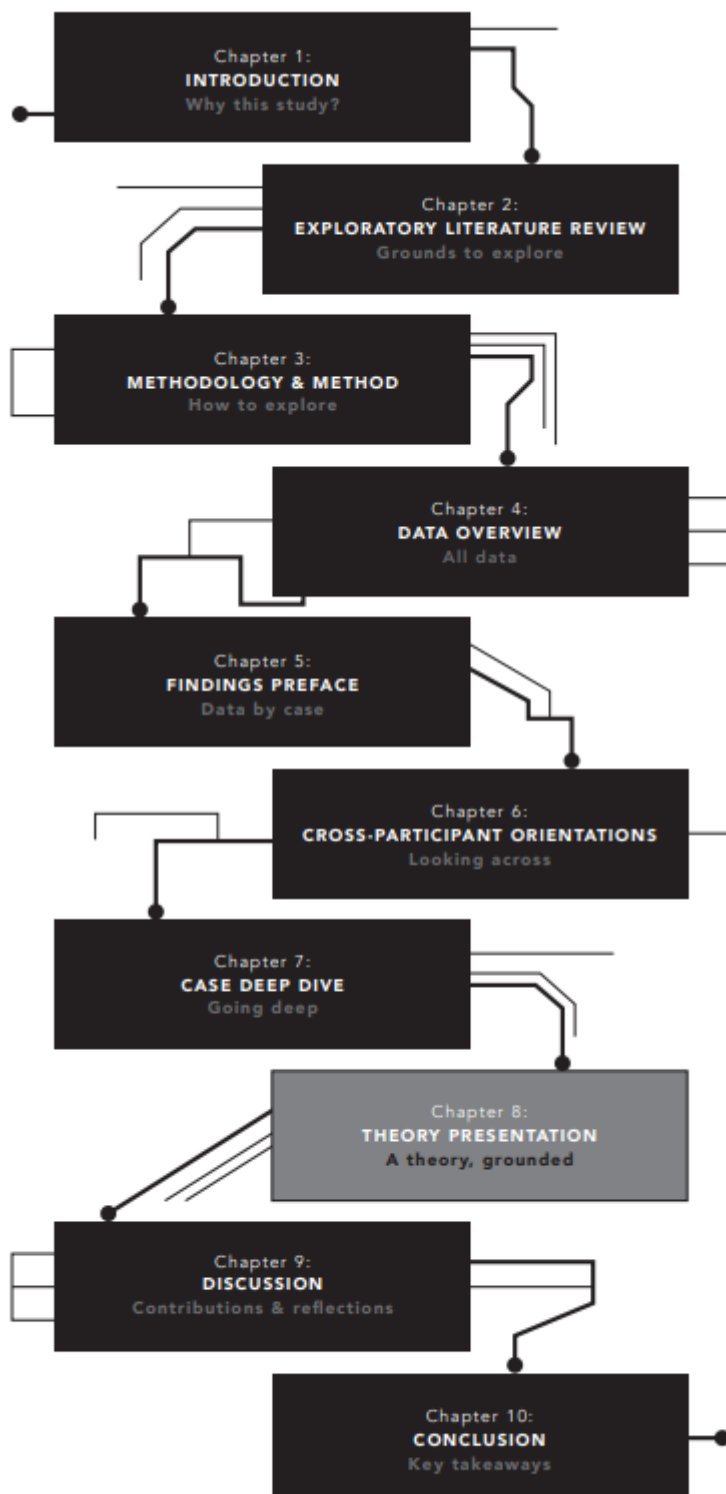
8.0 Introduction

In this brief chapter I first offer a brief résumé of findings, and then present a theory I interpret from findings.

8.1 Findings résumé and theory presentation

8.1.1 Findings résumé

Chapter 5 showed that across 32 participants connected to 11 deaths, the deceased-related digital material of significance to survivors was diverse, material was unique to survivor-deceased dyads, and what was significant and available fluctuated over time due both to forces beyond and within survivors' control. This resulted in idiosyncratic arrays of material significant to individual survivors at a given time.

Chapter 6 presented four participant orientations toward these arrays of material, interpreted across thirty-two participant accounts disconnected from death cases and relationships with other survivors. Orientations were: (i) Faith in digital material, (ii) Pain in engaging with digital material (iii) Undermining digital material, and (iv) Ongoing stories over digital history. Common to all orientations was deployment of digital material in service of survivor posthumous accounts (PMAs) with three changeable, interrelated components: (a) survivor account of dead (b) survivor account of survivor-deceased relationship, and (c) survivor self-account. Examination at this individual, longitudinal level—de-emphasising relationships between survivors and grief contexts—suggests orientations toward digital material running across the posthumous accounts of participants in relation to heterogeneous deaths, griefs and digital material.

Chapter 7 re-introduced inter-survivor relationships and grief contexts to the studied phenomenon, via a deep dive into the key, eighteen-participant longitudinal case. This illuminated the individual-level survivor orientations toward digital material identified in Chapter 6 as just one dimension of their production within a living, dynamic and complex network of relationally and socio-culturally situated survivors. Seemingly individual-level orientations were revealed as profoundly relational; inextricable from shifting relationships, group dynamics and politics, and the particular social, digital and cultural contexts of this complex and living grief ecology.

8.1.2 Theory presentation

8.1.2.1 Introduction

This section presents a theory of higher-level processes at play in findings, identified through data analysis (section 3.6.5). The theory draws from Chapters 6 and 7.

Though other theoretical readings were possible, I select this theory because it is most resonant with data, and persistent through fieldwork and analysis. This theory is also a point of confluence for this dissertation's key contributions, and a framework through which to render meaningful the findings in relation to multiple literatures. Additionally, as the immersed researcher, I find this theory the most compelling interpretation of these findings, and that which I am most keen to share.

The theory describes the role of deceased-related digital culture in the construction by survivors of their post-bereavement realities. Two substantial elements connect to form this theory. I sketch these elements separately, and then outline how they interlock. Then, I ground theory in data via worked examples showing it 'in action'.

8.1.3 Theory element one: Constructing realities-in-relation

This first element holds that inquiry participants, grieving in respect of deceased-related digital material, were engaged in a larger enterprise of constructing post-bereavement realities. Realities were being constructed from a range of resources and influences, which participants drew on and responded to. These resources and influences were subject to change, and the realities they were forming were in flux.

Theory element one groups these resources and influences into five construct constituents, and shows how these constituents are involved in reality constructing.

All five constituents were not necessarily involved in a given survivor construction. Rather, constituents represent a palette of materials that survivors, in particular relationships, contexts and times, drew on and responded to. Hence, reality construction was an active and creative endeavour, with survivors weaving select constituents—themselves shifting—to form realities tailored to changing relationships, contexts and times.

I use the term *realities-in-relation* to express the relationality of these constructs. They are not interior, individual survivor realities, but forming in relation to changing relationships, influences, contexts and times.

The following outlines the five constituents of survivors' realities-in-relation. The theory suggests constituents interact in survivor constructs, therefore as I describe each constituent I offer illustrations of this interaction.

The first construct constituent is survivor posthumous account (PMA). PMAs have three components that change and influence one other.

a) Survivor **account of dead** (their life, character, relationships & death).

b) Survivor **account of relationship** to dead.

c) Survivor **account of self** (pre- & post-bereavement, incl. account of grief & part of DRDM[35] therein).

These PMA components are shaped by three actants:

(i) Time post-bereavement

(ii) Survivor memory

- Memory of a, b & c (above)

- View on remembering & forgetting (fear of/inclination toward) in a, b & c.

(iii) Survivor relationship to pain & comfort (seeking/avoidance) in a, b & c.

These actants affect each other (e.g., time post-bereavement affects memory of dead).

An example of a survivor PMA shaped by actants is a survivors' account of themselves pre-bereavement (account of self) changing as, over time post-bereavement (actant), their memory of themselves pre-bereavement changes (actant).

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[35] Deceased-related digital material

These survivor PMAs are in dialogue with a community of others. Dialogue means the accounts, perspectives and voices of these others can shape survivor PMAs, and vice versa. Dialogue is real and imagined, with others actual and perceived, dead and alive, past, present and future. Survivor PMAs were in dialogue with:

Other survivors of the death

    (i) The (perceived) PMAs & actants of other survivors.

    (ii) Other survivors' (perceived) perspective on survivor's own PMA & actants.

The dead

    (i) Imagined perspective of the dead on survivor PMA and actants.

    (ii) Imagined perspective of dead on other survivors' PMAs and actants.

Future others: The imagined perspective on the survivor PMA and actants of:

    (i) The survivor in future

    (ii) Other survivors in future

    (iii) Deceased-unacquainted others (future friends, partners, offspring)

An example of PMAs in dialogue with the community of others is a survivor's account of their relationship with the dead (account of relationship) shaped by the imagined assessment of that relationship by another survivor. PMAs can be in dialogue with multiple others, e.g. a survivor's use of digital material in grief in dialogue with the

deceased's imagined opinion on this, and this influenced by another survivor's PMA of the deceased's character (account of dead).

Constituent 3: Social context

This dialogue between survivor PMAs and the community of others occurs in social contexts that influence them. The social context is a dimension of shifting conditions, which survivor PMAs and actants negotiate and respond to. Social contexts deem that certain survivor PMAs are in particular dialogue with certain others in the grief community, and certain of the community have greater and lesser influence on PMAs. The social context includes pre-, peri- and post-bereavement factors that influence PMAs and actants, and their dialogue with the community of others.

- Type, duration and quality of survivor-deceased relationship (particularly peri-bereavement).

- Bereavement context (COD[36], death type, circumstances & age, bereavement circumstances).

- Survivor attendance/involvement in post-death ceremonial activities.

- Survivor relationship with other survivors (pre- and post-bereavement).

- Survivor community configuration (survivor-deceased relationship types, durations & quality; survivor demographics, geographical spread).

- Inter-survivor dynamics & group politics (micro & macro-level; pre, peri & post-bereavement).

- Post-bereavement survivor social support and grief recognition (perceived).

- Prior grief experience of survivor, other survivors and social others.

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[36] Cause of death

An example of the role of social contexts in grief constructs is a (perceived) lack of recognition of a survivor's in-life relationship to the dead, leading to a posthumous account affirming the survivor-deceased relationship (account of relationship).

Constituent 4: Digital context

Another constituent involved in constructions are survivors' digital contexts. Digital contexts are interlinked with social contexts, for example, the duration of an in-life survivor-deceased relationship (social) influences the volume of deceased-related digital material available to survivors (digital). Digital contexts shape survivor PMAs and actants, and their dialogue with the community of others, within social contexts. With asterisks indicating digital conditions subject to change, these include:

- Deceased's in-life digital engagement, literacy and style.

- Survivor-deceased digital relationship (volume, content, platforms, frequency & duration, particularly peri-bereavement).

- Survivor digital engagement, literacy & style (pre- & post-bereavement)*.

- Deceased-related digital material (DRDM) available and significant to survivor (type, volume & content)*

- Survivor activity and intentionality in shaping DRDM availability & significance*

- DRDM (perceived) available & significant to other survivors (volume, content, platforms, frequency & duration, particularly peri-bereavement)*.

- DRDM unique to survivors and shared with others*

- Perceived digital engagement, literacy & style of other survivors (pre- & post-bereavement)*

- Views on and dispositions toward digital technologies of survivor and community of others (perceived), including personal histories and experiences, social contexts, cultural settings, norms, values and practices.

An example of a construct forming in relation to digital factors is the in-life digital engagement style of the dead shaping a survivor's view on how they and others ought to engage with the deceased-related digital material.

Constituent 5: Cultural influences

Survivor constructions are also influenced by cultural forces, conventions and meaning repositories, both local (particular to community) and broad (societal). Survivors either conform to or resist these influences. Influences are not only resisted and reinstated at the level of survivor PMAs and their actants. They are also resisted and reinstated in dialogue with the community of others, i.e. cohering and colliding with the (perceived) influences of these others. This occurs within the social and digital contexts described above, with particular dialogue between certain of the community, certain of the community particularly influential, and enmeshed in changing digital conditions. In inquiry data, examples of cultural influences include:

(i) Grief hierarchies (who can grieve and whose grief is most important)

(ii) The right, healthy way to grieve

(iii) The right, healthy grief role of deceased-related digital material

(iv) How to live post-bereavement

(v) How survivors ought story the dead (ideal versus actual)

An example is a survivor's posthumous account of their dead (account of dead) resisting the cultural expectation to idealise the dead. An example of a cultural influence combining with other construct constituents is where this expectation to idealise is resisted because it is (perceived) widespread among other survivors of similar relationship type (social context), and further resisted to protect a survivor whose (perceived) account of the dead is negatively affected by this expectation, due to the (perceived) volume of positive DRDM at their disposal (digital context).

8.1.4 Theory element one: Summary

This first theory element outlined five constituents of survivors' constructions of their post-death realities, in relation to deceased-related digital culture. It demonstrated this construction as fluid and profoundly relational; forming in relation to changing survivor PMAs and actants, in relation to a community of others, to changing social and digital contexts and in relation to local and broad cultural influences. It also demonstrated these resources and influences interweaving within survivor constructions.

In summary, theory element one holds that survivors' post-death constructs are mutable realities-in-relation, embedded in times, relationships and contexts. Figure 8.1 below visually summarises this first theory element.
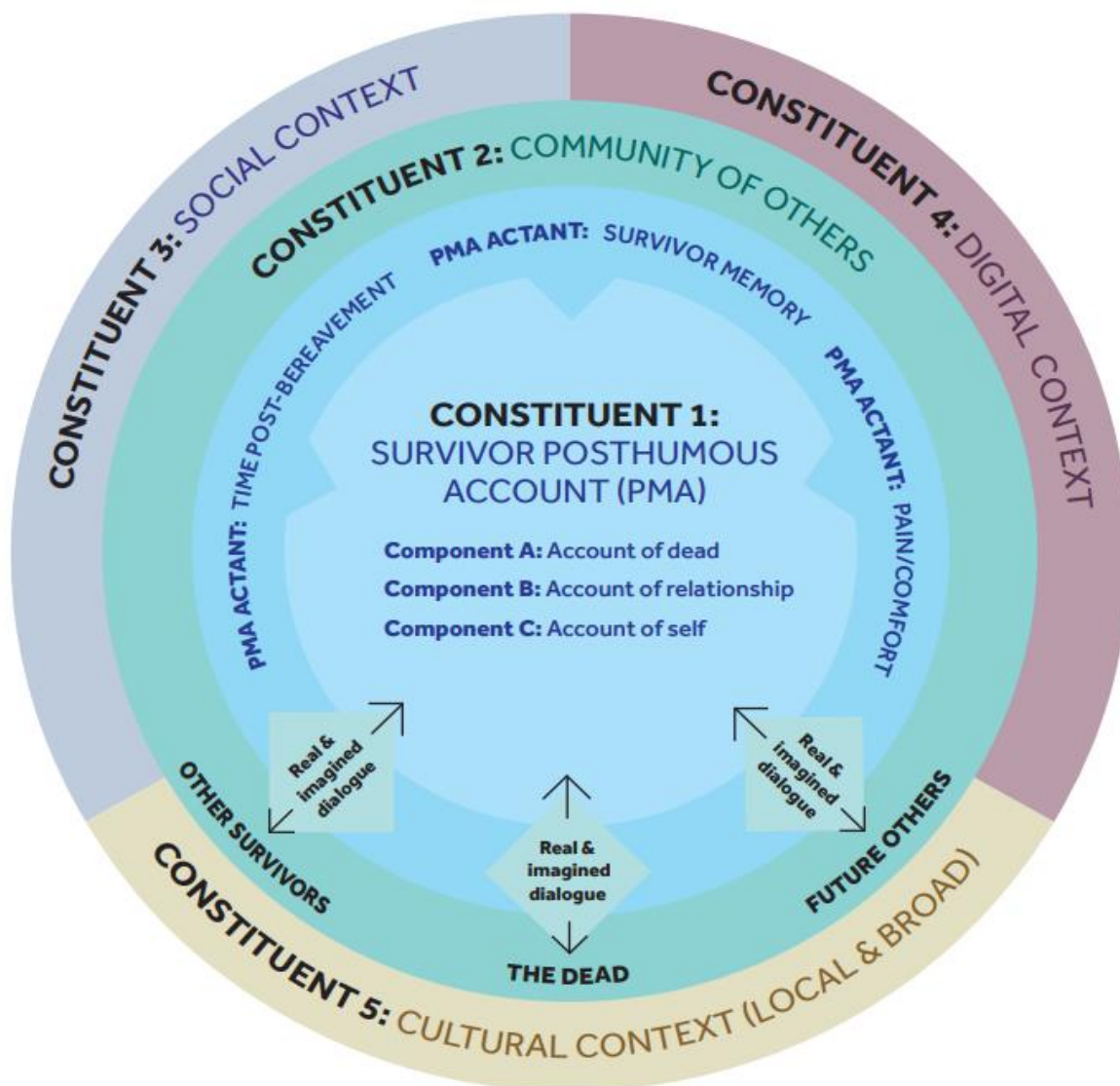
Figure 8.1: Theory element one: Five constituents of constructed realities-in-relation

8.1.5 Theory element two: Repertoires of realness

This second theory element focuses on the role of deceased-related digital material itself in survivors' constructions of their post-bereavement realities.

The findings chapters presented orientations toward digital material in survivor posthumous accounts. However, through data generation and analysis I began to see these orientations as part of a larger process, wherein survivors were creatively using the digital material to fortify their shifting realities.

Across survivor orientations, and the influences and actants shaping them, I interpreted two broad stances on deceased-related digital material, which survivors drew on to fortify their post-bereavement realities. I use the term *repertoire* to describe these stances. Each repertoire entails a position on what constitutes a more 'real' survivor construct, and the role of deceased-related digital material in proffering this 'realness'.

Survivors drew on one of the two repertoires when describing the deceased-related digital material, to appeal to the trustworthiness, impartiality and comprehensiveness, and therefore, realness, of their constructs. Broadly, this involves participants ascribing traits to deceased-related digital material in line with one of these two repertoires, and its construal of reality, its sources and its threats.

The following outlines these two 'repertoires of realness'.

In this first, 'record' repertoire, survivors describe the existence of a single history of the life, relationships, and survivors of their dead. Deceased-related digital material is considered an objective record of this single history. The following outlines the sources, traits, foci and positions of the record repertoire, with supplementary detail and examples in Table 8.1 (p. 364).

In the record repertoire, four traits made up how participants described deceased-related digital material as objective records of a single history of their dead: (i) precision, (ii) fidelity, (iii) objectivity and (iv) representativeness (see Table 8.1 for list of data concepts per trait). Survivors ascribed these 'record' traits to what I term *Literal deceased-related digital material*. This relates to the digital material *itself* (please see table for detail), broadly: minutiae of material's content and form, information about material, volumes and configurations of material at survivors' disposal, with certain types of material of key value in the record.

Certain uses of, and activities with, this *literal* digital material were characteristic of the record repertoire. Equating to the first three pattern bands of the Activities and Uses diagram presented in Chapter 5 (Figure 5.16, p. 216), these involved frequent, repeated, comprehensive and direct engagement with material, collecting, saving and ensuring material's closeness to hand.

In this first repertoire, the record is considered under threat from survivors' changing posthumous accounts (PMAs) and actants, from their dialogue with the community of others, and from social, digital and cultural forces. The passage of time post-bereavement therefore also introduces error, with changing memories and

interweaving survivor accounts distorting the pre-death 'truth' of lives and relationships. Preserving the record therefore involves an intrapersonal focus on survivor's individual PMAs, using literal material to correct distortions coming from the above sources. Precise, high-fidelity, objective and representative literal digital material are seen as impervious to these sources of error, and a corrective and anti-dote to them.

In this repertoire, to forget, lose or misconstrue the record causes survivors fear, pain and anxiety, as record preservation is a duty, an act of care and reflects the significance of the deceased, and survivor-deceased relationships. Lost detail and forgetting indicate lack of care, loss of what remains of persons and relationships, and loss of truth itself. Thus, the pain literal material entails (e.g. vivid evocations of loss, highlighting deadness, unwanted survivor encounters with past selves) is preferable to the pain of their loss.

To summarise, the record repertoire has an intrapersonal survivor focus, oriented toward literal digital material, and the pre-death past. Non-digital posthumous personal and communal accounts and memories corrupt this record over time, causing pain and a sense of loss. Though it can be a source of pain, the record must be protected via direct, frequent reference to its best analogue: literal digital material.

2. Rendition repertoire

In the second and opposing 'rendition' repertoire, the notion of one history—about the dead, their in-life relationships, and their survivors—is considered a fallacy. Rather, there are only renditions of lives and relationships, told and re-told from particular perspectives, times and contexts. Rather than a singular, fixed and objective history, these are multiple, relative and open-ended renditions. Absent a single history for deceased-related digital material to make manifest, material is instead viewed as providing opportunity for renditions of the dead, their relationships and survivors; inviting and enriching personal and communal accounts and memories. The following outlines the sources, traits, foci and positions of this second, 'rendition' repertoire, supplemented by Table 8.1.

In findings data, participants described deceased-related digital material in multiple ways that construed it as inviting renditions, clustered into four repertoire traits: (i) flexibility, (ii) change, (iii) alterity and (iv) non-representativeness (full lists of trait descriptors in data in Table 8.1). Survivors ascribed these traits to what I term *figurative* deceased-related digital material. This describes use of material as symbols, referents and catalysts for renditions beyond what material itself contains. As well as this figurative use of material, participants also used the material figuratively, i.e. remembered, imagined, possible and future material formed the basis for renditions.

Sources of renditions in the deceased-related digital material include missing material, interstices in material, material low in substance and context; material as organising structures for, or suggestive of, something other than what they contain;

future, potential and as-yet-unknown material; and *literal* material remembered and imagined, and knowingly misremembered and re-imagined.

Particular patterns of material use and activity were also characteristic of this repertoire, equating to the lower two pattern bands of the Activities and Uses diagram in Chapter 5 (Figure 5.16, p. 216). In short, this involved participants infrequently checking availability of literal material, but infrequent direct engagement, viewing or intervening; moving material from immediate view; and need-based deletion, disposal and use.

In this second repertoire, survivor posthumous accounts (PMAs) and actants, in dialogue with the community of others, and within social, digital and cultural milieus, are considered sources of new, rich and changing renditions, as accounts blend and develop over time. Time post-bereavement therefore also adds to renditions. Additionally, the flexibility of renditions to the survivors forming them keeps them current, ongoingly relevant, and tailored to them in a way that static records cannot be. Moreover, over time, *literal* material can become increasingly painful to engage with directly (e.g. contains no new information, clashes with changing PMAs, falsely suggests communication with dead). Survivors prefer potentially imprecise, but less painful renditions.

In this repertoire, the dead, their relationships and survivors are viewed as beyond digital capture or representation. Instead, survivors trust in a larger, ineffable 'sense' or knowing, emerging from in-person experiences of individuals and relationships pre-death, and between survivors and the community of others post-death. Though conceding that this involves forgetting, lost detail and misrepresentation, survivors challenge the idea of something essential to misrepresent, forget or lose, and the

record's claim to it. The lack of something essential to which records relate assuages fear of losing them.

In summary, the rendition repertoire has an interpersonal and figurative-digital focus, oriented to the post-death present and future. Its sources include imaginative uses of material, and uses inviting of imagination. This allows open-ended renditions that are bespoke and continuingly current to survivors' changing lives. Painful detail can be avoided or lost because it is secondary to a larger, ineffable, personal and communal knowledge of the dead, their relationships and survivors.

The two repertoires and their qualities are summarised in Table 8.1 below.

Repertoire	Record	Rendition
Sources in DRDM	***Literal digital material*** Minutiae of material: Images, video, text: content, wording, phrasing, punctuation, syntax, spacing, movement, voice, laugh, body, position, background, mise-en-scene. Info re. material: Dates/times, recency, platform rank/position, metadata. Volume & variety: Number, types, platforms, duration, frequency. Material of key record value: • 1-1 survivor-deceased material • Material unique/private to survivor • Candid, un-staged, natural, without awareness/intention • Direct link to dead (generated by/with, owned by, shared with) • Formative, defining, first/last re. dead/survivor/relationship • Low likelihood of recording: Negative, unremarkable, mundane	***Figurative digital material*** Material inviting of imagination: Missing material; gaps in material; material low in substance & context; material as organising structures for/suggesting something beyond content; Material as trigger, tool, avenue into story, memory, imagination. Literal material ignored, forgotten, lost. Imaginative accounts of material: Remembered & imagined literal material; Literal material knowingly misremembered and re-imagined. Future/potential material as-yet unseen/yet to be discovered.
Characteristic uses & activities	Comprehensively viewing material; Searching for new material; Saving; Frequent revisiting; Sifting for key types; Curating; Repeat engagement w/ key types, Frequent combing for new, Ensuring availability & recency.	Checking material but infrequently engaging; Occasional searching, sifting, saving; Infrequent recency-tracking but not intervening; Hiding material from view; Occasional checking/engaging; Need-based deletion/use/disposal.
Repertoire traits & descriptors in data	**Precise**: Detailed, accurate, specific, particular, exact. **Fidelity**: Lifelike, close, direct, faithful, vivid, real, actual. **Objective**: Impartial, pure, external to*, impervious to*, balanced. **Representative**: Capture, encapsulate, definitive, epitome, essence.	**Flexible:** Responsive, personal, bespoke, ongoing relevance & currency **Change:** Alive, dynamic, new, continuing, open-ended, unresolved/able **Alterity:** Difference, otherness, inviting, fertile, potentiality, richness, possibility **Non-representative:** Fragments, triggers, referents, tools, routes into*
Social & temporal foci:	Intrapersonal & pre-death past	Interpersonal & post-death current/future
Position on: Own & others'*	Damage record, corrected by literal material	Add to renditions, invited by figurative material
Position on: Time PB	Source of error (forgetting, memory change, changing*), corrected by literal material	Adds to renditions, invited by figurative material
Position on: Pain/comfort	Painful record preferable to lost detail	Lost detail preferable to painful record

Table 8.1: Summary of repertoires – sources, uses, traits, foci and positions

*PMA and actants, in dialogue with community of others, influenced by social, digital and cultural conditions.

The repertoires have opposing positions, foci and traits, in respect of divergent aspects of deceased-related digital material. However, both make claims for the 'realness' of their repertoire. That is, each repertoire is depicted as a better representation of the reality of the dead, their relationships and survivors.

Both repertoires achieve this by appealing to certain 'realness' properties, and depicting the other repertoire as lacking in these properties. Though divergent, both repertoires entail the same 'realness' claims: trustworthiness, impartiality and comprehensiveness.

Trustworthiness

The *record* is depicted as trustworthy, because it accesses pre-death truths frozen in time. These frozen records are impervious to post-death corruption from survivor PMAs (and actants) interplaying with those of others, and influenced by social, digital and cultural contexts. Renditions cannot be trusted because they are porous to these same record-corroding effects. Intrapersonal and literal-digital foci therefore increase trustworthiness by forestalling post-death subjectivity, opinion, memory, context, and time.

Conversely, the *rendition* is depicted as trustworthy precisely *because* it is malleable and responsive to these forces. Greater trust is placed in a reality that draws on multiple perspectives and adapts to form ever-new representations of the dead, survivors and survivor-deceased relationships. Renditions adaptable to new information are more trustworthy than non-negotiable records.

Impartiality

The *record* is impartial because it excludes the biases of self-interested survivors and their falsely positive posthumous accounts (e.g. to idealise the dead and over-emphasise positive in survivor-deceased relationships). Renditions are rife with this post-death bias.

Opposingly, the *rendition* views the record as partial because its *literal* sources are limited in perspective and duration, and biased toward performative and positive digital representations of people and relationships. In this light, renditions offer greater impartiality because they draw on more balanced ('real' life) and multi-dimensional sources; encompassing the less flattering, unstaged, unrecorded and mundane realities of people, lives and relationships.

Comprehensiveness

The *record* repertoire appeals to comprehensiveness because literal digital material captures detail otherwise uncaptured, fleeting and otherwise in the domain of self-serving survivor memory and accounts. The more literal-digital material available, the more comprehensive the account of the dead, their relationships and survivors.

Conversely, *renditions* are construed as more comprehensive because they go beyond what is digitally captured and capture-able. They include details and moments too negative, mundane, nebulous or intimate to be digitally represented, and pre-dating the digital age or occurring offline. Comprehensiveness here stems from in-person and between-persons knowledge of the dead, their relationship and their survivors. This is a felt, intangible, organic knowing beyond capture, digital or otherwise. Furthermore, open-ended dialogue between survivors and the community

of others over time, and in contexts, generate renditions with multiple perspectives, which can accommodate more and changing perspectives over time. This makes them more comprehensive than literal digital material, which is limited in perspective and inflexible to other perspectives, change and time.

