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Going to Funerals in Contemporary Britain
The Individual, the Family and the Meeting with Death

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Going to Funerals in Contemporary Britain:
The Individual, the Family and the
Meeting with Death

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Bath
Department of Social and Policy Sciences

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I greet you

and the dead that you bring with you

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Abstract

This thesis documents mourners' experiences of funerals in contemporary Britain, and considers the implications of these for an understanding of funerals' social significance. It represents the first time that experiences of these people, who attend funerals but do not contribute to their planning, have been taken into account in an analysis of funerals in contemporary Britain.

The data on which the thesis draws have been generated in collaboration with the Mass-Observation Project, a long-running, large-scale qualitative writing project based at the University of Sussex. Participants in the project are self-identified 'ordinary people' who were asked to write in detail about the most recent funeral they had been to, as well as the best and worst they had ever attended. These data were analysed thematically.

The thesis argues that the three previously identified 'authorities' over death and dying of religion/tradition, professional/expert, and individual/self do not fully account for mourners' experiences of funerals. By examining the 'doing' and 'displaying' of family at funerals, the thesis demonstrates that for mourners, the family constitutes a further authority over the funeral.

Among other themes, the significance of speakers at the funeral and of mourners' own authenticity are drawn on to then argue that Davies' theorisation of funerals as 'words against death' needs to take account not only of *what* is done at funerals but *who* does it; that funerals are also 'people and their relationships against death'.

Some Notes on Terms

This thesis uses a number of terms with particular meanings in mind. These terms include mourner, funeral arranger, wider mourners, congregation, officiant, funeral personnel and tea.

Mourner

Throughout this thesis, 'mourner' refers to someone who attends a funeral. For many readers, for whom the term 'mourning' is synonymous with 'grieving', 'weeping', 'wailing' or 'Queen Victoria', this will not be an immediately intuitive use. However, as the following discussion will show, it is possible to distinguish between, on the one hand, the personal experience and expressions of grief, and on the other, mourning as a public and socially shaped act, potentially independent of personal feeling.

One of the reasons why it is important to define how this term will be used is in response to Brabant, who has argued that "[t]here is a lack of conceptual consistency in primary concepts throughout the thanatological literature. This is particularly the case with the concept *mourning*" (2002, p. 23). Psychological literature on grief may use this term to mean the response to loss (Freud, 1949), the expression of loss (Parkes and Weiss, 1983) or work necessary to reconcile loss (Rando, 1993). Under these conceptions, both grief and mourning (if the two are distinguished at all) are viewed as internal to the individual, and intrinsically connected with personal emotional responses to loss. Anthropological literature, by contrast, strongly emphasises social and cultural influences over individuals' responses to loss. Indeed, early anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown writes specifically that mourning customs such as weeping

> "are not to be regarded as simply the expression of natural personal feeling… they are regulated in every detail by custom. It is the duty of the relatives and friends to mourn, whether they feel sorrowful or not, and it is equally their duty to mourn only for a certain period" (1922, pp. 285-6).

Durkheim comes to exactly the same conclusion, whereby weeping, lamenting and other expressions of emotions are

"not a natural impulse of the private sensibility bruised by a cruel loss; it is a duty imposed by the group. They lament, not simply because they are sad, but because they are obliged to lament" (1915/1976, p. 295).

Brabant's solution to the problem of disconnected definitions of mourning is a 'four-dimensional' model, comprised of bereavement (the fact of a loss), grief (the response to that loss), grief work (work on resolving the pain of loss) and mourning:

"social expectations as well as cultural definitions and rules that tell us how important our loss is; whether we have the right to grieve; and, if so, how much, how long, and in what ways we can and should do so" (2002, p. 30).

Elsewhere, Walter (1999) views the distinction as a threefold one: bereavement is "the objective state of having lost someone or something"; grief refers to "the emotions that accompany bereavement"; and mourning is "the behaviour that social groups expect following bereavement" (Walter, 1999, p. xv), which will include attendance at the funeral (Parkes, 1997).

The clarity in these distinctions is useful, although the definitions of mourning refer only to societal and cultural norms, appearing to neglect individuals' actual behaviour entirely; they also leave no room for socially and culturally unsanctioned mourning. Indeed, Brabant does go on to argue that norms exert such a force over bereaved people as to compel them into prescribed forms of action and make alternatives impossible. While the existence and influence of mourning norms is an important area for conceptualisation and discussion, and has been invaluable in the development of such notions as disenfranchised of grief and hierarchies of loss (discussed in Chapter 3), I reject the notion of unyielding constraint implied by Brabant's 'mourning'.

P. Robson (2002, p. 71), like Brabant, presents four linked concepts. Her definition of mourning, however, accords a great deal more agency to individuals. For Robson, bereavement is again the experience of loss by death, which usually but not always involves sadness. Grief is "the predominantly internal experiences of feelings" in response to that loss, "inevitably associated with unhappiness and suffering" (Littlewood, 1992, p. 40). In a departure from Brabant, Robson's next distinction is 'expressions of grief', such as crying,

which, as spontaneous and less symbolic acts (in contemporary British society), may be seen as a bridge between the internal grief and external mourning. Mourning is understood as "the predominantly external displays, behaviours and conduct engaged in by the bereaved person in the period following the death, incorporating (but not limited to) the rituals of the funeral and acts of commemoration" (P. Robson, 2002, p. 71). It is on this definition of mourning, under which a person is identified as a mourner simply by attending a funeral, that this thesis draws.

Participants in this study provided written data and are referred to as 'correspondents', a term which will be explained in much more detail in Chapter 5. The empirical chapters of the thesis refer freely to 'correspondents' and to 'mourners'. Since correspondents were writing about their experiences as mourners, much of the time the terms are interchangeable, and nothing is signified by my use of one rather than the other. Where I thought that it mattered that someone had experienced what they wrote about, or had written about what they experienced, I used the terms 'mourner' or 'correspondent' respectively, though I did not draw attention to this in the text.

As is discussed in more detail in Chapters 3, 4 and 7, it is possible to distinguish between mourners. In the thesis I use the terms 'funeral arrangers' and 'wider mourners' to make analytical distinctions between mourners where necessary, while 'the family' also occurs as a distinction employed by mourners themselves. I explain each of these terms briefly here, indicating where more expansive discussion will be found.

Funeral Arranger

In this thesis, the term 'funeral arranger' means a person who has organised the funeral through a funeral director[1], as opposed to the member of funeral staff who receives their instructions (Bailey, 2010). At times, I refer to funeral arrangers as 'the client(s) of the funeral director', precisely to draw attention to

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[1] In principle, funerals may be arranged without engaging the services of a funeral director. In practice this is rarely done (Parsons, 2003), and in this thesis none of those who had arranged funerals indicated that they had done so without using a funeral director.

this aspect of the role. Funeral arrangers are almost always a member of the deceased person's family (Parsons, 2003).

Wider Mourners

At a funeral, there are usually many other mourners present besides the funeral arranger(s), mourners who have had no involvement with the decision-making process. These I refer to in this thesis as 'wider mourners', where it is necessary to distinguish them from funeral arrangers. As will be discussed later in this chapter and in Chapter 4, existing research examining mourners' perspectives has been limited to study of funeral arrangers' experiences. This thesis complements such research by documenting wider mourners' experiences and perspectives.

Further discussion of this distinction between funeral arrangers and wider mourners may be found in Chapter 5.

The Family

Detailed discussion of sociological concepts of family, and the way in which they relate to existing research on funerals in contemporary Britain, is presented in Chapter 4. In Chapter 7, these concepts are drawn on to analyse 'the family' as a category of mourners' experience at funerals.

Congregation

For many people, this word will have religious overtones. In this thesis, there are none. The term is used merely to refer to the collection of mourners who have congregated for the funeral.

Officiant

'Officiant' refers to the functionary leading the funeral. On occasion, I use 'minister' to refer to Christian functionaries. Both correspondents and academic literature may refer to 'celebrants', a term which many secular functionaries, including those of the British Humanist Association, use to describe their role at

funerals. I use 'officiant' because it is not associated with any particular religious or non-religious organisation.

Officiants are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Funeral Personnel

It takes a number of people's work to produce a typical funeral. These people include funeral directors and other staff employed in funeral businesses, officiants, cemetery and crematorium management and staff, gravediggers, florists and newspaper staff. These people are often referred to as 'funeral professionals' (e.g. Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010). However, the designation 'professional' (Sciulli, 2005; Wilensky, 1964), particularly in the context of funerals (Howarth, 1996, 1997b)[2], is not uncontentious, and I therefore refer to 'funeral personnel'. In principle this term could encompass all those above, but in practice it tends to mean funeral directors and officiants. These are the personnel with whom funeral arrangers can expect to have contact, and who are likely to be present, active, and visible to mourners at the funeral itself.

Tea

It is conventional for a funeral in Britain to be followed by a less formal gathering at which food and drink are available. Some call this a wake[3], some a tea, some a reception, some a meal. For convenience, throughout the thesis I call it a tea.

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[2] Discussion of the professionalisation of funeral directors is not limited to Britain. See Cahill (1999a, 1999b), Emke (2002), Schäfer (2007), Bremborg (2006) and Heessels (2012) for international perspectives.
[3] In some places, Ireland particularly, 'wake' has a particular meaning (Grainger, 1998a). The thesis does not explore what lies behind terms used or the variation between them.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis offers an account of mourners' experiences of funerals in contemporary Britain, and considers the implications of these for an understanding of funerals' social significance. This introductory chapter explains the rationale and research questions of the thesis, and provides an outline of the chapters that are to follow.

Rationale

Why research mourners' experiences of funerals in contemporary Britain? In June 2011, I explained my research to a gathering of funeral directors. As I was articulating my interests with a series of questions – "Who are mourners? What are they doing there? What is the funeral like for them? What do they make of what's going on? What's their role in the whole thing?" – one leaned forward and said, not kindly, "I'll tell you what they are. They're *sheep.*" I was not unfamiliar with this attitude, having been a funeral director myself for some years before taking up postgraduate studies. This kind of view is also occasionally apparent in academic literature on funerals in Britain, with wider mourners viewed as passive followers of an active funeral director (Bradbury, 1999; Howarth, 1996) – although far more often, they are ignored entirely, as if those who make up what is usually the largest group of people at a funeral were unimportant. This thesis came from the suspicion, and led to the conviction, that wider mourners are neither unimportant nor sheep, but are in fact active in the production and interpretation of funerals.

In the following discussion, I will argue that to study funerals is to study society and its values, and that to study the social significance of funerals, that is, the meanings that people ascribe to them, can contribute to an understanding of what funerals express. I will make the case for researching wider mourners' experiences and perspectives by arguing that these mourners comprise major players in constructing the social significance of funerals, and that what funerals mean to them cannot be assumed.

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Why Study Funerals?

It may well be that "[t]he practices that humans use to deal with their dead are intrinsically interesting" (Caswell, 2009, p. 15), but these practices also have further significance for the social sciences. Many authors have drawn attention to the potential for the study of social and cultural responses to death to inform the understanding of social and cultural life. This insight has informed social scientific research for over a century (see Davies, 2002; Metcalf and Huntington, 1991; Robben, 2004) and continues today. In recent years in Britain alone, researchers have examined

- the experiences of those facing death (Armstrong-Coster, 2004; Hockey, 1990);

- the opportunities for power, control and professional prestige through management of the dead body by funeral directors (Howarth, 1996, 1997b);

- the complex meanings found in the dying and dead body (Hallam et al., 1999), whether as a corpse (Harper, 2008, 2010) or as ashes (Prendergast et al., 2006);

- the significance of modes of disposal (Davies and Rumble, 2012; Jupp, 2006; Walter and Gittings, 2010);

- the variety and commonalities in social constructions of grief (Valentine, 2006, 2008); and

- the meanings of and boundaries between life and death themselves (Howarth, 2000; Mellor and Shilling, 1993).

Research into the social significance of death and dying has highlighted issues of centrality to contemporary life as well as contemporary death, with common themes including identities, emotion, embodiment, individualisation and relationship, autonomy and control.

Funerals in particular have been held to be "always... meaningful and expressive" (Metcalf and Huntington, 1991, p. 24) of social values (Grainger, 1998b; Walter, 1990), if not of a society itself (Durkheim, 1915/1976). Funerals are often rich in ritual symbolism which is explicitly intended to communicate how death is understood in the midst of social life, and how (social) life is understood in the face of death. Not only this, but the ways in which funerals

are brought about – for whom, by whom, under what conditions and for what reasons – are revealing of essential social organisation and values. Accordingly, the funeral has been interpreted in a range of ways, from being a guard against the disordering potential of change (van Gennep, 1909/1960) or death (Hertz, 1907/1960) to being a manifestation of capitalist profit-seeking (Mitford, 1963, 2000; see also Metcalf and Huntington, 1991, Chapter 8)[4].

Such analysis of what is expressed through funerals' form (e.g. Grainger, 1998b; van Gennep, 1909/1960) and content (e.g. Cook and Walter, 2005; Metcalf and Huntington, 1991) has contributed enormously to theoretical understandings of funerals' significance in societies, and is discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. Yet funerals have significance not only to social scientists but *within* societies. That is to say, funerals *matter* to people: they are held almost universally[5]; typically they are a communal event, occasioning a gathering of people (Durkheim, 1915/1976) who may or may not usually come together in everyday life (Walter, 2007); and whether they are obviously highly symbolic dramas (Turner, 1967) or apparently technocratic 'empty' ritual (Hockey, 2001), funerals are *meaningful* to those who take part in them. It is *this* aspect of funerals' social significance, the subjective meanings which funerals hold for those involved in producing, conducting and attending them, with which this thesis is concerned. Studying the meanings given to and taken from funerals can be expected to yield rich insight into society and how its members make sense of both death and life.

Yet social science does not have a complete understanding of what meanings funerals actually hold. Examples of research into the social significance of funerals in contemporary Britain are limited in number, but some exist. As Chapters 3 and 4 will show, however, when considering subjective interpretations, there is a very strong methodological bias in this literature, with significant consequences. With very few exceptions (e.g. Jenny Hockey, 1993,

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[4] Funerals are of interest to other disciplines, too. Theologians, for example, may consider the role of the funeral in conveying Christianity (Billings, 2004; Grainger, 1998b; Irion, 1966), while psychologists might consider the effect of the funeral on individuals' experiences of grief (Bosley and Cook, 1994; Hayslip et al., 2007; Hayslip et al., 1999; Servaty and Hayslip, 2002-2003).

[5] Both worldwide (Metcalf and Huntington, 1991) and within Britain, funerals are held for most deaths. Prior (1989, pp. 72-3) provides a discussion of deaths for which those who would be arrangers choose not to hold a funeral. Since Prior's discussion refers to 1980s Northern Ireland, it may only be a starting point for considering this question in relation to contemporary Britain.

who interviews Christian ministers), the funerals literature is written not only with reference to funeral directors and their work (Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010; Howarth, 1996; Naylor, 1989), but by using these key informants also as key gatekeepers, whether to other personnel such as officiants, or to the funeral arrangers who are their clients.

Furthermore, and possibly as a result, existing literature on the funeral takes for granted that the deceased person's family is the proper focus of attention both for funeral personnel and for social scientific research. In contemporary Britain, funerals are almost always arranged by family members of the one who has died (Parsons, 2003), and in the rhetoric of funeral directors and officiants, the funeral is designed and held for the benefit of these people (Bradbury, 1999; Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010; Howarth, 1996; Naylor, 1989). Before the funeral, the advice of these personnel is sought, accepted and generally appreciated, such is the degree of unfamiliarity of funeral arrangers with funeral norms and possibilities (Holloway et al., 2010; Parsons, 2003). At the funeral itself, funeral directors attend closely to their client, guiding them from the car to the entrance to the crematorium, church or service venue; showing them to their seat; accompanying them from the room at the end of the ceremony and leading them to the next stage, whether it be viewing the flowers or going on to another venue for the committal or tea (Bradbury, 1999; Howarth, 1996).

The assumption that the funeral is 'for' the deceased person's family not only pervades popular literature on funerals (Albery et al., 1996; George, 2008; Gill and Fox, 1996; James, 2004; Wienrich and Speyer, 2003), but is reproduced in academic literature as well. Often the assumption is implicit, revealed through the use of family members who have arranged funerals as key informants on the meaning, significance and value of those funerals (e.g. Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010). Where explanation for such a focus is offered, it may be in terms of the "potentially therapeutic role… [which is] posited for the funeral" (Jenny Hockey, 1993, p. 131) where the funeral is constructed as an element in 'the grief process' of these people.

This focus on funeral arrangers and personnel is problematic. Subjective meanings *vary* between participants in the ritual (Turner, 1969), and research

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must take account of all participants' viewpoints if it is to have the fullest understanding of what is being expressed, and understood, in the funeral. What of the many other mourners who attend the funeral who are not family, and are not the funeral director's client? These wider mourners in Britain have never been the subject of in-depth research[6]. This thesis therefore contributes to knowledge of the social significance of funerals in contemporary Britain by providing an in-depth account of these mourners' experiences and perspectives.

This is not, however, merely an exercise in 'filling a gap' in the literature.

The Value of Mourners' Perspectives

I argue that there are two good reasons for undertaking research on mourners' experiences of and perspectives on funerals in contemporary Britain. The first is that if the funeral expresses meaning, funeral personnel and their clients have input into this expression, but it is mourners who stand witness to it. Of course, those who make decisions about the content of a funeral (whether funeral arrangers or personnel) do this precisely on the basis of the meanings they consider their decisions to hold (Holloway et al., 2010), and it is true that existing research does illuminate the 'meaning' of funerals by examining these decisions and the reasons behind them. In this way, recent research has documented the ways in which individualisation (Caswell, 2009) and spirituality (Holloway et al., 2010), for example, are expressed in funerals. However, funerals have many participants, and the meaning of a funeral will not be fully understood unless its significance to all those involved is considered (Moore and Myerhoff, 1977; Turner, 1969). As those who 'receive' what is 'transmitted' through funerals, mourners' interpretations comprise an important aspect of funerals' social significance[7]. Existing research has analysed what funerals (are

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[6] Even Holloway et al. (2010), who assert that they write about all of the funeral's participants, seem not to notice that the majority of mourners at the funerals in their studies remain unaccounted for. Davies (1990; D. Davies, 1996) has conducted surveys concerning popular attitudes to both religion and cremation, which do include some data on participants' experiences of going to funerals at crematoria. These data will be discussed in Chapter 4.

[7] I do not argue that wider mourners' interpretations comprise the totality of funerals' social significance. Funerals are clearly significant to funeral arrangers and personnel; I suggest that their social significance inheres also in the meanings ascribed to them by those who have never attended a funeral.

intended to) *say*; this thesis analyses what funerals in fact *get across* to those who are there.

The second reason is that in addition to being interpreters of funerals, mourners may actively contribute to what is expressed. It may be funeral arrangers and personnel who make decisions about the funeral's content (within constraints, as discussed in more detail in Chapter 3), but I argue that, far from being 'sheep', wider mourners make decisions too, that they do this on the basis of the meanings which they consider those decisions to hold, and that their decisions contribute to the overall production of the funeral. These decisions include (but are not limited to) what to wear, whether to send flowers, and whether to attend in the first place. As I discuss below, these decisions are far from given, but rather, made in the context of considerable indeterminacy. Since such acts are part of what is expressed, I argue that these mourners' actions and the meanings behind them must be taken into account in an understanding of the social significance of funerals.