8.1.6 Theory element two: Summary

This second theory element holds that, running beneath survivor orientations in the two findings chapters, are two undergirding broad positions on deceased-related digital material that heighten the realness of survivor constructs. By tying the deceased-related digital material to one of two opposing repertoires, survivors heighten the realness—trustworthiness, impartiality and comprehensiveness—of their accounts, while depicting the opposing repertoire as lacking in these same respects. Figure 8.2 visually summarises this second theory element.
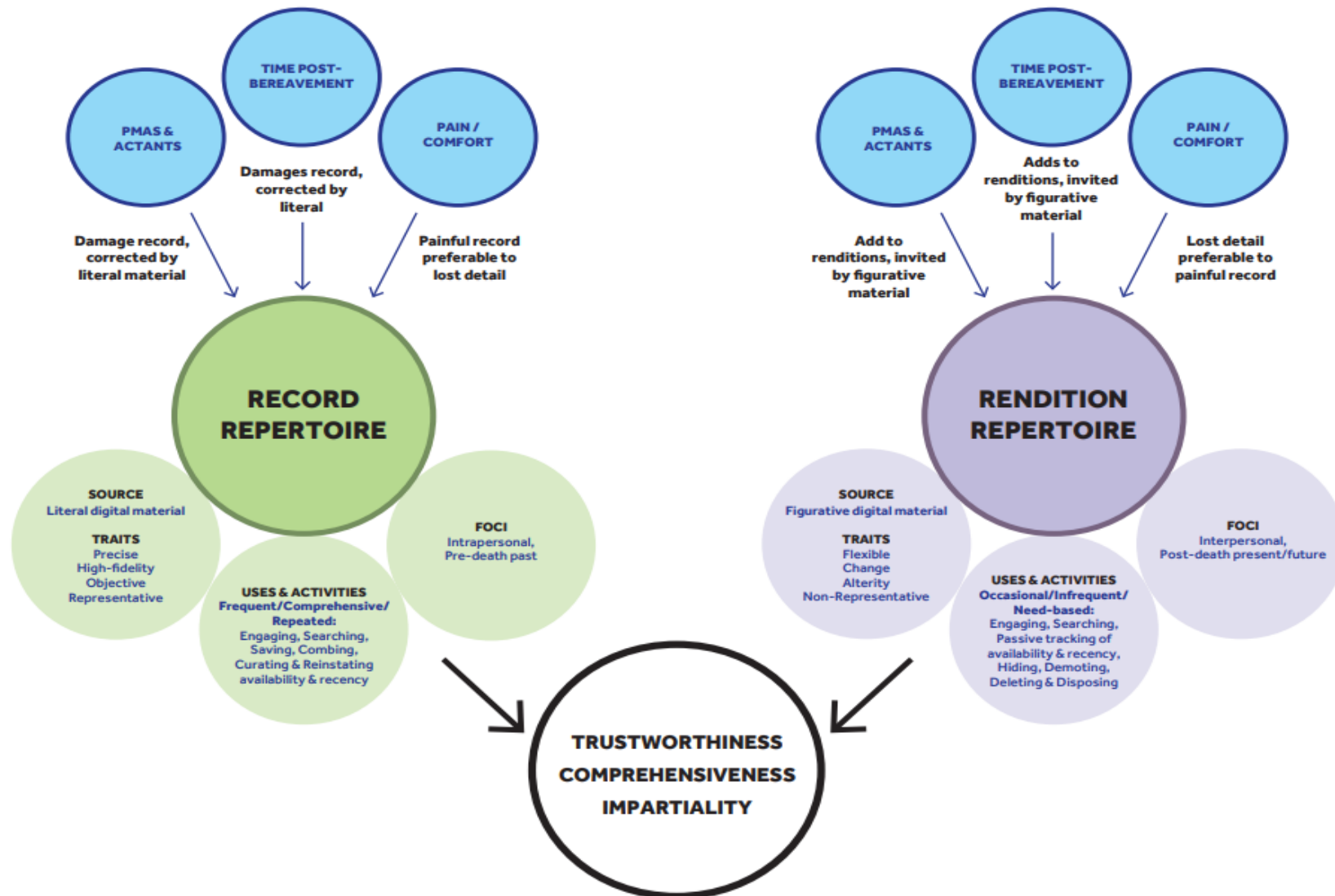
Figure 8.2: Theory element two: Repertoires of realness, record and rendition

8.1.7 The theory: Pliable realities-in-relation

Having outlined these elements, I describe how they interlock to form the theory. To summarise, the theory elements are:

(i)   Grieving in respect of deceased-related digital material, survivors construct fluid realities-in-relation; in relation to individual PMAs and actants, to a community of others, to social and digital conditions, and to cultural forces.

(ii)   By relating deceased-related digital material to one of two diverging repertoires, survivors confer realness to their constructs.

The digital material therefore offers a realness that is pliable to shifting constructs, so that, using the repertoires, the digital material can support changing realities.

The theory holds that survivors use this pliable realness not only to fortify their individual realities, but to support realities webbed into their relationships, communities, contexts, cultures and times. That is, by creatively relating the record or rendition repertoires to deceased-related digital material, survivors can bend the realness of their constructs not only in relation to their own changing PMAs and actants, but in relation to the community of others, to social and digital conditions, and to cultural forces. As combinations of these constituents differ and blend in particular constructs, and over time, survivors invoke repertoires tailored to their particular reality-in-relation. The digital material are therefore pliable to realities forming in relation. Thus, I term this theory: *pliable realities-in-relation*.

Because this theory describes a fluid enterprise, I show it in action via freeze-frames of survivors using repertoires in relation to combinations of construct constituents. To demonstrate the tailoring of repertoires in response to *changes* in construct constituents I show multiple freeze-frames for one survivor at different time points. In the first example, I show the two repertoires in use with respect to the same digital item at different times, demonstrating the pliability of even the same item's realness value in shifting circumstances.

In proposing a theory that involves the interplay of personal, communal, contextual, cultural and temporal dimensions, the key case—with its multi-perspective, context-rich, longitudinal data—is the test case for the theory. Therefore, I use this key case to explicate the theory in action in one example, and one example from another case showing fragments of theory in action in another network and context. I use serial respondent data and retrospective accounts to show this.

Data from the following worked examples appear in the findings chapters, with original locations given. To aid reading of these examples, Figure 8.3 shows the two elements of the theory side by side in a master diagram of the *Pliable realities-in-relation* theory.
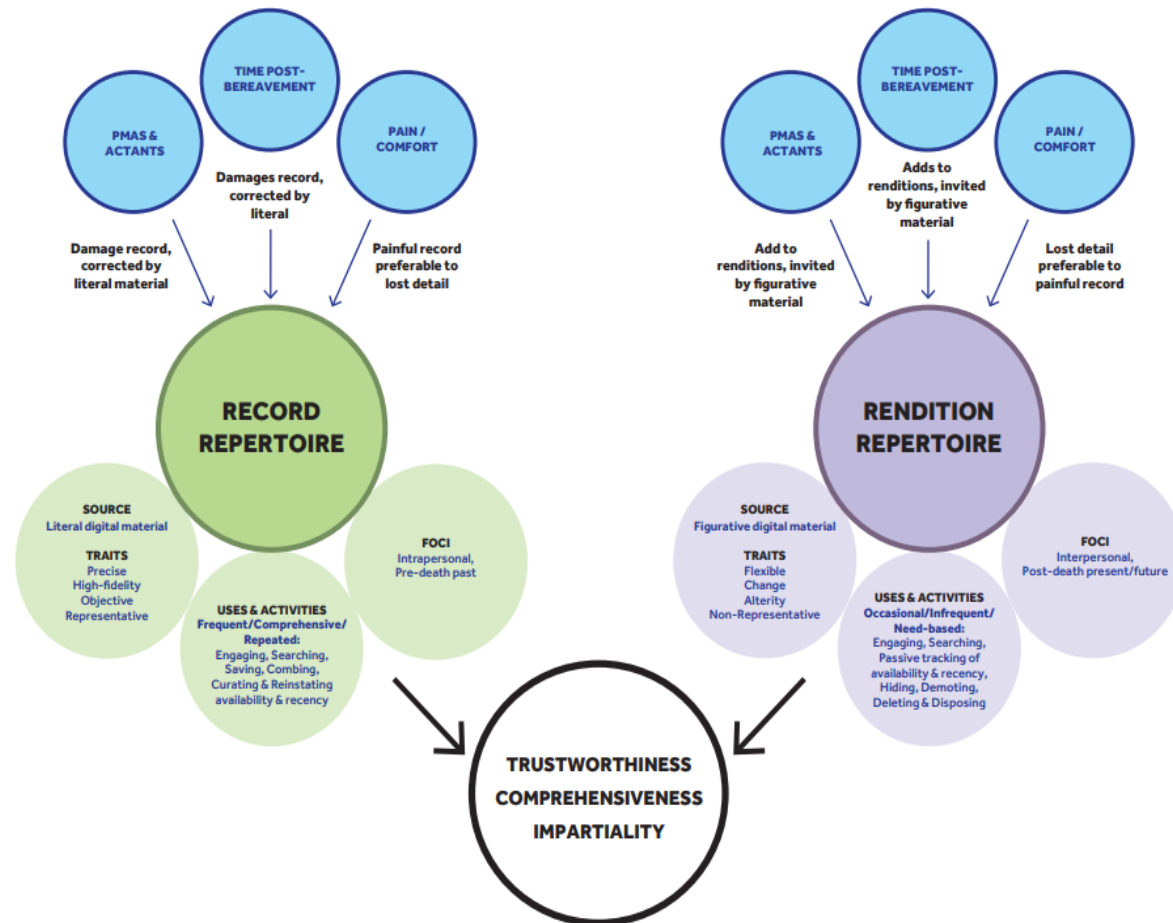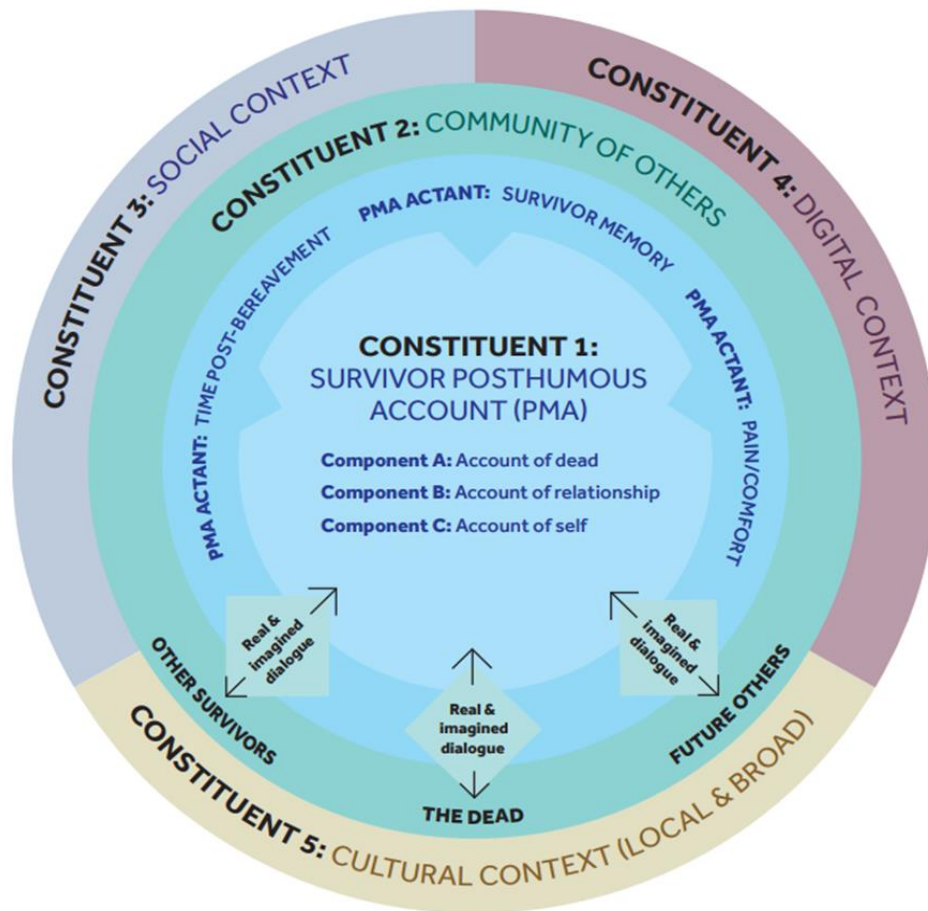
Figure 8.3: Pliable realities-in-relation master diagram - theory element one (left) & element two (right)

8.1.7.1.1 Worked example one: Leah's case

Example one, reported in book chapter, O'Connor (2020), focuses on one piece of digital material across four interviews with Leah's sister Sarah's (29)—extensive one-to-one text correspondence on Sarah's old, powered-off phone. Over time, Sarah employs different repertoires with regard to this same material, repertoires moulded to changing combinations of construct constituents. This example draws on data shown in Chapters 6 (sections 6.1.1, 6.1.2, 6.2.1, 6.2.2, 6.3.1, 6.3.2, 6.4.1 and 6.4.2), and Chapter 7 (section 7.1.3).

Six months after her sister's death, Sarah's ascribed the record repertoire to these texts. The *literal* material: minutiae of messages; particular texts' wording, dates and times received and sent, though unseen since Leah's death, evidenced the sisters' bond (account of relationship), assuaged fear of forgetting and brought comfort (actants) that Leah's character was encapsulated (account of dead) so future children could know her (community of others). The texts were the most 'real' form of Leah and the sisters' relationship now: external, objective records, safe from fading memory over time.

Ten months post-bereavement, Sarah ascribed the rendition repertoire to this same material. Now, with regard not to the material itself but to her decision not to view it (*figurative*), Sarah articulated confidence in her own memory, though imprecise and subjective, as tailored to her needs and best placed to represent her sister, their relationship and herself (account of dead, of relationship and of self). This repertoire is also bound to Sarah's changed position on the pain of engaging with *literal* material (actant). She does not want painful granular detail of her loss, making forgetting it preferable, and less difficult because of her growing confidence in her

own memory (actant). Moreover, decreased reliance on *literal* material is used to demonstrate a stronger in-life bond with Leah than that of remaining sister Betty, whose (perceived) focus on literal material indicates a lesser relationship (community of others). Thus, by linking herself to the rendition repertoire, and her sister to the record, Sarah cultivates an account of a stronger in-life relationship with Leah than sister Betty (account of relationship). The repertoire is therefore used to support a reality in relation to Sarah's shifting PMA and actants, and in particular dialogue with a survivor of equivalent relationship, her sister (social context).

Fourteen months post-bereavement, the rendition repertoire is at play still, but now to prevent a clash between Sarah's self-account (account of self) as a 'good sister', and *literal* digital material (content of texts) that might contradict this. Sarah adopts the rendition repertoire to protect knowingly 'rose-tinted memories' of negative text interactions with Leah and guard her self-account. To do this, Sarah challenges the very notion of a single, objective record about a person, a life and a relationship; there are no out-there truths about her, Leah or their relationship, only perspectives on them. She describes the loss of this *literal* material as the loss of just one version of reality amongst many (actant), and the texts themselves as limited, biased and low in substance compared to her and others' lived knowledge of the 'real' Leah and their relationships. Adding to this, over time Sarah has also forgotten some of the detail of this material itself (actants). The rendition repertoire is therefore used to support a reality in relation to Sarah's shifting PMA and actants.

Seventeen months post-bereavement Sarah has pivoted back to the record repertoire, recruiting the *literal* messages again, but this time to set the record straight on post-death falsehoods about Leah that are harmful to her and her sister.

These falsehoods come from other survivors, whose (perceived) PMAs glorify Leah (community of others) and reproduce a cultural requirement to idealise the dead (cultural context). Sarah depicts the texts as antidotes to these post-death polluting forces, reinstating an uncorrupted pre-death reality. This toggle back to the record is not only in relation to Sarah's own PMA—adulation clashes with her account of Leah (account of dead), and her self-account (depicting her as one of the comparatively 'shit sisters') (account of self). It is also again in relation to her remaining sister, this time to protect Betty from a harmful (perceived) account of Leah (account of dead) which, following this requirement to remember fondly, airbrushes out unsavoury aspects of Betty and Leah's relationship (account of relationship). Sarah sees this as stopping Betty from grieving the 'real' Leah. Interestingly, while Sarah's use of the record repertoire resists one cultural norm here, it reinstates another: the right way to grieve.

Across four interviews, Sarah harnesses the same deceased-related digital material in opposing repertoires, moulded to heighten the realness of constructs forming in relation to changing blends of constituents over time. These constituents include Sarah's fluctuating PMA and actants, in dialogue with her remaining sister, future others, and broad cultural influences. Sarah is creative with the reality-value of these texts, tacking adroitly between depicting them as sources of unassailable record, and as one of many renditions, depending on the reality-in-relation.

8.1.7.1.2 Worked example two: Adam's case

I offer a second example, with the suggestion that it is a fragment of the theory in action in another grief context and survivor network. In the following example, Adam's daughter Bella is also creatively using rendition and record repertoires to flex the realness of her constructs in relation to particular blends of constituents.

In the first of two interviews with sole respondent in Adam's case (69, Case 1), daughter Bella (43) used the record repertoire in respect of *literal* digital material relating to her father (Chapter 6, section 6.4.1). At the time of Adam's unanticipated death, father and daughter were estranged for two years, after Bella revealed Adam's marital infidelity to her mother and both parents cut communication with Bella.

Four years and four months post-bereavement, Bella described using digital material to counteract her tendency to posthumously romanticise Adam and their relationship. She frequently called to mind hurtful emails from Adam (to which she no longer had access), and reread his Facebook activity (*literal*) to remind herself of his difficult character and the minutiae of their fraught relationship. As per the record repertoire, Bella's own and others' account of Adam, and the effect of time upon them, were seen as inaccurate post-death build-up, which must be intermittently cleared back to reveal a pre-death reality. Bella's positive memories are 'not a real thing' and frequent reference to *literal* digital material restores reality by 'polishing it a bit'.

This was in a context where Adam's other survivors (Bella's mother and siblings) were perceived as glossing over 'reality' in their PMAs, leaving it to Bella to preserve this 'real' Adam. For Bella, *literal* digital material were bulwarks against rewriting of

history in her own memory and PMA, and in those of others. Though this history, and engaging with *literal* digital remnants of it, are painful, it is necessary to preserve the 'truth'; Bella is 'not a fan of reconstruction'.

Bella's use of the record repertoire in this first instance is thus tailored to a construct that includes her personal PMA (account of Adam and their relationship) and PMA actants (change over time in memory of relationship, relationship to pain, and perspective on forgetting), in dialogue with (resistance to) the (perceived) PMAs of other survivors of equivalent relationship [siblings] and (perceived) most grief-affected [mother] (social context). The social context of the death is also a construct strand, i.e. in-life survivor-deceased relationship (peri-mortem estrangement) and resulting inter-survivor dynamics.

In interview two, eleven months later, Bella invoked the rendition repertoire in respect of changed construct constituents (Section 6.4.2). Bella now articulates confidence in personal and shared accounts as proffering versions of the dead, in-life deceased-bereaved relationships, and survivor self-accounts that the bereaved can move forward with, and which are relevant to their ongoing lives and relationships. Bella occasionally checks the availability of the *literal* material relating to her late father, but infrequently engages with it.

This repertoire is in particular relation to Bella's mother. In Bella's view, her mother's PMA (components a, b and c), though glossing over details, is bespoke to her needs going forward. Specifically, the rendition makes space for Bella's mother to construct her late husband, their relationship, and herself pre and post-bereavement, in a way that protects how she needs to see these now (having had a good marriage, and been a good wife and mother). The rendition enables the avoidance of a more

painful PMA for Bella's mother. The rendition also permits a relationship between mother and daughter, which the hard 'facts' would inhibit. They need this more clement telling in order to move forward. The comfort in a continued relationship with her mother, even one based on a knowingly idealised account, is preferable to a non-negotiable history that would imperil the mother-daughter relationship.

In alignment with the rendition repertoire, Bella challenges the core idea of a single, true posthumous account of her father; there are only relative, subjective truths wrought by his survivors, reflecting how they need to remember him and their relationships. Previously 'not a fan of reconstruction', Bella now considers that 'everything is a construction'. Rather than railing against the inexactness of other vantage points, or seeing them as pollutants, she now considers alterity and otherness as defining qualities of construction.

Bella periodically returns to the digital material, but now as a means of connecting with a construct of Adam that helps her from repeating his mistakes. This use is now figurative; the material catalysing a story, rather than supplying an objective truth.

The rendition repertoire is therefore deployed here to flex to a reality in relation to Bella's self-account (PMA) going forward (to not be like her dad), to changing PMA actants (relationship to pain/comfort and time), and to align with her mother's PMA (a good marriage to a good man and a good mother) and the mother's PMA actant (pain avoidance).

This chapter presented a substantive, two-part theory, *Pliable realities-in-relation*, the product of a Constructivist Grounded Theory inquiry and analysis of grief and deceased-related digital culture.

Theory element one, *Constructing realities-in-relation*, described grief with respect to digital culture as social construction with five constituents. Griefs are constructed in relation to changing survivor PMAs and actants, in relation to a community of others, to changing social and digital contexts and in relation to local and broad cultural influences. Griefs are not standalone survivor realities, but realities-in-relation.

Theory element two, *Repertoires of realness* proposed two opposing, broad positions on deceased-related digital culture. Via these *record* or *rendition* repertoires, survivors heighten the realness of their grief constructs. Both repertoires appeal to realness via trustworthiness, impartiality and comprehensiveness, while portraying the opposing repertoire as lacking in these. By tying these repertoires to deceased-related digital culture, survivors heighten the realness of their constructs.

Combined, these two theory elements form the theory, *Pliable realities-in-relation.* This theory, grounded in two worked examples, holds that via the record and rendition repertoires, deceased-related digital culture is pliable in its reality value: it can support fluid grief constructs forming in relation to survivors, to others, to social and digital contexts and to cultural influences.

The functionalities of the media are not transported unchanged into the grief, nor are they dumb conduits carrying pre-formed griefs. Rather, survivors creatively flex and adapt the material to accord with the record or rendition repertoires, in order to support grief constructs that are not only personally constituted and oriented, but forming in relation to, and embedded in, times, relationships and contexts.

Chapter 9: Discussion
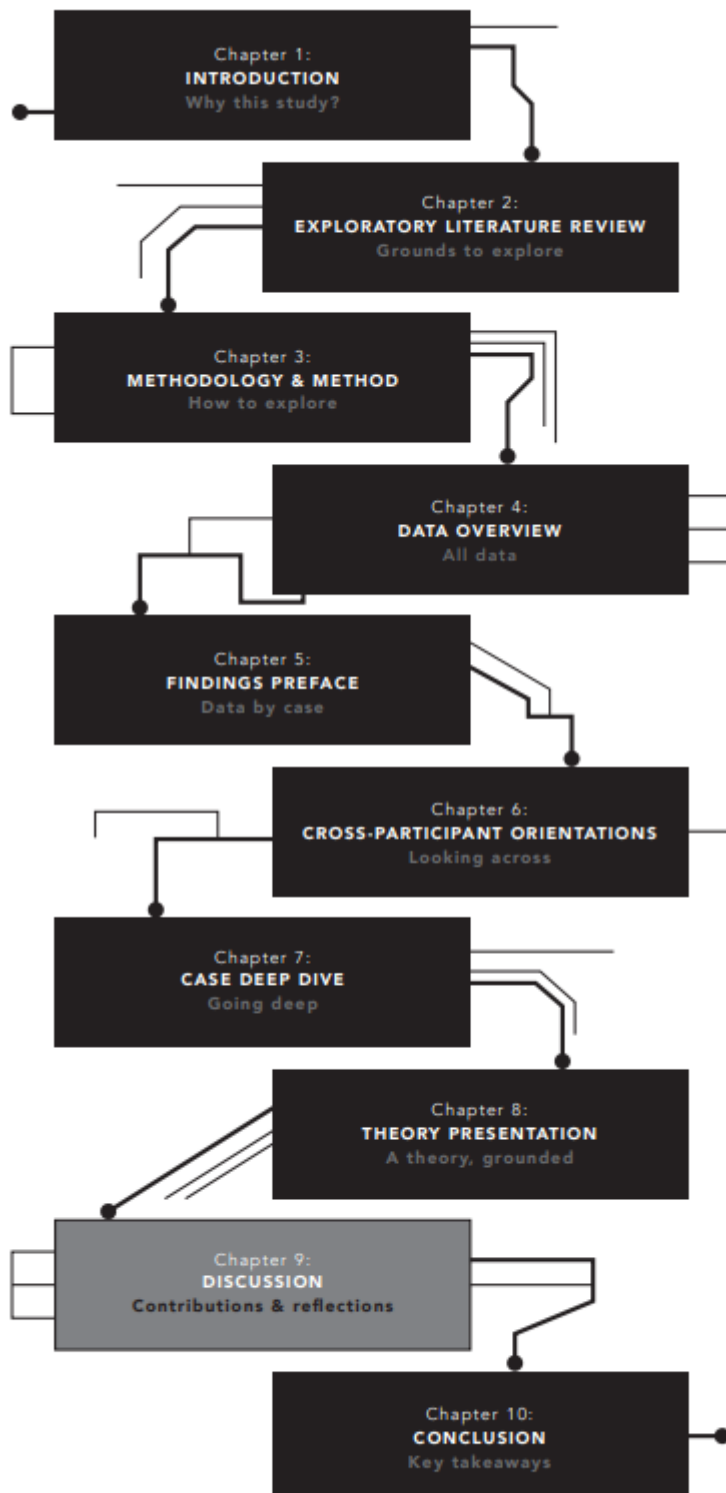
9.0 Introduction

This penultimate chapter is in two parts.

Part one: Contributions discusses the presented theory, contextualising it within existing theories and research, and demonstrating its contributions to these.

In **part two: Reflections**, I consider the qualities of inquiry, data and theory, consider their contribution in this light, and identify areas of future activity and application my work points to.

9.1 **Discussion part one: Contributions**

Though the presented theory, *Pliable realities-in-relation*, has many echoes in related literatures, rather than verifying previous work, the job of the discussion is to identify new dimensions my theory adds (Stern, 2007). My theory contributes primarily to three literatures: (i) grief theory, (ii) grief and material culture theory and (iii) empirical grief and digital culture literature. Mirroring the format of Chapter 2, the following discussion addresses these literatures in this sequence, putting the presented theory in conversation with each literature and exhibiting its contributions to each in turn.

9.1.1 Contributions to grief theory

To establish the contributions of the presented theory to grief theory, I address theory element one and the full theory, demonstrating their contributions in sequence.

9.1.1.1 Theory element one: Contribution to grief ontology

Firstly, theory element one contributes to conceptualisations of reality in grief theory, and extends this to a conceptualisation of reality in digital-age grief. To reiterate, theory element one suggests that: Grieving in respect of deceased-related digital material, inquiry participants construct fluid realities-in-relation; in relation to personal posthumous accounts (PMAs) and actants, to a community of others, to social and digital conditions, and to cultural forces.

Background to contribution

A philosophical term describing the nature of reality and existence, ontology has long been a concern in grief scholarship. This concern has two aspects: the form and constituents of reality in grief, and the relationship of the bereaved to this reality. Positions on grief ontology split along the paradigm shift in grief scholarship, outlined in Strand 1 of the literature review (section 2.1).

Before the paradigm shift, grief's reality was conceived as an objective force external to survivors, acting upon them. Bereavement occasioned a rending apart of realities; the old reality of survivor-deceased relationships, and inhabited by the dead, and a new reality without. The new reality, however difficult, was non-negotiable, and grief a gradual process of disassociating from old reality and adjustment to new. Problems

arose for those who did not yield to the new reality (e.g. continued relationships with the dead), and grief practitioners facilitated reality submission. Survivors' relationships to this reality were as passive recipients; their options to resist and become unhealthy, or defer and resume normality.

"The normal outcome is that deference to reality gains the day"

(Freud, 1917 [1915], p. 154).

Grief as gradual deference to reality without the decedent, and reality-resisting as pathology, characterise grief theoreticians and practitioners in the Freudian tradition (Bowlby, 1961; Parkes, 1986, 1983, 1972; Lindemann, 1944; Rando, 1995; Worden, 1982).

Conversely, theories that catalysed and followed the paradigm shift consider grief a social construction of reality, in which survivors are active agents. In this view, grief's reality is inseparable from those experiencing it; it evolves from people with unique and shared meanings who share time, place and culture (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Whereas pre-paradigm conceptions involve incrementally replacing old reality with new, post-paradigm grief ontology is characterised by survivors establishing continuity between pre- and post-bereavement realities. Though much theoretical variety exists in how this continuity is achieved, common is consideration of continuity-building as an enterprise in which survivors are active, interpretive agents, incorporating pre and post-death realities within their given conditions, relationships, contexts and temporalities (Neimeyer et al., 2014; Currier & Neimeyer, 2006; Klass & Walter, 2001; Hedtke & Winslade, 2016)

Refutation

Element one of the presented theory contributes to this latter, post-paradigm-shift, constructivist branch of grief ontology, by suggesting, that inquiry participants are constructing shifting grief realities in relation to fluid, interacting constituents.

This adds to the substantial scholarship refuting pre-paradigm-shift conceptions of grief's reality as external, objective and acting upon passive mourners. The existence of pre- and post-bereavement temporalities in theory element one, and interweaving of these in the realities under construction, also refutes the pre-shift contention that grief involves excising or transplanting the pre-death reality. The profound relationality of the construction in theory element one also contradicts the account of grief as a primarily intrapsychic matter that can be studied at the level of individual survivors abstracted from relationships, contexts and times.

As Chapter 2 established, refutation of these pre-shift contentions is already robust. However, the current refutation is novel, as it exhibits the incompatibility of pre-paradigm-shift grief ontology, and related conceptions, in the digital case. This is significant, because, as I show later, pre-paradigm-shift grief conceptions are reigniting in the digital context.

Having described the grief ontology refuted by theory element one, I next outline those it echoes and extends.

Contributions to constructivist grief theories

Fragments of theory element one resonate with multiple grief theories with a constructivist ontology. The following are three points in the existing grief constructivist scholarship to which theory element one contributes.

Contribution 1: Continuing Bonds

There is obvious resonance between theory element one and the flagship constructivist grief theory, *Continuing Bonds* (Klass et al., 1996). Continuing relationships with the dead run through theory element one, primarily via survivor posthumous accounts (PMAs), two elements of which might be said to relate to bond continuation: 'survivor account of dead' and 'account of survivor-deceased relationship'. Therefore, just as PMAs are threaded through the five constituents of theory element one, so too are continuing bonds. Secondarily, the role of the imagined dead in the community of others resonates with continuing bonds.

If we read PMAs as involving bond continuation, theory element one suggests that the form and extent of this continuation is not just a function of the deceased-bereaved relationship, but is intricately social and cultural. That is, bonds are shaped within communities of others, interlinked social contexts and digital conditions that enable and curtail them, and cultural influences that regulate them. This amounts to a contribution to the Continuing Bonds thesis because it situates bond continuation within these complex, multiple realms of influence. The case deep dive (Chapter 7) showed PMAs in open dialogue with those of others, and subject to interpersonal dynamics and group politics, thereby rebuffing construal of bond continuation as occurring between deceased and bereaved primarily.

This finding echoes Dennis Klass' (2006) and Neimeyer et al's (2014) critique of the widespread misappropriation of the Continuing Bonds thesis, wherein its social and cultural components are underrepresented or missing altogether, and continuing bonds as a theory becomes a vehicle for relocating grief back in the province of individual survivors, and survivor-deceased dyads. This underrepresents the role of relationships, communities, contexts, cultures and times in producing the grief in which bonds are continued, and the communal nature of bonds themselves (Klass, 2006; Neimeyer et al., 2014).

Theory element one extends this contention to the digital context, demonstrating that, for those grieving in respect of deceased-related digital material, bond continuation between deceased and bereaved is certainly at play, but nested into a wider reality construction endeavour that is intensely relational and situated; occurring "at least as fully between people as within them" (Neimeyer et al., 2014, p. 485).

Therefore, though a Continuing Bonds reading of theory element one is undeniable, I interpret bond continuation as an element of a larger, reality construction enterprise.

Contribution 2: Deceased-related digital material in survivor posthumous
accounts

The first constituent of theory element one, survivor posthumous account (PMA), suggests that deceased-related digital culture is involved in survivors constructing accounts with three elements: survivor account of dead, survivor account of survivor-deceased relationship, and survivor self-account.

This contributes to constructivist grief literature on survivor posthumous accounts: what they comprise, and the role of deceased-related digital material in their formation. For the purpose of specifying the current contribution to this literature, I single out the survivor posthumous account, but with the understanding that these are not standalone but forming within relationships, contexts and temporalities.

Central to Walter's (1996) exposition of the role of survivor representations of their dead in bond continuation, was the development by survivors of a biography of their dead: a history of their character, life and death, agreed upon by other survivors. Following Stroebe's (1997) critique, Walter tempered this; a biography of the dead "need not be true or agreed. All it needs is to be good enough for practical purposes" (1997, p. 263). This hinted at survivors' role in posthumous accounts, which Árnason (2000) built on, contending that posthumous accounts were not objective histories but stories reflecting survivors' changing view of themselves, and of their relationship with the dead. Similarly, Neimeyer et al. (2014) suggest that grief sparks a personal narrative activity with two aspects (i) "a need to process the event story of the loss itself and its import for our lives, as we contend with questions of why it happened and what it means for our lives going forward" and (ii) "an attempt to access the back story of our relationship to the deceased, both to restore some sense of attachment

security and re-establish a sense of continuity between the life we had and the life we face now" (p. 489).

Though there are differences in emphasis and categorisation, these theories all suggest survivor posthumous accounts involve (i) biography of deceased, (ii) autobiography of survivor and (iii) a relational account (of survivor-deceased relationship). These are the same three elements as the survivor posthumous account (PMA) in theory element one, constituent one.

What theory element one adds to this is the part of deceased-related digital culture (DRDC) in construction at these three levels. I contend that this is more complex and substantial than the manifestation of these categories in the digital case. Rather, I suggest DRDC can offer content particularly apt to these biographical, autobiographical and relational construction categories, and entail functionalities and possibilities that shape the categories under construction themselves.

First, (auto)biography and interpersonal connections are primary concerns of both contemporary media and communication technologies (Baym, 2010), and posthumous survivor accounts, such that DRDC can offer material of specific relevance to the posthumous accounts of today's grievers. Chapter 6 exhibited digital material involved in the construction of posthumous accounts that wove together the biographical ('who was this person who died and how did they die?'), autobiographical ('who was I then, and who am I now?') and relational ('what and how was our relationship'?). The chapter showed DRDC as a source of material apt to these categories of survivor posthumous accounts.

This was particularly apparent in this inquiry where deaths were violent and unanticipated (suicide, homicide, accident), which is in line with Walter (1996), Árnason (2000) and Neimeyer et al. (2014) who attest that such deaths cause greater rupture to biographical, autobiographical and relational accounts. It follows then that this would lead to a particular need to establish these via the digital material. For example, establishment of an account of the death (event story) was of particular importance in these violent and unanticipated cases. This was undoubtedly connected to the capacity for the digital material to entail content relating to the final days and moments of the dead, and survivors' ability, as imagined by Kasket (2011), to identify the point of discontinuity of their digital life, and of survivor-deceased digital relationships. Similarly, these violent and unanticipated deaths, were marked by survivors using digital material as a first port of call in their efforts to establish what happened and efforts to immediately and comprehensively review their relationship to the dead. This appears a digital manifestation of the post-death revisiting and reaffirmation of the history of the dead, the survivor and the survivor-deceased (Currier & Neimeyer, 2006; Holland, Currier, & Neimeyer, 2006).

Interestingly, purely biographical digital material (relating to the life of the dead); unrelated to survivors, was not the focus in this post-death surveying of material. Furthermore, such purely biographical digital material was not one of the key types of *literal* digital material in the record repertoire (Table 8.1, p. 364), whereas material related to survivors (e.g. material between survivor and deceased, or unique to the survivors) was. This adds to the contention in the grief literature that posthumous accounts are not, as was once proposed (Walter, 1996), focused on biography of the dead primarily, but that survivors account of themselves and their relationships with

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the dead are equally if not more important (Hedtke & Winslade, 2016; Árnason, 2000).

Secondly, Chapter 6 showed the involvement of media- and platform-specific functionalities, capabilities and affordances of DRDC in the posthumous accounts under construction. For example, DRDC related to one-to-one survivor-deceased relationships was of particular significance in findings, with survivors employing user-centric, relationship-centric, and chronological facilities of platforms (e.g. social media, messaging apps, email), to track back to the beginning of digital interactions with the deceased, to survey entire survivor-deceased digital relationships in chronological order, to search by keyword, time or media for particular exchanges, times or relational moments, to track recency of survivor-deceased interactions and platform-specific relationship rankings over time.

That is, the ways in which platforms and devices express, define and distinguish user-to-user connections, and the particular formats and functionalities by which these connections can be reviewed post-death, flow into survivors' accounts of their relationship with the dead and influence how the category itself is assessed. For example, in Oscar's case, the history of survivor-deceased communication on a given platform (WhatsApp) showing calls received, but not calls placed, shaping the survivor's posthumous account of a one-way relationship (Chapter 6, section 6.3.2).

Therefore, the contribution of this part of theory element one is that (i) deceased-related digital material can entail material particularly apt to the construction of posthumous accounts at the level of biography, autobiography and relationship and (ii) that digital material can afford novel means of parsing, searching, organising and

presenting information relating to these categories, such that the categories

themselves were shaped by media affordances and capabilities.

Contribution 3: Digital context as a dimension of grief ontology

As with theory element one, theories in the constructivist ontological tradition view grief as a multi-level phenomenon; if grief is a social construction, there are multiple levels of influences, contexts and frames commonly implicated in constructions.

Authors differently specify and separate these levels. Bob Neimeyer and colleagues have done this most extensively (Neimeyer & Gillies, 2006; Neimeyer, 2015; Neimeyer, 2000; Neimeyer et al., 2006)—most clearly outlined in Neimeyer et al. (2014)—conceptualising grief as meaning-making with multiple interacting levels: personal, familial, community and cultural. Klass (2006) situates the bond construction of individuals and families as occurring within a series of nested narratives: individual, family, tribe, nation and religion. Similarly, Hedtke and Winslade (2016) propose griefs are constructed from intersecting personal, familial, community, cultural and historical meaning systems.

Though authors differ in what these dimensions comprise, constructivist grief accounts propose elements roughly equating to personal, interpersonal, social and cultural spheres. The levels in existing theories therefore resonate with the construct constituents of theory element one. What theory element one contributes is the part of digital contexts in grief constructs. As with the previous contribution, I contend this is more substantial and complex than the digital equivalent of an analogue enterprise, amounting to an important contribution to this theory branch.

The following are two key ways in which digital contexts contribute to the levels of construction in constructivist grief accounts.

Firstly, digital factors feature in the social and cultural spheres of grief construction. Theory element one suggested, and showed via worked examples, survivor posthumous accounts and actants in (real and imagined) dialogue with a community of others. This dialogue was modulated by social contexts, e.g. some survivors in particular dialogue due to interpersonal dynamics (e.g. those of similar relationship type/tier), and group politics making some PMAs more, or less, influential. As the theory suggested, these social factors were entangled with cultural influences, e.g. grief hierarchies dictating a grief community's most influential PMAs.

These socio-cultural dimensions of grief construction are not new. What is novel in theory element one, is that digital contexts are entangled with these socio-cultural dimensions to the extent that they represent a contribution of significance to the levels of construction specified by existing theories.

The theory, worked examples (Chapter 8), and case deep dive (Chapter 7), showed digital factors as part of socio-cultural contexts. That is, socio-cultural dimensions, e.g. who was closest to the dead (social), and therefore whose PMAs ought be deferred to, based on a (cultural) grief hierarchy were modulated by digital factors, such as survivors' in-life digital relationships with the dead, what and how much DRDC was available to survivors, unique to survivors, and shared with others. That is, digital relationships with the dead, digital objects deriving from relationships, and objects demonstrating relational uniqueness with the dead, were part of how survivors appraised their own and others' in-life relationships with the dead. Digital factors therefore formed part of the socio-cultural dimension, influencing the power of survivors' PMAs in the grief community (social) and which local and broad (cultural)

norms are propagated in the grief community via these influential PMAs at micro-
and macro-levels.

The growing importance of digitality in appraisal of inter-personal connections, and digital means of representing and comparing relationships between individuals, makes this is an important consideration for grief theory. Digital means of enacting, representing and appraising relationships, and their use in post-death scenarios by the bereaved, may increasingly be part of how inter-survivor dynamics, group politics and the influence of PMAs as micro- and macro-levels are negotiated in grief communities, thus figuring in social and cultural dimensions of grief construction.

Theory element one proposes that survivor posthumous accounts were forming in real and imagined dialogue with a community of others (other survivors, the dead, future self and others), situated in social, digital and cultural contexts. Of novel contribution here is that this digital dimension of construction involved survivors engaging in complex readings of each other's digital contexts, and situating these others within the perceived digital contexts of the wider grief community.

Survivors' readings of others' digital contexts included more legible factors such as demographic characteristics, digital access, skill, engagement and deceased-related digital material available. This was combined with more interpretive readings of the personal, social and cultural environments forming others' (imagined) perceptions of digital technologies, views on and dispositions toward them, and norms, values, practices and expectations underpinning these.

This second, interpretive reading involved imagining other survivors' experiences of, and histories with, digital technologies, those of their family, peers, colleagues and community, and the physical availability and visibility of technology and infrastructures in their working environment, locale and geographical setting. It also involved an interpretive reading of the norms, values, practices and expectations about digital technologies emanating from these contexts, linked to deeper contextually and temporally contingent attitudes toward technologies.

These complex, multi-factorial readings of other survivors' digital contexts influenced how individuals imagined other survivors might view and experience grieving with deceased-related digital material relating to their dead, within a grief community

doing the same. These readings factored into the realities forming in relation to these others.

This construction of grief realities in relation to the interpreted digital contexts of other survivors, located within grief communities of individuals with their own digital contexts, was most apparent in the multi-participant case. For example, section 7.2.3 of the case deep dive demonstrated the posthumous account of Leah's tier-one friend Fiona (24) in particular dialogue with Leah's parents, Gary and Sally (58 & 57), and their perceived digital contexts.

Based on their age, perceived lifestyle (not 'sitting around at home'), perceived digital engagement (sparse), the imagined disposition toward digital technologies of their peers and local community (cautious), and cultural environment (rural, religious), Fiona interprets these parents as in a digital context where using digital material in grief might be perceived as inauthentic, and as though Leah's friends have 'moved on'. Based on her reading of their digital context, out of protection for Leah's parents, Fiona disengages from digital material at her own disposal, instead orienting toward means of grieving Leah aligned with these parents' interpreted digital context. Feeding this is Fiona's appraisal of the digital contexts of other members of the grief community in which these parents are embedded, which Fiona perceives as inclined toward digital activities beyond the ken of these parents, thereby amplifying their potential alienation and pain. Thus, the reality forming in relation to these parents is based on a complex interpretation of their digital milieus, situated within a grief community of others also in perceived digital contexts.

These complex digital appraisals shaped dialogue between survivors and the community of others, and the realities-in-relation being constructed.

In media and communication studies, socially contextual approaches are well established, with contemporary individuals immersed in complex social-cultural milieus that factor into their digital environments. Digital equity scholars, for example, understand that digital engagement is not a function of digital access, skill and demographic characteristics alone, but that interweaving personal, social and contextual factors form people's perceptions of their digital environments and shape their digital engagement (Van Deursen, Helsper, Eynon, & Van Dijk, 2017; Helsper, 2012; Helsper, Van Deursen, & Eynon, 2015). Helsper (2017) described the multi-factorial digital milieus involved in the digital engagement of contemporary individuals as a "socio-digital ecology" (p. 256). This term and concept is consonant with how key case participants related to each other as situated in complex, interpreted digital worlds. I contend that this concept is of use for grief theory. Grief scholars must consider modern grievers as embedded in these socio-digital ecologies, constructing grief in relation to others within interpreted socio-digital ecologies, situated within the larger socio-digital ecology of a grief community.

This socio-digital dimension of grief's construction not only contributes to constructivist grief theory. It also counters conceptual treatments of posthumous digital material, where material is described solely in terms of its technical capacity to exist and be accessed, without consideration that these may not map simply onto survivor experience.

In an early edited volume in this research terrain, in a chapter section entitled "*The impact of thanatechnology on the experience of illness, dying, and grief*", Carla Sofka and co-authors asked, "if grief reflects a social construction of reality referring to the meanings of death, dying and grief that evolve from people who share time, place

and culture", what role "the current technological revolution has in this construction" (Sofka, Noppe Cupit, et al., 2012, p. 4, italics in original).

Theory element one is an effort toward answering this question, identifying key ways in which the digital context of modern grieving is involved in its construction.

It also refutes Sofka et al.'s depiction of digitality as *impacting* grief, and the line of scholars that have taken up this impact discourse (e.g. Matthee, 2019; Bassett, 2015; Bassett, 2018; Baglione et al., 2018). I contend that this discourse is a return to problematic modernist grief ontology, where grief's reality is understood as fixed, and external to those experiencing it, affected by 'outside' factors that might disrupt or dilute it (digitality, in this case). This leads to grief normalisation, i.e. this grief is normal, and that grief is not, which, as the past century of grief theory has taught, and Strand one of the literature review established, is deeply problematic.

Theory element one rejects this impact discourse in the digital case of grieving, by proposing that digitality does not affect grief, as though grief is static and separate from those experiencing it. Rather, theory element one describes grief as fluidly constructing, and digital contexts as part of that construction.

9.1.1.2.1 Summary of discussion of theory element one

This first discussion section outlined how the first element of the presented theory,

Constructing realities-in-relation (i) refutes, and advances to the digital context,

conceptions of reality in grief theory, and (ii) challenges and contributes to the

constructivist branch of grief theory, particularly offering ways in which digital

contexts add to established levels of grief's construction.

9.1.2 Theory contribution to grief and material culture literatures

9.1.2.1 Introduction

In this section, I discuss how the full theory *Pliable realities-in-relation* contributes to grief and material culture literatures. As with the previous section of this Discussion chapter, there are many possible connections between my theory and existing scholarship.

However, in my reading, there is one branch of theory to which this thesis' proposed theory contributes particularly: grief as narrative, mediated by deceased-related material. I select this literature to expound upon in the following not only because it extends this particular literature in ways I find fascinating and wish to communicate. Equally, this literature is a device for me to reveal deeper issues with current conceptual patterns and empirical approaches to this research area, which lead into the larger implications and applications, outlined in the Conclusion (Chapter 10).

A major artery in the constructivist literature describes grief as narrative. Underlying narrative grief accounts is the root premise that organising, understanding and communicating our experience in storied terms is embedded in humankind (Bruner, 1986; Gergen & Gergen, 1986; Sarbin, 1986; Hermans, 2002). That is, humans bring coherence and continuity to experience by ordering events in a narrative template, with setting, plot, characterisation and themes, and that, in grief, survivors re-establish a narrative structure from the assault to story that loss occasions (Currier & Neimeyer, 2006; Valentine, 2008; Wojtkowiak et al., 2019; Goldie, 2011; Neimeyer et al., 2014; Árnason, 2000).

Death activates story particularly because its referents—the deceased, survivor-deceased relationship, and survivors as they related to the dead—have ceased to be, and enter the realm of pure story; represented only in the minds, memories and stories of those who experienced them. These stories interbraid with each survivor's subjective account of their relationship with the dead, and self-narrative, in communication with those of others, and in social and cultural contexts that shape stories.

Grief narratives are therefore not the private, unchecked fictions of isolated grievers. Rather, they are situated in that they reinstate or resist the narrative conventions of the teller's social, cultural and temporal context, interpretive in that survivors create stories from their subjective perspective within these contexts, and communicative in that narratives are told to others real and imagined whose perceived responses shape the narrative (Neimeyer et al., 2014; Currier & Neimeyer, 2006; Árnason, 2000).

At bereavement, the story of a person, their survivors and their relationships is under negotiation, within networks of motivated storytellers whose narratives are creative and interpretive but within the constrictions, expectations and consequences of particular milieus.

In material culture literature, there is much work on the part of physical deceased-related material in grief narratives; they represent sites where these interpretive, communicative and situated grief stories are negotiated (Gibson, 2004, 2008; Miller & Parrott, 2009; Hallam & Hockey, 2001). This is the body of literature to which the theory proper contributes. The following outlines three key ways in which my theory extends upon current conceptions of grief narratives and the part of deceased-related objects therein.

The first is a contribution to theory describing grief narratives as involving 'actual' and 'ideal' categories of the dead, their survivors and survivor-deceased relationships, and the part of deceased-related objects in these categories. Private and public grief narratives (e.g. conversations, eulogies, elegies and obituaries) are characterised by a classic tension between faithfully reflecting the 'actual' truth of the dead, their survivors and relationships, or distilling stories around flattering or exaggerated 'ideals' (Walter, 2005; Unruh, 1983; Kunkel & Dennis, 2003; Miller & Parrott, 2009). This duality responds to contradictory cultural expectations on grievers to remember lost people and relationships on the one hand, and on the other, that articulating the negative is taboo.

There is a wealth of work in sociology and cultural anthropology on the part of material culture in the construction of actual and idealized narratives about the people and relationships to which they pertain (e.g. Parrott, 2011; Miller & Parrott, 2009; Gibson, 2008).

Actual and ideal grief narratives not only form in relation to survivors' own stories of their dead, of themselves, and of their relationship with their dead, but in relation to the narratives of social others, where both resist or conform to actual and ideal categories. Within these social and cultural parameters, grievers are inventive in attributing material culture to these actual and ideal categories, interpreting categories from objects' physical properties, and creatively linking objects to categories via related memories, characteristics or events (Gibson, 2004, 2008; Miller & Parrott, 2009; Hallam & Hockey, 2001).

The theory I have proposed extends this.

First, it offers that these classic actual and ideal narrative categories are still at play when the deceased-related material involved is digital. In my reading, the *record* and *rendition* repertoires of the presented theory, and the *literal* and *figurative* material respectively associated with them, echo these actual and ideal narrative categories.

For instance *literal* material in the *record* repertoire was narrated as revealing the 'actual' warts-'n'-all character of Adam (worked theory example two, p. 375), with frequent engagement a way to resist others' idealization of him. Conversely, *figurative* material in the opposing, *rendition* repertoire was *also* used in the 'actual' narrative category. For example, *literal* material narrated as idealizing Leah's character and relationships, whereas Leah's sisters' personal and shared accounts (*rendition*) entail the 'actual' Leah (worked example one, p. 372).

As these examples demonstrate, via the repertoires, participants attributed actual or idealized categories to digital material, in order to resist or reinstate these categories in relation to others in the grief community, within their social, digital and cultural contexts.

Secondly, I propose that deceased-related digital material entail new interpretive possibilities for these actual and idealized narrative categories. This is because digital material brings its own dialectic about truth, reality and authenticity, and their sources, that grievers can weave into either actual or ideal narratives.

These are grand, opposing narratives that reflect pervasive cultural hopes and anxieties about the promises and perils of technologies, which recur with successive technological advances (Sturken & Thomas, 2004; Anderson, 2005; Baym, 2010), and are particularly animated at the death-technology intersection (Sconce, 2000; Bollmer, 2013).

The first narrative is *technological utopianism* wherein human identities and selves are viewed as extended by and authentically reproducible in data, divorced from bodies, and contain the essence of those to whom they relate (McLuhan, 1964; Kurzweil, 2005; Moravec, 1988). The second, opposing narrative is *technological dystopianism* which is critical and fearful of technology's impact on human practices and values whose fundamental essence is organic and embodied, and where the authenticity and substance of the technologically mediated is comparatively inferior (Benjamin, 2009 [1935]; Fisher, 1992; Spigel, 1992).

I contend that these are parallel discourses brought by the digital material, which are recruited in survivors' ideal and actual grief narratives.

For example, in the record repertoire, *literal* digital material was tied to the 'actual' narrative category via the *technological utopianism* discourse. *Literal* material was narrated as conveying 'actual' people and relationships via digital representations free from forces that blur truth over time: i.e. changing memories, avoidance of

painful truths, and subjective survivor accounts that idealize. In this *technological utopianism* discourse, literal digital material shows the truth of people and relationships by obviating and correcting human subjectivity.

Using the opposing, *technological dystopianism* discourse, this self-same literal digital material was attributed to the 'idealized' narrative category, i.e. literal digital material shows idealized versions of people and relationships because it brings a layer of awareness and intentionality that pollutes its truth value, it only partially represents dimensions and durations of characters, lives, relationships and events; does not capture the ugly, unflattering, mundane and negative realities of lives and relationships; and cannot encompass the ineffable, felt and shared knowledge of people and relationships. Thus, in the *technological dystopianism* discourse, literal digital material idealizes people and relationships, and is clarified and balanced by 'actual' human knowledge.

Thus, via either *technological utopianism* or *technological dystopianism* discourse, the same *literal* material can be turned to either actual or idealized narrative category, within a situated survivor narrative. The same is true for the rendition repertoire. For example, *figurative* digital material in the rendition repertoire was attributed to the 'actual' narrative category using the *technological dystopianism* discourse. Gaps, spaces, lost context, remembered, future and imagined material invited stories and memories are closer to 'reality' because shared memories and accounts are comprehensive, checked against each other, and open to new information in a way that partial and rigid digital material is not. Via the *technological dystopianism* discourse, figurative material is a direct line into 'actual' pre-death people and relationships.

This same *figurative* material is also attributable to the idealized narrative category via the opposing *technological utopianism* discourse, portraying it as susceptible to the unchecked human tendency to posthumously romanticise people and relationships. Time, changing memory, and the wish to avoid pain render personal and communal accounts untrustworthy. With no basis or corroboration in the 'actual' offered by *literal* digital material, they are in the realm of idealized fiction.

This finding supports the broad contention in the grief and material culture literature that objects of the dead are artfully deployed in grief narratives in actual and ideal categories (Miller & Parrott, 2009; Sutton & Hernandez, 2007; Gibson, 2008; Simpson, 2014). It extends this to the digital context, by proposing that survivors creatively enlist available cultural discourses about technology that are apt to this activity. The digital material entails new base materials malleable to these age-old grief narrative categories.

This contribution also challenges conceptual portrayals of posthumous material as simple, one-to-one representations or reproductions of the 'actual' people and identities to which they pertain (e.g. Matthee, 2019; Bassett, 2015; Clabburn et al., 2019):

"When we die, the digital content we have created becomes our digital legacy. This digital legacy will not only increase in importance as the information age flourishes, as the digital content created by people provides a rich reflection of the *actual* people who created the content"

(Matthee, 2019, p. 29, italics mine).

My theory suggests that such conceptions forget grief is a situated, interpretive and communicative activity wherein digital material's capacity to convey 'actual' people and relationships is not a purely technical question or abstraction but a function of its part in a given and fluid narrative.

9.1.2.4 Deceased-related digital material in accurate and vague grief narratives

Grief narratives are also characterised by two complementary qualities; certainty and vagueness.

Whether survivor narratives—about their dead, themselves and their relationship to their dead—ought to be certain or vague has been embattled in the theory. This began with Walter's (1996) contention that certainty—that checked against and corroborated by other survivors—was central. However, contemporarily, certainty and vagueness are viewed as mutually constitutive in grief narratives; one requires, and is completed by, the other (Sørensen, 2011; Kempson & Murdock, 2010; Goldie, 2011; Neimeyer et al., 2014; Árnason, 2000).

What is certain in a grief narrative—that agreed upon and verified by other survivors—lends it credibility. Credibility is key because grief narratives are communicated to others, real and imagined (other survivors, the dead, future others). However, grief narratives are not just series of verified certainties about the dead, their survivors and their relationships. Rather, narrative vagueness (the unknown, uncertain and unverifiable) complements certainty because it leaves room for interpretive storying from changing survivor perspectives, and in relation to social others and contexts. Vagueness leaves spaces open to story, possibility and imagination, keeping narratives alive and relevant to survivors. Thus, whereas the certain gives narratives a definitive, credible basis, vagueness is generative and leaves room for narrative manoeuvre.

My theory is an interesting addition to this.

First, in my reading, the *record* and *rendition* repertoires—and *literal* and *figurative* deceased-related digital material associated with them—can function, respectively, as sources of narrative certainty or vagueness. This appears to accord with current theory, and extends it by suggesting that the certain-vague complementarity applies when grief narratives are mediated by this digital material. For example, the frequency of survivor-deceased messaging (*literal*) ascertains relational closeness in a narrative, while chronological gaps between messages (*figurative*) are vague and open to narrative interpretation.

However, I assert that there is a difference in that deceased-related digital material entails a critical variation to the certainty-vague balance, because literal digital material can offer a new order of narrative certainty. The following sets this out.