Moreover, of the wider mourners we can ask, if the funeral is 'for' the family, then what, to be blunt, are those other people (some of whom may not know the family) doing there? On the other hand, perhaps their presence suggests that the funeral is *not* only a response to death by and for the family, but is significant to a wider community (Durkheim, 1915/1976; Grainger, 1998b). In either case, there is a need for an understanding of the perspectives and experiences of the broader group of mourners.

Mourners and Uncertainty

How mourners make decisions about and interpretations of funerals is also of interest, since changes within both funerals and wider society over recent decades mean that mourners in Britain may be uncertain not only of what to expect at a funeral, but also what is expected of them[8]. Even if they want to be 'sheep', there are grounds for thinking that they are not able to be.

In other countries and cultures, the role of wider mourners can be both significant and clear. In the US, these mourners attend the 'visitation' held at the

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[8] The following sketch outlines the curiosity of mourners' position; more detailed discussions are presented in Chapters 3 and 4.

funeral director's premises in the evenings prior to the funeral, as well as being at the service itself, also held in the funeral home (Harper, 2008). For the funeral director whose premises are being visited this is an ideal opportunity to impress mourners with their facilities and attentiveness, and staff are always on hand to guide visitors through their steps. Elsewhere, mourners have an active role in the funeral. In Finland mourners place flowers and read the message cards aloud as part of the ceremony (Walter, 1996b)[9] and in Sweden they pay their respects to the coffin during the funeral (Reimers, 1999). In Ireland, mourners may have important religious or social roles, or both: the congregation of a Catholic funeral is called upon to safeguard the soul of the deceased person through prayer, while the communal wake is essential to Irish funeral practices (Grainger, 1998a).

Such institutionalised visibility and norm-led activity contrasts with the situation of funeral-goers in contemporary Britain, where funerals have undergone considerable change over the twentieth century, with an accompanying decline in clear norms for people attending funerals.

As early as 1965, Gorer had documented the weakening of local traditions guiding the practice of mourning, writing that "[u]p to the beginning of this century… with quite insignificant exceptions, everybody knew how it would be appropriate for him or her to behave and dress when they suffered a bereavement and how to treat other mourners" (Gorer, 1967, p. 63). Previously, many traditions had been governed by locality: whether or not women attended the funeral or men carried the coffin varied by region, as did the venue for the funeral and conventions for teas (e.g. Clark, 1982; Thompson, 2004; Vallee, 1955). Others, such the wearing of black and the donating of flowers, were widespread although not without local variation (Gorer, 1967). The funeral ceremony itself was typically a religious service, employing a format which was familiar to those taking part at the funeral for whom shared attendance at church or chapel, even if not funerals, was a more regular occurrence. The roles and activities expected of each mourner, whether these be ascribed on the basis of their position in the community or their relationship to the person

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[9] Walter's article attributes these practices to Scandinavia. In personal communication, the author corrected this and made clear that the practices were observed in Finland.

who had died, were communicated through the community and learned as simply 'what is done' (Bocock, 1974).

Variations in funeral practice by region do remain: the use of 'cords' at a burial is almost unheard of in England while its omission in Scotland is almost unthinkable[10]. But the decline in traditional social mourning practices first noted by Gorer has been confirmed in more recent localised studies (Clark, 1982; Gore, 2001; Naylor, 1989), and even in communities which have retained much of their traditional funeral practice, such as Stornoway on the Western Isles, changes are beginning to occur (Caswell, 2009). Mourners' ability to enact even unchanging tradition relies on their being familiar with the roles and actions required by those traditions in the first place. However, if Walter (2007) is correct that contemporary mourners may not share a locality with the deceased person, practices which have remained unchanged for centuries may be unfamiliar to mourners who have travelled to come to the funeral.

The significance of religion in funerals has also altered. A majority of funerals are still led by a religious functionary (Holloway et al., 2010), but a general increase in secularisation (discussed in Chapter 3) means that the language, routines and songs in religious funerals are less familiar to funeral-goers. Moreover, even a funeral conducted fully and only in accordance with Church of England liturgy cannot now be anticipated in advance, since the order for a funeral is no longer strictly dictated but characterised by many options and alternatives open to the minister (Cook and Walter, 2005).

What is more, over the past two decades or so, funerals have been characterised by increases in consumer choice. One of the most significant innovations is the introduction of secular and 'life-centred' funerals, which celebrate the personality and deeds of the deceased person (Wynne Wilson, 1989) rather than focusing on the worship of God or assisting the deceased person to a future life in heaven. While sometimes in practice this results in little

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[10] Eight cords tied to the head, foot and sides of the coffin and used to lower the coffin into the grave – often symbolically, with cemetery or funeral staff bearing the actual weight of the coffin on webbing. Cord-bearers are selected usually on the basis of their relationship to the deceased person, and take positions according to the 'number' of their cord, with the first cord being at the head of the coffin and signifying the closest position to the deceased person. In many parts of Scotland cords were traditionally taken only by men, but this is changing even where other local traditions are kept, and the first cord is often now taken by the surviving partner, parent or eldest child of the deceased person irrespective of their gender.

deviation from the order of events originally standardised by Christian funerals, with perhaps some modifications to the type of music played and readings read, at other times it can mean considerable reinvention, well beyond the content of the spoken ceremony (Albery et al., 1996; George, 2008). Funeral arrangers may feel a sense of control and satisfaction in this (although, as Bell (1997, p. 241) points out, invented rituals carry a higher potential for 'failure' and disappointment than those which take their justification from tradition), but other mourners may not know what to expect. At individualised funerals, dress codes may be abandoned or modified, mourners may be asked to make a donation to charity at the ceremony rather than buying flowers, or to contribute to the service with their memories of the deceased person (Holloway et al., 2010). While the rates of uptake of non-religiously-led funerals have been limited, their influence has been considerable in that the eulogising of the deceased person's life has become a core of the standard Christian funeral also (Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010), and some elements of personalisation are beginning to be found in services led by Christian ministers. Whether the funeral is religious or not, therefore, many mourners will come to the funeral both unfamiliar with religious liturgy and theology, and unable to predict how any one life-centred, personalised funeral is likely to proceed.

Thus, mourners' experiences of, and perspectives on funerals in contemporary Britain are both undocumented and uncertain.

The Research Questions

The thesis seeks to contribute an understanding of the undocumented and uncertain experiences and perspectives of mourners to the academic literature. The project's research questions are: first, what are mourners' experiences of funerals in contemporary Britain? And second, when mourners' perspectives are taken into account, what are the implications for an understanding of the social significance of funerals?

At the end of Chapter 4, these questions are revisited, expanded and discussed in the light of the theories presented over the following chapters, while Chapter 5 presents the project's methodology and explains how these broad research questions were translated into more specific enquiries.

Outline of the Thesis

Chapter 2 considers social scientific theories of the funeral which offer ways of taking mourners' perspectives into account. Most of this theorising comes from anthropology, and the chapter lays out the major theoretical contributions of van Gennep (1909/1960), Hertz (1907/1960), Durkheim (1915/1976) and Turner (1967, 1969). It is shown that these theoretical contributions may be limited in their ability to illuminate mourners' experiences of funerals in contemporary Britain, but Davies' (2002) theory of 'words against death' is shown to have considerable promise for extending our understanding.

Chapter 3 considers the major theoretical issues which arise specifically in connection with funerals in contemporary Britain, and which have been raised primarily by sociology. The first part of the chapter is arranged around an exploration of the changing 'authority' over the funeral, from tradition and religion, to funeral personnel, to the individual (Walter, 1994, 1996a). In the second part, distinctions between mourners, and the special status given to family, are discussed.

Chapter 4 provides a review of empirical studies of funerals in contemporary Britain. It demonstrates the focus in the literature on interpreting the perspectives of funeral personnel and their clients. As well as presenting what *is* known about funerals in contemporary Britain, the chapter considers what is *not*, by highlighting aspects of the funeral which may be meaningful to wider mourners. This chapter is structured around the chronological experience of attending a funeral, so as to convey the 'start to finish' experience that mourners may typically encounter. At the end of this chapter, the project's research questions are discussed in the light of the theoretical and empirical context which Chapters 2, 3 and 4 have provided.

Chapter 5 lays out the methodological decisions taken, and the methods used, in the production of this thesis. Data were generated in collaboration with the Mass-Observation Project, which is a long-running, large-scale qualitative writing project. This is not a 'routine' method regularly discussed in methods texts, and therefore the chapter provides background on the Mass-Observation Project and its particular strengths and limitations. My own experience of funerals as a funeral director, and its implications for the thesis, are also

discussed, as are the ethical dimensions of the research. This is followed by an account of how Mass-Observation data were generated and analysed.

Three chapters present, analyse and discuss empirical data, and these are structured by theoretical themes. Chapter 6 returns to the question of authority, and analyses mourners' relationships to tradition, religion and the individual as authorities over the funeral. The chapter demonstrates that for mourners, neither tradition nor religion hold authority, and it is the authority of the individual that pertains. In so doing, mourners' perspectives on personalisation and the eulogy are considered. The chapter also presents data on a theme which has not been seen in the funerals literature before, namely, the significance for mourners of the speaker of the eulogy knowing or not knowing the person who has died.

Chapter 7 stays with the question of authority. Analysis is presented to show that for mourners at funerals, there was an authority further to those identified by Walter (1994, 1996a): that of the family. The chapter shows that family is a taken-for-granted category for mourners, on the basis of which they distinguish between themselves. It goes on to demonstrate that many standard funeral practices are simultaneously practices in which mourners actively accomplish family through 'doing' (Morgan, 1996) and 'displaying' (Finch, 2007), and that in a number of ways, family is not only present at the funeral but should be considered an authority.

Chapter 8 considers how mourners relate to death in the funeral. The chapter is in two parts. The first demonstrates that mourners do encounter death at funerals, in various ways. The second uses and extends Davies' (2002) theory of 'words against death' to give an account of mourners' relationships to death in the funeral, highlighting the significance for mourners of the funeral's practical and social dimensions, as well as the conditions upon which a successful 'funeral against death' depends.

Chapter 9 concludes that when mourners' perspectives are taken into account, funerals in contemporary Britain can be understood as 'people and their relationships against death'. This is arrived at by reviewing the evidence presented in the empirical chapters, and noting the importance of 'authenticity', a theme running throughout the analysis. The implications of the thesis for the

wider literature and for practice are considered, and its limitations and contributions are discussed.

Chapter 2: Theorising the Funeral: Perspectives from Anthropology

Introduction

This chapter reviews a major 'lineage' of anthropological theorising about funerals which may offer ways of considering mourners' perspectives on and experiences of the event[11].

The chapter begins by laying out van Gennep's (1909/1960) schema of *rites of passage*, which conceives of the funeral as a ritual concerned with social change. This is followed by a review of the complementary work of van Gennep's contemporary, Hertz (1907/1960), who highlighted the nature of funerals as responding to the specific changes wrought through death. Durkheim's (1915/1976) writing on funerals as a response to death and Turner's (1967, 1969) theorisation of rituals of change are discussed. I suggest that scope for applying these scholars' thought to funerals in contemporary Britain may be limited, but that newer theories with their roots in the older do hold promise. To this end, Davies' (2002) theory of 'words against death', which utilises Bloch's (1992) notion of 'rebounding violence', is introduced, and some of the ways in which it can be used to interpret and shed light on mourners' experiences of funerals in contemporary Britain are considered.

Conceptualising the Funeral

Rites of Passage

Rituals may be categorised in various ways (Bell, 1997; Durkheim, 1915/1976; Grimes, 1990, 1995). Although there are exceptions (for example, Cheal, 1988)[12], the funeral has commonly, and usefully, been conceptualised as a rite

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[11] There are other 'lineages' which, for reasons of space and relevance, cannot be reviewed here in full. Important anthropological themes not addressed in this thesis include the role of the dead body (see Metcalf and Huntington, 1991, as an introductory text) and the relationship between religion and the threat of death (Robben, 2004, provides some introductory reading).

[12] Cheal categorises funerals as 'rituals of resource management' which "do something about the situation" (1988, p. 284). These can be contrasted with 'rituals of reification' which affirm

of passage – one of "all the ceremonial patterns that accompany a passage from one situation to another or from one cosmic or social world to another" (van Gennep, 1909/1960, p. 10).

Van Gennep's seminal analysis of these rituals of change, drawing on material from a range of tribal societies, offers a schema (rather than a law - see Hockey, 2002) of rites of passage as comprising three stages: separation from the original state, a 'liminal' (threshold) period of transition, and incorporation into the new state. In a rite of passage, one of these stages may dominate the ritual as a whole: a wedding, for example, ends the liminal period of betrothal for the couple and emphasises incorporation, using symbols of binding so to do. In his discussion of funerals, van Gennep writes that though one would expect rites of separation to be prominent, anthropological data reveal that "transition rites have a duration and complexity sometimes so great that they must be granted a sort of autonomy" (van Gennep, 1909/1960, p. 146), while it is rites incorporating the deceased person into the society of the ancestors which are given the greatest importance. The liminal funerary rites discussed by van Gennep concern the living as well as the dead. For the living, those considered kin of the deceased person make a transition from association with death to reintegration into everyday living society. Kin enter – by rites of separation from the deceased person, such as burial of the body – into the transitional period of mourning, during which "social life is suspended for all those affected by it" (van Gennep, 1909/1960, p. 148). The duration of this period varies with the closeness of the relationship to the deceased person, but relatives will eventually emerge from it – by rites of re-incorporation such as meals shared with the community – into their new social roles (e.g. widow).

The Special Feature of Funerals: Death

Van Gennep's contemporary Hertz (1907/1960) focuses on death ritual in particular, rather than rituals of change in general. His analysis concerns the 'secondary burial' practiced in tribal Borneo and elsewhere. In this practice, the corpse is temporarily buried or stored immediately after death, and permanently

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unchangingness, and 'rituals of reproduction' which avoid ends, rather than bringing them about.

reburied (with much greater ceremony) only when the body has fully decomposed from 'wet' flesh into 'dry' bones. While decomposition occurs, the soul of the deceased person is considered to be between the lands of the living and the dead, and kin of the deceased person are under the prescriptions and prohibitions of mourning.

Hertz's insight concerned these parallel relationships between the physical state of the corpse, the spiritual state of the soul, and the social state of the mourners, and this aspect of his contribution to the cultural analysis of death ritual is still being mined over a century later (see, for example, Davies, 2000; Metcalf and Huntington, 1991; Parkin, 1996; Prior, 1989; Venbrux, 2007; Williams, 1990), but it is not what I will focus on here. Rather, I want to draw attention to the links between Hertz's analysis of double burial and van Gennep's schema for rites of passage. Although Hertz presented double burial rites as consisting of two stages rather than three, it is not difficult to see the connections with van Gennep's work: both authors discuss rituals which present both mourning and death itself as *processes*, transitions which cannot be accomplished in a single moment. Moreover, both authors highlight the *social* dimensions of individual death.

In van Gennep's view, changes in social status, while unavoidable because of biological changes, are threatening to social order, precisely because they require a dissolution of social structure (represented through individual social status) and a passage through disordered liminality, before order can be reinstated by conferring a new social status on an individual. The liminal state of being 'betwixt and between' (Turner, 1967), or "at once no longer classified and not yet classified" (ibid., p. 96) can be viewed by societies as being dangerous and polluting to ordinary life (Douglas, 1966), and it is true that ritual participants are often the subject of strong taboos and segregation during a liminal period. Thus van Gennep understood the purpose of rituals at rites of passage as being "to effect this change in such a way as to preserve social order and continuity in the longer term" (Parkin, 1996, p. 29; see also Hockey, 1990; van Gennep, 1909/1960). Theorists have identified a number of techniques which promote order in funerals and other rituals. For example, formality involves the use of 'restricted' rather than 'elaborated' codes (Douglas,

1973) of communication and behaviour, which prescribe and proscribe possible responses to utterances and acts (Bloch, 1974; Rappaport, 1996, pp. 432-3) and "is very effective in promoting a loose social acquiescence to what is going on" (Bell, 1997, p. 140). Furthermore, the structure of the ritual is largely unvarying between performances, enabling another "powerful tool of legitimation" (Bell, 1997, p. 145), namely traditionalism, the claim (accurate or otherwise) that ritual actions are rooted in cultural history and precedent, and are unavailable for ad hoc revision. In such ways is order upheld *within* ritual, and social order represented *through* ritual.

Hertz's attention is on the particular threat to social order which is posed by death. Understanding individuals as literally embodying the society of which they are part (Davies, 2002, pp. 10-14; Hertz, 1907/1960), Hertz argues that society

> "... feels itself immortal and wants to be so, it cannot normally believe that its members, above all those in whom it incarnates itself and with whom it identifies itself, should be fated to die... Thus when a man dies, society loses in him much more than a unit; it is stricken in the very principle of its life, in the faith it has in itself" (Hertz, 1907/1960, pp. 77-8).

The death of an individual represents the extinction of society, and is "tantamount to a sacrilege" (Hertz, 1907/1960, p. 77). The response is the ritual transformation of the one who has died into an ancestor – a more distant but still existing member of the group (Hertz, 1907/1960, p. 82) – and of those who survive into new social roles and relationships. Death can be related to as a transition rather than an annihilation or extinction (Hockey, 2002). This response, Hertz argues, is the ritual proclamation of the triumph of ongoing social life in the face of individual death (Davies, 2002, p. 6).

Hertz's view of society is now recognised as implausibly reified (Parkin, 1996), but was shared by his mentor Durkheim (1915/1976). Rejecting participants' 'common sense' explanations that funerary rites are propitiation for the dead, Durkheim proposes a sociological alternative. He argues that funerals occur because "[w]hen an individual dies, the family group to which he belongs feels diminished, and in order to react against this diminishment, it assembles" (1915/1976, pp. 296-7). Group members come together to enact socially

prescribed rituals of mourning (which may or may not be accompanied by the subjective feelings of grief which they represent), in order to affirm their own group membership "and because the collectivity, despite this blow, is not damaged" (Durkheim, 1915/1976, p. 299). Funeral rites, like other communal rituals, tend to have the effect of promoting group affinity, and in Durkheim's view this explains the very reason for societies' holding them. Its members may die, but the society endures, and this is what, according to Durkheim, funeral rituals not only convey but actually bring about.

Liminality and Communitas

The concept of liminality, which van Gennep noted as being elaborated in death ritual, has been expanded by Turner (1967, 1969, 1977). Conceiving of society as a "structure of positions", liminality becomes for Turner an "interstructural situation" (1967, p. 93) with ritual subjects temporarily devoid of the "rights and obligations to others of a clearly defined and 'structural' type" (Turner, 1969, p. 94) which are the hallmark of the relatively stable states from which the subject has departed and into which they will re-enter. However, Turner's focus is not the threatening potential of liminality (Douglas, 1966; van Gennep, 1909/1960), but its ability to reveal, "however fleetingly, some recognition (in symbol if not always in language) of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties" (Turner, 1969, p. 96). This generalised social bond, with its subjects relatively and temporarily undifferentiated in terms of role, status, power and hierarchy, is what Turner calls *communitas*, "a communion of equal individuals... an essential and generic human bond, without which there could be *no* society" (Turner, 1969, pp. 96-7). Liminal periods reveal and effect an alternation between these two modes of social interrelatedness, between structured relationships and the formless bond of *communitas*. For Turner, then, far from *guarding* against the threat of disorder, rites of passage *allow* access to basic and vital human connectedness.

Applying Anthropological Perspectives

How might the ideas so far discussed help to address this project's research questions? That is, how might these theories translate into experiences for contemporary funeralgoers?