In the *record* repertoire, survivors describe *literal* digital material in a narrative of certainty; it is evidence conferring believability to the situated narrative it supports. For example, frequency of survivor-deceased messages is evidence of a friendship under threat from imagined others and 'fuzzy' survivor memory. However, contrary to analogue sources of narrative certainty, *literal* material confers certainty not via the agreement of others, but via material whose certainty comes from *eschewing* the accounts of others. That is, I contend that the agreement of others is trumped by the certainty offered by *literal* digital material sealed off from the corrupting accounts and memories of others.

However, this new, digitally-focused narrative certainty is double edged. The very qualities that confer it—specificity, exactness, detail, vividness, anchoring in time, digital ranking, rating, positioning and quantification etc.—are also those which, with time post-bereavement and changing survivor memory, can be painful. The first

findings chapter (sections 6.2 & 6.4.1) showed *literal* digital material can be painful encounters with loss; they can age badly (slip in rank, recency and position, lose context and meaning); highlight deadness (show people and relationships frozen in increasingly distant pasts, contain nothing new); clash with changing survivor accounts and actants (e.g. negatively depict survivors). They can also falsely suggest communication with the dead, and material that once evoked the dead can become evocative of its role in grieving.

Thus, in these ways, this new digitally-focused certainty can be painful. This pain is either worthwhile for the certainty it brings to a relationally and contextually situated narrative, or creates a need for narrative vagueness to offset it.

Via *figurative* material, free from these sources of pain, narrative vagueness was available, and participants were creative in finding it. For instance, looking at the first worked example of the full theory (p. 372) through this lens of certainty and vagueness, Leah's bereaved sister first narrates the content of text messages (*literal*) as evidence of Leah's regard for her. However, as the minutiae of this material clashes with her own self-view (might show her being bitchy to Leah), Sarah remembers/imagines these same texts as low in substance and context (*figurative*), and inviting of a narrative more flexible to her self-account.

This digital certainty, and its interaction with survivor's relationship to comfort and pain and their changing memory, and their fluid PMA and actants, may explain why the novel availability of such narrative certainty is not upending the certainty-vagueness balance, and why vagueness is still needed to complement it.

This is of particular interest, given that digital material would appear to disrupt the certainty-vague balance in grief narratives. That is, if greater certainty about the dead, survivors and survivor-deceased relationships were the ultimate goal of grief narratives, as Walter (1996) contended, deceased-related digital material might bring survivors closer to achieving it.

However, my theory refutes this, suggesting that greater accuracy alone can be painful, and curtail narratives' malleability to changing memories, relationships and posthumous accounts, and to pain and comfort. It chimes with the idea that *epistemic uncertainty* is a knowledge form as important and generative as certainty, with imagined realities, hypotheticals and reveries means of knowing and constructing realities (Bachelard, 1971; Ehn & Lofgren, 2010; Sørensen, 2016, 2015). The importance of vagueness in my theory is also a digital expression of the importance of epistemic uncertainty in grief, (Sørensen, 2015), where vagueness stirs "helpful yet not entirely truthful images and realisations of the dead" and translates "the potentially disturbing facticity of death, decay and loss into manageable and opaque forms, protecting the bereaved by a layer of vague knowledge" (p. 35/36).

My appraisal of the full theory is that survivors are creative in eking out the vague in the apparently certain, and that, like the *record* and *rendition* repertoires, either can be drawn upon within narratives that are simultaneously personal, that relate to others, and that are in social, digital and cultural milieus that modulate what and whose stories are told. This corroborates the established ingenuity of grievers to craft grief narratives from the limitations and possibilities of given settings and materials (Neimeyer et al., 2014; Hedtke & Winslade, 2016). It extends this to the

digital context, showing that the part of deceased-related digital material in grief is

not simply a matter of exporting material with single, universal or fixed characteristics

and meanings unchanged into griefs. Rather, the digital material brings novel

possibilities (certainty) and limitations (pain), which are negotiated in situated,

communicative and interpretive survivor narratives. Viewing grief as narrative and

reading my theory through this lens, is a vehicle for illustrating the inveterate

creativity and ingenuity that grief continues to entail in digital contexts.

Margaret Gibson (2004) used the term 'evocative objects' to describe material culture relating to the dead that entails for their survivors a direct link to their dead; body trace, memory, or symbolic connection. Gibson describes however, how over time and use in mourning, material can instead come to represent or remind of its grief role, thereby losing its directness to the dead. Thus, material's evocativeness can become overwritten with a painful layer of memory of grief, such that it transitions from an 'evocative' to a 'melancholy object'.

This is clearly redolent of elements of my theory relating to survivors' relationships to pain and comfort, where material was comforting because of its evocativeness (of deceased, relationship and survivor pre-death), and painful when this directness became encased in a layer of memory about its grief role; an added 'emotional wrapping' (section 6.4.1). This extends Gibson's conception to the digital case; that by virtue of its involvement in grieving, digital culture can also move from evocative to melancholy.

However, an added dimension emanating from my theory is that, as described in the previous section, as well as this painful loss of direct links to the dead, digital material can also be painful because it *retains* directness; directness itself can be painful. To reflect digital objects' potential to both lose directness to the dead, and to retain it, both of which can be painful, I propose the term '*double-melancholy*' objects.

9.1.2.6 Summary of theory contribution to grief and material culture literatures

This second section of this chapter's Contributions demonstrated three ways in which the proposed theory, *Pliable realities-in-relation*, contributes to grief and material culture literature. By connecting my theory to one of the prominent contemporary theoretical grief treatments, grief as narrative, I identified three key ways in which my theory develops current theory. In the next section, I turn to the contributions of my theory to the empirical literature.

9.1.3 Theory contribution to empirical literature

9.1.3.1 Introduction

The original contributions of my theory to empirical literature on grief and deceased-related digital culture are threefold.

Findings/theory

First, previous empirical findings are lacking in three fundamentals of my theory: (i) time and change (ii) relationship and context, and (iii) death-centred digital culture focus. To show this, I offer three examples of critical points of departure between my theory and previous empirical findings in this space. As well as enabling detailed comparison between previous findings and my theory, these illustrations are emblematic of research approach patterns in this field, and the implications flowing from them, to which my theory contributes.

Approach

The three fundamentals of my theory are lacking in other studies due to their conceptual and methodological approaches. Specifically, they do not apply the principles and methodologies of related disciplines to this related area. My approach, driven by grief and material culture principles and methodologies, is unique in doing this. This is the second novel contribution to empirical research in this area. I show how the approach of my work is lacking in previous research and needed in future efforts.

Larger implications

This builds to the third contribution of my theory to this empirical literature; it illuminates how research in this area is reigniting problematic methodological issues and conceptual misapprehensions about grief, and the part of deceased-related material therein, which related disciplines have shown to have deleterious effects.

Using my theory, I show why awareness of these deeper implications must inform future research undertakings in this emerging field, and sets precedents for how researchers report, situate and assess findings and theory in this nascent scholarly area.

In the following, I weave the above levels of contribution into three subsections addressing, in turn, the three fundamentals of my theory lacking in previous research: (i) time and change (ii) relationship and context, and (iii) death-centred digital material.

Time and change are cornerstones of both elements of the *Pliable realities-in-relation* theory. The theory describes grief, and the part of deceased-related digital culture therein, as a reality-constructing enterprise that is dynamic and fluid by definition, where studying it is a freezing of the frame.

The centrality of time and change to my theory is the first point of departure from existing findings and theory. Of the studies in the narrative review, none longitudinally generated information about the phenomenon in a repeated-engagement fashion, following participants over time post-bereavement, as my inquiry did.

For example, in their chapter *Transition and Letting Go*, Cumiskey and Hjorth (2017) use excerpts from qualitative interviews to establish how mobile media can over time be party to a 'letting go' process for survivors, invoking Klein's (1940) 'linking objects' that bridge detachment from the dead:

"With time, previously emotionally charged digital content did not carry as much significance for the user as it once did. It was easier for them to distance themselves psychologically from their digital linking object, and they visited certain digital archives less often" (Cumiskey & Hjorth, 2017, p. 117).

Though the authors recognise this 'letting go' discourse has been challenged in grief theory, they invoke it on the basis that their Western participants are informed by it, and in cultural contexts where letting go is a perceived requirement.

However, applying my theory to this finding, suggests this letting go may represent points in time for their participants that are, by definition, apt to change, and that investigation over time is required. Indeed, if I had analysed my first-wave, retrospective interview and diary data, I would have found survivors disengaging from material over time, and perhaps also surmised material was party to a one-directional, letting-go process. However longitudinally and repeatedly asking what role, if any, material was having, nuanced this, enabling me to perceive material moving in and out of significance over time, depending on shifting and situated survivor accounts. Furthermore, longitudinal, repeated engagement also impressed on me that though survivors may have been less frequently accessing or engaging directly with *literal* material, this did not mean material was moving out of significance, or mediating 'letting go'.

Rather, my theory suggests material can have a *figurative* role not linked to engagement in the literal sense. Indeed, it suggests material was equally useful in constructions if—and indeed *because*—it is not engaged with by survivors. This is illustrated in the first worked theory example (section 8.1.7.1) and in my book chapter, O'Connor (2020), where text messages are part of this bereaved sister's posthumous account despite, and perhaps *because*, they are never actually accessed. The texts' role in Sarah's narrative hinges on her rejecting their availability.

Comparing my theory to Hjorth and Cumiskey's findings illustrates the importance of embedding time and change into methodologies, reporting of findings, and the drawing of theoretical conclusions based on findings. It also exemplifies what my theory suggests is a deeper implication of empirical work in this field: that findings of

research that do not take time and change into account can be read as supporting

problematic grief theory (here, Kleinian detachment via linking objects) which

invokes grief as linear and piecemeal detachment, enabled by digital material. The

deleterious effects of such reductive and linear grief accounts are well established

and it is critical that grief researchers in this new terrain are aware of their effects,

and thread this awareness through our methodologies, theorising and reporting.

My theory is an important contribution to this position because it displays the

inappropriateness of these old grief concepts in this new terrain. It also amounts to a

call for future researchers in this field to be vigilant in preventing these persistent

misapprehensions from re-entering grief research in this digital context.

The second critical contribution of the presented theory to the empirical literature is its relational and contextual embeddedness. That is, for participants from whose accounts I formed this theory, the part of deceased-related digital culture in grieving was webbed into their relationships with others real and imagined, past, future and present, inextricable from the social, digital and particularities of community and contexts, sat in local and broad cultural frames.

This was borne out most dramatically in this study's eighteen-survivor case, wherein what otherwise seemed individual-level orientations toward digital material identified in Chapter 6 were, in the Chapter 7 case deep dive, shown as realities forming in relation to a complex, particular and dynamic grief ecology. Accordingly, these dimensions of grief's construction—relationship and context—underpin my two-part theory, *Pliable realities-in-relation*, with individual survivor accounts just one of five construct constituents at play.

The profound relationality and contextuality of my theory shows previous studies in this space as lacking in this critical dimensionality.

To illustrate, for Bassett's Constructivist Grounded Theory inquiry, she interviewed 31 unrelated 'digital inheritors' about heterogeneous digital culture relating to their dead. Her substantive *Theory of Second Loss* (Bassett, 2020b; Bassett, 2018; Bassett, 2019c) "describes the fear of losing precious data which contains the essence of the dead" (2019, p. 1). In this theory, biological death of the other is the first loss experienced by survivors, the second is loss of 'precious' data possessed of

their deceased's 'essence', such that digital-age grief is marked by fear of this latter loss.

There are some similarities between Bassett's theory and mine. An element of my theory maps onto (fear of) second loss, in that survivors' relationships to pain and comfort was an actant on their posthumous accounts, and an influencer of *record* and *rendition* repertoires. However, my theory suggests fear of second loss is much more changeable, relational and contingent than Bassett's theory allows.

First, taking the fear of second loss at the individual survivor level at which Bassett proposes it. In my theory, pain and comfort (including fear of loss) was not universally negative. On the contrary, for some, loss of material was a comfort, e.g. relieving survivors of decisions to delete or dispose of material. Moreover, due to the proposed *double-melancholy* of digital objects (p. 414), material can be, or become, painful. Thus, losing it, and the thought of its loss, can be positive.

Moreover, my theory holds that survivor pain and comfort (including loss of material and fear of loss) is not a matter of individual survivors. Rather, in my theory survivors' fear of loss of material was bound up in the posthumous account this material fortified or undermined, in dialogue with social others, and in social, digital and cultural settings that placed conditions and expectations on accounts.

For example, in the second worked theory example (p. 375), losing material about her father was a fear for Adam's daughter, Bella, because it offered *literal* detail (*record* repertoire) of his difficult character and infidelities, which helped Bella resist the attempts of other survivors to whitewash Adam. However, in dialogue with Bella's mother, this fear changed. Later, in the *rendition* repertoire, losing material is a

positive as it protects her mother's self-account—as having had a good marriage—and complies with the cultural norm informing her mother: to fondly remember the dead.

Extracting fear of second loss, or any element of this phenomenon, from the fluid relationships and contexts that shape them, suggests they occur principally 'inside' individual survivors. It forgets grief is a communicative, situated and interpretive activity by people in particular and shifting relationships, milieus and times. As this example in Adam's case shows, by exploring this phenomenon over time at the level of groups of death-connected individuals—in line with grief and material culture principles—the role of relationship and context in grief's construction is clear.

Furthermore, it illustrates how treating this as a matter of individuals and studying it at that level, leads to universal accounts of the role and value of material. Bassett's theory proposes that fear of second loss is because it is "precious data which contains the essence of the dead". My theory is a direct challenge to the proposition that data is always or universally precious, or experienced as containing the deceased's 'essence'. I argue this is grief theory history repeating, where we have seen (as outlined in Chapter 2) how treating and studying grief as a matter of atomised individuals, flows into harmful normative and universalising grief discourses.

My theory stands as a counter-example, advocating for future empirical efforts in this space that are wise to the pitfalls of developing grief theory, digital-age or no, based on individual-level, decontextualized research, and, if doing so, employing appropriate caveats to counter universalising and normative readings.

The third fundamental of my theory lacking in previous empirical research in this terrain is that it relates to heterogeneous and changing arrays of deceased-related material. This resulted from this inquiry's death-centred focus, drawing on grief material cultural precedents.

This death-centred, material-inclusive approach is exclusive to this inquiry. Consequently, unique contributions arise from the theory encompassing it. These advances come into view by comparing my theory with previous findings.

To illustrate, Clabburn et al (2019) conducted an interpretative phenomenological analysis of interviews with young people parentally bereaved by motor neurone disease and in receipt of parents' 'digital legacies': heterogeneous material created ante-mortem for post-mortem consumption. In their proposed '*Model of Reciprocal Bonds Formation'*, the authors propose a development to Walter's durable biography theory (1996), with the addition of an 'autobiographical chapter' directly 'from' the deceased. Clabburn et al. offer that durable biographies comprise Walter's 'final chapter' and Fearnely's (2015) 'penultimate chapter' and this newly identified 'autobiographical chapter' *from* the dead about their lives, identities and characters, furnished by digital legacies.

This finding is interesting particularly because of the cause of death involved, in that 'legacies' furnished autobiographical information about parents which their surviving children had not been privy to due to their progressive neurodegenerative disease, e.g. parents' voices or mobility levels never witnessed by interviewees.

However, viewed in light of my theory, the contention that autobiographical information proffered by digital material transfers unchanged into survivors' biographies of their dead is problematic. It suggests a one-to-one relationship between 'information' in these legacies and that information's part in the biography of the dead, which does not track with my theory. It also confers a fixity and objectivity to this autobiography, as though the life, identity and character are singular, agreed and definitive and can be imparted to survivors via digital material.

"…use of this autobiographical chapter (the legacy), provides a sense of comfort and continuing bonds through watching the videos and learning about the deceased's life, identity and character" (p.819)

The authors suggest this advances bereavement theory as the dead are normally silent in the formation of their biographies. However, this reading renders survivors as passive recipients of fixed and objective information about their dead rather than creative agents that interpret and craft it to their situated accounts.

My theory challenges the idea that digitally received 'information' about the dead might be transported unchanged into survivors' accounts of their dead. It holds that the use or value of any material relating to the dead, even material with such a direct link to them, is only as useful as its part in supporting situated survivor accounts in relationships, contexts and times.

I propose that the simplicity of this finding is owing to the study's object-centred focus: taking a pre-defined type of material and investigating its grief role, as opposed to taking the death of a person and related griefs as the focus, and asking survivors to specify material at play in grief. This is a critical distinction, as it places

grief at the centre of the inquiry rather than particular types of material, which narrows the field and misses the larger grief enterprise in which material is involved.

Furthermore, rather than focusing on individual digital objects, object types or platform-based groupings of objects, as other studies have, my inquiry and theory incorporated ecologies of material relating to a death, and their role within situated survivor accounts. This looked beyond the particulars and functionalities of platforms and devices, to the higher-level traits, foci, repertoires and discourses in which material was implicated. Arrays of material were involved in my participants' reality constructions, and to focus on a type or cluster of types would have underrepresented or narrowed this larger enterprise. This broader, overarching focus on grief, and the part of this material therein, was therefore critical in my interpretation of the pliable role of this material in survivors' realities-in-relation.

My theory therefore suggests research in this area ought be less focused on specific types or definitions of digital material, and beware of developing grief theory on the basis of work with this focus. To do so, I contend, risks missing the complexity of how this material in involved in posthumous compositions by relationally and contextually situated survivors. As shown in the Clabburn et al. example, developing grief theory from this narrow material-oriented focus leads to theoretical contributions that reduces grief to the collecting of objective information by passive survivors, rather than interpretive reality constructing by situated agents.

Using three examples of previous empirical efforts on grief and deceased-related digital culture, I showed how three characteristics of my theory contribute originally to the findings, approach and larger implications of the empirical literature.

9.1.4 Contributions summary

In this first part of the Discussion chapter: Contributions, I placed the presented theory in conversation with three literatures (i) grief theory (ii) grief and material culture and (iii) empirical literature. In doing so, I set down the contributions it makes, challenges it presents, developments it affords, and deeper patterns it identifies and forewarns, in interdisciplinary scholarship, theory and research in this emerging area.

9.2 Discussion part two: Reflections

This second part of the Discussion chapter is a brief reflective epilogue, where I identify aspects of inquiry, data, findings and theory that should be taken into account in appraising the quality and contribution of this work. In keeping with this thesis' ontological and epistemological position, wherein research endeavours are unrepeatable efforts with specific qualities, these are not limitations but noteworthy particularities of this endeavour.

In the following, I establish these particularities, anticipate objections, and acknowledge blank and blind spots that point to future research opportunities.

9.2.1 Methodology and method-related reflections

9.2.1.1 Gender

Twentieth-century grief models are founded on studies of female grief, primarily of western women widowed by the World Wars, undertaken by men (e.g. Freud, 1917 [1915]; Parkes, 1972; Lindemann, 1944; Marris, 1958). However, this gendered basis was unacknowledged and became the foundation for *adult* grief theory (Hockey, 2002; Valentine, 2006). Focus on women's grief is rooted in patriarchal medical discourses linking emotionality and women's femininity with reproductive cycles; pathologising female grief as 'hysteria' and lost social status; and femaleness as irrational and unruly, tamed by male reason, control and objectification (Showalter, 1987; Hockey, 2002; Doyal, 1979).

Grief as 'women's work' has filtered into grief research: it is traditionally difficult to involve men, resulting in an underrepresentation of males in grief research (Martin & Doka, 2000; Hockey, 2002; Walter, 1999). Consequently, the findings we offer and theories we devise as grief researchers are critiqued as recapitulating their gendered, patriarchal origins (Valentine, 2006; Hedtke & Winslade, 2016; Hockey, 2002).

Though aware of this history and effect in this inquiry, in recruiting case key contacts I chose not employ a strategy to recruit male contacts specifically, for fear of curtailing recruitment in this unknown terrain. Recruitment in this inquiry was therefore subject to these forces, with females dominating KC recruitment (2=male, 9=female), chain referrals (4=male, 17=female) and total participants (6=male, 26=female). The findings of this inquiry are predominantly female-generated and must be situated as such.

Similarly, grief theory has a problematic history of developing grief accounts from Western contexts (Valentine, 2006; Field et al., 1997; Walter, 1999): generalizing them to non-Western contexts (e.g. Rosenblatt, Walsh, & Jackson, 1976), depicting non-Western griefways as exotic in comparison to canonical Western norms (Gunaratnam, 1997), and portraying non-Western griefs as comparatively irrational or primitive (Field et al., 1997; Gunaratnam, 1997).

To destabilise the Western focus of this study, I took steps to open the study to the global, interconnected "borderless world" (Skey, 2012, p.471) accessible via the Internet, i.e. publicising the study online, study website and remote participation. However, in reality, this bid to recruit beyond the West was constrained by the requirement for participant English proficiency, the study's Anglo-centric origin, and use of my UK-based professional communication networks and location-specific recruitment avenues (local magazine adverts and speaking engagements). Consequently, all participants and deceased (bar one) came from the English-speaking West (England, Scotland and the U.S.A).

Despite three-quarters of the world's population being non-Western, and entailing more than 60% of the world's Internet users (Statista, 2020), thus far academic knowledge about grief and deceased-related digital material particularly, as well as *Digital Death* research generally, is almost exclusively North American and European in origin and focus (some exceptions, e.g. Choudhary, 2018) (Öhman & Watson, 2019). Moreover, the first big-data projection of the global future of the digital remains phenomenon by Öhman and Watson (2019) (using Facebook, thus limited but useful as an example), project that incidence of deceased Facebook

users will be most prevalent in South Asia and Africa in the coming decades, the authors advocating for scholarship focused on these areas.

However, research endeavours and data are always marked by particularities and contexts. By recognising and conserving these in research reports, we block their transference to contexts other and inappropriate. Indeed, the above difficulties with gendered and ethnocentric grief scholarship resulted from a lack of recognition of the origins and contexts of findings, and their indiscriminate application and generalisation to inappropriate contexts and populations.

Therefore, in recognising the female and occidental facets of this inquiry and its contributions, as Klass (1999a) suggests, I steep the grief account I am proposing in the context that produced it, draw out these particularities as I disseminate to block their application to inappropriate contexts, and suggest that future research attends to the particularities my inquiry does not.

A key characteristic of this inquiry's methodology, rooted in its grief and material culture foundations, is exploration of the role of time in the studied phenomenon. This was enacted via serial generation of interview and diary data over a maximum of one year, producing the duration data unique to this study.

9.2.1.3.1 How much data were duration data?

Drilling down into the data, about one third of participants (37.5%, 14 of 32) did not generate duration data, participating in once-off interviews. Moreover, though 19 participants agreed to partake in the diary element, and 29 entries were generated, this was a relatively small number given that these participants had the possibility to diarise to any extent in their study duration.

Owing to this inquiry's exploratory ethos and sensitive terrain, the extent, intervals and duration of participant engagement were not fixed, but negotiated with individual participants. However, as a neophyte researcher in this sensitive terrain, I found it difficult to be forthright in these negotiations. Though agreeing in theory that bereaved participants are responsible agents capable of making decisions about participating (Corbin & Morse, 2003; Dempsey et al., 2016), in practice I felt guilt at making study requests of grieving people.

With this acknowledged, it is nonetheless the case that nearly two thirds of participants (62.5%, 20 of 32) partook serially, and that the substantial, greater corpus of duration generated *were* duration data. That is, this 62.5% participated over an average of 5.3 months (range=2 to 12 months), generating an average of 3.3

data points[37] (range=2 to 7), with an average interval of 10.9 weeks (range=4 to 48 weeks). Thus, though I acknowledge that a proportion of inquiry data were not duration data, and appreciate my role in this, the major proportion of data from the majority of participants were, thereby supporting this study's unique claim to this attribute.

9.2.1.3.2 Did studying longitudinally in death-centred cases affect findings?

Longitudinal, repeated engagement with participant cohorts can influence findings, with participant 'conditioning' potentially affecting responses, and phenomena being studied (Taris, 2000; Ruspini, 2008). I observed this effect in my research. A few participants mentioned having considered research aspects more after reading study information; one commented that screening prompted re-reading material relating to their dead. Additionally, some participants reflected or prepared in anticipation of follow-up interviews, e.g., searching out material prior to interview or cueing material up to show me. This study's multi-participant, death-centred cases may have heightened this conditioning effect. Some same-case participants communicated about their study involvement, potentially prompting comparisons of digital material and their uses and experiences. Some same-case participants either directly or indirectly made inquiries of me about digital material at the disposal of others in their case.

Though some conditioning inheres in repeat-engagement inquiries, I took steps to offset its effects. For example, I factored out of my analysis instances, activities and experiences with the material I knew to have been influenced or prompted by study

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[37] Interviews, diaries & digital objects

involvement. I was careful not to indicate when asked about other case participants and did not make suggestions about what material relating to their dead was in existence or playing a role, even when I knew other material existed. I also communicated, prior to and at the beginning of follow-up interviews, that participating in a follow-up interview did not require participants to prepare themselves or any material, and that having nothing to report at interview was equally important to the study.

It is critical to note that repeated engagement with participant cohorts also has counter-balancing, positive effects. Data quality improves as participants attune to the study focus over time (Ruspini, 2008), participants bring experiences of past study encounters to the next (Duncan, 2000), and, in sensitive research, familiarise with the process and develop rapport with the researcher, thereby encouraging richer data (Dempsey et al., 2016; Sque et al., 2014).

Lastly, this inquiry's interpretivist-constructivist epistemology does not claim separation from inquiry or findings. Rather, as described in the Methodology chapter (section 3.3.3.1) it embraces the entanglement of researcher, research and researched, and is critical and curious about what this entanglement says about the studied object. For instance, given the profound relationality of my proposed theory, it is unsurprising that survivors also oriented to each other with respect to their participation; their participation thus reflecting their contexts as survivors in networks of other participating survivors. This attests to my theory, that survivors are constructing their post-bereavement experiences in relationships and communication with social others, creatively weaving the available materials in their contexts.

9.2.2 Theory-specific reflections

Having drawn out noteworthy qualities of this study's methodology and method, in the following I make observations about the proposed theory, *Pliable realities-in-relation*. I identify (i) where this theory is especially marked by the data and context that produced it, and would particularly benefit from investigation with specific other data and contexts, and (ii) where its qualities forecast future applications.

9.2.2.1 Theory-specific qualities

9.2.2.1.1 Dominance of key case

The proposed theory is grounded in data from 32 participants constellated around 11 cases of digital-age death. Leah's case (two) was dominant, accounting for 56.25% of participants, the remaining 43.75% spread across the other ten cases. Thus, the majority of data on which my theory is based related to this case.

As an exploratory inquiry, this unique and unexpected opportunity to engage so extensively over time with this case was welcomed. On this basis, (as described in Chapter 3), I chose to focus on this key case, pivoting away from multiple-case study methodology and using death-centred case studies as a method. This pivot from multiple-case methodology to method also changed the analytic aspiration: from analysing multiple, approximately similar cases, to using one extensive system of death-connected individuals as my analytic base (case two), and the other cases as fragments of other survivor systems to check emerging theory against.

This pivot filtered through to analysis: I first conducted a cross-participant analysis regardless of death case, and then an in-case analysis of the key case, with constant comparison against the other cases.

For cross-participant analysis, I reasoned that though some people were grieving the same deaths, they were grieving relationships that were unique and idiosyncratic with respect to unique and idiosyncratic arrays of related digital material. Though initially concerned that dominance of Leah-bereaved participants might undermine findings at this cross-participant level, this exercise was critical in illuminating that, even when over half participants are death-connected, one can analyse and report findings that do not speak to that connectedness.

This connectedness is unique to my study, the analysis and explication of which was enabled via the deep dive into this unique and extensive eighteen-participant case. Therefore, the dominance of Leah's case is my theory's unique strength and unparalleled contribution. This quality makes this case singular in the literature both in grief scholarship generally, as well as in this particular niche of that literature.

9.2.2.1.2 Dominance of 'positive' survivor-deceased relationships

The proposed theory is grounded in data relating predominantly to grief for 'positive' survivor-deceased relationships. In many cases, participants referred to less favourable qualities and characteristics of their dead, and relational ups and downs. However, in 10 of the 11 cases, these were narrated as characterful foibles of people and relationships that were positive on the whole.

Adam's case (case one) was the exception, his surviving daughter describing a difficult, serial adulterer from whom she was estranged (case profile on p. 168). In

the other ten cases, *literal* digital material was evoked in the *record* repertoire as purveying objective evidence of dead individuals and survivor-deceased relationships that were positive on the whole. By contrast, in Adam's case, as the second worked theory example (p. 375), Adam's daughter used *literal* material as records of the negative, 'actual', Adam which must be protected from his idealisation.

This 'negative' case serves as an inverse manifestation that supports the theory, i.e. the theory shown manifesting in the opposite direction to positive cases but its categories applicable to both. From the constructivist perspective, 'deviant' or 'atypical' data do not necessarily disconfirm observed patterns. Rather, they are analytically fertile as they shed different light on proposed data patterns, thereby refining, contradicting, and potentially fortifying, interpreted patterns (Silverman, 2011; Madill, Jordan, & Shirley, 2000; Potter, 1996). Moreover, attention and openness to the novel aspect upon phenomena offered by deviant cases is considered a mark of quality of inquiries and their findings (Silverman, 2011; Madill et al., 2000; Potter, 1996).

In the grief and material culture literature, the use of material in griefs for complex lives and fractious relationships is particularly fruitful, with related material implicated in inter-survivor negotiations of the actual and ideal in narratives of complex characters and relationships (Miller & Parrott, 2009; Gibson, 2008). Adam's case echoes the tensions in the actual and ideal particular to negative cases, and the part of deceased-related digital material therein, suggesting the fruitfulness of exploring negative cases further.

However, recruiting survivors of 'negative' deaths in research presents challenges, as survivor feelings about the dead, the life and the relationship (e.g. guilt, regret

shame, blame) and clashing narratives and dynamics can preclude participation (Maple, Edwards, Plummer, & Minichiello, 2010; Caswell & O'Connor, 2015). This was certainly at play in my study, with survivors liberally chain-referring when the life and death in question had been without negative feelings other than that caused by bereavement, or major discrepancies in survivor accounts.

Therefore, though in-case chain referral was apt to recruit positive death cases, the one 'negative' case supported and strengthened the theory in a manner distinct from the others. This suggests grounds for focused inquiry on grief and digital culture in 'negative' death cases, with recruitment tailored to these contexts, where my theory might be purposefully investigated with negative cases.

9.2.2.1.3 Paucity of anticipated deaths

Another notable characteristic of data driving this theory is that that it does not accord to deaths anticipated by deceased and bereaved, where material was overtly influenced by this anticipation.

Despite noticing this paucity in incoming data and tweaking recruitment accordingly (as described in Chapter 3 section 3.6.4.3), generating more anticipated death cases was likely hampered by my feeling I was 'ambulance chasing' when seeking participants at cancer care services and hospices (Sofka, et al., 2012). Though five of 11 cases were anticipated by deceased or bereaved, or both, no case entailed the death-preparatory digital activity that is possible and that I hoped to encompass. Therefore, referring to the map of the *Digital Legacy and Data* terrain (Figure 1.1, p.9), in this study, material in the category 'intentionally death related' (e.g. illness

blogging, suicide chronicling, death-casting, after-death communication services) was not represented.

This order of material would likely add complexity to the sources and traits of the *record* and *rendition* repertoires (theory element two, section 8.1.5). This is because awareness of recording, and intent of post-death consumption, on the part of those represented are critical to the 'realness' claims of both repertoires. These same factors are what mark out material death-related by intent of deceased.

For instance, my theory proposes that the 'realness' of the *record* repertoire—its trustworthiness, impartiality and comprehensiveness—stems from its ability to access a pre-death time, free from self-interested accounts of lives and relationships distorted by knowledge of deaths. Key types of *literal* material offering this record is that without awareness or intention of those represented (candid, un-staged, natural), and material with directness to the dead (Table 8.1, p. 364).

Material in the 'death-related by intent of deceased' category would therefore be interesting to investigate with my theory, as it appears to offer directness to the dead on the one hand, but combined, on the other hand, with extreme awareness of recording and intent of post-death consumption on the part of the dead. This might entail subjective narration of the deceased's own lives, deaths and relationships, informed by knowledge of their own death. In *record* repertoire terms: distorted by the subjectivity of the self-interested and death-informed teller (the dead).

Additionally, the *rendition* repertoire stems from a view of *literal* material in the *record* repertoire as entailing awareness of recording and performance on the part of those involved, which undermines their 'realness'. One imagines this position might be

exaggerated in the case of the death-preparatory material that is even more obviously aware, intentional and performative.

Previous empirical work in this area has included this order of material (e.g. Bassett, 2020b; Clabburn et al., 2019; Cumiskey & Hjorth, 2017). However, as established in section 9.1.2.6 of this chapter, these approaches did not study this order of material within wider ecologies of digital material, in grief communities, nor over time.

On this basis, I suggest the theory I propose ought to be explored in future empirical efforts that take my systemic, longitudinal and material-inclusive approach, and which include this order of 'death-related by intent of deceased' material. As an emergent and substantive theory, I expect this theory to morph and evolve in other scholars' hands, but observe that it will benefit and nuance particularly in light of investigation with respect to this order of material.

9.2.2.2.1 Functionalities focus

A problem intrinsic in academic work relating to new media and communication is that the pace of technological change can shorten our work's shelf life. A key way to future-proof is to not focus our studies on specific media categories, manifestations, platforms or devices, but study at the level of the functionalities that can apply beyond specific media of the day. A good example of this in the *Digital Death* literature is Sofka et al.'s (2012) seminal publication *Death, Dying and Grief in and Online Universe*, which, though only eight years old, aged badly due to its focus on now-aged or aging media (e.g. MySpace, CDs and Skype). As Baym (2010) warns, we centre on specific media and platforms at our peril.

On this basis, the first future-relevant quality of the proposed theory is its focus on the meanings and roles of arrays deceased-related digital material in griefs, rather than on specific types or categories of material. What results is a theory describing the grief role of this material with respect to repertoires, sources, uses, traits and positions that relate to media functionalities, but not tied to specific media. By taking this function-oriented approach I offer a theory more equipped to absorb unknown technological advances to come in this fast-paced research area.

This theory's focus on media functionalities, and their meanings and roles in grieving, aligned with participants' descriptions; participants often didn't or couldn't specify specific media, or the origin or housing of media, seeming confused why I was asking, and uncertain about the answer as it was unclear or irrelevant to that being described. For example, respondents would describe the record of one-to-one

digital communication with the dead, and the part of this function in their grief, but were unsure or uninterested in which exact media manifestation.

Moreover, participants moved seamlessly between different digital materials, whether they had access to it or not, interweaving at times with physical material, such that it was artificial and incongruous with their descriptions to anchor material in specific media. Additionally, the significance of material participants did not access, the unavailable, missing, remembered, possible, future or imagined (c.f. *figurative* material in the *rendition* repertoire), shows the narrowness of a media-centred focus and how it would have curtailed exploration of this *figurative* aspect.

Thus this theory's focus on media functionalities, and their roles and meanings in griefs, not only makes it more future proof, it is also instructive for future scholars in this emerging field. It suggests that our impulse to study with media types, specify and categorise types of media, focus on material accessed or accessible, and separate digital from physical material, may not reflect the studied phenomenon. If, as my study suggests, survivors describe their grief with respect to deceased-related digital culture at the level of functionalities, we ought to develop theoretical renderings that reflect and honour that. The proposed theory represents a first step in this effort, on which I hope future scholars will build.

9.2.2.2.2 Grieving together, apart

The final future-relevant quality of my theory is that data on which it draws relate predominantly to communities of physically and geographically separated survivors.

This was particularly represented in the key case, with Leah's 18 participating survivors spread across three countries. Excepting Leah's parents and two friends (sisters) living nearby in Leah's place of origin, each of the remaining 14 were living at significant geographical removes from other survivors (participants and non-participants). Eight of these 14 were in social settings devoid of anyone who knew Leah or the grieved relationship. Six participating survivors were too geographically distant to attend Leah's funeral. Eleven did attend, but returned thereafter to social contexts devoid of other survivors, or deceased-acquainted others.

Though the other 10 cases show fragments of grief communities, the majority described—verbally and via social network maps—grief communities spread over and across countries. Of the 13 participants in these other cases, nine were grieving at a remove from others who knew the dead or grieved relationship, and described communities of survivors with the majority in similar social contexts, with little or no social contact with others grieving the individual in question.

Early in this inquiry, I identified this as a future-relevant quality of my data and resultant theory, observing that it reflects trends of a modern West where globalisation, and shifting family and social structures, are challenging conventional, locale-bound grief communities. However, I did not foresee the applicability of my theory to today's extraordinary grief context: a worldwide spike in digital-age grief with the outbreak of the novel Coronavirus COVID-19 on March 11th 2020, in which,

at the time of writing more than million people have died (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 2020). This ongoing 'mass-bereavement event' (Harrop et al., 2020) is occurring when over half the world's population, in over 90 of the world's territories, has been in some form of government-implemented stay-at-home order (AFP, 2020). Combined, this has created both a 'digital surge' in the use of the Internet and new media (De, Pandey, & Pal, 2020), and unprecedented grief scenarios where the bereaved (COVID related or no) are in social conditions with restrictions on funeral attendance, congregating for post-death events, and on social contact thereafter.

If we conservatively estimate that each of the million people dead has fifteen survivors, we begin to see the scale of this digital-age mass-bereavement event, with fifteen million people worldwide grieving in socially-curtailed contexts. Added to this are those who have been bereaved by non-COVID deaths in this time, and are grieving in socially curtailed conditions. Therefore, there is affinity between the socially-isolated grief contexts of those on whose accounts I based my theory, and those grieving during this pandemic. It is my hope that this affinity will fortify grief theory and practice, to better support these survivors in griefs that will extend far beyond the end of this pandemic.

Chapter 10: Conclusion
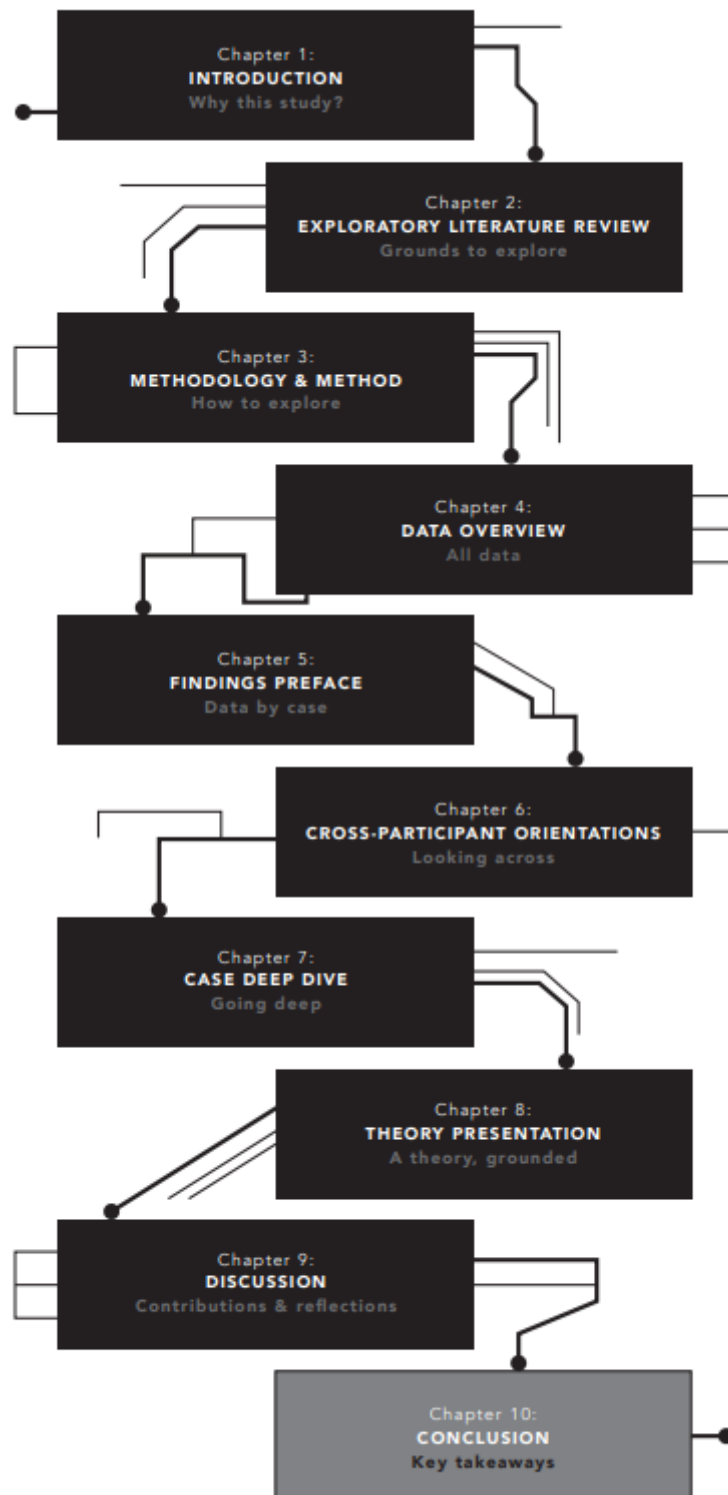
10.0 Introduction

In this final chapter, I offer a succinct summation of this thesis and re-contextualise it with the work's original motivations. I then offer commentary on its larger implications, and the audiences to whom these speak. I conclude by listing key takeaways, and remark on my hopes for my theory and thesis.

10.0.1 Thesis summation

Motivated by conceptual treatments of Digital Legacy and Data, and a lack of empirical research informed by established grief and material culture theory and methods, I undertook an exploration of grief and deceased-related digital material rooted in these principles and methodologies. To carve out a manageable terrain, I employed a material culture-driven designation: '*Deceased-related digital culture*'; digital material emanating from a life and death, rather than its repurposing thereafter. With this novel designation, taking digital-age deaths of individuals as analytic units, I explored openly and longitudinally what digital material was used and how it was experienced in griefs of multiple groups of death-connected survivors.

I devised a bespoke, emergent and qualitative methodology to sensitively and flexibly explore, refiguring study aim and objectives as expected. Of 11 death-centred cases recruited, 10 comprised one or two survivors, and one was a singularly productive and data-rich, 18-survivor, longitudinal case.

I found that, across heterogeneous death cases, survivors cited the grief role of diverse and changing arrays of related digital culture, with material fluctuating in availability and significance, and survivors active in altering that availability and

significance. Via a tailored Constructivist Grounded Theory (ConGT) analytic approach, I interpreted four survivor orientations toward this diverse and changing deceased-related digital material, across all 32 participants, irrespective of death-connection. In-case analysis of the 18-participant key case reintroduced these death connections, explicating—in four survivor micro-systems—the role of inter-survivor relationships and grief context in producing the seemingly individual survivor orientations identified in cross-participant analysis. This case was a dynamic, relational ecology of survivors forming orientations toward digital material steeped in relationship, context, time and culture. This case demonstrated grief with respect to deceased-related digital material as profoundly relational and socially constructed, constituted and situated.

I then presented my two-part theory '*Pliable realities-in-relation*'. This emergent, substantive theory described grief with respect to digital culture as social construction with five constituents: personal, community, social, digital and cultural. By creatively connecting material to two opposing repertoires, *record* and *rendition*, deceased-related digital culture was pliable in its reality value for survivors; supporting fluid constructs forming in relation to survivors, their grief community, social and digital contexts, and cultural influences.

Finally, I re-contextualised this theory with three key literatures: (i) refuting, and advancing grief ontology and theory in the digital case; (ii) refining and expanding to the digital case accounts of grief as narrative mediated by physical material, speaking to grief narratives as continuingly creative, communicative and situated in the digital case, and (iii) challenging the findings and methodological approaches of existing empirical endeavours with respect to my theory and approach, thereby

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illuminating how problematic methodologies and conceptual misapprehensions about grief are reigniting in current empirical efforts. To close, I cast a critical, reflective eye on inquiry and theory, drawing out notable inquiry qualities and pointing to future theory directions and uses.

10.0.2 Return to thesis origins

Circling back to the original motivation for this research, how does this inquiry and theory relate to the conceptual and empirical stimuli for this endeavour? First, with respect to the conceptual treatments of Digital Legacy and Data that motivated this research, my inquiry and theory propose that:

- Defining and categorising deceased-related digital material, and assigning uses, meanings and values to them abstracted from griefs in which they are involved is incompatible with material's grief-particular and changing role, and underrepresents survivors' creative deployment of material within shifting and relational grief constructs. Based on my findings, I conclude that, applied to the bereaved, this effort to categorise fixes and abstracts in a way that does not accord with the experience of grieving with deceased-related digital culture. Accordingly, I suggest this quest toward categorisation and definitional clarity ought to bring material cultural insights to bear. As the literature review established, this discipline has eschewed this effort in recognition of the deep specificity, variety and variability of material's involvement in griefs.

Moreover, I suggest that, in the case of the bereaved, abstractly-assigned and classified material can create expectations for how and what should, and should not, be significant. As we know from grief theory history, this quest to classify and define can lead to normalising grief discourses and collapse grief's diversity.

- My findings trouble conceptual portrayals of digital material with respect to what it *might* technically enable and become; its 'aliveness' (afterlife / living on), and ability to faithfully capture the dead. What I have found does not fit construal of material's afterlife, nor its capacity to capture the dead to whom it relates, based on technical persistence and accessibility alone.

The technical potential for digital traces of their dead to 'live on' was only realised for inquiry participants to the extent that material was woven into posthumous accounts crafted around grievers' ongoing lives, relationships and contexts. It was survivors' creative narration of material into living accounts that accorded its continuing currency, relevance and vitality; the potential to 'live on'. Thus, the technical affordance of persistence did not export simply into 'living on' in survivor experience. Furthermore, as I argued in my book chapter "*Posthumous digital material: Does it 'live on' in survivors' accounts of their dead*?" (O'Connor, 2020), digital material can be said to 'live on' in griefs when, and even *because*, it is not actually available or accessed.

Regarding material's ability to capture the dead, I conclude that a 'capture' discourse can be at work (record repertoire), but only to the extent that it supports a given situated posthumous account, and where an opposing

discourse (rendition) can be applied to the same material with a different set of construct constituents.

In both cases of aliveness and capture, the material and its characteristics are modified in the course of being harnessed into griefs—to serve and reflect the embedded social phenomenon—such that use in social practice mutates the media's functionalities. Thus, though the media facilitates, and shape griefs, per the concept of mediatization (Hepp, 2013), the practice (grief) simultaneously shapes the media (Refslund Christensen & Sandvik, 2016a).This further undermines the contention that material's abstract technical capacities are transported unchanged into this situated cultural practice.

- Finally, in this inquiry's light, the third conceptual supposition motivating this research: that digital material relating to once-living people has a causal—positive or negative—impact on grief, is overly simplistic. This discourse implies that digital material relating to the dead is separable from the griefs in which it is involved. This is challenged by the proposed theory; that grief is a social construction in which digital material is one strand in a complex weave out of which grief realities are crafted. I contend that this causal discourse is a return to objectivist grief ontologies in the modernist tradition, wherein grief acts upon those passively undergoing it. My theory refutes this ontological account and the survivor passivity it implies, instead contending that the grievers are active, interpretive and innovative in their relationship with digital material and its role in their griefs.

I conclude that digital material does not visit unto survivors forms of grief that help or hinder them, rather survivors are agents actively forging material's part in their situated grief constructs. Dennis Klass (2006) notes that reductive help-or-hinder discourses abound in grief scholarship and must be resisted. I conclude that they are rekindling in the digital case where they are equally inappropriate.

My research was motivated by appraisal that the above conceptual treatments were unexplored in primary research in keeping with grief-and-material-culture research tenets. In light of the above reflections, I conclude that my hunch to conduct a piece of research in line with these tenets: to longitudinally study survivors in social contexts and inclusive of material per death case, was fruitful and instructive to this field of study, to the multiple, transdisciplinary literatures to which it contributes, and beyond.

As to this, in the following, I set down some wider implications and future applications flowing from this research, my intentions to disseminate them, and the multiple audiences to which they speak.

10.0.3 Implications, applications and audiences

10.0.3.1   Curtailing the revival of dead grief concepts: Death scholars

An implication from my research for scholars across death, dying and grief-related disciplines is my observation that dead grief concepts are reviving in the digital case. I view my research as a step toward cultivating scholarship that acknowledges our tendency to return to problem grief concepts, and is deliberate about not repeating misapprehensions that have taken a century to erode. My work also serves as a reminder of our responsibility as knowledge producers in this space; that our depictions of post-death digital material imply notions about grieving that filter into clinical, social, and cultural understandings thereof. We must recognise that professionals and lay people calibrate their ideas and experiences of digital-age grieving against expectations drawn from our work. If grief is a social construction, academic conceptions form part of constructs, and we have a duty of care not to introduce harmful concepts into the cultural bloodstream.

Existing and planned thesis outputs are primarily constellated around this implication. It features strongly in my thesis-based book chapter (O'Connor, 2020), is the direct focus of a chapter I am leading with Prof. Elaine Kasket entitled "*What grief isn't: the revival of dead grief concepts in the digital age*", (accepted abstract in Appendix Z), for Palgrave's 2021 *Studies in Cyberpsychology* Series, and I have submitted a paper of the same name to the 5th International Symposium of the Death Online Research Network, 2021. In 2021/22 I will write *Death Studies* and *Mortality* articles aimed at the broader Death Studies audience. Through these avenues, I will disseminate this implication amongst the Digital Death research community particularly, and the wider spread of death-associated disciplines

generally. As the separation between Death Studies and Digital Death Studies becomes less clear or useful in the coming years, more and more thanatologists will become Digital Death scholars. By illuminating the potential conceptual pitfalls, I hope my work will ease this transition.

10.0.3.2 Countering the impact narrative: Grief therapy and practice

An obvious application of my work is its relevance to grief therapy and bereavement care practitioners. In particular my counter to the impact narrative is germane to this group, where Kasket has noted its particular prevalence (Kasket, 2019). I will present again at the Annual National Conference the Association of Bereavement Service Co-ordinators (UK), and publish a piece in *Bereavement Care* outlining the application of my findings to the grief support community (Appendix Z). This application is critical and timely, given the present unprecedented surge in demand for bereavement support services amid the current Coronavirus pandemic; with UK Bereavement Support charity Sue Ryder reporting an 84% increase in demand for online bereavement support services in 2020 (Sue Ryder, 2020), wherein deaths, funerals and griefs are increasingly digitally mediated and socially restricted.

10.0.3.3 Countering normative grief portrayals: Public and media

Relatedly, mass migration online during the current pandemic, and the mass bereavement in socially restricted conditions coinciding with it, is leading to an uptick in survivors seeking information and support online (Booth, 2020). However, much online writing about grief invokes normative grief discourses, which are perpetuated by search engines algorithms (searching 'stages of' auto-completes with 'grief') (Kasket, 2020). In respect of grieving with digital remains specifically, Bassett has

published a number of online general-interest articles, with the normative suggestion that loss of deceased-related digital material is uniformly negative, and its preservation universally comforting, e.g. "*The overwhelming fear of losing digital messages from dead loved ones: 'Second loss' is a new phenomenon for those grieving*" (Bassett, 2019b; other examples: Bassett, 2019a, 2017). I intend to provide an online counter-narrative via contributions to *The Conversation*, *Psychology Today* and other media outlets, and to reach the general public via research-based theatre and podcasting (Appendix Z).

10.0.3.4   *Doing 'the right thing' by survivors?: Technology-policy and ecological applications*

My finding that material's part in grief is not predicated on access or endurance, and that losing material is not universally negative for survivors, challenges recommendations to social networking, technology companies and designers to 'do the right thing' by survivors and ensure material is preserved (e.g. Bassett, 2020a; Bassett, 2018; Stokes, 2015). My work nuances this, showing flaws in the idea that preservation is universally desired by survivors, and that the notion of one 'right thing' for all is a harmful fallacy. Quoting my book chapter (O'Connor, 2020) in a recent article, Kasket (2020) noted that access to and control over material formats is just one side of this story; survivors have agency and exert control, and their responses are not uniform or unpredictable: "There is no right or wrong in grief, online or off" (p.1).

My work is a direct challenge to service-provider recommendations that uniformly link continued endurance of posthumous material to care for the bereaved. This position also has ecological implications, given the environmental cost of the energy

consumption of data centres that store this information, responsible for emitting as much CO_2 as the global aviation industry (Pearce, 2018). My work contradicts recommendations that we ought to commit energy to preserving data relating to the dead at great ecological cost, when, at best, this is not what all survivors want, and at worst, its preservation is harmful.

10.0.4 Closing remarks

The seed for this research was sewn a decade ago by modest digital traces of my friend's mother's life. It is my hope that my research will fortify grief theory, kindle public and scholarly critique of grief's portrayal, promote informed grief support, and catalyse considered technological infrastructures for the increasingly digitally-entangled and uncertain griefs of the decades to come.

Finally, in this doctoral thesis, I hope to have established myself as an independent researcher capable of conceiving, designing and delivering a thoughtful, innovative and rigorous piece of original primary research; the first step in a research career on what it is to grieve with the digital fragments of those we love.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Relevant Pre-PhD events, presentations and training

Event	Location, Date	Participation
DORS 2: 2nd Death Online Research Symposium	Durham University, U.K. 9th-12th April 2014	Attended
Cruse Loss and Bereavement Awareness One-day Workshop	London, U.K. 16th Sept. 2014	Attended
Digital Memories: 5th Global Conference	Oxford University, U.K. 24th-26th Sept. 2014	Oral presentation: *Remember me (and here's how): Designing for digital death.*
When is Death? Conference	University of Leicester, U.K. 18th April 2015	Oral presentation: *Social rebirth after biological death: Researching the found dead in the digital age*
Digital Legacy Association Conference	London, U.K. 23rd May 2015	Attended
Bereaved Parents Support Organisations Network Conference (BPSON)	Nottingham, U.K. 19th June 2015	Oral presentation: *Introducing Reusable Learning Object (RLO) "Digital Remains: What we leave behind when we die"*
Centre for Death and Society annual conference: Death and its Futures	University of Bath, U.K. 5th- 6th June 2015	Poster presentation: *Social rebirth after biological death: researching the found dead in the digital age*

Appendix B: Literature search strategy

1. Database search

Searching of electronic databases was conducted with the search terms in Table 2 below. These terms were developed in consultation with a University of Nottingham librarian with specific expertise in multi-disciplinary database searching. The strategy detailed here draws from Hawker et al. (2002).

Table 2: Narrative review search terms

A	B	C	D
Relating to 'Digital'	Relating to 'Material'	Relating to 'Bereaved people'	Relating to 'Posthumous'
"digital" or	"material" or	"grief*" or	"posthumous" or
"technolog*" or	"materials" or	"grieve" or	"post-humous"
"online" or	"artefact*" or	"grieving" or	"die*" or
"computer*" or	"artifact*" or	"loss" or	"death" or
"data" or	"memorabilia" or	"mourn*" or	"dead" or
"internet" or	"remains" or	"bereav*"	"deceased" or
"device*" or	"memento*" or		"late"
"media" or	"momento*"		
"content"	"inherit*" or		
"account"	"trace*" or		
"accounts"	"object*" or		
	"archiv*"		

The search was then conducted in three parts:

1. **Primary search:**
   - PsycINFO (host: Ovid)
   - MEDLINE (host: Ovid)

2. **Secondary search:**
   - CINAHL (host: EBSCO)
   - EMBASE (host: Ovid)
   - ZETOC
   - ASSIA
   - Search systematic reviews using MeSH headings
     - (a) Cochrane
     - (b) JBI (EBP database on OVID)
     - (c) Campbell library (social scientific systematic reviews)
   - British and UK counselling databases
     - a) British Education Index
     - b) ERIC (Education Resource Information Centre)
   - Web of Knowledge
   - Scopus
   - Google Scholar
   - BHI (British Humanities Index)
   - ACM (Association for Computing Machinery) Digital Library

With each of these database searches:

(i) No time limit was placed on searches, as the digital focus is a time limit.

(ii) Searches hosted by Ovid were set to include "In Process" searching which includes literature either in the process of being assigned a MeSH heading or subject heading, or which has not been assigned these because it does not fit existing terms.

(iii) Lack of standardisation across multidisciplinary electronic databases means that truncation characters were developed for each individual database and search terms were set for each database in order to align with their respective subject headings. For databases where the search terms do not align with subject headings, keyword searching was carried out.

(iv) Upon setting up the search on each database and refining it, each search was registered and set to run at regular intervals.

(v) Alerts were set up for key authors and citations through each individual database.