Bynum (1996) suggests that the idea of liminality in the sense of the stripping away of statuses may be more applicable to elites, who "in effect are the [social] structure" (Bell, 1997, p. 56), but others have found ways of applying Turner's work. *Communitas* in relation to mourning is discussed largely with reference to communal response to communal death: "people coming together as equals" (Littlewood, 1993, p. 76) in shared grief after such disasters as Aberfan[13] (see also Miller, 1974) and Hillsborough[14] (Walter, 1991b). In such circumstances, normally enforced social structures may be temporarily abandoned "in the face of something which puts all human hierarchy in the shade" (Walter, 1991b, p. 619). Living through such an experience of *communitas* can produce deep and longlasting loyalties within groups (Turner, 1967, 1969; see also Glaser and Strauss, 1971), while dispersal after such a loss can result in alienation from other mourners and arguably hinder communal recovery from the disaster (Erikson, 1979; Littlewood, 1993).

Reflecting on the more everyday experience of being a mourner at a standard funeral, Walter comments that in general "I may well find myself during the service relating to the deceased... but I am not relating to the other mourners" (2009a, p. 58). One funeral Walter had attended had bucked this trend, and that was where the tea, usually held after the ceremony, had preceded the funeral. Informal speeches and conversations enabled mourners who had previously heard of each other through the deceased person to put names to faces and establish enough of a shared connection that by the time the funeral was held they were "no longer twenty five isolated individuals but the united company of those who had loved Phil" (Walter, 2009a, p. 59). It was the tea – unstructured, and lacking the rule-bound formality characteristic of rites of

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[13] On 21st October 1966, 28 adults and 116 children were killed when a colliery spoil-heap above the Welsh village of Aberfan collapsed.
[14] On 15th April 1989, 96 Liverpool FC fans were killed in a crush at Hillsborough football stadium, Sheffield.

passage and other rituals (Bell, 1997) – that produced this *communitas*-like experience.

It is worth noting that Walter mentions that his experience of isolation occurs commonly at life-centred funerals, a style of funeral which is becoming increasingly prevalent (Caswell, 2009). As will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, these ceremonies are characterised by an emphasis on celebration of the deceased person's individuality, biography and personality. Walter argues that "an individualistic society clearly has problems generating communal ritual" (Walter, 1991a, p. 304); Wouters (2002) agrees, but suggests that personalisation in death ritual may not be a manifestation of individualism but rather an attempt at 'solidarization'. Neither religion nor locale, he argues, can any longer be relied on to induce the feeling of 'we-ness' (Elias, 1991) which provides the buffer against the threat of being overpowered by the despair of grief (c.f. Durkheim, 1915/1976). Personalisation in funerals may been seen as an attempt to create a 'we' between mourners, by asserting membership of a *symbolic* community with the deceased person as its locus.

Caution is required in taking Wouters' comments to be directly applicable to British funerals, however. Wouters is referring to Dutch mourning rituals, which became 'attenuated' (Gorer, 1967) during the 1960s and 1970s to the degree that it is still not unusual for funerals to be fully private, with restricted attendance and public announcement only after the event. In that context, personalisation represents a greater change than in Britain, where at no point has it been standard for the funeral – as opposed to the expression of grief – to be private to that extent. Furthermore, Wouters' emphasis is on the personalisation of the form of the ritual, rather than only the content, and this also is not happening in Britain to anything like the extent that it has in Holland, where ritual specialists offer advice and assistance with creating ceremonies based on clients' and families' creativity rather than liturgical history or ceremonial conventions (Quartier, 2010). But despite these considerable cultural differences, Wouters' reference to the symbolic community is a valuable insight into how *communitas* could manifest in contemporary funerals.

Wouters' application and extension of Turner's concept of *communitas* in relation to death ritual is a welcome contribution to the literature, where it is

much more common to find van Gennep's terms in use. However, there is little consensus about *how* those original terms should be used in relation to contemporary British funerals. If focusing on a deceased person who is not believed to be going to an afterlife (Davies, 2006) or on mourners for whom funerals "simply involve the public acknowledgement of the death of a person significant in our private lives" (Littlewood, 1993, p. 75), contemporary British funerals are best seen as rites of separation. Alternatively, the funeral can be seen as emphasising a transitional process, though whether it is the deceased person or the mourners who are transformed is ambiguous: "The *deceased* is physically dead but not yet quite socially dead. The ritual of the funeral helps *us* move through this transformation" (Davis, 2008, p. 415, emphases added)[15]. Finally, the funeral can be seen as an incorporation: Froggatt argues that "since the dying person... is on a journey from life to death, reincorporation back into society occurs at a symbolic level through funerary and mortuary ritual" (Froggatt, 1997, p. 33), while Howarth considers that the funeral effects incorporation for some mourners, since it is the point at which the husband's new status as widower, for example, is acknowledged (Howarth, 2000, p. 129). Musgrove and Middleton (1981, p. 53) favour a pragmatic approach, arguing that attribution of any of van Gennep's three stages should be made with reference to the lived experience of those undergoing the transition; in the case of funerals this does rather leave those focusing on the position of the deceased person (e.g. Harper, 2008, 2010) with something of a technical difficulty.

Of course, contemporary funerals are held within societies very different from those from which anthropologists such as Turner and van Gennep derived their theories. Indeed, while the concepts of separation, liminality and incorporation may prove useful to an understanding of experiences of funerals, attempts to map the rite of passage schema onto our own ceremonies yield widely varying and ultimately dissatisfactory results. As Jon Davies (1996, p. 52) notes, "it begins to lose its simplicity on application". A significant reason for this is that in contemporary Britain rituals are not used to effect change but to

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[15] As Exley points out (1999; see also Howarth, 2000; Mulkay and Ernst, 1991), we can take for granted neither that social death occurs after physical death, nor that a funeral automatically brings physical and social death into coincidence.

acknowledge it (Gluckman, 1962) – to use Walter's words, rituals have changed in meaning "from magic to marker" (Walter, 2006, p. 1).

Through the combined work of van Gennep, Hertz, Durkheim and Turner, a picture emerges of a funeral as an event which is concerned with working change on social identities, and continuity on social existence, interrupted by death. Though Turner's idea of *communitas* seems to hold some promise for interpreting the experiences of mourners in contemporary Britain, as a whole the theories so far discussed may be limited in their application to an analysis of subjective meanings made of a funeral. There is a further theory in this lineage, though, which carries a great deal of potential for exploring both funerals and mourners' subjective experiences of them, and as such, is one of the main theories with which the later part of this thesis will be concerned. This theory is Davies' 'words against death' (Davies, 2002).

'Words Against Death'

Davies (2002) argues that the standard formulation of rites of passage, and the conceptualisation of liminality (shared by both van Gennep and Turner), need to be supplemented with ideas such as those put forward by Bloch (1992). Bloch retains a three-stage shema of rites of passage, but contends that rather than being independent of the periods either side of it, the transcendental quality of the liminal has effects which are retained by the ritual subject even after incorporation, so that rites of passage do not merely alter the socially ascribed, recognised and sanctioned statuses of individuals, but involve permanent existential changes for those individuals themselves. This is brought about by a process of 'rebounding violence'. The total displacement of the mundane in the ritual subject's experience is described as the initial violence; the incorporation of the transcendental into the now-forever-changed mundane is the second 'conquest' which constitutes the 'rebounding violence'. Using examples of initiation rites, Bloch notes that actual violence is often a feature of rites of passage, although it is the subjective experience of the ritual participant which is the principal object of the theory (1992, pp. 3-6).

Under such a view, funeral rituals do not simply acknowledge or effect changes in social relationships, but imbue the participants and the social group with a reinvigorating force in the face of death. Davies (2002) considers that it is the 'words against death' common to almost all funeral rituals across the world that are key to bringing about this transformation for mourners. His argument is based on the assumption that some kind of adaptation to death is needed since, thanks to self-consciousness, humans are *conscious* of death's nature, which is to destroy that very self-consciousness. Humans are particularly (although perhaps not uniquely; see Kellehear, 2007, pp. 12-5) conscious of this threat, they respond to it, and draw above all upon language, a fundamental symbol and manifestation of self-consciousness, so to do. Since it is symbolic, this self-conscious meeting with death can be survived, and its successful accomplishment transforms those who yet live.

Davies himself presents this argument in six propositions: (1) humans are self-conscious; (2) language is the key medium of self consciousness; (3) death is a challenge to self-consciousness; (4) language is the key response to this challenge; (5) in funerals this verbal response is related to other kinds of response such as movement and music; (6) successfully meeting the challenge of death through funerals transforms humans "in ways which make them better adapted for their own and for their society's survival in the world" (Davies, 2002, p. 2).

Davies (2002, p. 7) aligns himself with earlier authors such as van Gennep, Hertz and Durkheim in considering that it is society, ongoing social life, which is posited against individual death. However, where earlier authors referred to the physical gathering together of communities (Durkheim, 1915/1976) or the re/assertion of order (Hertz, 1907/1960; van Gennep, 1909/1960), and were implicitly concerned with societies where individual deaths certainly could disrupt whole social orders, Davies' attention is on the symbolic realm. Individual death is a *symbolic* threat to social life (and may or may not be an actual threat also).

It will be noticed that Davies' argument has shifted from viewing death as a threat to self-consciousness – a trait of individuals – to viewing death as a threat to social identity. For Davies, the two are so closely linked as to be

interchangeable in this context. Indeed, Davies writes that identity – understood as "the way people understand themselves in relation to other persons, to the world around them and to supernatural realms" (Davies, 2002, p. 4) – is so closely linked to self-consciousness that "[i]t could even be said that identity is self-consciousness expressed in the public sphere" (Davies, 2002, p. 5). Thus as well as challenging self-consciousness, death threatens social identity. Death rituals repel the threat by asserting, through words, the endurance of identity. It is in this way that society – the "cradle of identity" (Davies, 2002, p. 7) – is brought to stave off the threat of death. Exactly how this endurance is expressed in a particular context is an empirical question, and one to which Davies pays a good deal of attention, providing a wealth of illustrations from a range of cultures.

The assertion of society is symbolic, visible under analysis. Subjectively, for ritual participants, the experience is one of having faced and survived loss brought about through death, having survived the ordeal of that loss, and having touched some strengthening force even as they mourn. What is experienced as transcendental is not society but a feeling of hope (Davies, 2002, pp. 21-2). This is not fully and finally accomplished in one short ceremony, but is represented there and can be experienced in miniature. Davies illustrates what his theory means for mourners in contemporary Britain:

> "… by means of funerary rites, not least the power of words, they have so overcome life's hardship as to affirm the social goal of their culture… rituals of bereavement produce a different kind of person... a personal change occurs because of what has been encountered. The public sign of this transformation is often that of formal memorials which stand as testimony not only of the one who has died but of those who consent to continue to live a social life" (Davies, 2002, p. 56).

Davies, like Bloch, is drawing on and developing van Gennep's idea of the rite of passage as transformative. Departing from van Gennep, however, both Davies and Bloch highlight not the preservation or recreation of social order, but the psychological and existential changes wrought by the ritual within participating individuals. Both acknowledge that social relationships will be altered as a result, but it is the individual that is seen as the ritual subject. For

the purposes of this thesis, Davies' theory of 'words against death' therefore holds great potential, since in contrast with theories which emphasise the role of the deceased person (e.g. Hertz, 1907/1960), or of those making choices about the funeral (e.g. Caswell, 2011), it allows a focus on those who attend the funeral and may (or may not) be transformed by it. For this reason, the final chapter of the thesis employs and extends Davies' theory. Since this is so, it is worth going into further detail, as well as considering some of the limitations of the theory as presented.

Davies makes clear that it is the *content* of the words which does the work against death. It is their rhetoric – their power to persuade, to state a case in defiance of the fact of death – through which mourners' beings and identities are transformed (Davies, 2002, pp. 2-3). Some funerary words may constitute 'performative utterances' (Austin, 1961), that is, statements which bring about the very thing that they state. Austin's own classic example of such an utterance is 'I name this ship'; Davies suggests that 'we commit his body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust' at a funeral "constitutes a clear performative utterance" (Davies, 2002, p. 8) precisely because it does not itself place the body into the ground (and indeed is spoken during or often after the lowering of the coffin) but instead declares that the living relinquish their custody of the deceased person's being, transferring the same from living society to the ground.

Not all – perhaps few – words against death are performative utterances, though. Words of comfort to those grieving (Davies, 2002, p. 45), words which proclaim the religious meaning of death (chapters 5-9), words which evoke any 'significance realm' in which death may have a meaning (pp. 215-6), words which assure that the death will not have been in vain (p. 22), poetry expressing themes of loss and survival (pp. 203-5) – all these may be words against death. Words incorporated into music and drama may be 'against death' (pp. 197-200, 206). Even music absent any words, and cultural forms such as painting, sculpture and architecture (in particular the architecture of memorials) may be 'against death' if they convey the possibility of living more strongly having borne the suffering of bereavement (pp. 200-3, 207-8). The illustrations I have selected here are only those which can plausibly be imagined in contemporary

Britain, and Davies' book offers much more varied examples from other societies. What is common to all the examples of 'words against death' is that they must be able to confront death (Davies, 2005, p. 20) with hope (Davies, 2002, pp. 16, 21-2 in particular), and, if they are to be successful, must be experienced as doing so.

How might 'words against death' manifest in *funerals* in contemporary Britain? The eulogy, the verbal core of contemporary funerals, will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, but for now let us note Davies' own answer to the question. Acknowledging that alongside religious belief mourners may hold anti-religious positions, or lack a commitment to or interest in anti-/religion[16], Davies suggests that 'words against death' at a funeral may not be liturgical but "are now equally likely to be poetic or explicitly therapeutic" (Davies, 2002, p. 209; see also Bauman, 1998). In Davies' view the hope that such words offer may be derived from an eschatology, from the retrospective fulfilment of identity, or from the ecological fulfilment of identity (Davies, 2002, pp. 141-3; 2005, pp. 118-27). Eschatology, the religious (and in this country mainly Christian) account of (among other things) the fate of those who die, may be expressed in funerals as faith in eternal life with God (Davies, 2005, pp. 118-20). Hope through the 'retrospective fulfilment of identity' is seen when "fond memory replaces hope" of the dead person's continued existence in another world (Davies, 2005, p. 122). Funeral rituals focus on the life of the deceased person as it was lived and is remembered, rather than as it is now and will be for eternity. As will be seen throughout the thesis, it is this kind of hope which dominates funerals in contemporary Britain. The main work of 'words against death' in this kind of funeral is satisfactorily to represent the deceased person's identity in mourners' memories. Davies' third kind of hope, with its origins in the 'ecological fulfilment of identity' refers to the relationship of humanity to the earth, but did not feature in the data at all and will not be elaborated here (but see Davies and Rumble, 2012, for further discussion).

Thus, 'words against death', and the kind of hope they offer, will vary even within one context. Still, Davies contends, "through them all the process of adaptation and social evolution continues through expanding patterns of the

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[16] Religion and secularisation, both in funerals and in larger society, will be discussed in Chapter 3.

rhetoric of death" (2002, p. 209). Arguably, Davies' references to adaptation and evolution are the most vulnerable feature of the theory. The most elaborated explanation of his position is as follows:

> "The fact that practically all human societies possess some formalized death rites, alongside the otherwise practical task of disposing of a body, suggests that funerary ritual possesses some very positive function in human life. In evolutionary terms, it is likely that death rites have a positive adaptive significance, for if they possessed no such benefit they would have been abandoned long ago" (Davies, 2002, p. 6).

As already seen, the idea that funerals help both individuals and social groups to adapt to individual deaths and death in general is an important part of Davies' theory. It is unfortunate, therefore, that the social evolutionary assumptions behind this aspect of the theory are neither elaborated nor defended, since it is far from clear that longstanding and widespread cultural practices are necessarily 'very positive' for all (or, perhaps, many) members of a society, nor even for a society as a whole. Neither is it clear that societies and species are so analogous as to make exposition of the merits of a social evolutionary perspective as redundant as the defence of an evolutionary perspective in a natural history work.

This omission notwithstanding, for the purposes of this thesis Davies' theory of 'words against death' provides the most promising overall theory of the funeral to date. It offers a way to theorise mourners' experiences of funerals as symbolic and transformatory encounters with death, and, as will be shown in Chapter 8, has clear application to funerals in contemporary Britain.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown the development of anthropological theories which understand the funeral as a ritual social response to the changes brought about by individual death. For the most part, these theories have been developed with reference to rituals other than the funeral (Bloch, 1992; Turner, 1967, 1969; van Gennep, 1909/1960), or in social contexts very different from modern industrial societies (Durkheim, 1915/1976; Hertz, 1907/1960), which themselves display considerable variety in funeral custom and organisation (Walter, 2005b). For

this thesis, Davies' (2002) theory of 'words against death' holds the merit that it offers a way to make sense of funerals from mourners' own perspectives, and it is this theory that will be used – and built on – in the analysis of empirical data in Chapter 8.

Potential for application though it has, Davies' theory was not developed in the particular context of funerals in contemporary Britain. The following chapter considers specific theoretical issues which arise from these.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Issues in Contemporary Funerals: Perspectives from Sociology

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to consider major theoretical issues which arise in connection with the overall project of understanding mourners' experiences of funerals in contemporary Britain. Although the title of the chapter refers to the discipline of sociology, and although most of the literature discussed within is sociological, the division thereby set up between anthropology and sociology is only coincidental. Anthropologists have indeed written about funerary practice in contemporary Britain (see, for example, Prendergast et al., 2006), but it happens that the literature on funerals themselves is largely sociological.

The chapter is arranged around discussion of two theoretical issues, which, alongside Davies' (2002) theory of 'words against death', underpin the thesis and are used to interpret the empirical data in Chapters 6, 7 and 8. The first of these issues is 'authority' over the funeral (Walter, 1994, 1996a). It is shown that over time, the authority once held by tradition and religion has given way first to the authority of experts, in the form of funeral directors and officiants, and now to the authority of the individual. Mourners' relationship to each authority is considered at each stage of the discussion. This part of the chapter pays close attention to two key phenomena in contemporary funerals, those of secularisation and personalisation.

The second theoretical issue discussed is that of social norms which produce and reproduce distinctions between mourners. These may be interpreted as binary or hierarchical distinctions, but in either case family relationships are given special status.

The chapter demonstrates that while these theoretical issues can certainly contribute to a conceptual framework for understanding mourners' subjective experiences of funerals, *wider* mourners' relationships to authority, and indeed, to other mourners, are not merely unresearched but entirely unconsidered in existing literature.

'Authority' in the Funeral

Walter identifies three kinds of death (1996a, p. 193), or three approaches to death (1994, p. 47), each with its own authority. In *traditional* death, the authority over death is religion and local tradition. The priest and family or community preside over the deathbed, over the preparations for death and over the management of death once it has occurred. The typical funeral will be held in church, followed by burial in the local churchyard. In this funeral, the community's concern is to transport the soul of the deceased person, through prayer, to the afterlife. Mourning is guided by commonly-known rituals and conventions. In *modern* death, authority has been transferred from the religious representative and the community to professionals and technical experts. Doctors preside over the preparation for death, funeral directors are the repositories of what was once traditional knowledge about how funerals are held, and the body itself is cremated at a "high-tech, mass turnover institution organised on bureaucratic lines" (Walter, 1996a, p. 193) in a process which most ordinary people would not know how to bring about. The rituals of mourning no longer obtain, and grief is kept private. In *neo-modern* or *postmodern* death, ideals of individual autonomy, choice, and personal authenticity preside over the preparation for death, the expression (or not) of grief, and the content of the funeral, which now becomes a celebration of the unique life of the one who has died (Walter, 1994, 1996a)[17].

It must be remembered that these are dimensions of ideal types, and that while they do describe historical trends (Walter, 1994, p. 49) in which traditional death is replaced by modern death, which in turn is superceded by neo-modern or postmodern death, they are not likely to be found in isolation from one another[18]. Indeed, overlaps are easily found within funerals in contemporary Britain – it is perfectly possible (and, as the empirical data in this thesis bear out, not uncommon) for a life-centred funeral to be arranged through a funeral

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[17] Authority is only one dimension of these three types of death. Walter (1994, pp. 47-60) also traces many other aspects, including bodily context (meaning archetypal causes and trajectories of death; life expectancy; the visibility of death in society), social context (social structure; notions of personhood; the kind of loss death is perceived to incur), coping (strategies of grief and mourning; patterns of support and surveillance), the journey (conceptions of death and its meaning; funerary arrangements), and values (including ideas of 'good' and 'bad' deaths).

[18] Walter's is not the only way of conceptualising 'types' of death over history. Ariès' (1974, 1981) is but one alternative, though from a distinctly French perspective (Walter, 1994, p. 14).

director and held in a country church, and such combining of authorities may or may not produce tension (Walter, 1994, p. 63). When documenting such overlaps, however, it is crucial not to mistake what Walter calls the 'revival' of traditional practices with the domain of or a return to the *authority* of tradition. What underlies revival is the authority of "the postmodern individual who picks and chooses from traditional deathways what s/he fancies" (Walter, 1996a, p. 199). The inclusion of horse-drawn hearses (Fairways, 2011), for example, illustrates how revival may manifest in contemporary funerals, although again it should be stressed that it is not *what* is included in a funeral that indicates the authority, but *why* that element is there.

The notion of authority is not intended to illuminate funerals only, but the entire field of dying and death. Thus Walter himself barely sketches how authorities manifest in the funeral. The following sections will therefore consider that question in detail, with particular consideration (where the literature makes it possible) for how *mourners* at funerals might experience and relate to these kinds of authority.

The Authority of Tradition

It is not only in funerals, or in the realm of death and dying, that tradition's authoritative status has been questioned. The discussion below of detraditionalisation as a wider phenomenon contextualises the discussion of tradition and funerals which follows.

Detraditionalisation

Walter is not the only author to argue that tradition no longer holds the authority that it once did; other scholars writing about societal shifts (beyond those occurring in the realm of death) agree. Understanding tradition as "an orientation to the past, such that the past has a heavy influence or, more accurately put, is made to have a heavy influence, over the present" (Giddens, 1994, p. 62), and the *authority* of tradition as indicating "not only what 'is' done in a society but what 'should be' done" (ibid., p. 65), Giddens is one of a number

of authors to argue that this authority has waned at the societal level. Acting in accordance with tradition (whether with regard to rites of passage, kin and other intimate relationships, social roles and occupations) no longer appears self-evidently the thing to do (Shils, 1981, p. 201) but is susceptible to criticism and questioning (Thompson, 1996, p. 90). It is no longer the prime authority over individuals' action, but merely one among others – and this shift from inevitability to optionality is so drastic as to mean that tradition is no longer an authority at all (Giddens, 1991, pp. 194-5). Even authors such as Campbell who question whether traditional action has ever simply been unthinking compliance with unexamined authority, or rather "highly self-conscious and deliberate action on the part of individuals" (1996, p. 162) nonetheless agree that such decision-making takes place now in a context which permits, if not demands, some other, less authoritative, relationship of individuals to tradition.

While tradition's authority has declined, traditional practices yet endure. They may become delocalised as a result of transmission through mass media rather than intergenerational contact (Thompson, 1996, pp. 98-9). They may persist devoid of former meaning (Giddens, 1994, p. 102). They may be cherished and defended as markers of group identity (Giddens, 1994, p. 100) or be resisted and rejected (Shils, 1981, p. 201). Nonetheless, they remain. Gross (2005) accounts for this retention of traditions divorced from the authority of tradition by distinguishing between 'regulative' and 'meaning-constitutive' traditions. Regulative traditions carry the threat of exclusion for those who do not comply, while meaning-constitutive traditions are those which lend meaning and through which individuals make sense of the social world. Whether a particular tradition is regulative or meaning-constitutive then becomes an empirical question about individuals' motivations for following traditional action (Gross, 2005, pp. 296-305) – although this question may not have an 'either/or' answer, but perhaps an 'and' or even a 'neither/nor' (Adam, 1996, p. 142).

How may all of this be seen in death rituals in general, and in funerals in particular?

Tradition and Detraditionalisation in Funerals

In comparison with a century ago, there are few prescribed social responses to death. It is important not to romanticise the past and we should be aware both that the lavish funerary rituals attributed to the Victorian era were at most restricted to those who could afford them (Howarth, 1997b; Jalland, 1999) and that such rituals may not have been experienced as beneficial by those who practiced them (Littlewood, 1982, p. 19; Walter, 1996a; see also Hockey, 1996). Nonetheless, over the twentieth century a decline in ritual observances in relation to death did occur[19]. This decline was neither total (Frisby, 2012), nor uniform either over time or by region or class (Jalland, 2010; see also Howarth, 1997a, 2007), although some social death practices have declined or died out completely. For example, Gorer's survey of UK death practices carried out in 1963 found that a majority of respondents indicated the occurrence of a death by means of drawn curtains, with the practice being least common in the south-east and almost universal in the north of England. In her study of the management of death rituals in a northern city (Naylor, 1989), reported that of the homes she visited in the company of a funeral director there to make arrangements with the family, only one house had offered any outward sign of a death having occurred such as drawn curtains (Naylor, 1989, p. 242). Similarly, in discussing the customs of Deal in Kent, Gore (2001) also locates this practice firmly in the past. In other examples of changing traditions, viewing the body of the deceased person now takes place at the funeral director's premises rather than the family home (Gore, 2001) and is no longer a social occasion but a private one, with few people other than family members visiting and visits being treated as private occasions by funeral staff (Harper, 2008). By the 1950s (Marris, 1958) and 1960s few widows wore full mourning dress for any length of time if at all, "a major change in British customs over the last 50 years" (Gorer, 1967, p. 41). Furthermore, social seclusion in mourning was almost extinct by

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[19] There are reasons for this decline in addition to a more general weakening of tradition's authority. Increasing life expectancy meant that where in the previous century death had been omnipresent, people now began to be able to afford to ignore its threat until later in life, while both world wars resulted in death on such a scale that "Victorian death practices seemed both inadequate and inappropriate, especially in the absence of bodies to bury" (Jalland, 2010, p. 8). Economically and logistically, each war also forced normal mourning rituals to be abbreviated, with the result that "[a] relatively low-key approach to funeral ritual was established and continues to influence contemporary ceremonies" (Howarth, 1997b, p. 127).

the 1960s, to the extent that Gorer reports that his abstention from social occasions on grounds of his own bereavement caused embarrassment to his would-be hosts (Gorer, 1967, p. xxii). It is because of changes such as this that Littlewood (1993, p. 69) argues that death rituals have been removed from the community and located, if anywhere, in the private world of the bereaved individual.

Detailed empirical data on *funerals* spanning the past century do not exist. However, in the studies that are available, traditions, and the authority of tradition, can also be seen to have declined. In his ethnography of a northern English fishing village, Clark (1982) reported a shift from burial to cremation, and from community-led practices to the employment of funeral directors. Littlewood's (1982) research with bereaved family members in the late 1970s found that almost all wore black or dark clothes to the funeral. In the 1980s Naylor (1989) found that family members did not consider dark clothes obligatory for the funeral, although wider mourners tended to wear black (Naylor, 1989, pp. 287-8). The same study did observe the new (at the time) phenomenon of including popular music in the funeral, suggesting that tradition did not hold full sway. Overall, Naylor saw funeral arrangers as being unfamiliar with funeral organisation, if not funeral practices, and reliant on funeral directors to guide them (Naylor, 1989, p. 123), suggesting a shift from the authority of tradition and community to the authority of the expert (Walter, 1994, 1996a). Twenty years later, Holloway et al. (2010) presented a very different picture. Also studying a northern English city (Hull), these authors found funeral arrangers being guided by funeral directors and officiants, but using them as a resource through which personal choice could be exercised, rather than relying on them as a guide to normative funeral practice. Tradition was only a basis for funeral decisions where the deceased person or their family 'liked things traditional'; the decisions made on this basis concerned music, prayers and clothing (Holloway et al., 2010, pp. 23, 43, 54) and individuals were consciously choosing them, in the context of being obliged to make some form of choice (Giddens, 1990, p. 39) since funeral directors and officiants declined to make decisions (at least openly) on their clients' behalf.

Placing these studies in this chronological order gives the impression that tradition's authority in the funeral has declined in a neat, linear fashion (perhaps particularly in the north of England!). Yet Caswell's (2009) more recent comparative study of funerals in three sites across Scotland shows that this is not so, and that the authority of tradition has not disappeared entirely in contemporary funerals. Caswell argues that in Stornoway, on the Isle of Lewis, "traditions have a moral and emotional influence over the decisions the bereaved make, so that anyone who makes decisions which are different from the norm is likely to cause comment" (2009, p. 122). This manifests in funerals which are services of religious worship, in community (gendered) practices around carrying and interring the coffin, and in burial as the mode of disposal. In Inverness and Edinburgh, by contrast, Caswell observed traditional components of funerals being experienced (both by funeral directors and their clients) as available for selection on the basis of consumer preference. Caswell herself attributes the persistence of tradition's authority in Stornoway to its being at a geographical remove from the influences of modernity, although other authors (admittedly none of whom are writing about islands) suggest that this kind of isolation does not necessarily prevent the erosion of traditional funeral practices (Clark, 1982; Denison, 1999; Thompson, 2004).

As well as regional variations, Howarth (1997a, 1997b, 2007) has argued that funeral traditions are maintained in working class funerals, though there is no empirical research documenting this, nor whether any such retention would reflect 'regulative' rather than 'meaning-constitutive' traditions.

What are the implications for mourners of tradition's decline as an authority in the funeral? Gorer concluded that in contrast with the beginning of the twentieth century when "every society in the world... had explicit rules of behaviour which every mourner was meant to follow" (Gorer, 1967, p. 63), his study had shown that "the majority of British people are today without adequate guidance as to how to treat death and bereavement" (ibid., p. 126). But while ritualised customs prescribing behaviour of and towards mourners has all but disappeared, other sources of authority may still pertain.

The Authority of Religion

As with tradition, the role of religion in wider society contextualises discussions of its authority in funerals. I argue below that secularisation in broader social life as well as in funerals combine not only to lessen religion's (likely) authority for mourners, but to induce a context of considerable uncertainty for people attending a funeral in Britain today.

Secularisation

Scholars of religion confirm that religion's decline as an authority in Britain is not limited to the sphere of death. As will be discussed presently, a process of secularisation has affected both society and individuals over the twentieth century. Britain can be understood as something of an anomaly in this context: the discussion which follows in no way should be taken to extend even as far as other European countries (Davie, 2001; Hervieu-Léger, 2001), and certainly not the rest of the world (Berger, 1999; Davie, 2007). Furthermore, following the major British writers on the topic (Bruce, 1996, 2002; Davie, 1994, 2007; Heelas and Woodhead, 2005), I discuss the process of secularisation with reference only to Christianity. This does mean passing over other organised religions which, in Britain, may be undergoing very different processes from those which Christianity has been subject to. However, these religions account for only a minority of the British population: in 2001 71.8% of people in England and Wales were recorded as Christian, 15.1% as having no religion. Other religions, including Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Judaism and Buddhism accounted for 5.4% of the population between them (ONS, 2011). As this thesis overall will address mainline British experience (Walter, 1999), a discussion of Christianity and secularisation forms part of the social context within which that experience is set[20].

While Britain remains formally a Christian country with established churches in both England and Scotland, a Church of England monarchy, and seats for Bishops in the House of Lords (Voas and Day, 2007, p. 95), there is strong evidence of secularisation at both the societal and individual levels

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[20] For a more in depth discussion of mainstream and marginal religions both in Britain and across Europe, see Davie (2007, chs. 7 and 8).

(Dobbelaere, 1981, 2001). At the societal level, secularisation describes a shift from the church to the state in provision of and authority over such areas as healthcare, education and welfare (Bruce, 1996, pp. 39-43; 2003, p. 56), alongside a decline in the social status of religious institutions (Bruce, 2002; Davie, 2007). Bruce has argued that "Christian ideas are not taught in schools, are not promoted by social elites, are not reinforced by rites of passage, and are not taken-for-granted in the mass media"[21] (2001a, p. 202). Brown (2001) describes a decline in what he calls 'discursive Christianity': "a unifying Christian environment which commandeered the vehicles of public discourse, penetrating home and office, school and hospital, street and pub, parliament and town hall" (p. 57) to such an extent during the nineteenth century that while it was possible not to agree with the message of Christianity, it was not possible not to be familiar with it. Indeed, Brown argues that what made Britain Christian was not the presence of churches or the number of people attending those churches but "the way in which Christianity infused public culture and was adopted by individuals, whether churchgoers or not, in forming their own identities" (p. 8). Brown's accompanying claim that secularisation began in 1963 (p. 1) may be somewhat controversial and even tenuous (Voas and Crockett, 2005), but his central observation that Christian concepts, practices and references no longer pervade everyday life to such a great extent should not be disregarded.

As well as these societal changes, there is much evidence of secularisation at the individual level, associated with a decline in the extent to which people claim membership of a religion, perform religious practices, hold and display religious beliefs, and conduct their everyday behaviour according to a religious code (Bruce, 2002; Voas and Day, 2007). Despite complex measurement issues (see Bruce, 2002, Chapter 10, for an in depth discussion) it is not disputed that church attendance has fallen dramatically during the past 150 years. For example, Brierley (2000) calculates church attendance at 7.5% of England's adult population in 1998, compared with between 40 and 60% of Great Britain in 1851 (Bruce, 2001a). These figures are corroborated both by the Church of England's own data, and by detailed studies of religious activity in

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[21] The assertion that Christian ideas are not reflected in rites of passage will be discussed in more detail below.

various British localities (Bruce, 2001a). Church membership and self-reports of affiliation to religion have also decreased (Bruce, 2002; Voas and Crockett, 2005), as have traditional Christian beliefs such as "belief in God (especially a personal God), Jesus as the Son of God, life after death, the devil, and the authority of the Bible" (Gill et al., 1998, p. 508). It should be noted that these rates are means for the population as a whole, and that religious belief and church attendance are stronger amongst older generations (Voas and Crockett, 2005).

Davie (1994, 2007) argues that declines in churchgoing, church membership and even in traditional Christian belief should not uncritically be accepted as evidence of secularisation. Instead, she argues, "in many ways [the sacred] is becoming more rather than less prevalent in contemporary society" (1994, p. 43). The basis for this claim is the incidence of 'believing without belonging': Davie does not deny that active membership of religious organisations is low (under 15% of the population), but views the high proportion of British people – between two-thirds and three-quarters – who report belief in "some sort of God" (1994, p. 75) as counter-evidence of secularisation. Davie's focus is on 'common religion', nominal Christianity based on beliefs that "[begin] to drift further and further away from Christian orthodoxies" (1994, p. 76) as well as an enormous variety of beliefs and practices classed as New Age ideas. This focus is extended by Heelas (1996b) and Heelas and Woodhead (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005) who examine the range and significance of 'spiritualities' in a localised study of Kendal, in the northwest of England, finding that although a 'spiritual revolution' has not taken place, relatively large numbers of people actively use some form of spiritual practice in "[living] out their own interior lives in their own interior ways" (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005, p. 13).

The concepts employed both by Davie and by Heelas and Woodhead are vulnerable to criticism, particularly on definitional grounds (Bruce, 2002, pp. 199-200; Voas and Bruce, 2007, p. 50). Indeed, Davie refuses to define either 'belief' or 'belonging', because "[o]perationalizing either or both of the variables too severely is bound to distort the picture" (1994, p. 94), attracting the complaint that with no conceptual clarification the very notion of believing

without belonging "is now more misleading than helpful as a way of describing the contemporary situation" (Voas and Crockett, 2005, p. 13).

Much of the literature that I have cited here is concerned with supporting or refuting one of two major competing positions: the secularisation thesis and the individualised religion thesis (Pollack and Pickel, 2007). These theses claim, respectively, that modernisation tends to increase secularisation, or that modernisation alters religious social forms from institutionalised religion to individualised religion. For our present purposes, it does not really matter which thesis – if either – holds. What both sides agree on is the observation that institutionalised religion is no longer a medium through which most people understand and organise their lives. It is clear that orthodox Christian beliefs are in decline and have been so for some considerable length of time, replaced in part by participation in individually-tailored spiritual activities. The authority of the church is displaced by the authority of the self, and "the diminishing number of people who continue to do religion do it in an increasingly individualistic and idiosyncratic manner" (Bruce, 1996, p. 233). Thus it would seem that "as there is a secularization of society and culture, so is there a secularization of consciousness" (Berger, 1967, pp. 107-8). Bruce (2001b) argues that this process has already passed the point of no return: institutionalised religion no longer has significance as a guiding influence over social life.

Davie, however, has one further concept which should be mentioned: vicarious religion, the idea that "the wider public are not entirely indifferent to the activities of the religious institutions even if they take no – or very little – part in them on a regular basis" (2001, p. 108). Davie's argument is that as long as even a minority keeps institutionalised religion active, its social significance remains considerable since others continue to take the institution for granted. 'Secularised' Britons, Davie notes, continue to patronise Christian buildings and to object to their decay, to criticise the conduct of Christian representatives, and, crucially, to utilise institutionalised religion in death rituals. While funeral ceremonies are becoming more individualised, Davie notes, "relatively few take place outside the influence of churches altogether" (2001, p. 110).

Secularisation in Funerals

Until the late 1980s, the Church of England effectively held a monopoly over funeral ceremonies, with 'duty clerics' instated at crematoria to take services for the growing number of dead and their families who had no regular contact with their local church (Walter, 1990, p. 71), and with funeral directors (who control the information available to those arranging funerals) promoting the services of 'tame' Christian ministers as an alternative to parish clergy for arrangers describing themselves as 'not really religious' (Hockey, 1996; Naylor, 1989). There is something of a black hole in the research between the 1980s and the present, at which time not only is it clear that there is a wider choice of officiants[22], but there are indications that funeral directors are making choices more available to their clients (Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010). Now, in addition to the Christian minister, celebrants are available from the British Humanist Association (BHA) and the Institute of Civil Funerals, and there is also an unknown but noticeable number of independent funeral officiants. In addition, some funeral directors will take on the role of officiant if requested by the funeral arranger.

Holloway et al. (2010) write that this variety results in a range of funeral types. At one end are religious funerals, following a set liturgy and including only some personalisation, in the form of the eulogy[23]. These differ from those with more flexibility regarding the liturgy and more of a focus on the individuality of the deceased person but still including religious ideas in the ceremony, which differ again from primarily secular funerals which focus on the deceased person but which may include religious elements such as a prayer, blessing, reading or hymn, at the request of the funeral arranger. Such secular funerals may or may not be associated with a "worked-out, elaborate ideology" (Moore and Myerhoff, 1977, p. 10). Finally there are Humanist funerals, which normally permit no

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[22] Intriguingly, Davies (1990) reports on extensive survey research from both rural and urban England conducted at the end of the late 1980s, indicating that a large majority of participants (who were selected as members of the general population rather than as (ever having been) mourners) considered that funerals *should* be conducted by the clergy.
[23] Personalisation and eulogies are significant features of funerals in their own right, and will be discussed in much more detail below.

religious content at all[24] and which are entirely a "backward looking" celebration of the deceased person's life.