(vi) Cited reference searches were conducted on Web of Knowledge and Google Scholar. These two databases/engines allow citation searching whereby you choose a key paper in your area and search for citations into the past (literature that it cites) and into the future (literature that cites it) as well as literature that cites the literature that it cites. The main use of citation searching is that it allows researchers to follow research leads both forwards and backwards in time (see figure below). The same process was used for key authors in the area.
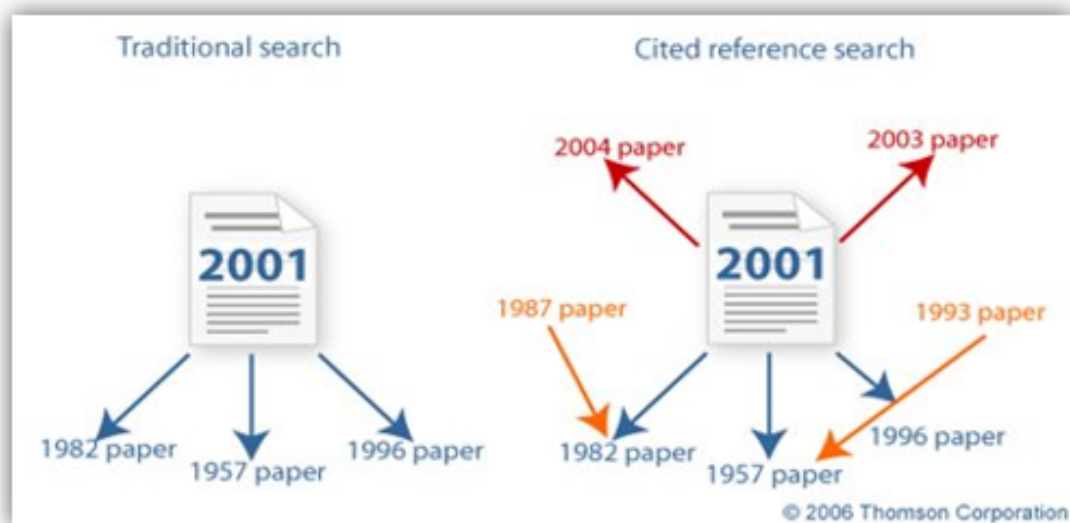
Figure: Cited reference searching (Figure source: University of Nottingham, 2016)

3. Wider searching:

- Reference lists of key papers and texts were hand searched.
- Citations found in individual articles were followed up.
- 'Related' articles suggested by databases were followed up.
- Searches of e-dissertations and e-theses were carried out via EThOS: UK E-Theses Online Service; DART-Europe E-theses Portal; and NDLTD Global Thesis Search.
- Experts in the field were contacted to ensure coverage (e.g. Prof. Elaine Kasket, external PhD advisor).

All identified articles were exported to EndNote in folders showing databases of origin and date of extraction. Material was then assessed for inclusion using the criteria below, first by reviewing titles and abstracts and, where needed, following more detailed reading.
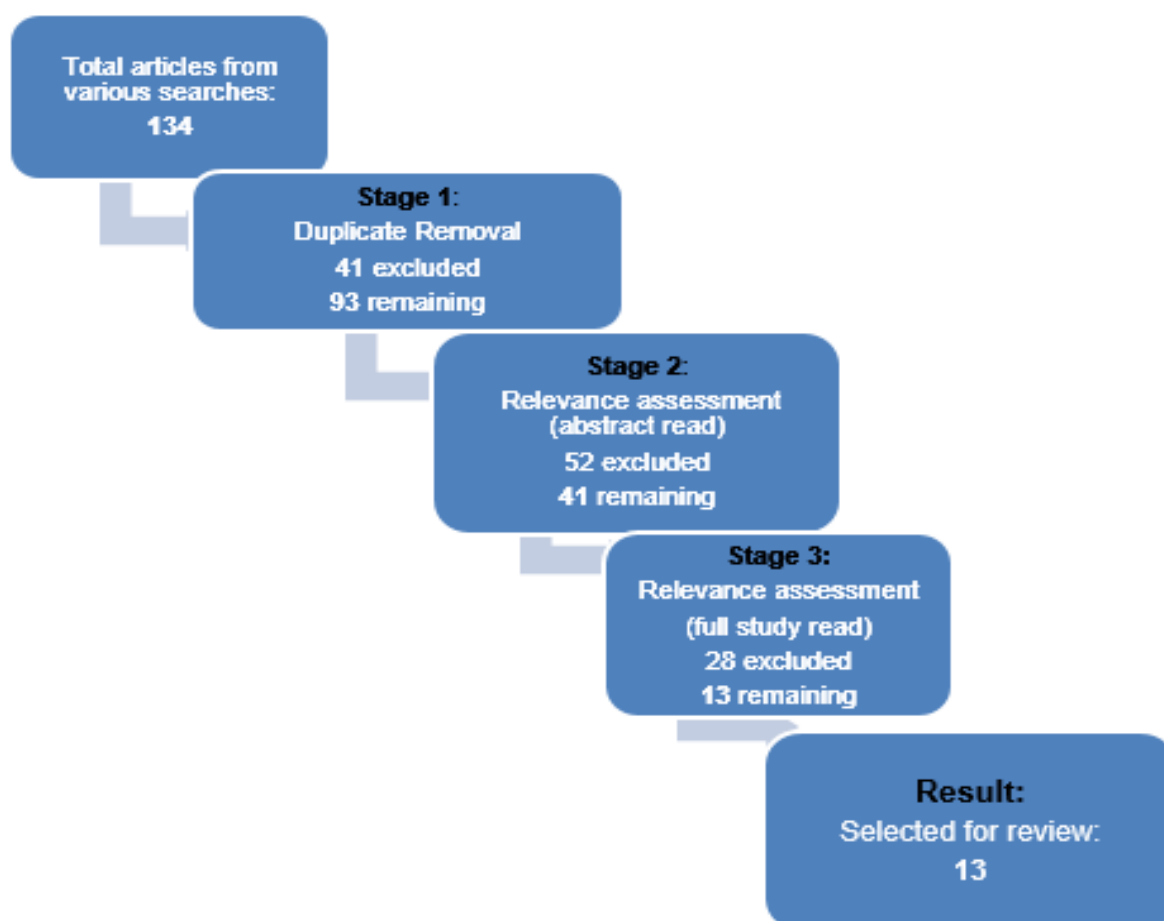
Inclusion criteria:

1. Reports of empirical research on bereaved people's use and experience of the posthumous digital artefacts of the dead.
2. Written in English language.

Exclusion criteria:

1. Reports of research outside remit of the search aim.
2. Reports of research on the topic of online grieving and memorialisation practices.
3. Articles relating to diet as might be identified with the search term "Die*" in search column D in Table 2 above which is included to capture the terms "die" and "dies".
4. Not written in English language.
5. Duplicates.

Appendix C: Process of study identification

```
┌─────────────────────┐
│ Total articles from │
│ various searches:   │
│        134          │
└─────────────────────┘
        ┌─────────────────────┐
        │      Stage 1:       │
        │ Duplicate Removal   │
        │    41 excluded      │
        │   93 remaining      │
        └─────────────────────┘
                ┌─────────────────────┐
                │      Stage 2:       │
                │ Relevance assessment│
                │   (abstract read)   │
                │    52 excluded      │
                │   41 remaining      │
                └─────────────────────┘
                        ┌─────────────────────┐
                        │      Stage 3:       │
                        │ Relevance assessment│
                        │  (full study read)  │
                        │    28 excluded      │
                        │   13 remaining      │
                        └─────────────────────┘
                                ┌─────────────────────┐
                                │      Result:        │
                                │ Selected for review:│
                                │         13          │
                                └─────────────────────┘
```

Appendix D: Disciplines of reviewed studies

Discipline	Number of studies	Studies
Human Computer Interaction & Interaction Design	7	Elsden and Kirk, 2014 Kirk and Sellen, 2012 Odom et al., 2010 Odom et al., 2012 Massimi and Baecker, 2010 Petrelli et al., 2008 Petrelli and Whittaker, 2010
Information and Computer Sciences	1	Brubaker et al., 2013
Psychology	2	Kasket, 2012 Bassett, 2018
Multimedia Studies	1	Bailey et al., 2015
Media & Communication Studies	1	Cumiskey & Hjorth, 2017
Health & Social Care	1	Clabburn et al. 2019

Appendix E: Researcher orientation essay

Disciplinary and institutional context: A minority Health Scientist

Though the research 'Paradigm Wars' described by Gage (1989) were undermined by Guba and Lincoln as "undoubtedly overdrawn" (1994 p. 116), the tension between objectivist and interpretivist knowledge paradigms was alive and well in the institution where I undertook this inquiry. The battle for recognition and acceptance of interpretivist research approaches (Staller, 2012; Eisner, 1991; Steinmetz, 2005b) played out regularly.

As a School of Health Sciences, students and staff from clinical disciplines (nursing, medicine, physiotherapy, pharmacy, occupational therapy etc.) were the majority, with a minority from social sciences and humanities. As one of a handful of non-clinician students with a social science background (psychology), I was in that minority. Teaching in the School aligns with requirements of professional bodies mandated to be 'evidence informed', research undertaken (pre and post-doctoral) is predominantly quantitative and mixed methods in approach, and the majority of research funding comes from clinical bodies.

This created a doctoral environment with a "positivist orthodoxy" (Steinmetz, 2005b, p. 280); i.e. dominance of positivist and post-positivist epistemologies, wherein interpretivist-constructivist inquiries require special justification. This filtered into the doctoral experience via curricula, training, expertise and backgrounds of those delivering training, seminars, ethical approval processes and student reviews. Through these avenues flowed assumptions that objectivist, quantifying research

approaches were default, that others were deviations from this desired standard, and ought to be assessed according to the assumptions of that standard. Moreover, there was an institutional "epistemological unconsciousness" (Steinmetz, 2005a, p. 109), a lack of awareness that this assumed standard is itself one of a range of knowledge positions, with qualities, strengths and limits.

Discussions about this inquiry, its design, quality and contribution pervaded its undertaking. Over lunch, in corridors, at presentations, training and seminars, I found myself defending the inquiry's knowledge pre-suppositions from this "often unchallenged epistemological privilege" (Staller, 2012, p. 397). This inquiry was formed in this crucible; shaped by resistance to this orthodoxy, and my wish to represent an alternative in my institutional setting. In another context, it might have been other.

Epistemological/paradigmatic inclinations: Constructivist

My personal inclination with respect to research philosophy and existential philosophy is constructivist. First, I believe that perception of reality forms reality and that this varies between individuals; that based on the unique blend of background, context and experience, different people exposed to the same phenomenon experience different realities. Further, I do not subscribe to the idea that a singular truth can be objectively appreciated, nor directly measured given differing perceptions of people and the complex nature of interpreting meanings of phenomena. I believe meanings and realities are shaped through social interactions, are contextual and change over time.

This inclination is influenced by my first training in psychology, and my disillusionment with what I felt was its oversimplification, universalising and reifying of human complexity, and under-emphasis of agency, context and difference (e.g. in cognitive psychology, experimentalism, behaviourism). Instead I gravitated toward social constructivist approaches in psychology (e.g. Bruner, Gergen, Wittgenstein and Vygotsky), which more authentically attended to the inchoate, involved, unpredictable and active business of being a person in a society, time and culture.

Appendix F: Participant consent form

CONSENT FORM
(Final version 1.1: 26.01.17)

Title of Study: The Digital Memories Study: Exploring how bereaved people utilise and experience the posthumous digital artefacts of their dead.

REC ref: D16122016

Name of Researcher: Mórna O'Connor

Name of Participant: **Please initial boxes**

1.   I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet version number ……… dated .../.../… for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2.   I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without my legal rights being affected. I understand that should I withdraw that, if I wish, the information collected to that point may also be withdrawn from the study.

3.   I understand that data collected in the study may be looked at by authorised individuals from the University of Nottingham, the research group and regulatory authorities where it is relevant to my taking part in this study. I give permission for these individuals to have access to these records and to collect, store, analyse and publish information obtained from my participation in this study. I understand that my personal details will be kept confidential.

4.   I understand that, if I give permission, interviews will be recorded and that anonymous, direct quotes from the interviews and diary entries I submit to the study may be used in the study reports.

5.   I agree to being asked to identify other people to take part in the study who have been bereaved of the same individual as me. I understand that this element of the study is optional and that I may opt out of it at any point without impacting my own participation in the study or legal rights. ☐

6.   I authorise the addition of the anonymised information I create for this study to an online archive of study results. I understand that my personal details will not be recognisable in this database. I understand that I may opt out of this at any time without explanation and without affecting my participation in the study or legal rights. ☐

7.   If I take part in a group interview, I agree to respect and uphold the confidentiality of those partaking in it and to refrain from discussing it with others. ☐

8.   I wish to receive a summary of the study findings. ☐

9.   I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant   **Date**   **Signature**

_____   _____   _____

Name of Person taking consent   **Date**   **Signature**

Appendix G: Interview one topic guide

Pre-interview

- Introductions and thanks for time taken to participate/travel to interview.
- Check participant has read and understood the Participant Information Sheet, invite questions and give hard copy.
- Remind participant of purpose of study and principles of informed consent.
- Sign and countersign participant consent form.
- Invite participant to complete Participant Demographics and Information Form.
- Briefly outline interview structure, general interest areas, tone and approximate duration.
- Remind participant they may pause or stop the interview at any point.
- Ask about use of audio recorder and where permitted turn on.

Interview topic areas
Part one: The deceased

(i) Gain insight into the character, life, relationships and death of the deceased individual.

(ii) Explore the participant's in-life relationship to the deceased, their experience of the death, and the time elapsed since.

(iii) Explore the role played by digital technologies in the life of the deceased, and in relationship between deceased and participant.

Part two: Related digital material

(i) Explore what deceased-related digital material is playing a role for the participant as they grieve, beginning at the point of bereavement.

(ii) Explore participants' access to and engagement with material, the frequency and quality of engagement, and their views about and perspectives on engaging with this material.

(iii) Explore which, if any material, is more or less significant to the participant since the death and why, and if this changes over time post-bereavement.

Post-interview (vary sequence as appropriate)

- Check if anything has not been covered that the participant thinks may be helpful in understanding their experience.
- Ask if there is any part of the interview to which the participant would like to return or add.

- Explain and conduct the social network map exercise and its chain-referral purpose, leaving the Dictaphone on where permitted.
- Where participants are willing, identify potential recruits from map and negotiate appropriate method of inviting their participation.
- Explain diary component of study. Where participants wish to partake, talk through protocol for their chosen diary method.
- Thank participant for their time and participation, stressing the importance of their views and the contribution to the study.
- Ask if participant has any questions.
- Turn off audio recorder.
- Outline how study can be contacted.
- Give participant copy of consent form.
- Signpost to appropriate support services if required.

Appendix H: Bereavement support services

(General list amended to reflect geographical areas, relationships to deceased and death causes)

Cruse Bereavement Care:
The leading charity in the UK specialising in bereavement. They provide support, information, advice, education and training with services offered free to bereaved people.

> Cruse's National Helpline: 0808 808 1677
> Cruse's Nottinghamshire Area Service:
> > **Telephone**: 0115 9244404
> > **Email**: nottinghamshire@cruse.org.uk
> > **Address**: Room 36, Lenton Business Centre, Nottingham, NG7 2BY.

The Samaritans:
Offer 24/7 free and confidential support.

> **Freephone**: 116 123
> **Email:** jo@samaritans.org
> **Freepost:** Freepost RSRB-KKBY-CYJK, PO Box 9090, STIRLING, FK8 2SA

> The Nottingham Samaritans: 18 Clarendon Street, Nottingham, NG1 5HQ.

> To find your local branch, visit: http://www.samaritans.org/branches

Bereavement UK:
Offers information about death, dying, bereavement, funerals and self-help counselling.

> http://www.bereavement.co.uk/

Appendix I: Letter/email invitation to follow-up interview

THE DIGITAL MEMORIES STUDY

The University of Nottingham
UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

Room B33
B Floor
School of Heath Sciences
Queens Medical Centre
Nottingham
NG7 2HA
United Kingdom

Study title: The Digital Memories Study: Exploring how bereaved people utilise and experience the posthumous digital artefacts of their dead.

Researcher: Mórna O'Connor

Dear [PARTICIPANT NAME],

I am writing to invite you to a follow-up interview for the Digital Memories Study. To arrange a suitable time and date, please respond via return email [or by phone or post using the details at the end of this letter].

Should you not respond to this invitation, I will contact you on one further occasion to arrange an interview date and to ascertain if you wish to be contacted for future interviews.

If you are taking part in the diary element of the study, and wish to submit entries to the study at interview, I would like to remind you to bring your diary to the interview date. If you do not wish to participate in a follow-up interview, please contact me to arrange submission of any outstanding diary entries.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely,

Mórna O'Connor
Doctoral Candidate
NCARE: Nottingham Centre for the Advancement of Research in End of life care

Telephone: Study phone number
E-mail: digital.memories@nottingham.ac.uk
Website: www.digitalmemories.info
Address: Mórna O'Connor, Room B33, B Floor, School of Health Sciences, University
               of Nottingham, Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham. NG7 2HA, United Kingdom.

Appendix J: Online diary invitation email

Dear [PARTICIPANT NAME]

I hope you are doing well.

At your first study interview, we discussed the diary component of The Digital Memories Study. Following this discussion, you expressed interest in using the online diary method. I would like to thank you for your interest and participation in the diary element of the study.

For the online diary, we will use the online file-sharing service 'Box'. You have been signed up as a contributor to a folder on Box. This Box folder will be your online diary folder for the duration of the study, where you can upload your diary entries and any related digital material (more on this below). As I mentioned when we spoke, the diary space is yours to write in as much or as frequently as you wish and I will send you diary reminders every so often.

The following is information on: (i) Setting up Box (ii) What to write in your diary and (iii) Uploading digital material.

1. Setting up 'Box'
You will shortly receive an email from me via the host service 'Box' inviting you to collaborate on your diary folder. You may not wish to upload diary entries right away but I encourage you to go through the diary set-up as the folder invitation will expire if it's not accessed.

Your diary folder is where you upload your diary entries and digital material for the study. As I mentioned at the interview, this diary folder is private and only accessible and visible to you and me. Any material you do submit will of course be treated as confidential and anonymised.

When you receive the invitation email from Box, there are a few simple steps to follow to get set up. I am attaching a step-by-step guide to signing up (APP), which also includes some additional information about naming your diary files.

When you have signed up to Box, you will be able to see your diary folder. Your unique study folder is [UNIQUE CODE]. This folder is where you upload your diary entries and any related digital material.

2.   Diary Guide
I am also attaching the study Diary Guide. This document is a guide to what your diary entries might be about, and also includes some prompt questions you might like to write about. This document is intended as a rough guide; the prompt questions are suggested areas of interest that may help you as you write, rather than questions that you must answer. You are encouraged to write about any element of

your encounters with and thoughts about digital material relating to [DECEASED NAME] that are important or relevant to your experience.

3. Uploading digital material

As I mentioned when we spoke, you may also wish to submit digital material to the study. This material is digital content that helps to tell your story or give examples of what you have spoken about in your interviews and diary entries (screenshots of content - text, SMS, emails, posts etc. -, documents, links to online content, photos, audio files, videos etc.).

Whether or not you upload such content is entirely up to you. Any material you do submit will of course be treated as confidential and anonymised and would be used only to inform my understanding of your experience. Digital material that you submit to the study would not be directly reproduced in the study publications without my seeking your direct permission to do so.

You will receive the email from Box shortly. Do let me know if you have any issues getting set up or if you have any questions at all. If at any point you wish to change to another diary-keeping method, or if you wish to opt out of the diary element of the study, just let me know.

Thanks so much and warm wishes,
Mórna

Appendix K: 'Box' set-up guide

Online diary Set-up Instructions (v1.0, 30.11.2016)

STEP 1.   You will receive an email invite from me, inviting you to view files on the online file-sharing service 'Box'.

In the email, please click "Accept Invite"

Please note that Box works best using the Chrome web browser. You can also use Box on your mobile device.
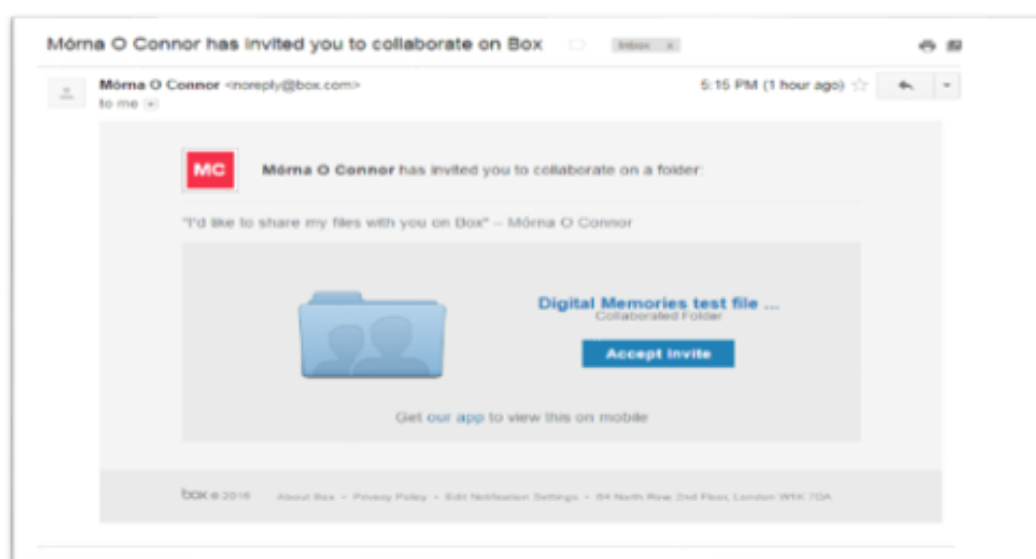
STEP 2.   The next screen may ask if you are affiliated with the University of Nottingham User. Please select the option that indicates that you are not affiliated with the University.

STEP 3. On the next screen, fill in your details in the required fields, create a password (and take note of it) and click "Continue". It's best to make a strong password at this point as the service will ask you to create a new one later if it's not sufficiently strong. Your password should be up to eight characters with a mixture of letters, numbers & special characters.

The 'Box' service is a University-specific version of the file-sharing service 'Dropbox'. Therefore, if you have previously created a Dropbox account with the same email address as the one you are using to create your Box account, the service may ask you to enter your Dropbox password here.

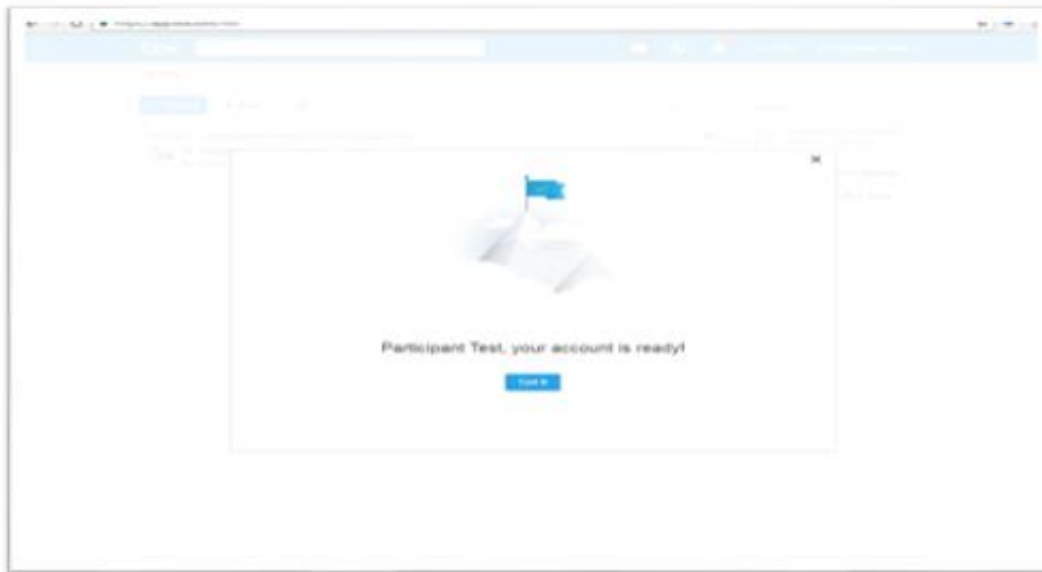**STEP 4.** Choose "For Personal Use" and then "Next"

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STEP 5. Click "Skip this and go straight to Box" at the bottom of the page.
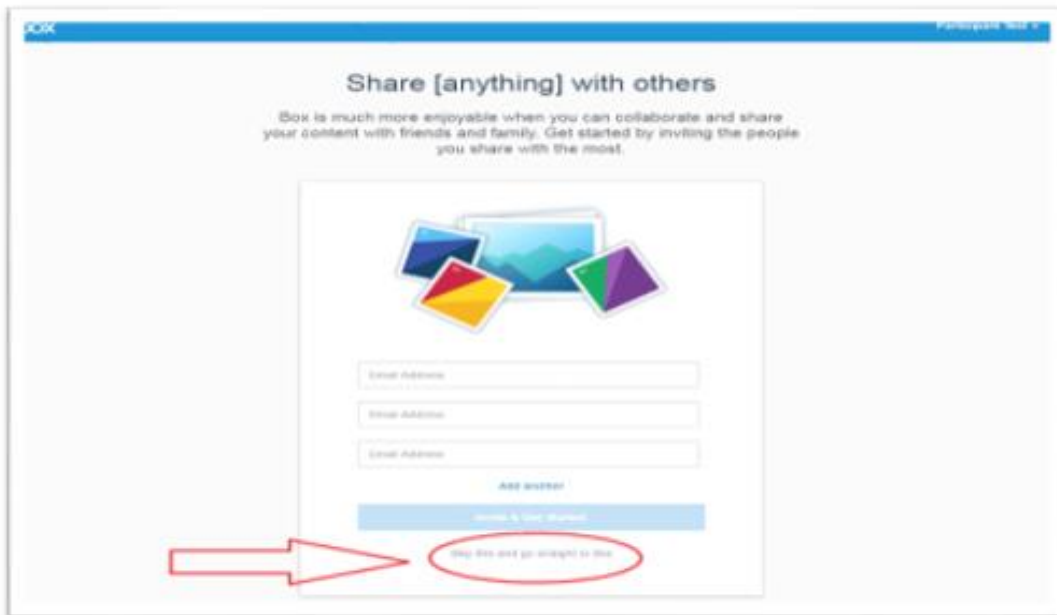
STEP 6. Click through the next five info boxes by clicking "Next" until you reach the screen telling you that 'your account is ready', as in step 7 below.

**STEP 7.** Click "Got it"

STEP 8. Now that you are signed up to Box, you will need to accept the invite from me to contribute to your study diary file. Depending on your browser, the following screen may look different.

You may have a grey strap at the top of your page telling you that you have a pending invitation to collaborate. If so, click 'See Invitation' (circled below) and click through to accept the invitation.
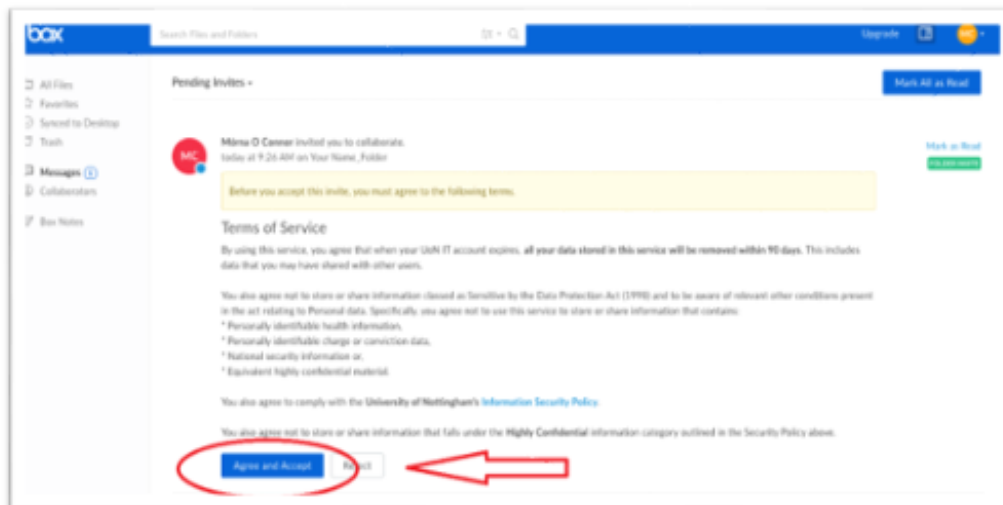

OR

You may see the box below. If so, in the grey rectangle near the top of the page, click "Accept" (circled below).

517
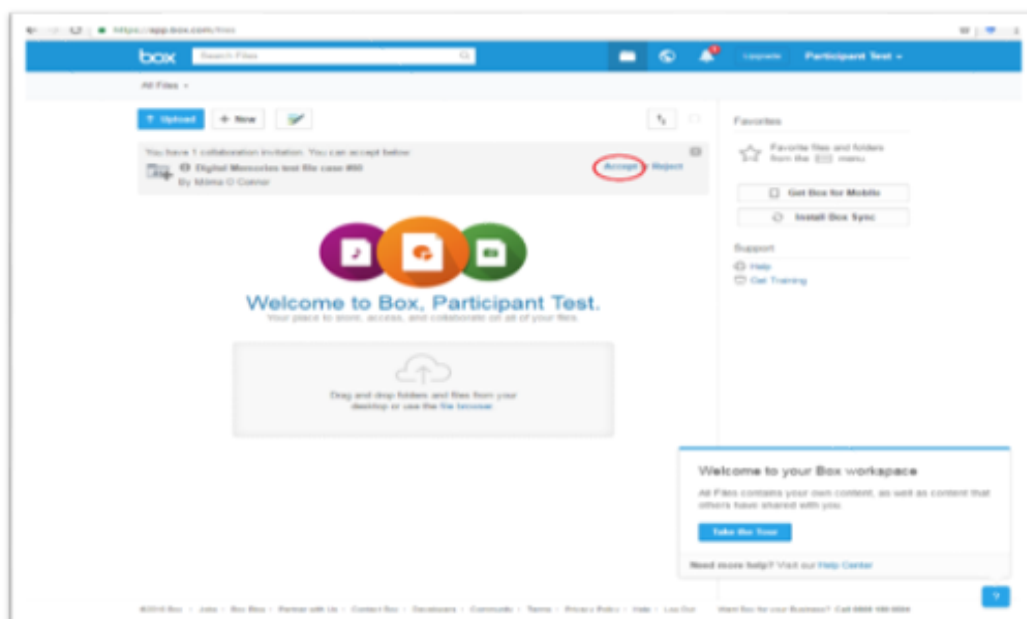
STEP 9.   Read the Terms of Service agreement and, if happy to, click
           "Agree and Accept".

STEP 10.   Click on the folder icon with your study name/code to open your diary
           folder (circled left below). This code will be in the format CS0_P0_Folder and
           will be the only folder available to you. This is your own private study folder to
           upload all diary entries and supplementary material at any time throughout
           the study. Click on this folder to open it before uploading content to it.

           To upload diary entries or supplementary diary files (screenshots, documents,
           photos, videos, audio files etc.), please click the black "Upload" button (circled
           right below). If you wish to send me web links to online content, you can
           include these in the text of your diary entries or create a document containing
           these links. Before you upload files to your folder please read step 11 below.

STEP 11.

NAMING DIARY FILES BEFORE UPLOADING

Before you upload a file to Box, please name it using the following format or similar.
Don't worry about being too exact with this, this is just a rough guide to help you
name your files.

The following is a useful format:

"**Surname<dot>First name<underscore>filename<underscore>dd.mm.yy**"
Please use the date of writing for diary entries.
Please use the date of uploading for supplementary diary material like screenshots,
documents, photos etc.

e.g. Bloggs.Joanne_diary entry_09.11.16

If you are submitting more than one file on the same day, add A, B, C etc. after the
file name:

e.g. Bloggs.Joe_diary entry A_09.11.16

If you are uploading content other than diary entries, e.g. photos, videos,
screenshots, other documents etc. please add an appropriate descriptor after your
first name:

e.g. Bloggs.Joanne_emails_09.11.16

If you are uploading multiple files of the same type on the same day, please assign a
letter/number to them:

e.g. Bloggs.Joe_video A_09.11.16

If you wish to upload a full file of photos, documents, videos etc. to Box please
upload the file in full and name it accordingly, using the above format.

Diary Guide (online, audio & paper-and-pen) (v1.0, 30.11.2016)

Dear diary...

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the diary element of the Digital Memories Study. Your participation is very much appreciated. The following guide may be useful to you as you create and format your diary entries.

When you are creating an online, audio or paper-and pen diary entry for the study, please do so in the way that makes best sense to you. You may want to make lengthy or short diary entries, you may wish to create them often or less frequently, or a mixture of these. There is no 'right' way to do it; it is your diary so please do feel free to make it your own.

What should my diary be about?

I would like to hear about your experiences with, and thoughts, about digital material relating to your loved one. This material might include photographs, videos, emails, messages, blogposts, voice messages, social media activity, web pages etc. This list does not cover all types of digital material that may be significant for you and you are encouraged to write about any digital content relating to your loved one that is significant for you. You may also wish to record your thoughts on and experiences of the personal devices related to your loved one, their phone, laptop, computer, kindle etc. Please feel free to speak/write not only about your current experiences, and how your experiences with this content may have changed over time.

Please use the diary to record your *uses* of and *experiences* with the digital material related to by your loved one as you encounter/have encountered them.

Please also use the diary to record your more *general thoughts and feelings* on the digital material relating to your loved one. For example, you may not be encountering material very often or not wish to engage with it right now or not at all; you may have general feelings about the amount of material or about its content and your ability to engage with it, or you may have thoughts about the role of technologies in remembering your loved one. These are just examples, please write about your own more general thoughts.

To help you get started, here is a list of guide questions you might like to touch on, or start with. These are just suggestions; please tell me about anything that what you feel is important in your experience.

- Have you encountered digital material online or on devices relating to your loved one since their death?
- What has it been like to see/not see this material?
- How did you come across material?
- Is there material you do not wish to engage with/haven't engaged with yet? Why is this?
- At what point after the death of your loved one did this material play a role? Please specify the material and what role it played.
- How often do you read, watch, encounter or use material? For what purpose?
- His this frequency and purpose changed since the death?
- Is there any particular piece of digital material that you return, to or do not return to? Why?
- Have you, or have you considered, deleting, editing or disposing of material? Why/why not?
- Is there particular digital material that is particularly meaningful to you at this moment? Why?
- Has your use and experience of material changed over time since the bereavement? If so, how. If not, why?
- How do you imagine you might use or experience this material in future?
- What is the relationship, if any, between digital material relating to your loved one and related physical material, e.g. their personal effects, keepsakes, physical photographs etc.

Any and all possibilities for diary creation are encouraged, once the diary is based around your experiences around, and thoughts on, the digital material relating to your loved one.

You may wish to include other documents, links or media alongside your diary entries. These might be examples of documents, photos, links, screenshots etc. that you refer to in your diary. If so, please do send me this content using the study email address or your Box diary folder. If you don't know how to do this or forget the process, please contact me and I will talk you through it.

If you are writing a pen-and-paper diary, please do remember to sign and date the entry before you post or give it to me. You may have chosen to take another name, a pseudonym, for the diary element of the study. If so please sign your diary entries with this if you prefer. If you wish to request more diary paper or freepost return envelopes, please do not hesitate to contact me.

If you are audio recording your entries, don't forget that the study recorders can hold over 20 hours of recordings so don't worry about recording too much content.

Please remember, that for all diary types, online, audio, and paper-and-pen, you can request to have your diary entries returned to you at the end of the study.

If you have any questions, please do get in touch with me, Mórna, using the contact detail below:

Telephone: +44 (0)7999059011
E-mail: digital.memories@nottingham.ac.uk
Website: www.digitalmemories.info
Address: Mórna O'Connor, Room B33, B Floor, School of Health Sciences, University of Nottingham, Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham. NG7 2HA, United Kingdom.

Appendix M: Pen-and-paper diary, cover & sample page

THE DIGITAL MEMORIES STUDY

Study Diary

Date of entry: _____
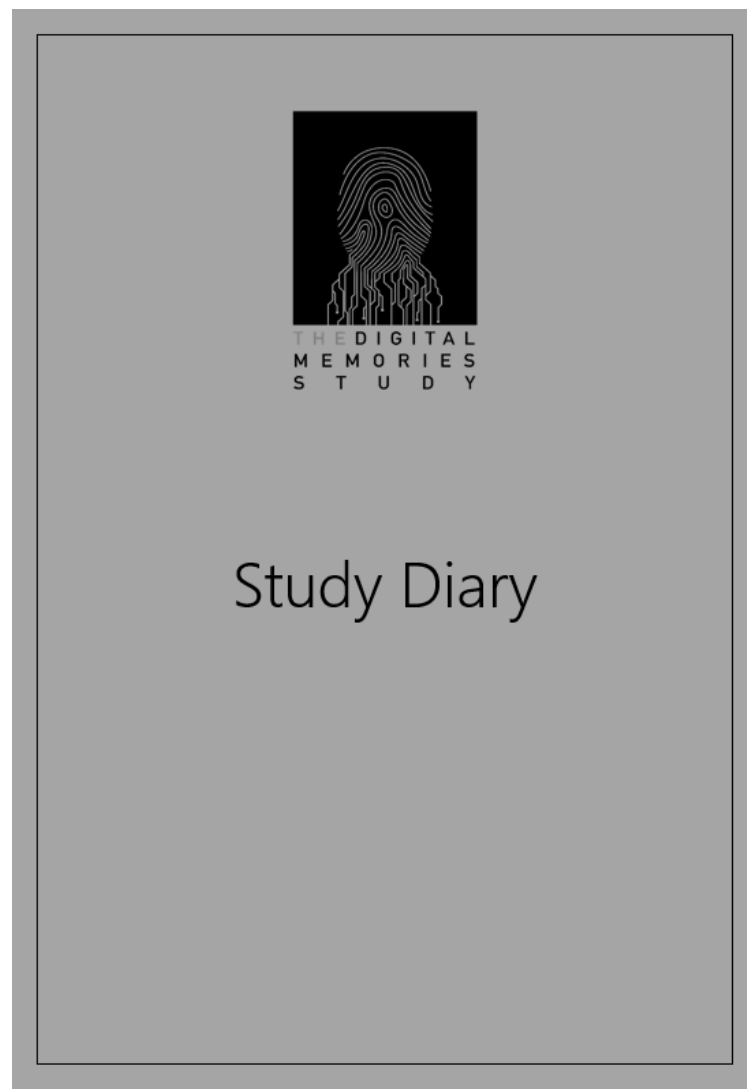
Appendix N: Email prior to remotely-conducted initial interviews

Dear [PARTICIPANT NAME]

I am writing to check two details before our interview.

1. Signature
On the day of the interview I will be emailing you a consent form to read through and sign. Signing this form represents your formal entry into the study. As we are doing the interview remotely, we need to work out a way for you to sign this document and send it to me.

Can I also ask if you have a digital signature that you might be able to paste into the consent document on the interview day? If you don't have a digital signature, don't worry. Other options are that you print the consent form out after the interview, sign it and either scan it and email it to me, or print it, sign it and post it to me (I reimburse the postal cost).

2. Mapping exercise
As you read in the study information, this first interview entails a short mapping exercise. In this exercise I ask you to make a map of those who have been affected by death of [DECEASED' NAME] from your perspective, and then talk me through that map. In order to create your map, you will need a large piece of paper (A3 is best but smaller will work too) and some pens. Some people like to use different coloured pens or colouring pencils to signal different groups of people or connections between people or groups. You may not want to use colours at all, whatever makes sense to you in making your map is best.

If you wish to create your map before the interview, please feel free to do so. If you don't have the time to do this you can of course do it when we speak, either is fine.

After the interview, I will also ask you to take a photo or scan of your map and email it to me.

Please let me know if you have any concerns or questions about any of the above, we can work out alternatives. It is worth noting that, should you wish to participate in subsequent study interviews, you would not be asked to send materials to me, and so they would be a little simpler for you.

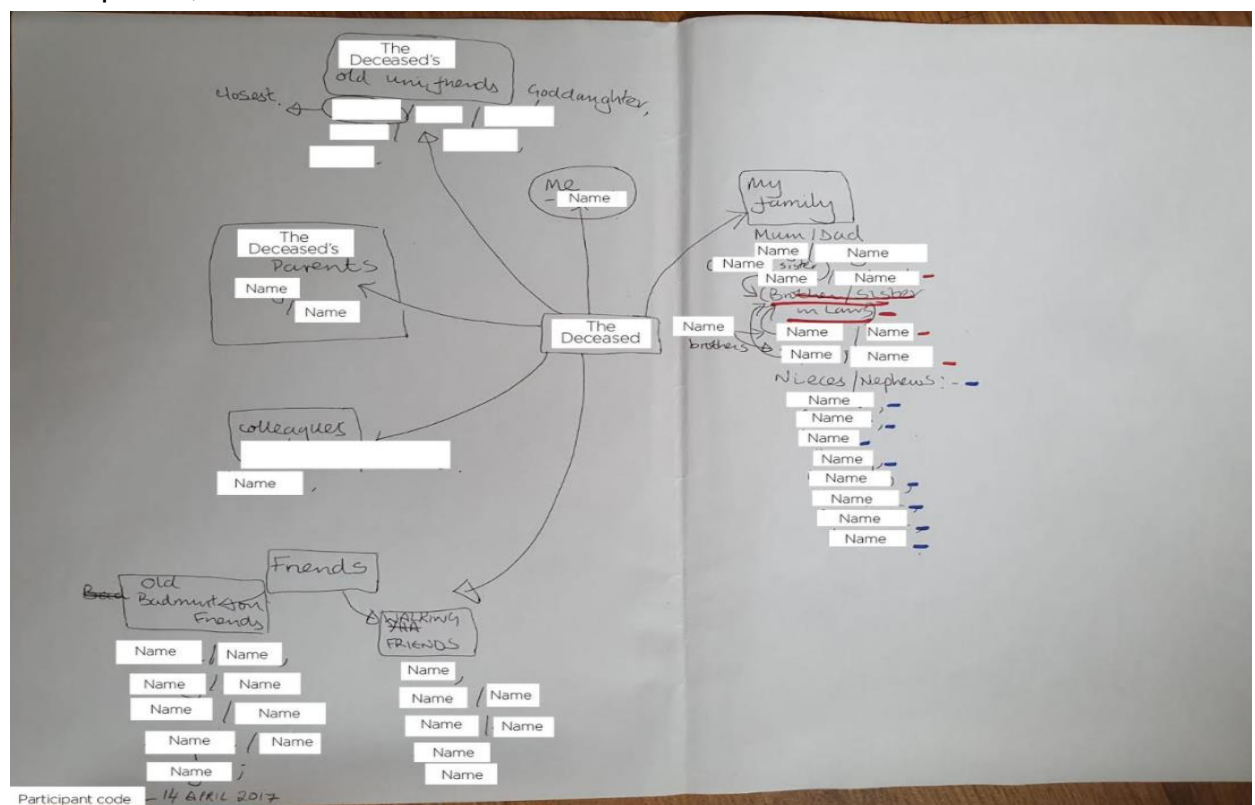Do let me know about the signature and map.

Many thanks and best wishes,
Mórna

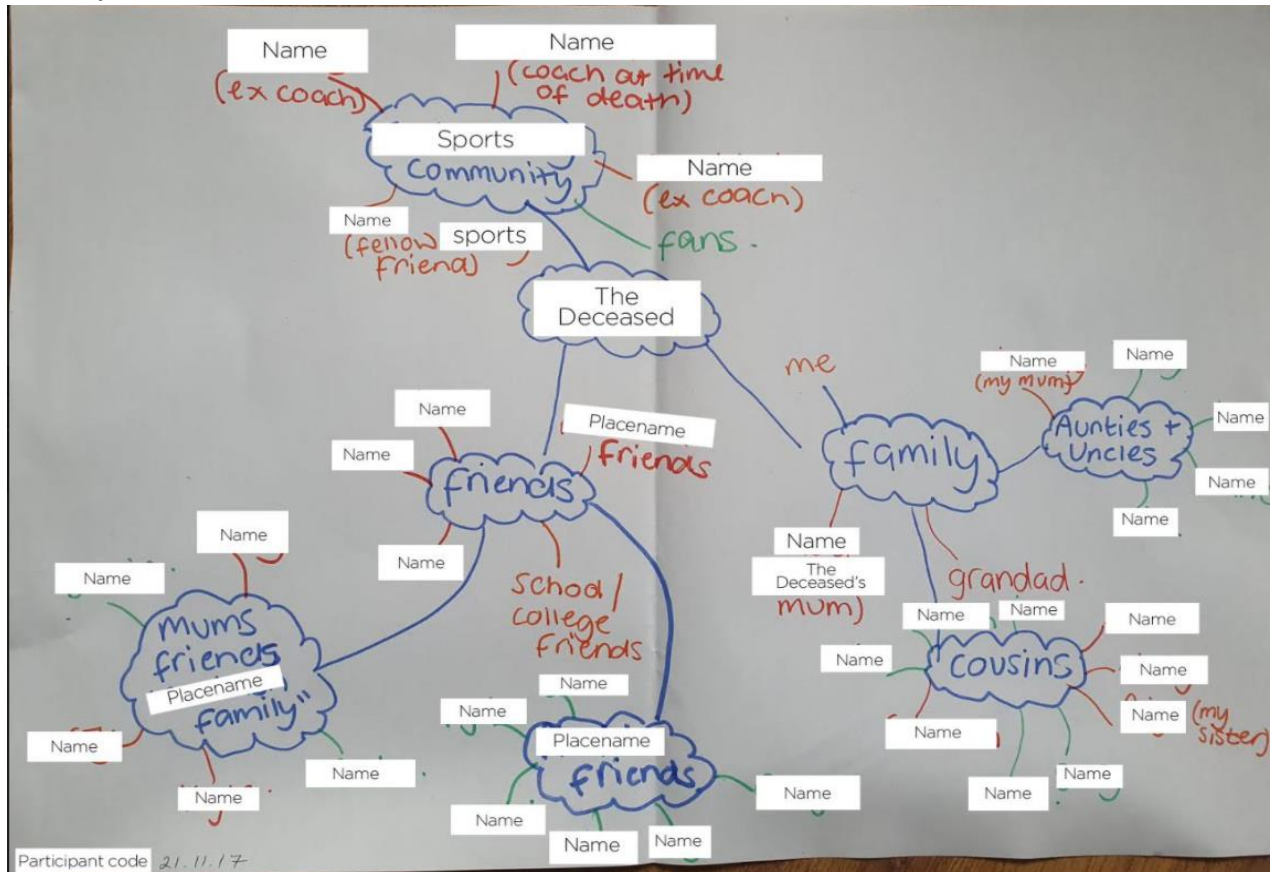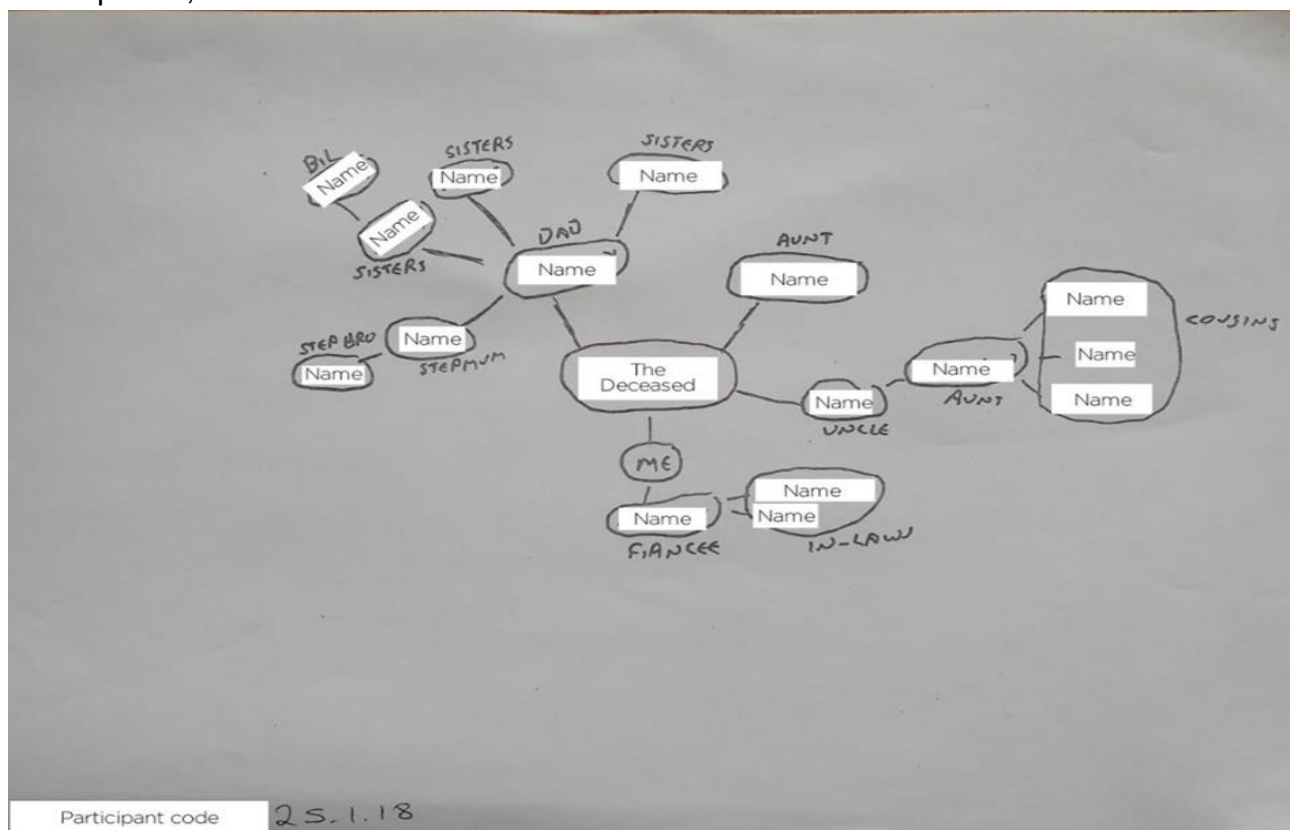# Appendix O: Samples of participant social network maps

Participant 13, Leah's case
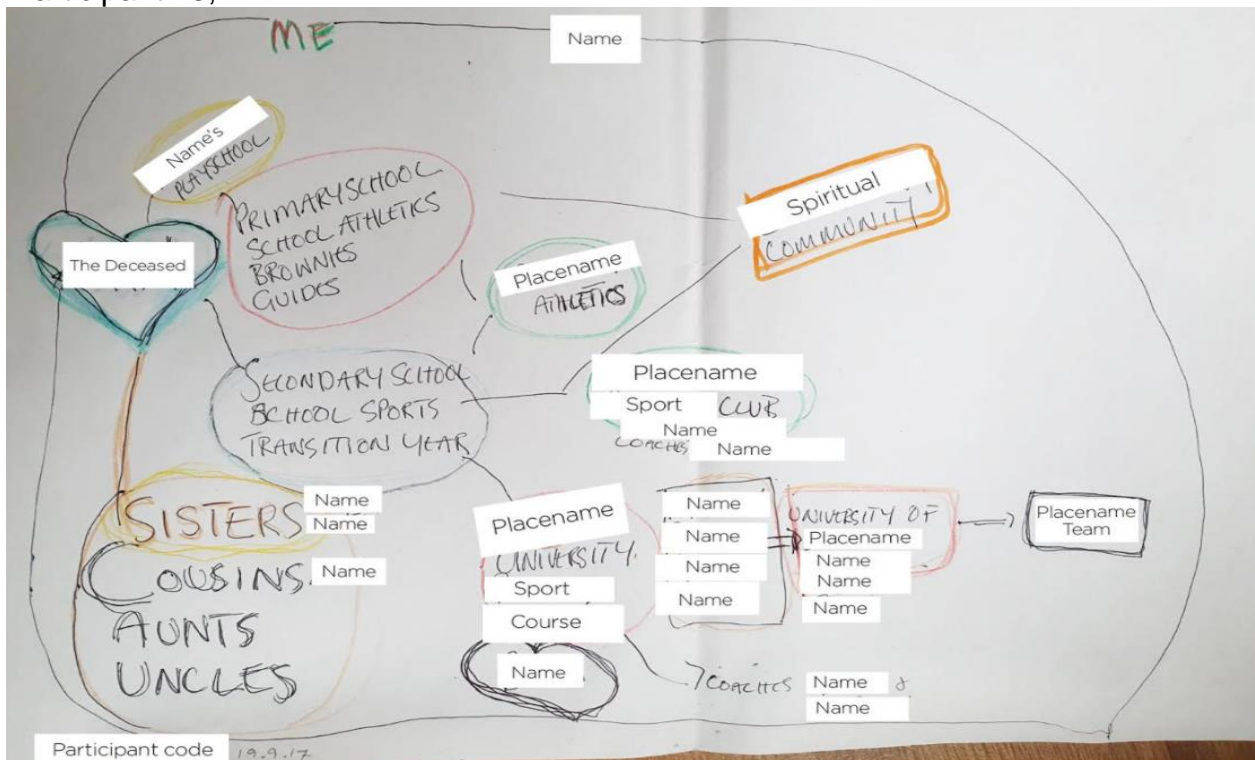
Participant 1, Deborah's case

Participant 1, Oscar's case

Participant 1, Ella's case

Appendix P: Study publicity (poster & flyer)

Appendix Q: Study website content

The following was the content of study website www.digitalmemories.info

Page 1: Home Page

What is the study about?

These days we live so much of our lives online and using devices. As we click, like, mail, tweet and surf we leave traces of ourselves in digital spaces. When someone dies, these traces can live on after their death. In the past, when a person died, the bereaved could look back at physical memories of the dead: photographs, letters, and personal effects. In the digital age, bereaved family and friends can also have access to a great range of digital memories of the dead: photos, emails, social media accounts, messages, videos etc.

The Digital Memories Study is a research project being undertaken at the University of Nottingham to explore the experience of being bereaved of a person who has left behind digital traces.

This study is the first of its kind to study this new and growing phenomenon. We know little about the digital-age experience of bereavement and understanding it is hugely important. Constant modern developments mean that our technologies are becoming increasingly involved in our lives and those born today are creating digital traces of their entire lifespans.

Understanding this phenomenon and developing responses to it is therefore not only important now, but for bereavement horizons ahead.

We are looking to speak to people who have been bereaved of an individual who has left behind a digital trace. Please go to 'Participate' to find out more and 'Contact us' if you have any questions or would like to take part.

Page 2: Participate

If you think you would like to participate in the study, we would like to hear from you. Please read the study's Participant Information Sheet for information on what the study would involve, or you can contact us directly and we will talk you through the next steps.

Sub-tabs:

- Study publicity
- Participant Information Sheet

Page 3: Contact us

If you would like to participate, or find out more, please contact:

✉ digital.memories@nottingham.ac.uk

📞 (Study phone number)

📍 Mórna O'Connor, Room B33, B Floor, School of Health Sciences, University of Nottingham, Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham. NG7 2HA, United Kingdom.

Appendix R: Participant information sheet (PIS)

Room B33
B Floor
School of Heath Sciences

Queens Medical Centre
Nottingham
NG7 2HA
United Kingdom

Study Title: The Digital Memories Study: Exploring how bereaved people utilise and experience the posthumous digital artefacts of their dead.

Researcher: Mórna O'Connor

Healthy Volunteer's Information Sheet

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not you would like to take part, I would like you to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. I, Mórna O'Connor (the researcher) will go through the information sheet with you if you wish and answer any questions you have. Talk to others about the study if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear.

What is the purpose of the study?
Increasingly, people use technologies in every part of life: to work, play, shop and communicate. This means that people create digital footprints over the course of their lives, such as emails, messages, social media accounts, files on personal devices etc. Nowadays, when a person dies, these digital footprints can be left behind and encountered by bereaved people. We know little about how bereaved people use and experience this digital content left behind by loved ones.

The aim of the study is to explore how people bereaved of an individual who has left behind digital traces after death use and experience this digital content after a death. We will do this by conducting interviews with bereaved people connected to individual deaths, as well as asking them to write diaries about their experiences. The study will be based in the Nottinghamshire area but will include participants from anywhere in the UK, as well as other countries where digital technologies are widely used.

Why have I been invited?

You may be receiving this information sheet because you have seen one of our adverts and contacted the study. It may also be that the study has been suggested to you by someone you know who is already taking part. You may also reading the online version of this information sheet on the study website.

You are being invited to take part in the study because you have been bereaved of a person who has left behind digital traces after their death. On behalf of both myself and the research team, I would like to express my deepest sympathies for your loss.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this research study. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. This will not affect your legal rights.

What will happen to me if I take part?

The amount of time you would be involved and the frequency of your contact with the study is up to you, within a one-year maximum. You may take part as much or a little as you like over a maximum period of one year between January 2017 and April 2018. The study has four elements. Elements two, three and four are optional.

I would like to:

1. Invite participants to take part in a series of interviews (up to four) about their use and experience of the digital content left behind by the deceased. These interviews will be spread out over each participants' study period and their frequency will be negotiated with them. The minimum we ask is one interview.

2. Invite participants to map out (on paper or verbally) the network of people who have also been bereaved of the deceased.

3. Invite participants to help to recruit others to take part in the study who have also been bereaved of the deceased. This may be done by passing Study Invitation Packs to these others or by giving their contact details to the study.

4. Invite participants to keep diaries about their use and experience of the digital content left behind by their loved ones. Participants can create these diaries at any time and any frequency during the study period.

If you decide to take part in the study, I will first ask you some questions to ensure that you are eligible to take part in the study. You may then be invited to attend an interview about the digital traces left behind by your loved one and how you use and experience them. At this interview, if you are happy to do so, you will sign a consent form to indicate your agreement to take part in the study.