A shift towards these newer forms of secularised ceremonies is commonly referred to throughout the funerals literature, but has not to date been extensively explored or quantified. In their recent study of funerals in Hull, Holloway et al. (2010) report a non-religious proportion of 35%. This figure should be treated with some caution: it is arrived at by counting all funerals whose officiants are not official religious representatives, but does not make any reference to the content of the funeral. Furthermore, the authors' further claim that this may be representative not only of Hull but of the whole of Britain is based on the opinion of one funeral director, and is clearly challenged by Caswell's (2009) demonstration of variations in practice by region. Jalland (2010) suggests that the majority of funerals are led by a religious functionary, although not on the basis of systematic research. Clearly, further study is required to clarify the current and changing distribution of religious and non-religious funerals.

The haziness of the picture notwithstanding, it is clear that there has been an increase in the number of non-religious funerals in Britain over the past two decades. The wider societal secularisation discussed above can certainly be seen to have influenced this change: writing in 1990, Walter finds a dislike amongst people arranging funerals of the apparent hypocrisy of holding a religious service following the death of someone who was not themselves religious or from a religious family. It may be thought that the present availability of a range of officiants to suit the required religiosity would mean an end to this 'mismatch' of the officiant's and the deceased person's or family's (or other funeral arranger's) preferred levels of religiosity. Indeed, on the assumption that this 'hypocrisy' is undesirable to funeral arrangers, it might be thought that the comparatively small number of outright atheists in Britain would lead to a similarly small proportion of Humanist celebrants being engaged. Empirical research, however, shows that families may select a Humanist (atheist) celebrant while harbouring some reservations about the BHA's and the celebrant's philosophy: ideology may not be the lone attracting factor (Holloway

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[24] Indeed, the BHA's guide to suggested ceremony formats, poems and readings is entitled *Funerals Without God* (Wynne Wilson, 1989).

et al., 2010, p. 168). Indeed, research into the reasons governing people's choices of funeral officiant suggests that religious or ideological affiliation can be secondary to a known and liked personality or reputation (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 24). Furthermore, it has been found both in Britain and in the US that many clients not only hope for a mix of secular and religious rather than sharply demarcated territories, but expect it (Caswell, 2009; Garces-Foley and Holcomb, 2006). Not only this, but despite the BHA's ideological clarity, some of their officiants do permit or even offer prayers, blessings and hymns in ceremonies, as long as they themselves are not expected to participate (Holloway et al., 2010, pp. 158-60).

A second complaint about religious funerals in the 1980s – and much more significant, according to Walter (1990) – was the impersonality of the Christian service in the crematorium, attributable both to the now ended practice of establishing a 'duty cleric' at crematoria who would not have known the deceased person or the mourners, and to the invariability of the Christian liturgy, which focused on commending the deceased person to God and the proclamation of faith in eternal life (Holloway et al., 2010; Walter, 1990, pp. 222-6). The BHA, by contrast, views the funeral as "an occasion to celebrate a human life that has ended and to provide mutual support and comfort for the living, rather than as a 'service' to God" (Wynne Wilson, 1989, p. 1), while the Institute of Civil Funerals defines a civil funeral as one which is "driven by the wishes, beliefs and values of the deceased and their family, not by the beliefs or ideology of the person conducting the funeral" (2010). Thus variations in levels of personalisation between religious and non-religious funerals can be expected, and will be discussed in more detail below.

Whether or not the funeral is religious or includes religious elements, the popularity of 'life-centredness' is growing (Jalland, 2010, p. 261); Young and Cullen write that "mourners want to hear about the person they have lost, have praise for him or her, respond to an effort to bring him or her alive again at least in words, and, by implication anyway, to be led in a lament for the departed" (1996, p. 185) [25]. Religious and secular funerals tend now to share a similar form (Caswell, 2009, p. 227), with the eulogy at its centre (Holloway et al., 2010,

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[25] We should bear in mind that by 'mourners' Young and Cullen are referring to immediate family members. Whether all mourners want these things remains to be seen.

p. 256; Young and Cullen, 1996). Church of England ceremonies include "a eulogy spoken by the priest, prayer, a sermon, and hymns" (Harper, 2008, p. 173); Walter (1997c, p. 172) describes Humanist funerals as including some speech on the reason for the gathering and some thoughts on death, followed by music and readings of poetry, with a spoken tribute to the deceased person as a centrepiece (see also Messenger, 1979; Wynne Wilson, 1989).

By absorbing the focus on the eulogy, Christian funerals have become more life-centred, while secular funerals, even if they do not include the overtly religious elements discussed above, may yet incorporate religious themes – in the US this has included an emphasis on such themes as redemption and hope, for example (Garces-Foley and Holcomb, 2006). In Britain, Cook and Walter (2005) speculate that the augmented role of poetry in non-religious funerals may be an attempt to 're-enchant' (Lee, 2008) the funeral by evoking a transcendence lost with the rejection of religion. Even inclusion of overtly religious elements in funerals, though, can no longer be assumed to indicate religious belief (Cook and Walter, 2005; Holloway et al., 2010). The Lord's Prayer may be included in the service at the request of the funeral arranger because it brings back comforting memories of school assemblies, or as a way of catering to any Christians attending the funeral. In this case, even if the prayer is included as a genuine act of worship in the ceremony, the authority for its recitation is not a religious minister but the funeral arranger(s) or the deceased person themselves.

The picture of secularisation, then, is that non-religious funerals have been taken up to probably varying degrees in Britain, with many ceremonies incorporating both religious and secular elements. A pressing question, given the much higher levels of secularisation in society more generally, is what might explain the comparatively low levels of secularisation in funerals. Jalland (2010, p. 256) suggests that the Church of England retains cultural and emotional value for individuals in England, although Littlewood (1992, p. 38) has argued that its funerals are experienced as an ordeal as often as a comfort. Acknowledging that many of her bereaved research participants struggled to make sense of the death or the funeral within Christian terms, Littlewood records surprise that "few people tried adopting another system of religious

beliefs in order to interpret their experiences" (ibid., p. 38). The adoption of a new system of belief may seem to be rather a tall order in the ontological chaos of recent bereavement, so it is perhaps not surprising that funerals do not reflect a sudden switch in religious affiliation. But why do funerals not reflect the decrease in Christian affiliation?

I put forward three possibilities. First, that death requires meaning to be made of it (Nadeau, 1998, 2001), and that the claim that "[t]he systems of religious ritual and belief, which formerly provided guidance and explanation at times of bereavement, have lost credibility in a world which is changing so rapidly that all traditional ideas are suspect" (Parkes, 1986, p. 18) is overstated. Individuals who are non-religious in everyday life may, when confronted with the unique enormity of loss and grief at a death, turn to a still culturally familiar meaning-system (Davie, 1994, 2001). While Seale (1998) argues that it is medical and psychological discourses which are used to make sense of death in contemporary society (and Bauman (1998) claims that death no longer needs sense to be made of it at all), it should be remembered that these discourses characterise death as final and explicable, and are silent on the question of meaning. In the pain of grief and the cognitive difficulty of adjusting to such an altered reality, religious narratives which affirm the continuation of the deceased person's essence may seem not only more comforting but simply more realistic (Jalland, 2010).

Second, that there just are not as many nonreligious officiants as there are religious ones, and that the affiliation of the officiant at the funeral does not always reflect the ideal choice of those arranging the funeral.

Third, that the selection of officiant is influenced not only by the preference of the funeral arranger and the availability of a range of officiants, but also by the funeral director, who restricts and enables access to particular officiants and kinds of officiants. It is probably rare for this to be done on politico-religious grounds, but funeral directors may understandably and possibly correctly assume that families would not want to be a guinea pig for a new officiant. Not only may they wish to protect families from a potentially poor officiant, but funeral directors are also likely to be held responsible for the recommendations they make. Using a parish minister from the Church of

England or Scotland for the funeral allows the funeral director to transfer some of that responsibility to the institution which has appointed the minister as its representative at funerals.

Davies (2005, pp. 58-60) notes that religion can add gravity to a funeral, but suggests that it is mainly conservatism on the part of both the funeral director and their client which explains continued reversion to what was the default funeral for so long. The more familiar that people become with alternatives to religious officiants at funerals, he argues, the more often these alternatives will be chosen.

Elsewhere, Billings (2004) draws on his experience as an Anglican priest to put forward four reasons why funerals "are overwhelmingly Christian" (p. 83). These are: (1) Christian funerals do not rule out the possibility of the living being reunited in the future with those who have died; (2) Christian funerals do not insist that those who are bereaved must 'let go' of a dead person who no longer exists, but permit them to maintain a relationship with them (c.f. Klass et al., 1996); (3) Christian funerals assert that all life is valuable; (4) Christian funerals give access to a God who can make forgiveness possible even between one who is living and one who is now dead, thus easing regret for mourners[26]. Billings offers no empirical evidence for these assertions or for the implied claim that non-religious funerals cannot offer any of these, neither does he seem to recognise that funerals with a Christian officiant may vary widely in their liturgical content. Indeed, Billings' claims are based on his own experience of conducting funerals as an Anglican priest. Thus while the 'findings' of his analysis must be treated with caution, they can still serve as data which offer some insight into how Christian ministers may interpret their continued domination of funeral ceremonies.

This section has demonstrated that religion is no longer an authority over social life more generally, and that its authority in the funeral has also declined. Berger asserts that where there *is* religious instruction and a comprehensive religious worldview, it results in "a universe furnishing highly effective barriers against

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[26] This argument recalls Johnson's notion of 'biographical pain', defined as "[t]he irredeemable anguish, which results from profoundly painful recollection of experienced wrongs which can now never be righted" (2012).

anomy" (Berger, 1967, p. 114). Thus it would seem that the erosion of institutionalised religion, because it was one of the structuring forces both of society and of the funeral, means that funeralgoers (regardless of their own religious positions) are faced with a major absence of structured and consistent guidance.

The Authority of the Expert

It has been argued that mourners' experience of the funeral is dominated by the influence of experts, although it should be noted that this designation is rarely accorded to the florists, newspaper staff, coffin manufacturers or cemetery and crematorium workers whose specialised activity contributes to the production of funerals. Researchers' attention on funeral 'experts' to date has been concentrated on funeral directors and, to a lesser extent, officiants (Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010; Howarth, 1996; Naylor, 1989; Parsons, 2003). Each of these is viewed (by these researchers as well as by funeral arrangers) as holding authority over the funeral. This authority mainly consists in practical control; moral authority, as will be seen below, is less willingly granted.

Funeral Directors

Funeral directors have been described as holding a "pivotal" role for those arranging funerals (Holloway et al., 2010)[27]. Funeral directors are not legally required when a funeral is to be carried out, but few people know this and almost all funerals are arranged through one (Parsons, 2003, p. 70). Indeed, for many they are the first port of call when a death has occurred (Holloway et al., 2010), although a funeral can never be held without the contributions of further 'experts' such as doctors and registrars (Bradbury, 1999).

Some researchers find funeral directors to correspond to Walter's (1990) model of the 'Professional Funeral Director', who "is given, and/or takes,

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[27] For historical perspectives on the development of funeral directors' role, see Litten (1991), Howarth (1997b), Adams (1993) and Jupp and Gittings (Jupp and Gittings, 1999). Cross-national studies are rare (but see Clark and Szmigin, 2003; Harper, 2008, 2010; Walter, 2005b, 2012c), but there are some studies from other countries, including Sweden (Bremborg, 2006), Australia (Carden, 2001), New Zealand (Schäfer, 2007), Canada (Emke, 2002), the US (e.g. Cahill, 1995, 1999a; Mitford, 1963, 2000; Pine, 1975; Sanders; Thompson, 1991) and Japan (Suzuki, 2000).

control" (Walter, 1990, p. 141). Smale (1997), the most condemning of this group of researchers, argues that "funeral directors exist because they have convinced the general populace that occupational specialism is applicable to the private, personal, emotional, transfixing moment of death" (p. 113). Despite their claims simply to meet the needs of funeral arrangers, he argues, funeral directors in fact organise funerals which are "tawdry, lacking in sensitivity to individual needs, unnecessarily routine in operation, excessively expensive and self-perpetuating" (p. 115). Smale's contention is that funeral directors have gained control over the very definition of appropriate or satisfactory funerals, by virtue of being able to "regularly and successfully create, present and direct [this] important ceremony" (ibid., p. 115), but have used that power to create their own demand and provide a service which meets only their own requirements for profit and occupational prestige.

Funeral directors hold and exercise control in a number of ways, which begin well before the funeral actually takes place. Often one of the first ways is control over the dead body, which is removed – at the request of the funeral arranger – from the place of death and taken into custody at the funeral director's premises. Then, "having already relieved the bereaved of the body, they are now able to deliver them from the exigencies of funeral organization" (Howarth, 1996, p. 112). The interview during which arrangements for the funeral are discussed is generally led by the funeral director (Howarth, 1996), who may deliberately limit, but in any case control, the range of options offered to clients (Holloway et al., 2010, pp. 92-3; Howarth, 1996, pp. 117-20; Naylor, 1989, p. 170) over such decisions as the choice of officiant, the venue for the funeral, the coffin, wording for a notice in the newspaper, music for the ceremony, and items to be placed in the coffin (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 93; Walter, 1990, p. 61). Funeral directors put effort into conveying an image of authoritative and specialist knowledge (Smale, 1997) in their interpersonal interactions with funeral arrangers and with the general public, as well as through their formal, quasi-professional dress, and the display of certificates in the public areas of their premises (Bradbury, 1999; Howarth, 1996). Smale (1997) argues that the 'tradition' of walking in front of the hearse is principally for the purpose of drawing attention to the funeral director so that the public

continue to think that funerals are impossible without one, although other authors note that the practice is also instrumental in managing timings of funeral ceremonies (Howarth, 1996). Finally, and as noted above, funeral directors are not the only 'expert' involved in bringing a funeral about, but funeral arrangers have little contact with any others, and may even be denied contact with personnel such as crematorium or newspaper staff (Howarth, 1996, p. 120; Parsons, 2003).

A review of the literature suggests that funeral directors' own perceptions of their role have changed over the past 20 or 30 years; funeral directors also view their clients as having become less familiar with funeral tradition and practice over that period (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 104). While there are variations by region and social context (Caswell, 2009), and may be particular variations between large and small funeral firms (Parsons, 1999; Walter, 1990, pp. 141, 265-6), there appears to have been a general shift for funeral directors from seeing themselves as the proper controllers of funeral arrangements and practice, and seeing funeral arrangers as wanting funeral directors to hold control (Howarth, 1996, p. 112) to seeing themselves as a service provider who offers choice and facilitates a funeral in accordance with their clients' wishes (Holloway et al., 2010). However, even those funeral directors who view themselves as mere servers of funeral arrangers construct and constrain the choices they offer to these clients. Some fail to see that they do this (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 94; Smale, 1997); others consider themselves entitled, even obliged, to make some decisions (including the choice of officiant) without consulting their clients (Caswell, 2009, p. 160).

Some researchers are inclined to view funeral directors' control as deliberately and unfairly stolen from their clients (Clark and Szmigin, 2003; Smale, 1997), although others note that it can be useful to distinguish between the activities of funeral directing as an industry and funeral directors as individuals when considering such issues (Bailey, 2010). Others still note that funeral directors may use their power to the benefit of clients, not their detriment, by acting as advocates for them in dealings with the coroner and other figures in the 'closed network' of death management in contemporary Britain (Bradbury, 1999, pp. 228-9).

Funeral directors do not need to wrest control from their clients, who come to them willingly, who may be glad to have the funeral arrangements taken 'out of their hands', who may not even want to be given a full range of options (Bradbury, 1999, p. 73; Holloway et al., 2010, pp. 91-2, 101-2; Howarth, 1996, p. 113), and who give "generally glowing accounts of the funeral director" (Bradbury, 1999, p. 73; see also Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010). As noted above, hardly any people choose to take the organisation and conducting of the funeral into their own hands (Parsons, 2003) and it is perhaps this, the automaticity with which bereaved people turn to funeral directors, which demonstrates the authority which they hold. If they know about it, clients may object to the degree of control which the funeral director withholds from them within the process of arranging a funeral (Holloway et al., 2010; Parsons, 2003), but it does not occur to them to question the necessity of a funeral director in the first place. Walter expresses a similar idea:

> "The problem with funerals is not that they cost too much, but that they cost at all. The funeral that communities used to provide for themselves has been stolen, and then sold back to them, at a price. We are now so used to this that all we can complain about is the cost at which it is sold back!" (1990, p. 80).

Officiants

If there is little (though some) tension between funeral directors and their clients, there is much more between funeral directors and officiants, the other 'expert' accorded authority over the funeral by the funerals literature, by funeral directors (and therefore by funeral directors' clients), and by themselves.

As noted above, funeral directors have a degree of influence over who is selected as the officiant for the funeral. Both funeral directors (Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010; Naylor, 1989) and researchers (who do not comment on funeral directors' assumptions) appear to take it for granted that people making arrangements for a funeral will use an officiant. Officiants themselves may suggest that a family "[give] their own tribute" (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 107) but not, apparently, that the officiant's presence at all is redundant.

Only one British study to date has observed the meeting that takes place prior to the funeral between the funeral director's client(s) and the officiant. This study was conducted by Holloway et al. (2010) in Hull, northern England, and noted that officiants (of all faiths and none) very much controlled these meetings. Indeed, the researchers' descriptions resemble Howarth's observations of funeral directors two decades earlier (1996), in that officiants saw themselves as indispensible sources of information without which (in fact, without whom) funeral arrangers would be unable to cope, or at least unable to arrange a funeral (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 108). Despite this, many officiants did not fully inform clients of what they (the officiants) would be doing at the funeral (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 109)[28], both suggesting that at least some officiants felt entitled to make decisions without consultation, and belying the claim that their information-giving role was for them primary. In her interview study Caswell similarly found that officiants assumed the authority to advise families of not only what was possible in a funeral, but what was appropriate and desirable (2009, p. 162).

Like funeral directors, officiants in these studies also saw themselves as servers of funeral arrangers, stating that their job was simply to listen to them – rather than to talk to them – in order to create a ceremony and a eulogy that would fulfil these people's wishes. This point – the fulfilment of clients' wishes – was consistently the point at which tension over authority began for officiants (Bradbury, 1999, p. 89; Holloway et al., 2010, pp. 109-22). Secular officiants placed more emphasis on following arrangers' wishes, although Humanist officiants could be rigid about refusing to allow religious elements into the ceremony (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 115). Some ministers viewed it as their Christian duty to tend to funeral arrangers through providing a funeral regardless of whether those people wanted a religious ceremony or not. Many, though, would not countenance 'toning it down' despite knowing that those arranging the funeral would prefer this, arguing that if people wanted a non-religious funeral then they would not have come to a Christian minister (Holloway et al., 2010, pp. 111-2). In these studies, Church of England (Holloway et al., 2010) and Church of Scotland (Caswell, 2009) ministers,

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[28] Holloway et al. refer to the use of symbols such as candles and evergreen foliage, as well as the inclusion of poems without arrangers' foreknowledge (2010, p. 109).

obliged to provide funerals for parishioners if requested, perhaps experienced most strongly this tension between being expected to be an 'MC' for a funeral of the arranger's design and conducting a "theologically 'correct' funeral" (Walter, 1990, p. 61), although the idea that a funeral depends on the arranger's input was still strongly endorsed (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 116). Caswell (2009, p. 203) found that Quakers and Roman Catholic priests restricted funeral arrangers' choices about the content of the ceremony, asserting that worship must take precedence over all else. Well aware that their congregation could be expected to comprise diverse religious, agnostic or atheist positions, some Christian ministers viewed the funeral as an opportunity for evangelism, although many also refrained (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 113).