This interview can take place in your home, at the University of Nottingham, or other private place if you prefer. Interviews also take place over the phone or using video calling software (e.g. Skype, FaceTime). Interviews will take about an hour and the conversation will be recorded if you are comfortable with that. If you prefer, the researcher can take notes instead.

At this interview, you will be asked to map out the other people who have been bereaved of the deceased. You may do this in any way that you see fit, perhaps using the paper, sticky notes and pens that I will provide, or by talking me through this map.

At this first interview I may also ask you to give some Study Invitation Packs to other individuals who have been bereaved of the same person as you, or to direct these others to the study website, www.digitalmemories.info, where they can read about participating in the study. If it is easier for you, you may prefer to give the name and contact details of these individuals to me and I will contact them directly, mentioning that you have nominated them.

Whether or not you wish to do take part in recruitment of others, and the way you do so, is entirely up to you.

The reason behind mapping out the social group of the deceased, and speaking to multiple people in that group, is that the study aims to explore the different types of digital traces of the dead that are available to different people, as well as different people's views and perspectives on these traces. However, it is worth noting that we are also interested in exploring the experiences of individual bereaved participants. Therefore, if you would like to take part as an individual and would prefer not to recruit others, we are very much interested in speaking to you.

At this first interview, the diary element of the study will also be explained to you by me, Mórna. If you want to take part you can choose to keep your diary using the online, audio or paper-and-pen methods. If you choose the online method, you will invited via email to the secure online diary space. You will then be able to submit diary entries about the digital traces left behind by your loved one, how you use them and any thoughts about, or experiences you have, with them. You will also be given a diary guide to help you if you are unsure what to write about.

You can submit entries to your online diary space whenever and as often as you like during the study and there is no limit to the amount you can write. Other participants in the study will not be able to see what you write; your online diary space is only visible to you and the research team. You can also email, audio record or hand write your diary entries if you would prefer. I will explain what to do for each of these options. Remember that you can change your diary-keeping method (e.g. from online to audio) at any time. You can also withdraw from the diary element of the study at any time without giving a reason and without it impacting your participation in the interview element of the study.

I may contact you to remind you about the diary element of the study, with no less than four weeks between reminders and a maximum of ten reminders over your time in the study. I will also offer to send you a copy of your diary entries at the end of the study.

After your first interview, I will contact you for up to three further interviews. You do not have to take part in all four interviews if you do not wish to, the minimum I ask is one interview. Should you decide against coming for an interview, I will not contact you about subsequent ones unless you tell me otherwise.

These other interviews would also be on the topic of your experience with the digital artefacts left by the deceased. The reason for these serial interviews on the same topic is to explore the phenomenon under study over time.

At the end of your study journey, you will exit the study. You can then request a copy of all the diary entries you submitted to the study. If you wish, I will send you a summary of the study findings and you can visit the study website, www.digitalmemories.info, for information and updates on the study. At the end of the study, you may also be invited to a findings sharing event attended by other participants and interested parties. Whether or not you wish to receive information or attend events after the study is entirely up to you.

Expenses and payments
Unfortunately expenses are not available for participating in this study.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
Some people may find talking and writing about a deceased loved one, and what they have left behind, upsetting. The researcher who talks with you will be experienced in discussing sensitive topics with research participants.

Another possible disadvantage is that you may recognise or be recognised by others in your group in the published study findings. We will make every effort to make you anonymous in all study publications, by changing your name and any other identifying information in your interviews and material you submit to the study. However, if others in your group know you have taken part in the research it is possible that they will still recognise your account in the study's publications. You may also be able to recognise the accounts of others in your group in published study material.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
For some people, it may be good to talk and write about the dead. In other research studies like this, people report that taking part can be a positive experience.

The information we get from your participation in this study will help us to understand what it is like to be bereaved of a person who has left behind digital artefacts after their death. Little is known about this phenomenon and studies like this one will help us to understand what those who die in our digital age are leaving behind, and what the views and perspectives are of their bereaved. This information may have relevance for bereavement support services, online service providers and estate and willing services as they cope with death and bereavement in the digital age.

The overall benefit of the study will be that you will be involved in a project that will further our understanding of this new phenomenon.

What if there is a problem?
If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should contact me, Mórna O'Connor, and I will do my best to answer your questions. My contact details are given at the end of this information sheet. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this by contacting the Research Ethics Committee Administrator, c/o The University of Nottingham, School of Medicine Education Centre, B Floor, Medical School, Queen's Medical Centre Campus, Nottingham University Hospitals, Nottingham, NG7 2UH, United Kingdom. Email: louise.sabir@nottingham.ac.uk.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?
We will follow ethical and legal practice and all information about you will be handled in confidence.

If you join the study, the data collected for the study will be looked at by authorised persons from the University of Nottingham who are organising the research. They may also be looked at by authorised people to check that the study is being carried out correctly. All will have a duty of confidentiality to you as a research participant and we will do our best to meet this duty.

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept **strictly confidential**, stored in a secure and locked office, and on a password-protected database. Any information about you which leaves the University will have your name and

address removed (anonymised) and a unique code will be used so that you cannot be recognised from it.

Your personal data (address, telephone number) will be kept for 12 months after the end of the study so that we are able to contact you about the findings of the study. All other data (research data) will be kept securely for 7 years. After this time your data will be disposed of securely. During this time all precautions will be taken by all those involved to maintain your confidentiality, only members of the research team will have access to your personal data.

Although what you say in interviews and diary entries is confidential, should you disclose anything to us which we feel puts you or anyone else at any risk, we may feel it necessary to report this to the appropriate persons.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?
Your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without your legal rights being affected. If you wish, you can request a copy of your diary entries up the point of your withdrawal. Should you wish, data collected up to the date of withdrawal can be erased, or you may opt to have it used in the study.

What will happen to the results of the research study?
The materials produced in the study will be studied in detail and used in writing a thesis for an educational qualification (PhD) for one of the research team (Mórna O'Connor). This thesis will be published online and material from it will also be published in articles submitted to academic journals and conferences in order to share the findings with others. A summary of the findings may also be published on the study website and presented at a findings sharing event held at the end of the study.

Direct quotes from your interviews and diary entries may be used in these publications and presentations, but you will not be identified in any of these.

The material produced by you in the study may also be published in an online store of study data so that other researchers can use it for other academic studies. You would not be identifiable in any of this material. If you wish, you may opt out of this without impacting your participation in the study.

Who is organising and funding the research?
This research is being organised by the University of Nottingham and is funded by The Vice Chancellor's Scholarship for Research Excellence.

Who has reviewed the study?
All research in the University of Nottingham is looked at by an independent group of people, called a Research Ethics Committee, to protect your interests. This study has been reviewed and given favourable opinion by the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee, University of Nottingham.

Further information and contact details

Researcher:

Ms Mórna O'Connor
B33 Postgraduate Research Office
B Floor
School of Health Sciences
University of Nottingham
Queen's Medical Centre
Nottingham
NG7 2HA
United Kingdom

Telephone: +44 (0)7999059011
Email: digital.memories@nottingham.ac.uk
Study website: www.digitalmemories.info

Study Supervisor:

Dr. Kristian Pollock
Room C1061
School of Health Sciences
Queen's Medical Centre
Nottingham
NG7 2UH
United Kingdom

Telephone: +44 (0)115 82 30810
Email: kristian.pollock@nottingham.ac.uk

Appendix S: Letter of ethical approval

E-mail: FMHS-ResearchEthics@nottingham.ac.uk

**Faculty of Medicine and
Health Sciences**

30th January 2017

Mórna O'Connor,
PhD Student,
NCARE: Nottingham Centre for the Advancement of Research into
Supportive, Palliative and End of Life Care.
B33
School of Health Sciences
QMC Campus
Nottingham University Hospitals
NG7 2UH

Research Ethics Committee
C/o Faculty PVC Office
School of Medicine Education Centre
B Floor, Medical School
Queen's Medical Centre Campus
Nottingham University Hospitals
Nottingham
NG7 2UH

Dear Ms O'Connor

Ethics Reference No: D16122016 **– please always quote**
Study Title: The Digital Memories Study: Exploring how bereaved people utilise and experience the posthumous digital artefacts of their dead.   **Short Title:** The DigiMem Study.
Chief Investigator/Supervisor: Dr Kristian Pollock, Principal Research Fellow, NCARE: Nottingham Centre for the Advancement of Research into Supportive, Palliative and End of Life Care.
Lead Investigators/student: Mórna O'Connor, PhD Student, NCARE: Nottingham Centre for the Advancement of Research into Supportive, Palliative and End of Life Care.
Other Key Investigators: Professor Heather Wharrad, Chair in e-learning and Health Informatics, HELM: Health e-Learning and Media, Dr Glenys Caswell, Senior Research Fellow, NCARE: Nottingham Centre for the Advancement of Research into Supportive, Palliative and End of Life Care.
Type of Study: PhD Project, Interviews, Qualitative only methodology

Proposed Start Date: 01/02/2017	**Proposed End Date:** 31/01/2019 15mths
No of Subjects: 90	**Age:** 18+ years
School: Health Sciences	

Thank you for your letter dated 26th January 2017 responding to the comments made by the Committee at its meeting on 12th December 2017 and the following documents were received::

- DigiMem FHMS Research Ethics application form and supporting documents v1.0 30.11.16
- Revised DigiMem FMHS Research Ethics application form and protocol v1.1 26.

These have been reviewed and are satisfactory and the study is approved.

Approval is given on the understanding that the conditions set out below are followed:

1. You must follow the protocol agreed and inform the Committee of any changes using a notification of amendment form (please request a form).

2. You must notify the Chair of any serious or unexpected event.

3. This study is approved for the period of active recruitment requested. The Committee also provides a further 5 year approval for any necessary work to be performed on the study which may arise in the process of publication and peer review.
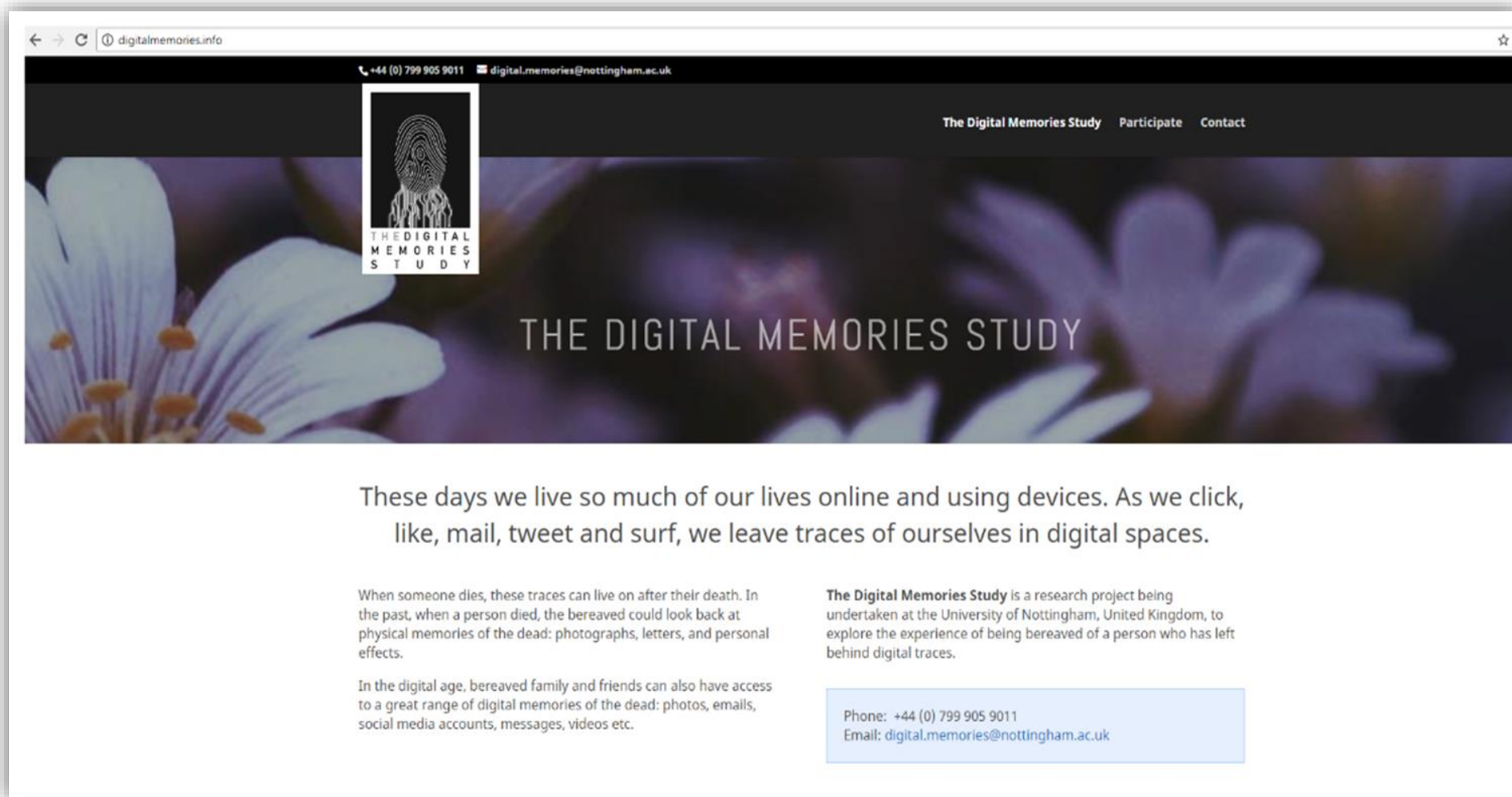
4. An End of Project Progress Report is completed and returned when the study has finished (Please request a form).

Yours sincerely

pp *Lonnegan*

Professor Ravi Mahajan
Chair, Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Appendix T: Screenshot of study website homepage

Appendix U: Participant demographics and information form

Date: ..../.............../.............

Information about you:

Title: ....   Name: ....

Date of birth:.......................   Age: ....   Gender: ....

Profession: ....

Ethnicity: ....

Religious affiliation (if any): ....

Level of education: ....

Contact information:

Home telephone number:............................   Mobile: ....

Email address: ....

Postal address: ....

....

How would you prefer the study to contact you? (please circle) email/telephone/post

Information about the deceased:

Name:..

Ethnicity:..

Date of birth (approx. if unknown):.....................................

Date of death (approx. if unknown):....................................

Age at death (approx. if unknown):.....................................

Time elapsed since death (approx.): ....

Your relationship to the deceased: ....

Appendix V: Case two friendship-tiering method

Without direct experience of the deceased's friendships, and aware of participants recognising themselves and others in research output, I was reticent about ranking friendships in this case. Furthermore, obvious issues arise with third parties developing categorisations of multiple relationships with an individual across a complex social network, particularly after that individual's death. Nonetheless, differences in friendship degree were present in this group, and not reporting them would flatten critical findings nuances.

Additionally, expressions of friendship degree with Leah pervaded data in this case. In the social network mapping exercise, family and friends articulated differences in relational degree between Leah and her friends, and when considering eligibility for nominating others to participate. Discussing others' relationships with Leah was also a core feature of data for all case participants; situating their relationships with Leah with respect to others' and expressing differences in others' relationships with Leah. Perhaps owing to a lack of accepted means of expressing degrees of platonic relationship, friends in this case liberally referred to and ranked other friends' relationships with Leah, as a means of gauging their grief and articulating their bond with Leah.

Thus, across the extensive data collected for this case, I gained rich, complex and intimate insight from the perspectives of 18 grievers—from family to casual acquaintances—about the 14 participating friends' relationships with Leah. Bringing to bear myriad data and my saturation in this case, I was therefore uniquely placed to develop light-touch categorisations of these friendships. Intended solely as an aid to expressing relational nuances for this thesis' purpose, I devised the four-level friendship tiering system seen in Chapter 7. The following factors fed into this tiering.

Data factors influencing friendship tiering

- Participants' appraisal of their friendship with Leah
- Other participants' appraisals of that participants' friendship with Leah
- Cross-referencing friendship information/appraisals of individuals and group.
- Friendship appraisals made by Leah (in material shown to me/referred to by participants, e.g. Leah's diary).
- An individuals' nomination to the study by others
- Comparing friends identified and ranked in all social networking maps
- Relationship of person appraising the friendship to Leah – credibility/ability to make appraisal and evidence for appraisal.

Relationship factors influencing tiering

- Duration
- Co-habitation
- Attending same school, sports club, university
- Shared activities and interests
- Relationship in person and at geographical remove
- Time spent one to one and in groups
- Frequency, quality and type of in-person relationship

- Frequency, quality and type of digital relationship
- Relational issues/discord/fracture
- Whether and how repair of issues/discord/fracture in relationship occurred
- Time spent beyond main reason for meeting/point of contact
- Travel/holiday time spent together
- Travelling to see one another and distance travelled
- Meeting Leah's friends and significant others
- Attendance at and activity at funeral
- Contact with/visiting of family since death
- Post-death memorialisation activity
- Post-death use and experience of Leah-related digital & physical material
- Degree of grief experience

Appendix W: Participant-referral diagram key

 = Case key contact

 = Nominated

 = Nominated & participated

 = Unresponsive/uninterested

 = Nomination not communicated to nominee
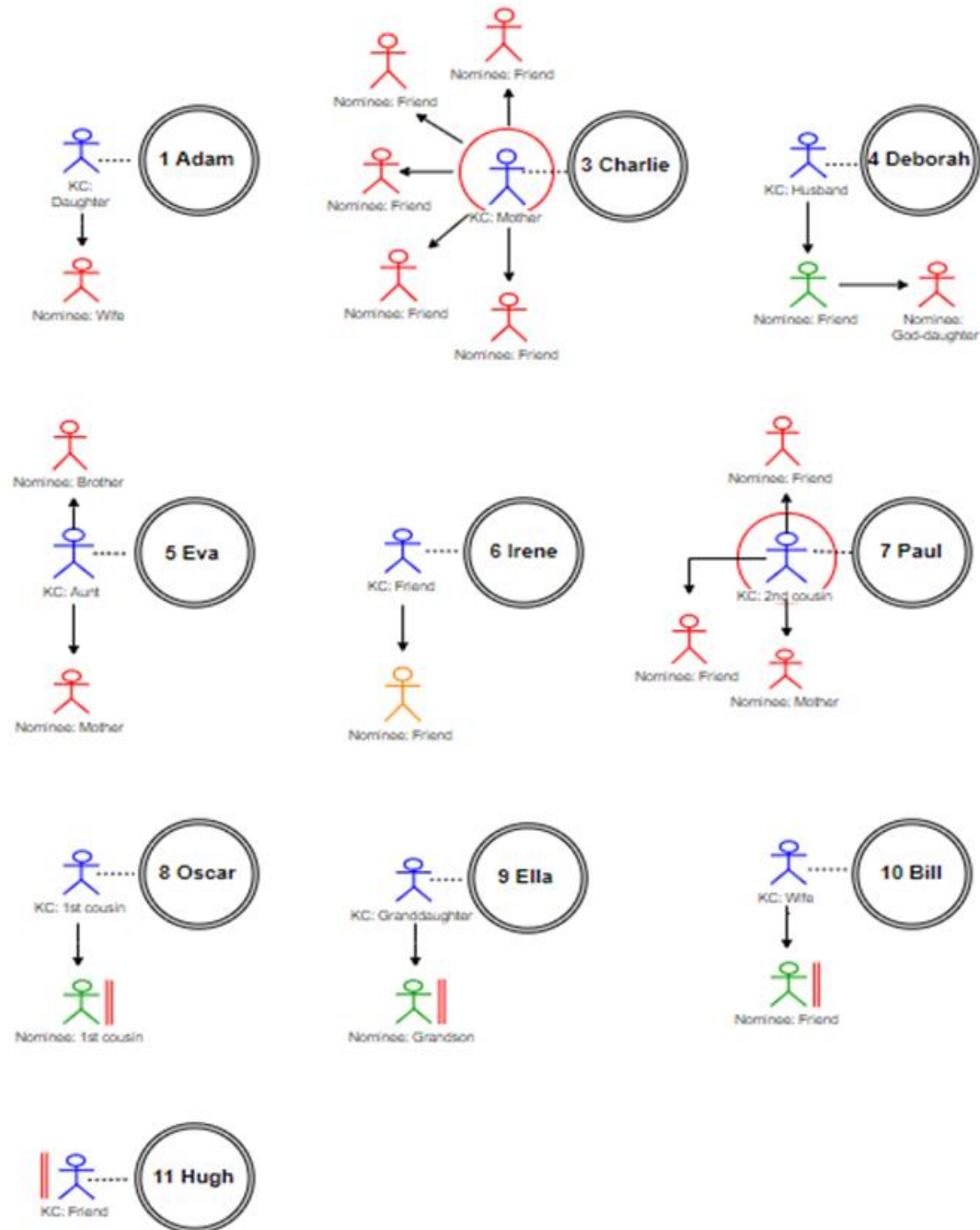
 = Not invited to nominate

 = Withdrew before communicating nomination

 = Participants interviewed jointly

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Appendix X: Participant referral per case, including unsuccessful

Appendix Y: Nominee invitation letter/email

THE **DIGITAL**
MEMORIES
STUDY

The University of
Nottingham

UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

Room B33
B Floor
School of Heath Sciences
Queens Medical Centre
Nottingham
NG7 2HA
United Kingdom

Study Title: The Digital Memories Study: Exploring how bereaved people utilise
and experience the posthumous digital artefacts of their dead.

Researcher: Mórna O'Connor

Dear [NOMINEE NAME],

I am writing to you to invite you to take part in a research study. You are receiving this invitation
because someone you know is taking part in the study and has suggested you might be
interested in participating. This study is called "*The Digital Memories Study: Exploring how
bereaved people utilise and experience the posthumous digital artefacts of their dead*". It is
taking place between January 2017 and April 2018 and is funded by the University of
Nottingham Vice Chancellor's Scholarship for Research Excellence.

The study is about the experience of being bereaved in a digital age, at time when digital traces
of lives and relationships can remain after the death of an individual. Specifically, the study
aims to explore how people who have been bereaved of such individuals, use and experience
this digital content.

You are being invited to take part in the study because I understand that you have been bereaved
of [NAME OF DECEASED]. On behalf of both myself and the research team, I would like to
express my deepest sympathies for your loss.

This letter is accompanied by a document called a Participant Information Sheet, which I invite you to read. This Participant Information Sheet describes the research study, why we are doing it, and what taking part in it would involve for you as a participant. If you have any questions about this document, or the study generally, please do not hesitate to contact me, Mórna O'Connor, using the information below. I am happy to discuss any part of the study, talk through it with you and answer any questions you may have, without obligation to participate. You may also wish to visit the study website, www.digitalmemories.info, for more information about the study.

If you would like to participate in the study, please contact me at the telephone number, email, or postal address below and I will contact you about next steps.

Thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely,

Mórna O'Connor
Doctoral Candidate
NCARE: Nottingham Centre for the Advancement of Research in End of life care

Telephone: +44 (0) 7999059011
E-mail: digital.memories@nottingham.ac.uk
Website: www.digitalmemories.info
Address: Mórna O'Connor, Room B33, B Floor, School of Health Sciences, University of Nottingham, Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham. NG7 2HA, United Kingdom.

Appendix Z: Post-doctoral dissemination plan

Output type	Proposed date	Title (if known)	Description/Abstract	Publisher/outlet	Status
Book chapter (co-authorship invited by Prof. Elaine Kasket)	2021	*What grief isn't: The revival of dead grief concepts in the digital age*	Abstract: We used to think grief was about moving through a set of prescribed stages to detach from our departed, a process after which we would be 'over it' and resume normality. However, this view has been roundly dismissed, and the deleterious effects of such universal, linear and reductive grief accounts well established. Multi-disciplinary scholarship suggests relationships are not ended by death, but changed, and there is no right, one or healthy way to grieve; no stages, steps or prescriptions. Rather, grief involves survivors narrating their dead, their relationship to them, and themselves, in relationships with others doing the same, with narratives responsive to and modulated by socio-cultural conditions and expectations. Within these shifting parameters, grief is interpretively crafted, and our griefs are as idiosyncratic and diverse as the relationships to which they pertain. In the last two decades, mourning has become electric. With it, the old, problematic conceptions of grief are re-entering the scholarly and cultural bloodstream. At the cleavage of grief and the digital, we are again seeing troubling assumptions: that grief (i) can be reduced to universals (ii) has a distinct, singular form impacted by digitality (iii) acts on survivors devoid of agency or interpretive capacity. In this chapter, we use longitudinal, qualitative case data—generated with a community of diverse people grieving the digital-age death of one young woman—to problematize the revival of these dead grief conceptions in the contemporary context. Via data illustrations, we shine light on the inappropriateness of current attempts to again marshal grief into something more reduced, universal, singular and one-directional. This builds to the thesis of this chapter: that though the digital context brings novel possibilities and conditions to modern grieving, grief remains a relationally and contextually embedded human activity resistant to prediction, reduction and universalism. As well as being critical for researchers and theoreticians in this space, we outline big-tech policy, therapeutic and ecological applications flowing from this position.	Palgrave *Studies in Cyberpsychology* series	Accepted
Conference presentation	Apr 21-23, 2021	*What grief isn't: The revival of dead grief concepts in the digital age*	As above	5th International Symposium of the Death Online Research Network (DORS5)	Submitted
Online article	2021	*What grief isn't: The revival of dead grief concepts in the digital age*	Journalistic article on the above topic, drawing out how the revival of antiquated grief concepts is happening in a time when we need them least: the mass bereavement event that is the Covid-19 pandemic.	*The Conversation* and/or *Psychology Today*	
Journal article	2021	*The ethics of longitudinal research with groups of death-connected individuals*	Abstract: The past decade has seen an explosion in the use of information and communication technologies in all aspects of modern life. As we message, like, mail, post, tweet and surf, we leave traces of ourselves in digital spaces. When an individual dies, these traces can persist and the bereaved can encounter digital material relating to their dead across a range of services, platforms and devices. The Digital Memories Study is a research project exploring the experience of being bereaved of a person who has left digital traces of their life. Prior studies have centred on bereaved people's experiences of material related to their dead on particular platforms (e.g. Facebook), and on individual bereaved people's encounters with digital material connected to a death. The Digital Memories Study takes a more holistic view, exploring the range and diversity of digital material that can be left after a death as experienced by multiple bereaved people connected to a death.	*Sage: Research Ethics* series	Editor interest confirmed

			Undertaken as a PhD project at the University of Nottingham, United Kingdom, this inquiry used a multiple-case study approach, where each case was focused on the death of an individual. In eleven such 'death-centred case studies', serial interviews were conducted and participant diaries collected from multiple people connected to deaths over the course of a year. This research ethics case explores the problems and possibilities of conducting and reporting research that longitudinally engages multiple survivors about the life, death and relationships of the individual they are grieving. I pay particular attention to issues of participant confidentiality when researching groups of death-connected people, representation and rights of the dead in research, and the challenges and advantages of researcher emotional responses, when undertaking longitudinal research with groups of bereaved people.		
Journal article	2022	*Pliable realities-in-relation: Narrating the dead with deceased-related digital material*	Paper targeting death studies scholars and the bereavement support community, linking accounts of grief as narrative to the digital context, presenting my theory thereon, and suggesting therapeutic applications for the grief support community.	*Death Studies* or *Bereavement Care*	Unwritten
Journal article	2022	Unknown	Paper focusing on serial longitudinal interviews with bereaved parents in the key case, a contribution to the substantial literature on parentally bereaved couples unique in its digital aspect.	*OMEGA: Journal of Death and dying* or *Mortality*	Unwritten
Podcast	2022	Unknown	Creating a podcast episode about my research as described by Allmann (2016) and done by Salifu, Almack, and Caswell (2020).	Unknown	Unwritten
Journal article	2023	*Grief and deceased-related digital culture: New economies of divestment and accumulation*	Divesting and accumulating material culture related to the dead are classic means by which the bereaved, both individually and together, forge accounts of their dead, of themselves, and deceased-bereaved relationships. Forces that engender and curtail the divestment and accumulation of physical deceased-related material are well established. This article establishes via data illustrations that (i) deceased-related *digital* culture can also be party to the personal and social enterprise of forging posthumous accounts and (ii) identifies five novel factors of digital material making for new economies of divestment and accumulation with respect to this form of deceased-related culture.	*Journal of Material Culture*	Unwritten
Research-based theatre	2023	Unknown	Having seen a research-based theatre piece based on Coen, Rosenberg, and Davidson (2018), I wish to devise a theatre piece based on my research.	Unknown	Link with author (Coen) to be pursued post-PhD
Manuscript	Unknown	Unknown	Book based focusing on the larger body of data generated with the 18-participant key case, a small portion of which is shown in this thesis.	Unknown	Publisher interested