It should be noted that most officiants (of all types) put a lot of work into preparing and conducting funerals, really engaging with what they feel to be a significant responsibility and making efforts to perform what they consider to be a service of high quality (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 106). However, you cannot please all of the people all of the time. Criticisms by mourners of officiants include sins against the deceased person (for example, making mistakes about names or dates), sins against the mourners (omitting important elements or people from the deceased person's biography), and sins against proper ritual or dramatic conduct (seeming rushed) (Holloway et al., 2010; Walter, 1990).

As these criticisms suggest, whereas officiants experience tension with funeral arrangers for authority over the funeral, for the most part, this tension is invisible to those arrangers (Holloway et al., 2010). That said, where traditional religion and therefore, as its representative, the minister, still hold authority, funeral arrangers can be all too conscious of tension should they wish to depart from usual practice (Caswell, 2009, 2011).

Struggles for authority between the experts, though, are familiar to both funeral directors and officiants themselves. Both parties view the other as trying to exert an undue level of influence over funeral arrangers and over the funeral itself (Howarth, 1996, pp. 133-4; Naylor, 1989, pp. 206-12; Parsons, 2003). Officiants may add the accusation that funeral directors grant too much control to families, particularly over the choice of music (Naylor, 1989, pp. 212-3). Even in Stornoway where experts hold such authority that "they effectively take

charge of the collective memory" concerning funeral tradition (Caswell, 2009, p. 122), it is funeral directors who are inclined to allow their clients to innovate in the funeral, ministers who are not. Notwithstanding, officiants shared with funeral directors the view that at the funeral itself, the authority of the expert is paramount. The participation of the arranger(s) and other mourners in the funeral may be eliminated or stifled as far as possible (Howarth, 1996, p. 189), and it can seem that between them funeral directors and officiants run the whole event (Howarth, 1996, pp. 187-95). Both sets of experts give the same reasons for this. The first concerns the 'need' for mourners who are unfamiliar with proper funeral practice to be guided by personnel who view themselves as professionals (Howarth, 1996, p. 171). Alternatively, this can be interpreted as the 'need' for experts to maintain their professional 'front' (Goffman, 1959) by staging a smooth 'performance' – both researchers and funeral directors themselves refer to the funeral using this term (Howarth, 1996; Naylor, 1989). Achieving a smooth performance means giving mourners clear cues about the correct place to be and things to do. To such ends, funeral directors may 'shepherd' mourners into and from the chapel, moving them around the arena of the funeral performance at the prescribed times: from waiting room or cortège to chapel, from chapel to flower area, from flower area away from the crematorium. Having steered clients' choices about the ceremony so that they result in the familiar format means that the funeral director is also able to draw on 'rehearsals' of previous experience, reducing the risk of their making a mistake (Howarth, 1996, p. 171). The second reason given by experts for minimising mourners' participation in the ceremony concerns the 'need' to maintain emotional order at the funeral (Howarth, 1996, p. 189). It can be viewed as imperative that members of the congregation be protected not from feeling strong emotion, but from expressing it at the funeral (Jenny Hockey, 1993), and this may be for some officiants reason to deny (Bradbury, 1999, pp. 88-9) or try to deny (Caswell, 2011-2012) families' actual requests.

This section has shown that funeral directors and officiants hold, exercise, admit to and are aware of varying degrees and means of authority and control as 'experts' in funeral arrangements and ceremonies. It will be noted, however,

that all of the literature here discussed relates these experts only to the funeral director's client. But for some minor comments concerning the importance of keeping the congregation quiet, wider mourners, and the authority that they might ascribe to experts at the funeral, are entirely ignored.

The Authority of the Individual

Of the authors discussed above who agree that tradition has declined in authority, it is only Walter (1994, 1996a), writing about the context of dying and death, who identifies expertise as an intermediate authority. Those writing about wider societal trends have argued that tradition's authority has given way directly to the authority of the self. Indeed, this claim has been dubbed by others both 'the detraditionalisation thesis' (Heelas et al., 1996) and 'the individualisation thesis' (Smart, 2007).

It was noted above that Giddens (1991) maintains that tradition now represents only one authority among many, and as such is no authority at all. In modernity, Giddens argues, without the courses of action or identities supplied by a single source of taken-for-granted authority, it simply is not possible but reflexively to construct the path of one's life, and one's identity with it. As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim put it, "[y]ou may and you must lead your own independent life, outside the old bonds of family, tribe, religion, origin and class" (2002, p. 11). Tradition may be performed, though not because it holds authority but rather because 'it's nice to be traditional', a line of reasoning which is based on the assumption of selectivity in both action and identity (Giddens, 1990, p. 39). Indeed, Giddens argues (1991) that actions are chosen *in order to* construct an identity. Individuals in modernity, he argues, have no option but continually to engage in the 'project of the self'. Identity is a project that individuals must continually work on, making choices about how to live and who to be. Inevitably, those choices are structured by social conditions (Bauman, 2005; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), nonetheless, the essential determinant of, and thus the authority over, identity and of action is no longer any given meaning-system but the individual, the self.

This position is not undisputed. There are two lines of argument which challenge it. The first frames itself as a critique of the detraditionalisation thesis

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(e.g. Heelas et al., 1996), and the core of this argument is that the claim of a wholesale shift of authority "from 'without' to 'within'" (Heelas, 1996a, p. 2) is overstated. These critics agree that tradition is no longer a determining authority, but argue that it still has influence in modern societies (Thompson, 1996, p. 90). Others suggest that Giddens (in particular) grossly overestimates the degree of agency really available to, or, indeed, the degree of reflexivity really employed by modern individuals (Campbell, 1996). The decline of tradition's authority, these authors argue, does not appear to lead directly to the reign of the self's authority. Rather, individuals act on the basis of habit, whimsy and unthinkingness as much as they do reflexive deliberation (c.f. Verplanken and Aarts, 1999).

The second line of critique is framed as an objection to the individualisation thesis, and disputes the conception of identity-construction as an isolated activity of atomised individuals. Forwarding what she calls the 'connectedness thesis', Smart (2007) argues that individuals are in fact embedded in 'personal lives', complex matrices of personal and shared memories, biographies, relationships and culture. From this understanding, although identities and actions may still be reflexively chosen and constructed, the notion that the individual self is the authority over this process becomes problematic.

These criticisms notwithstanding, the authority of the individual, manifest in the growing trend for personalisation in funerals, has been the focus of sociological writing about funerals in Britain for over a decade.

Personalisation

Cook and Walter (2005) argue that the key feature of contemporary funerals is the shift away from religious authority to the phenomenon of personalisation. Although personalisation in contemporary funerals is widely written about as a significant feature (Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010; Naylor, 1989; Walter, 1990, 1996d, 2006), clear statements of what the term means are rare. I identify three related but distinct usages:

(i) *Personalisation as the exercising of choice*. This is contrasted with being dictated to or restricted by the prescriptions of tradition (Cook and Walter,

2005, p. 386; Garces-Foley and Holcomb, 2006, p. 208), of religion (Cook and Walter, 2005, p. 386; Naylor, 1989, p. 211) or (deliberate or unwitting) of the funeral director (Naylor, 1989, p. 381). Research suggests that funeral directors' clients do seem to have a greater numbers of decisions and a greater range of choices about the content of the ceremony to make now than in the 1980s and 1990s. Decisions over which clients now have some influence include the timing of the ceremony and the selection of officiant, while the range of choices over such items as coffins, vehicles, stationery, music and memorialisation has grown (Bradbury, 1999; Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010; Howarth, 1996; Naylor, 1989; Smale, 1997). Funeral directors retain a lot of control including, ultimately, the power to alert clients to the possibility of choice or not, but more recent research suggests that some pride is taken in 'just doing whatever the family wants' (Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010), although the experience of clients (Holloway et al., 2010) does not entirely support funeral directors' suggestion that they have lived up to the ideal they themselves set.

(ii) *Personalisation as making a funeral unique, unusual or different from other (personalised) funerals*. A number of non-academic publications offer "tips about how to ginger up […] more conventional and timid ideas" (Albery et al., 1996, p. 57), such as decorating the crematorium with banners or flowers (see also Francis, 2004; George, 2008; Gill and Fox, 1996). Ideas need not be particularly 'alternative': a family adding the decorative image of an angel or a heart to a newspaper notice which would normally be text only is personalising in this sense (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 30). It is also this aspect that Cook and Walter seem to have in mind when they write that if the funeral is designed by an officiant using a template then personalisation is only superficial (2005, p. 375). Caswell (2009, p. 229) suggests that such superficiality may be commonplace, noting that as funeral directors and officiants become more familiar with co-constructing individualised ceremonies with families, such work on the part of personnel can soon become standardised, resulting in "mass produced individualisation" (Walter, 2006, p. 7).

(iii) *Personalisation as the expression of individual personality* (Cook and Walter, 2005, pp. 375-6). The only explicit definition of personalisation in the literature – "when the funeral relates to the deceased individual, focusing on his

or her personality and qualities" (Caswell, 2009, p. 224) – relates to this aspect, and to this aspect alone. This kind of personalisation may be done, for example, through "the playing of bagpipes, certain forms of dress" (Bosley and Cook, 1994, p. 79), or through the adornment of the coffin with a photograph, football scarf or other symbol of the deceased person (Harper, 2008). Less conspicuous means can be choosing the coffin on the basis of the deceased person's preferred wood, or choosing their favourite flowers to place on it. Those in the know will recognise the significance of these choices, though to other mourners the symbolism may be invisible. Perhaps the most common manifestations of this third type of personalisation are in music and words. Music which was particularly favoured by the deceased person may feature in the funeral, or popular or religious music whose words are seen to be apt (Caswell, 2009, 2011-2012; Holloway et al., 2010; Naylor, 1989; Parsons, 2012). Readings and poems may be chosen for similar reasons, although the most striking example of these personalised words is surely the eulogy, a tribute to the deceased person which includes "biographical information, details about family members, amusing or endearing anecdotes and information about any interests that the deceased had" (Caswell, 2009, p. 229). As noted on p. 53, the eulogy is now a central feature of both non-religious and Christian funerals, and will be discussed in more detail below.

At times it is difficult to tell which – if any – of these uses an author is intending. For example, Holloway et al. describe the range of music over a number of funerals: "The music at entry varied with some being very personalised and at other times being more neutral" (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 198). Equally, apparent opportunities to identify personalisation are passed over, or interpreted within different conceptual frameworks. The widow who chose music for her husband's funeral because it "reflects [his] lovely gentle personality" (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 202), for example, is not identified as personalising his funeral, but as making it meaningful.

This scope for uncertainty does not detract from the closeness with which these three features – exercising choice, valuing singularity and demonstrating an identity – echo precisely those features of individualisation

identified by Giddens (1991). Personalisation in funerals indeed appears to be an indicator of the authority of the self (Caswell, 2009).

Nonetheless, there are questions over *which* self has authority. Decisions about personalisation are made by all of the parties involved in the design and planning of the funeral. Many are made by the funeral director's client – indeed, Caswell qualifies her definition of personalisation thus:

> "When [personalisation] happens through the involvement of the bereaved in the planning and conduct of the funeral, this involvement will result in a funeral that is personally meaningful and thus personalised to, the bereaved" (2009, p. 58).

However, as she goes on to point out, many funeral arrangers do not arrive at the funeral director's with their decisions already made or even considered, and the funeral is often a co-construction between funeral personnel and client. Holloway et al. find that while the funeral director functions as a facilitator of the client's preferences and an offerer of choices, the officiant is much more likely actively to try to influence them (2010, p. 262). Church of England ministers also need to make their own choices about funerals: Cook and Walter (2005) note that the book of *Common Worship* no longer makes reference to what *shall* happen at a funeral, but suggests what *may*, with the minister needing to select the most appropriate options for the funeral in question. Finally, Exley (1999) reminds us that the deceased person themselves may have made decisions about the content of the funeral before death, whether through informally making their wishes known or through planning and paying for a funeral (that is, purchasing a 'pre-paid funeral plan') before their death (Clark and Szmigin, 2003).

While many authors interpret personalisation as reflecting the authority of the individual, this view is not universal. Bosley and Cook suggest that symbols of the deceased person are "messages of identification given to those gathered" (1994, p. 79). As mentioned above, though, such messages may not get through to mourners who may be unfamiliar with the deceased person's taste in music, for example. When those arranging the funeral offer an officiant little in the way of preferences about the funeral or characterising information about the deceased person, then the onus is on that officiant to create a funeral to meet

widely varying expectations, of many unrelated people, with varying relationships to the deceased person, and with whom the officiant themselves may not be familiar. The potential for unsuccessful messages of identification in these circumstances is high (Quartier, 2006, p. 21). Even where a client actively makes choices and directs the eulogy by supplying information and proofreading the script, agreement on the resulting representation of the deceased person is far from guaranteed:

> "Biographical facts about the deceased may be verifiable, but opinions and beliefs about them are not... the story narrated in the course of the eulogy will be incomplete and told from a particular point of view" (Caswell, 2009, p. 224).

Considering the reasons for its popularity, Naylor (1989, p. 350) views personalisation as the result of the absence of any overarching framework within which to define and respond to death. She argues that medical, bureaucratic and religious discourses about death compete but do not produce a dominant framework, so that individuals both are able to and must choose their own way, and make their own interpretations which are expressed in the funeral.

Recalling Naylor's discussion of competing interpretive frameworks, we should not be over-ready to infer the endorsement of individualism even where seeming indicators, such as languages of individualism, personal authenticity and uniqueness are drawn on at and in relation to funerals. A key American study has shown that the employment of such dominant discourses as these may not reveal deeply held commitment to the ideals contained within them, but merely the relative unavailability of non-individualistic discourse, meaning that those holding non-individualistic values can struggle to express them (Bellah et al., 1985).

As suggested by the presence of popular literature, personalisation is generally seen as a positive when designing a funeral. Funeral directors and officiants alike speak with some pride about making sure that the wishes of the family or arranging client are followed (Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010; Walter, 1994, p. 33), though whether this pride is justified can be questioned. Even where clients' wishes are stringently followed, though, personalising a

funeral is not always experienced positively by mourners. Although Wienrich and Speyer write that "almost all those who have tried it advocate looking after at least some aspects of the funeral" (2003, p. 83) and exercising choice, the experience is noted elsewhere as increasing the demands on bereaved funeral arrangers and as introducing a pressure to make 'good' decisions (Bradbury, 1999; Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010, pp. 94-5, 256). Authority is not only gratifying but is also a burden, and this burden is no longer borne at the societal level in the corpus of funerary tradition, but must be carried by the individual (c.f. Blauner, 1966).

The Eulogy: Socialising the Individualised Funeral?

Funerals in contemporary Britain are now almost all personalised in the third sense above, or 'life-centred', at least to some degree. Life-centred in this context means that, unlike traditional Christian funerals which focus on the immortality of the soul or the love of God and look forward to the deceased person's future in an afterlife, funerals are focused on the biography and personality of the deceased person (Walter, 1990; Wynne Wilson, 1989) and look backward. This is not to say that Christian funerals (for example) no longer refer to the immortality of the soul or to the love of God, but that the eulogy has become an essential feature or even the core of both religious and non-religious funerals (Holloway et al., 2010). A eulogy "may be expected to include biographical information, details about family members, amusing or endearing anecdotes and information about any interests that the deceased had" (Caswell, 2009, p. 229). Both the content and the centrality of the eulogy are compatible with Davies' (2002) theory of 'words against death'. Other words in the funeral may (or may not) address death directly, but it is through these words that the individual's identity is recounted, and through this act that the power of identity in the face of death is proclaimed symbolically.

Some authors, while recognising the authority of the individual as being expressed through the personalised or life-centred funeral, offer alternative interpretations of the eulogy in particular.

For Walter, the life-centred funeral with its focus on the eulogy "expresses what might be termed a secular religion of self-fulfilment – the notion

that a full human life is one in which the person's full potential is attained" (1990, p. 220). Although this sounds similar to Davies' 'retrospective fulfilment of identity' discussed in the previous chapter, its meaning is different. For while Davies' emphasis was merely on the symbolisation of the deceased person's identity, Walter's is on an *evaluative* relationship to lives, biographies, characters and identities. Furthermore, through creating and standing witness to the depiction of the deceased person through the eulogy, which makes a final statement of the their uniquely fulfilled potential, mourners feel themselves to be doing a service to the one who has died. As Walter notes, this 'grassroots' idea that the funeral is 'for' the deceased person – found also among participants in Holloway et al.'s recent study (2010) – stands in contradiction to the view that 'the funeral is for the living': a view held by many secular and religious officiants who, on examination, mean that the funeral is for the immediate family of the deceased individual (Holloway et al., 2010; Messenger, 1979; Walter, 1990). This latter position is expressed also in both popular (George, 2008) and academic literature, whether explicitly (e.g. *The Dead Citizens' Charter*, 1998) or implicitly by highlighting families' needs at and understandings of the funeral – whilst failing to acknowledge, let alone explore, the significance of wider mourners and their experiences (Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010).

Caswell (2009) also offers a way of regarding the eulogy as a service performed by the funeral arranger(s) for the deceased person, in which self-fulfilment is replaced by the reflexive construction of self-identity (Giddens, 1991). The eulogy, as the centrepiece of a personalised funeral, represents the completion of this project, on behalf of the one who has died. Caswell's interpretations of the impact of the funeral are limited to a focus on the people who make decisions about the funeral's production. Indeed, she asserts that understanding personalisation in funerals means focusing on individuals rather than groups (Caswell, 2009, p. 62). This view can be challenged, however, as personalised funerals do have implications for the wider group of mourners. A good eulogy, argues Walter, may prompt those listening to consider the value of their own choices; it "challenges me to ask what the purpose of my own life is" (Walter, 1990, p. 229). Holloway et al. (2010, p. 254) suggest that every funeral, whether personalised or not, provides for all mourners a socially endorsed

philosophical response to the fact of death, both in the universal sense of facing the mysteries of death and life, and in the particular sense of making some statement concerning the death and life of the individual whose funeral is being held (Walter, 1990, p. 135).

Finally, Walter (1996c) considers the impact of the funeral on mourners' understandings of the person they knew, and their relationship with that person. Walter proposes a 'biographical model of grief' in which bereaved people make sense of the death that has occurred through talking about the deceased person with others who knew them, gradually constructing a more or less stable representation of the deceased person[29]. Walter observes that for many mourners there is a satisfaction in gaining (and for some, even a felt need to gain) a picture of the deceased person which is free from inaccuracies and obvious omissions. The funeral is an occasion upon which mourners' habitual understandings of the deceased person can be transformed, whether this means that they are strengthened by being affirmed by others, expanded by new information about or perspectives on the person they knew, or contradicted and undermined by others' perceptions of the deceased person.

There are two ways in which the funeral can contribute to mourners' constructions of the one who has died. The eulogy formally and publicly presents a representation of the deceased person which may transform mourners' own understandings in any of the ways mentioned above. Even if those writing the eulogy make efforts to gather information from people who knew the deceased person in different capacities, though, the result can easily be partial or even inaccurate (Caswell, 2009, p. 225). Alternatively and additionally, there are the more informal parts of a funeral, such as the funeral tea, where mourners have the opportunity (which is not always taken) to talk to each other about the deceased person and to share a dialogue rather than simply receive an address. In contemporary society, Walter argues, when the groups of mourners brought together by a funeral are likely to be socially and geographically dispersed from one another (Walter, 2007), it is a rare opportunity for dialogue that the funeral provides.

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[29] 'Stable' is Walter's own word, and is discussed in more detail in Stroebe (1997) and Walter (1997b).

This discussion of authority has shown that while tradition and religion still feature in funerals, their status as authorities over funerary practice has declined over the twentieth century and particularly in the past two or three decades. Similarly, the 'experts' – funeral directors and officiants – may be accorded less authority than formerly, although they still retain a good deal of control. The authority of the individual, observed in personalisation and life-centred funerals with their focus on the eulogy, is a strong theme of contemporary literature on funerals in Britain and is indeed, as Cook and Walter (2005) observe, the key feature of contemporary funerals. Indeed, the individual can be called an authority exactly because personalisation and life-centredness, particularly through the eulogy, is core to all funerals, including religious ceremonies. Not only that, but the 'experts' of funerals defer to it, actively bringing it about, whether gladly or not.

Existing literature thus provides us with an analytically informative view of contemporary funerals. However, it is a partial view. All of the empirical studies discussed above are concerned with understanding funerals from the perspectives of the 'experts' of funeral directors and officiants (e.g. Jenny Hockey, 1993; Howarth, 1996), or of their clients (e.g. Bradbury, 1999; Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010). While a very small proportion of the theoretical literature can be used to consider how the funeral may be experienced by the wider group of mourners (Walter, 1990, 1996c), none of it has been applied empirically.

But who, or what, has authority over the funeral for wider mourners? The literature reviewed here shows us that for mourners who arrange the funeral it is largely the authority of the self that holds sway. But these people differ from the wider group of mourners on an important dimension, which is that they have some, perhaps a large amount of, influence over the funeral's content. In this sense, they themselves can exercise authority. Most mourners attending, though, are not in this position, and it is an empirical question – which this thesis will address – whether these wider mourners attribute authority over the funeral to tradition, religion, experts or the individual, or indeed, whether other sources of authority emerge.

In the overall project of investigating the funeral from mourners' perspectives, however, it will not be sufficient just to consider how these mourners relate to authority at the funeral. It will also be important to consider how they relate to *each other. I* distinguish between funeral arrangers and wider mourners, an analytical distinction. Existing research suggests that mourners are likely to make their own distinctions, although on bases other than arrangement of the funeral.

Distinctions between Mourners: Binaries and Hierarchies

The socially-oriented definitions of mourning explored in the 'Notes on Terms' (p. 9), particularly that of Brabant (2002), draw attention to a crucial aspect, namely the notion of 'display rules' and 'feeling rules' (Hochschild, 1983). These are social norms concerning proper outward expression and even inward experience of emotion following a death. Such 'grieving rules' cover "who, when, where, how, how long, and for whom people should grieve" (Doka, 1989, p. 4), and treat varying relationships to the deceased person differently.

P. Robson (2002) traces social notions of differential grief and mourning. In Victorian times the requirements of mourning were borne almost exclusively by women (Jalland, 2010), and consisted principally in the assumption of mourning dress and seclusion from social occasions. Walter writes that

> "[t]here were clear rules for how long you mourned a spouse, a child, a grandchild, a sibling, a parent, and significantly there was no formal mourning period for a friend, however close you may have been" (1999, p. 130).

As a result, the act of mourning was a public signifier of the mourner's relationship to the deceased person rather than, say, a level of sorrow at a particular loss. Doka suggests that similar rules of mourning still apply, even if traditional signals such as dress do not: "society defines who has a legitimate right to grieve, and these rights correspond to relationships, primarily familial, that are socially recognised and sanctioned" (1999, p. 37).

Doka (1989, 1999, 2002a) views such rules as being binary. Some people who experience grief at a death stand in such a relationship to the deceased person that their grief is 'disenfranchised'. That is to say, "they incur a

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loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned and/or socially supported" (Doka, 1987, p. 3)[30]. Examples of such relationships include gay spouses or partners (Green and Grant, 2008; Reimers, 2011), ex-spouses, co-workers (Fowlkes, 1990), caregivers, and friends. Doka argues that norms about who may grieve and mourn after a death do not accurately reflect the patterns of relationships which people hold in life. In particular, he argues, after a death it is the grief of the deceased person's family which is privileged, to the exclusion of others:

> "when a family member dies, one is allowed and expected to grieve, often in a specified way. Yet human beings exist in intimate networks that include both kin and non-kin" (Doka, 2002a, pp. 6-7).

Writing from a Swedish perspective, Reimers (2011) argues that social norms about grieving and mourning in fact invoke a particular and heteronormative notion of family, with painful consequences for gay partners and spouses (Howarth, 1996, p. 180; Walter, 1990, p. 116). Grief has been shown to intensify with closeness to the person who has died (Doka, 2002a, p. 4) and friends can be much closer to each other than family members (Allan, 1996, 2008; Roseneil, 2004; Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004). Nonetheless, the grief of friends typically is not sanctioned institutionally through law or policies on compassionate leave (considered on p. 76). Neither is it common for friends to be involved in arranging a funeral (Holloway et al., 2010; Howarth, 1996).

However, Robson and Walter (2012-2013) argue that norms about grief (and, by extension, mourning) are not binary but hierarchical. In other words, the recognition of grief by others does not draw on a binary notion of 'I expect that people in close relationships to the deceased person feel grief, while people in less close relationships do not', but rather a hierarchical notion of 'I expect that people in some close relationships to the deceased person feel more grief than people in other relationships'.

These claims have their basis in empirical research conducted in England. Participants were asked to read vignettes describing basic details of someone who had died and fifteen people connected to them, then indicate by

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[30] In addition, some losses (e.g. the death of a pet or children flying the nest) may not be regarded as likely to result in grief, and some grievers (e.g. children or people with learning disabilities) may not be regarded as capable of grief (Doka, 1989, 2002b).

means of placing namecards for each person in the network in order of "the likely intensity and duration of each character's grief, relative to the others, *based on their relationship with the deceased*" (Robson and Walter, 2012-2013, p. 102, emphasis in original). For example, 'David, aged 40. Only child. Dies of cancer' has a network including his parents, his ex-wife, their 11 year-old daughter, his best friend, his business partner, his second wife, his doctor and his siblings. Participants were also asked supplementary questions, including who they would consider to be the 'principal mourners' at the deceased person's funeral. It was made clear that there were no right answers and that cards could be placed in any pattern.

Robson and Walter note that while participants may have been uncertain as to how to place particular characters, no-one struggled with the notion of ranking mourners by relationship, lending support to the validity of the hierarchy concept in this context. Their findings showed that participants endorsed the primacy of family relationships, with the top position – that of 'chief mourner' – being occupied by the parents or spouse of the deceased person. Robson and Walter draw on Littlewood (1982; 1992) to explain that a 'chief mourner' is one who is (a) perceived to be most close to the deceased person, (b) thereby most qualified to speak authoritatively on the deceased person's behalf, and (c) seen to be the proper recipient of the most sympathy and support after the death. The next 'rank' was assigned to siblings and children of the deceased person, followed by grandparents and grandchildren. The best friend came next, followed by in-laws and aunts, uncles and cousins, then godparents, and finally neighbours, step-relatives, work colleagues and those with contractual or professional relationships to the deceased person, such as being their GP or childminder.

Similar forms of this hierarchy are reflected in and supported by social and institutional practices. For example, if a person dies intestate[31], assets default to the spouse (and dependent children) under inheritance law. Organisations allow varying levels of compassionate leave in the event of a bereavement (Bond and Wise, 2003) and do not always document when leave will be granted. Where written policies are available, leave is usually

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[31] Without a will.

automatically granted for the deaths of family members only, and in an order similar to that laid out by Robson and Walter's participants (Charles-Edwards, 2005, pp. 162-6). For example, the University of Bath grants leave only for immediate family, defined as "mother, father, spouse, partner, son or daughter, or any person living as a member of the employee's household" (University of Bath, 2011). Sympathy cards available in the shops which refer to a relationship with the deceased person are similarly restricted to a small range of 'nuclear' family relationships (P. Robson, 2002, p. 61).

For those within them, hierarchies of bereavement can be contested. Indeed, Robson and Walter (2012-2013) make explicit references to competition over the 'top' positions, with 'winners' and 'first reserves'. Parents of a deceased adult, they suggest, may vie with their offspring's spouse for the right to make arrangements for a funeral or for the right to be recognised as "the most bereaved" (Raphael, 1984, p. 281). Robson and Walter argue that grief may thus be experienced as disenfranchised if it exceeds the socially legitimated degree. Indeed, Littlewood's (1982) study of bereavement found precisely that – that those whose grief was not socially validated experienced extra distress, sometimes severely. Interestingly, Littlewood found that there were particular distresses experienced by 'secondary mourners' – those whose role was perceived as being 'helpers' to the chief mourner. This was a position usually occupied by adult children of the deceased person, who found that rather than receiving sympathy and support, and recognition of their loss, they were expected by others to *provide* sympathy and support, and to recognise the 'far worse' loss sustained by their surviving parent (Littlewood, 1982, p. 181).

At the same time a position near the top of the hierarchy is not always experienced positively, particularly if there is a shortfall between the degree of grief (sorrow) assigned to that rank and the degree of grief (sorrow) actually felt by the person occupying that role (Littlewood, 1982, p. 179). For example, the death of an abusive parent may come as some relief to their children. Finally, the 'correct' degree of grief may be inwardly experienced, but a higher rank in the hierarchy may call for public expression of that grief not merely through attending the funeral, but also through emotional display (Hochschild, 1983). As will be discussed in Chapter 4, despite Robson and Walter's assertion that

norms about styles of grief may indeed be binary (2012-2013), those who are expected to perform grief publicly may be uncertain exactly what is expected of them, and in any case may prefer to nurse their grief privately.

There is empirical evidence to suggest that at least as far as mourning is concerned, some individuals may well be 'disenfranchised' rather than simply not being accorded a high enough position in a hierarchy. Meller (2010), for example, makes a strong case for understanding Deaf mourners as being excluded rather than displaced. Nonetheless, Robson and Walter's concept remains a promising tool for the analysis of distinctions made between mourners at funerals.

Whether conceived of as binaries or hierarchies, research suggests that norms about grief and mourning prioritise family relationships, although with a specific, limited, notion of 'family' being employed. Again, however, where such literature refers to funerals, it is informed entirely by the perspective of funeral personnel and their clients – a perspective from which wider mourners are apparently entirely invisible.

Conclusion

This chapter has set the conceptual scene for an understanding of mourners' attendance at funerals in contemporary Britain. In so doing, it has explored two theoretical issues which will be drawn on later in the thesis (particularly in Chapters 6 and 7), in the analysis of empirical data. The first of these was the changing authority over the funeral. It was seen that with the advance of modernity, the authority of tradition and religion have declined, as has, to some degree, the authority of the only funeral 'experts' to have been the subjects of research – funeral directors and officiants. Permeating the funeral, according to the literature, is the authority of the individual, the self, exemplified in the centrality of the eulogy. The second theoretical issue was that of distinction between mourners. Whether these are conceived of as binaries or as hierarchies, family relationships are privileged.

What is *not* known is how authority in the funeral is experienced by wider mourners. All of the empirical evidence about how authority is experienced and manifest came from studies with funeral arrangers and personnel, and focussed largely on the process of making decisions about the funeral's content. Wider mourners do not make such decisions, neither are they in close contact with funeral personnel prior to the funeral. Nonetheless, they must make decisions of their own (discussed in the following chapter). On what authorities do they draw when making these decisions? And how do mourners relate to the shifting authorities of tradition, religion, expert and individual as represented in the content of the funeral? Addressing questions such as these, as this thesis does, will also contribute to the understanding of the social significance of funerals in contemporary Britain.

Neither do we know how mourners relate to others in the congregation or experience their own position there. Although the theoretical literature on binaries and hierarchies promises ways of interpreting mourners' experiences, empirical studies have not yet been carried out in relation to funeral congregations. This thesis contributes such a study. Again, understanding how mourners conceive of their own position relative to others present will contribute to an understanding of how funerals are experienced, and the meanings they hold, in Britain today.

Throughout this chapter, it has been clear that mourners' behaviour and experiences are largely ignored, both by funeral personnel and by scholars. This lacuna will be addressed in the following chapter, which reviews empirical studies of funerals in contemporary Britain.

Chapter 4: Going to a Funeral in Contemporary Britain:
A Review of Empirical Studies

Introduction

This chapter collates empirical social scientific data on funerals in Britain in order to consider contemporary funerals from a mourner's point of view. Studies which focus on the funeral are few and far between, and as, noted in the previous chapter, are invariably informed by investigation of the funeral director's role, whether that is because the funeral director is the intended topic of study (e.g. Howarth, 1996; Naylor, 1989; Smale, 1997), because the funeral director is viewed as integral to an understanding of the social management of death (e.g. Bradbury, 1999; Prior, 1989), or because the funeral director can function as a gatekeeper to the funeral arrangers whose choices and experiences are presented as the actual focus of study (e.g. Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010). One consequence of this bias in the literature is that empirical data on the funeral ceremony itself, which funeral directors do not routinely attend, is almost entirely absent from the literature: the only systematic exception is the recent observation by Holloway et al. (2010) of 40 funerals in Hull[32]. A further result is a persistent emphasis on the power which the funeral director and other personnel, notably the officiant, hold over the production and interpretation of the funeral. I do not dispute the influence of these personnel on the decisions and understandings of their clients – all of the studies cited in this section so far attest to it – but as this chapter aims to demonstrate, there are a number of areas into which that influence may not extend. These areas are the spheres of decision and action of wider mourners.

Davies (1990) is notable for bypassing funeral directors and studying popular views on some aspects of funerals. This research presents quantitative data from an extensive study on rural attitudes to religion (see also Davies et al., 1990; Davies et al., 1991) and an urban study on attitudes to cremation (see also Davies, 1995). Although neither study has funerals as its focus, and

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[32] Caswell (2009) attended and observed a small number of funerals during her comparative study of practices in Scotland. Her observations constitute valuable data, but they were made fortuitously rather than by design.

although the rural study is concerned with attitudes rather than experiences[33], Davies' contribution is a rare glimpse directly into what mourners might have to say.

In order to present a view of the funeral from the mourners' point of view, then, this chapter has had to read 'sideways' into the literature, drawing on sometimes oblique references in the 'funeral director-centric' literature to mourners and areas of their concern. On occasion, where illuminating, I also consider the perspectives of mourners in other countries. Caution needs to be exercised when using international literature, however, since funeral practices and meanings vary widely between even neighbouring or apparently similar countries (Harper, 2008; Walter, 2005b; Woodthorpe et al., 2012). Thus, where literature concerning other countries' funerals is used, it is clearly stated.

The chapter begins with a consideration of who mourners are. In the Notes on Terms (p. 8), this was a theoretical question, and I established how a 'mourner' can be understood to mean anyone who attends a funeral. In the previous chapter I discussed the binaries or hierarchies which mourners may encounter. In this chapter I discuss how these classifications may be enacted within the funeral itself, paying particular attention to the notion of 'family'. I show the taken-for-granted way in which the concept of family has been used by researchers writing about funerals, and contrast this with conceptual developments in family sociology, as well as considering how 'family' has been observed in empirical studies of funerals.

The remainder of the chapter presents an empirical picture of aspects of the funeral, organised around the chronology of the event itself. Before the ceremony happens, mourners must hear about the funeral and decide whether to attend. For those who do attend, there are a number of considerations that arise: sending flowers or making a donation, what to wear, how to get to the funeral. During the ceremony, mourners arguably do not participate actively, although they are witness to different kinds of ceremonies from which they make meaning. The ceremony is the most formal part of the funeral, and is usually presided over by 'experts' (the officiant and the funeral director), but for mourners it can also be a highly emotional occasion. After the ceremony,

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[33] Similarly, Davies and Shaw (1995) investigate attitudes to, rather than experiences of, burial and cremation as funeral choices.

mourners have an opportunity to talk informally before leaving or attending the funeral tea.

This chronology of the funeral presents the empirical context for the thesis, complementing the theoretical context provided in Chapters 2 and 3. With the theoretical and empirical contexts reviewed, this chapter revisits the project's research questions.

Who Mourners Are

In a recent study that included observation of around 50 funerals, Holloway et al. (2010) concluded that it is usual for between 20 and 60 mourners to attend a funeral. Elsewhere, Naylor (1989) suggests the figure is between 17 and 50. How accurate these estimates are is open to debate but difficult to quantify. Both of these studies were small and localised, and both draw on experienced funeral directors' opinions to confirm that their observations were typical, but large-scale survey data on funeral attendance are currently unavailable.

Mourners are reported to be usually middle aged or in their twenties, with attendance by teenagers and children less common (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 122). A number of factors are thought to influence variations in the numbers of mourners at funerals. Among adults, the younger the deceased person, the more people may be expected to attend (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 17), although the same does not hold true for the under-18s: many more people should be expected to attend the funeral of a teenager than of a baby (Prior, 1989, p. 173; Walter, 1990, p. 120). Naylor reports that funeral directors claim that attendance varies by whether or not the death was expected (Naylor, 1989, p. 291), although she does not elaborate on this point even to confirm which type of death should attract more mourners to the funeral. Naylor finds in her own study that group membership has an impact, a finding echoed by Caswell (2009) and Walter (1990) who suggest that members of associations or clubs, as well as societies such as the Freemasons, can expect more people to attend their funeral. Walter (1990) adds occupations as a factor in mourner numbers, giving the armed forces and emergency services as examples of groups who attend colleagues' funerals in large numbers.

Writing about Northern Ireland, Prior (1989) argues that it is social status which underlies these variations in attendance, claiming that in general whether due to group membership or economic activity and potential, "those who are highly valued by the community get large numbers of mourners at funerals" (Prior, 1989, p. 172). Indeed, Prior claims, the less socially valued the deceased person not only the fewer the mourners but the more cursory the funeral itself. Walter (1990) presents a more Durkheimian idea that the reason for group attendance and in particular group control over the funeral may lie in the attributes of the group rather than the individual: "the tighter knit the group, or the more threatened it is by death, the more likely it will be to take over the funeral" (Walter, 1990, p. 119). Examples of such groups include, again, Freemasons and the armed forces, who may respectively be thought of as tight knit and as threatened by death (both literally and symbolically).

Considering the relationships between mourners, it has been claimed that "those who know the chief mourner and those who know the deceased are often not the same people" (Hass and Walter, 2006-2007, p. 6) and that mourners may also not know one another (Walter, 1990, p. 122; 1996c, pp. 12-3). According to Caswell's (2009) research, mourners at funerals in Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis still comprise "a 'natural' funeral community… most of those who have come together for a funeral have been related to one another, or have lived and worked closely together" (Denison, 1999, p. 66), but this does not hold for Inverness or Edinburgh; neither can it be held true of rural Wales (Denison, 1999; Thompson, 2004). Naylor (1989, p. 291) argues that this does not represent a diminishment of community attendance at funerals but rather a shift in the locus of the community, away from a geographical area and onto an individual (the deceased person). Drawing on Durkheim's (1915/1976) idea that communal ritual, especially death ritual, produces a shared feeling of 'effervescence' which reinforces emotional bonds between those present, Caswell goes on to argue that in funerals where the mourners do not know each other "when the funeral service works well there may be a sense of temporary community of mourners established" (Caswell, 2009, p. 220), although in Walter's (2009a) experience, this does not appear to be the norm.

Hierarchies amongst Mourners: The Family

Allowing for variations in terminology, there is a clear hierarchy of mourners evident not only through but even within the funeral literature. The literature distinguishes between mourners in general and a smaller class of mourners in particular, which smaller class can vary in size and composition, and may be limited to a single individual, and they are the only mourners whose experiences of funerals have so far been researched. These are those mourners who have made the funeral arrangements through the funeral director. In this thesis I refer to them as 'funeral arrangers', but other researchers have termed them 'the bereaved' (Caswell, 2009), 'the mourners' (Bradbury, 1999) or, most commonly, 'the family' (Bradbury, 1999; Holloway et al., 2010; Howarth, 1996; Naylor, 1989; Prior, 1989; Walter, 1990), despite Parsons' warning that "no formal mechanism exists to establish who should enter into a contractual relationship with a funeral director" (Parsons, 2003, p. 42), and that not only friends but also executors such as solicitors may take on this role. In practice, being a member of the deceased person's family[34] and being involved in the arranging of the funeral do often overlap. Only a single individual can enter into a contractual relationship with the funeral director, but decisions about the funeral are often negotiated between several people, including other family members and friends (Parsons, 2003). This should be borne in mind when researchers such as Naylor (1989), Harper (2008) and Holloway et al. (2010), for example, elide 'the funeral director's client' (that is, what I term the 'funeral arranger') with 'the bereaved', 'the next-of-kin' and 'the family' respectively.

Unpicking 'The Family'

It is noticeable that in the funeral literature 'the family' is, firstly, taken for granted as an uncontroversial term, and secondly, used to refer to the nuclear family[35]. This is in stark contrast to the complexities and shifts explored in the

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[34] The term 'family' is explored in more detail below. There are no empirical surveys of the relationships that funeral arrangers hold to the one who has died. In (qualitative) literature on funerals in contemporary Britain, funeral arrangers are almost exclusively spouses, partners, adult children, parents, siblings, and nieces and nephews of the deceased person (Caswell, 2009; Harper, 2008; Holloway et al., 2010; Howarth, 1996; Naylor, 1989).

[35] Although this use is endemic in the funerals literature, those researching bereavement and grief (e.g. Nadeau, 1998; 2001) may use the term more consciously.

sociology of the family, where 'family' is a developing concept (Allan, 2008; Finch, 2007; Morgan, 1996, 2002, 2011; Silva and Smart, 1999; Smart, 2007). A significant shift in ways of thinking about the family in recent years has been Morgan's (1996) notion of 'family practices': a way of thinking about family as an adjective rather than a noun (Morgan, 1996, p. 11). Family practices – the things that people do that are constructed as being to do with family – are active, routine, fluid and socialised (Morgan, 1996, pp. 190-2), and thinking about the family in these terms frees us from viewing 'the family' as a relatively stable nuclear structure contained within a single household, a manifestation of family which is now only one of many (James and Curtis, 2010; Morgan, 1996).

Focusing on the active aspect of family practices, a number of researchers have gone on to explore family as a verb. The notion of 'doing family' (Allan, 2008; Perlesz et al., 2006; Seymour, 2007; Silva and Smart, 1999, pp. 8-9) can then be used to illuminate how 'family' is constructed and reconstructed through everyday activities, from teaching children to brush teeth (Morgan, 1996) and using 'mum' as an address (Perlesz et al., 2006) to making bequests (Finch and Mason, 2000). As can be seen in these examples, practices can be interpreted and categorised in a number of ways, and many if not all practices through which family is 'done' are simultaneously other kinds of practices too. Brushing teeth may be seen as a hygiene practice, bequeathing as a legal practice. Precisely because of this potential for ambiguity or multivalence, the notion of 'doing family' through family practices enables us to see how family is both embedded in and accomplished through the activity of everyday life. Furthermore, although practices may establish and reveal how any one particular family is 'done' (what we eat, when and with whom, for example, can contribute to our family identity), 'doing family' means drawing on culturally shared notions of what families are, who is family, and how those who are family relate to one another and to others (Morgan, 1996, p. 192). We recognise our own and others' families as families because what they are doing is what families do.

Taking this notion of 'doing' family practices as a starting point, Finch (2007) offers another potentially fruitful concept for the consideration of families at funerals. This is the concept of 'displaying family': the process of individuals

and groups indicating 'family' to others (p. 73). In the first instance this is accomplished "primarily through direct social interaction with the individuals with whom one is establishing family relationships" (p. 74); others then reinforce (or, presumably, challenge) the 'family-ness' of the relationship. Such others include other family members, friends, colleagues and employers, and public agencies, all of whom have more and less formal means of endorsing others' family relationships at their disposal.

As can be seen, Finch's concept has particular salience when individuals feel the need to *assert* 'family-ness'. Although much of her discussion concerns types of family arrangement such as cross-household blended families and chosen families of same-sex partnerships or groups of friends, Finch states that it is *circumstances* rather than *types* of family which call for varying degrees of display – for example, a father who returns from a long business trip may read his children a bedtime story as a means of (among other things) re-establishing his fatherliness to them. Again, James and Curtis draw attention to the ways in which families are "rooted in the social" (James and Curtis, 2010, p. 1164). Even if they are not uniform (Morgan, 1996), cultural concepts of family are powerful (James and Curtis, 2010, p. 1165). The authors argue that "the tug of culture can become especially strong… when family displays take place in public settings, where 'the family' is literally on view to others who are not family members" (James and Curtis, 2010, p. 1166). Clearly, the funeral can be seen as one of these occasions.

The Funeral and the Family

None of these conceptual complexities are acknowledged in the funerals literature. Even Caswell (2009), who discusses the notion of 'liquid' relationships (drawing on Bauman, 2003, 2005), clearly does not mean to use the term 'family' in any way that implies "that individuals are *doing* family instead of simply passively residing within a pre-given structure" (Silva and Smart, 1999, p. 5). What is not so clear, however, is whether authors' seemingly simplistic use of the term 'family' simply reflects their own taken-for-granted assumptions, or whether the funeral itself is a site of less fluid family practices than everyday life. Robson and Walter's (2012-2013) focus-group research into

hierarchies of grief (which was discussed in more detail in Chapter 3) is commendable in considering relationships not normally acknowledged in the funerals literature, such as step-parents or the childminder of a dead child. The findings suggest "that the respondents subscribe to the view that there is something special about consanguinial kin relationships" (P. Robson, 2002, p. 67).

Prior (1989) and Howarth (1996) suggest that the funeral director actively asserts and reinforces the hierarchical, nuclear family structure at various points throughout the funeral (which will be illustrated as this chapter proceeds). It is possible that using the funeral director as a gatekeeper to bereaved research participants, as a number of authors have done (Caswell, 2009; Harper, 2008; Naylor, 1989), encourages the parroting of the funeral director's view of funeral arrangers as, firstly, 'the family' and secondly, the mourner(s) of prime importance at the ceremony. Funeral directors, though, are not responsible for initial decisions about which individuals contact them to arrange funerals, and a further possibility is that funeral arrangers themselves perpetuate or return to 'traditional' notions of family at a funeral. Recognising that in life, individuals are embedded in personal lives (Smart, 2007) which encompass kin, friendships, acquaintances, and more and less impermanent sexual relationships, Prior observes that "most deaths are taken out of the social networks in which they occur and are subsequently privatised within the kinship group" (Prior, 1989, p. 146), arguing that this amounts to an effective "monopolisation of death by the family" (ibid.). As Howarth (1996) observes, funeral arrangers and those around them must make distinctions based on a hierarchy when deciding how to allocate places in the limousines or seats in the chapel, and these distinctions are routinely made on the basis of traditionally recognised family relationships.

What of disenfranchisement and the funeral? Its very nature suggests that it would be difficult for researchers to identify disenfranchisement unless specifically looking for absences from funeral attendance[36] or involvement. However, some indications are present in the literature. Fowlkes (1990) draws attention to two kinds of relationships in particular which can be primary during life but which are relegated to a position below that of 'family' after death and at

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[36] As I will argue in the methodology chapter, this project is well placed to do exactly this.

the funeral: friendships and working relationships which, as Fowlkes notes, may involve the sharing of intense emotions, over a period of many years, in sometimes dyadic relationships (e.g. paired police officers, therapists and their supervisors). Indeed, the language of the business world, where people may be described as being married to their jobs, "is literally the language of partnership" (p. 639), yet such intimacies are rarely given recognition at funerals. Girlfriends and boyfriends of dead teenagers have also reported being marginalised at the funeral by 'the family' (Howarth, 1996, p. 180).

Because it is such a consistent division, the issue of 'family' as a distinguishing concept between mourners at the funeral recurs throughout this chapter. Thus far I have shown how a particular notion of 'the family' pervades funeral practice and analysis, and has implications for the kinds of relationship which are excluded. Discussion in later sections of this chapter will address some of the gradations within this 'family' which have been observed and which suggest the 'ranking' so characteristic of hierarchy.

The remainder of the chapter discusses the funeral as far as possible from the perspective of the wider mourner, indicating differences in their experience from those of funeral arrangers where appropriate.

Before The Ceremony

Finding Out About the Funeral

Before anyone can attend a funeral, they must hear about it. In Britain, it is conventional for those arranging the funeral to place an announcement in the local newspaper (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 28; Prior, 1989, pp. 141-52). This notice gives the deceased person's name and date of death, and usually their age, and indicates arrangements made for the funeral. In addition, notices usually name and identify by relationship the people 'left behind', as well as stating whether flowers or donations are welcome. Sometimes requests concerning mourners' dress may be included, and details of the tea following the funeral are provided.

Among other things, the newspaper announcement establishes 'family', which is displayed through the inclusion and omission of named relatives of the deceased person. Decisions about who to include – indeed, whether to publish such a list at all – are consciously made by those who arrange funerals, and it is intriguing that in this display of family, relatives who have already died are sometimes included (Holloway et al., 2010, pp. 28-9). The announcement further invites or excludes "others in the community" (Naylor, 1989, p. 174), having first, of course, established who are 'others' both explicitly through the conventions of naming family members and implicitly through distinguishing between those who place the announcement and those who read it. This is the first step in accomplishing one of the other major functions of the announcement: establishing the level of privacy of the funeral (Hockey, 1990, p. 48; Prior, 1989, p. 144). The funeral itself may be openly described as 'private', or, more commonly, some activities are reserved for family members only, such as the sending of flowers or attendance at the committal (disposal of the body) if this occurs separately from the rest of the funeral ceremony.

It is possible that identifying who should be informed about the funeral may not be straightforward, since the deceased person's membership of social networks may be partially or completely unknown to those members of the immediate family who are likely to have the responsibility of arranging the funeral (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Feld and Carter, 1998; Giddens, 1992), although we should not be over-ready to assume that such disconnected networks are the norm (Gross, 2005). Walter's (1996c, 2007) observation that funeral congregations in fact are often composed of people who knew the deceased person but may not know each other or the people who organised the funeral is an indication that such obstacles can be overcome, although there remains the possibility that some of those who would have attended simply do not hear about the funeral. With growing membership of online communities where the deceased person's login details, online name or very participation remain unknown even to spouses and close friends (Suler, 2004), this possibility becomes much more likely. At the same time, social networking sites provide a powerful additional tool for communicating funeral details.

Deciding to Attend

Once alerted to the funeral, potential mourners must decide whether to attend. The absence of research means that little is known about how this decision is made. Holloway et al. (2010, p. 125) note that it can seem important, particularly for family members, to be present at the funeral, such that special effort is made, or the funeral itself is delayed, to make attendance possible. Why their presence is both felt by individuals and seen by others to be important is not explored by the authors of the study. Attendance at a funeral, especially in large numbers, or by people who have travelled a long way or who had only irregular contact with the deceased person in life can be taken to signify respect for the person who has died, which in turn can act as a comfort to mourners whose grief is socially validated (Walter, 1990), but whether these considerations figure in mourners' decisions to attend – or not to attend – is thus far unknown.

Indeed, reasons not to attend seem to be clearer, for there are costs associated with going to a funeral. Some of these are emotional: in Hull it was reported that some people do not attend because they are too upset (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 125). Furthermore, a funeral can also be experienced by those who do attend as something of an ordeal (Walter, 1990). There may also be financial costs. As noted in Chapter 3, the granting of compassionate leave is not mandatory and may be unpaid, and where it is provided it is expected to be used at the deaths of a very limited range of immediate family members (Bond and Wise, 2003; Caswell, 2009, p. 129). Just as importantly, policies place strict limits on time off to attend the funeral, limits which reflect the temporal norms of businesses rather than of mourning (Pratt, 1981) and are likely to deter some mourners from attending.

Sending Flowers

Flowers have a long association with death. In a brief article discussing the folklore of flowers, Drury (1994) describes many ways in which flowers have been used in British mourning practices, from being placed inside the coffin before burial to being planted on graves, from being distributed to mourners visiting the deceased person's home to decorating the church for the funeral. In

addition, flowers were used in ways also evident in contemporary funerals, such as being thrown onto the coffin as it lies in the grave and being made into garlands to be taken to the funeral. Drury suggests that the flowers used in funerals were symbolic of religious themes (such as evergreens representing the immortality of the soul), of relationships between mourners and the deceased person (such as rosemary representing the persistence of memories) and of attributes of the deceased person themselves (such as red roses representing their goodness, white their virginity).

However, Drury provides no evidence of the meanings that folk themselves (rather than folklorists) gave to these floral practices (Walter, 1996b). Walter (1996b) goes on to note that we also lack data on the meanings that people give to contemporary funeral flowers, although he is prepared to speculate that funeral flowers now are symbolic not of mortality, but of love, respect and remembrance. While this is only speculation, Goody (1993, p. 285) argues that the sheer amounts of money spent on them does suggest that funeral flowers are meaningful in some way. Tributes can be costly: in 2007 the average amount spent on flowers by people arranging funerals was £229 (Sunlife Direct, 2010), and although the lower figure of £128 in 2010 represents a considerable drop, it is still a considerable outlay[37]. Mourners uninvolved in the funeral arrangements who buy flowers will also be considering significant expense. A search of florists' websites today suggests a minimum charge of £25, with most tributes costing between £35 and £80. Furthermore, the forms that tributes take would seem to be meaningful. Goody (1993) observes a shift from wreath-shaped tributes to sprays, while Walter (1996b) notes that some tributes take a symbolic form such as a football or teddy bear. Social identities may be represented with floral tributes spelling out the deceased person's name or relationship to the sender, such as NAN or DAD. It is generally family relationships that are signified in this way (Harper, 2008). The symbolism of flowers is contextual, however. After funerals, flowers are sometimes donated to local hospitals, care homes and hospices, often those which have cared for the deceased person before death (Walter, 1996b). Those same flowers which at the funeral may be thought to represent love and respect may be viewed by the

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[37] Goody (1993, p. 285) citing Hennessey (1982) reports that in 1982, the average spend on flowers by those arranging funerals was £23.

people to whom they are subsequently donated as symbols of death itself (Goody, 1993, p. 285), and such gifts are commonly disassembled and rearranged in vases so that their provenance is undetectable.

Yet there is a contradiction between this meaningfulness of flowers, and the commercialised and abstract way in which routinely they are brought into funerals (Walter, 1990, pp. 144-5; 1996b). In 1990, Walter related the story of a woman who was discouraged by the funeral director from making a tribute for the coffin from the flowers in her own garden (Walter, 1990, p. 137). We cannot know how widespread such discouragement was then or still would be, but it remains the case that tributes are usually chosen by mourners in the days before the funeral from a brochure of standard designs at the florist's or funeral director's premises in the days before the funeral (Walter, 1990), where they will also write a message on a card that will be displayed with the flowers. The actual stems used in the tribute are selected by the florist, and delivered to the funeral director on the day of the funeral, who arranges them both in the hearse and at the crematorium, church or cemetery. The collection of tributes and messages is viewed by funeral arrangers and other mourners after the funeral ceremony (1996), and flowers may be taken home by funeral arrangers as well as being donated elsewhere (Holloway et al., 2010), although it is most common to leave the flowers in place for eventual disposal by crematorium or cemetery staff. As Walter notes, one of the implications of this procedure is that it is common for flowers never to be touched by their senders (Walter, 1990). Neither are they usually touched by their recipients, whether mourners consider the recipient to be the funeral arrangers (who look at the flowers but rarely touch them) or the deceased person (whose coffin is usually adorned with only one tribute).

This lack of mourners' practical involvement with funeral flowers marks a difference from pre- and early 20th century funerals where mourners took or were given flowers to hold, carry and strew over the grave (Drury, 1994). It also differs from contemporary practices in other places. For example, mourners in

Finland[38] bring flowers to the funeral themselves, and read the accompanying message publicly as they place the flowers around the coffin (Walter, 1996b).

Floral practices are not fixed, however. Goody noted in 1993 that it was becoming more common for those arranging funerals to request donations to charity to be given instead of flowers, and this would seem to be an established alternative now (Fairways, 2011; Holloway et al., 2010; Sunlife Direct, 2010). Nonetheless, there are variations. Both Goody (1993) and Howarth (1997a) suggest that flowers are particularly significant in working class funerals, while Drury's (1994) account of the range of practices across England reminds us that regional variations should always be allowed for.

Walter (1996b) argues that our current funeral customs are the result of an interaction between the commercial interests of the florist and the funeral director, and more autonomous folk customs, which have their origins not only the traditions described by Drury (1994) but also mourners' exposure to representations of funerals and public mourning in the media. They also are used to represent and reproduce the hierarchy of mourners: the funeral director arranges the flowers on and around the coffin according to relationship to the deceased person; the more prominent the tribute, the more importance its sender has been given (Harper, 2008, p. 179; Howarth, 1996, p. 179). Tributes from immediate family members are usually given pride of place. However, while there "seems to be a strong pressure to produce a floral tribute for the funeral" (Walter, 1996b, p. 107), British mourners are not subject to the level of commercial pressure as are those in the US (Mitford, 1963, 2000), neither are there religious traditions of using flowers at funerals as there may be in Mediterranean countries (Walter, 1996b). Rather, Walter suggests, "British mourners feel freer to follow their intuitions in this matter" (1996b, p. 107) – although whether intuition is experienced as the only, or even a sufficient guide to practice is an empirical question yet to be answered, and is a question which will be addressed in Chapter 7.

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[38] Walter's article attributes these practices to Scandinavia. In personal communication, the author corrected this and made clear that the practices were observed in Finland.

Making a Donation

As mentioned above, it is becoming common for mourners to be asked to donate to charity in place of sending flowers. I have been unable to find research relating to this practice; this thesis will be the first time that it has been studied in contemporary Britain. A leaflet published by Fairways, one of the largest funeral companies in Britain, says that when donations are requested, "the choice of charity often relates to the cause of death. Alternatively one or more charities are selected which the deceased supported in life" (Fairways, 2011, p. 8). As will be discussed below in the section on the ceremony, collecting in aid of a charity related to the deceased person in some way (as opposed to, for example, the favourite charity of the person who has arranged the funeral) is consistent with the trend towards individualisation and personalisation of the funeral.

Parsons (2003) and Howarth (1996) have drawn attention to public disapproval of funeral directors' financial profiting from others' human loss. Whether such disapproval extends to the charities (and indeed, the florists) who are the beneficiaries of wider mourners' only direct payment in connection with the funeral (unless the tea is held in a licensed venue and drinks are bought) is unknown. Donations may be sent directly to the charity, via the funeral director, or placed in a collection box at the end of the ceremony itself (Holloway et al., 2010). Again, whether and how mourners use these options, and the meaning that such practices may hold for them, is currently unknown. And again, Chapter 7 will explore the practice of giving donations from mourners' perspectives.

What to Wear

Formal and commonly shared prescriptions concerning the assumption of mourning dress have not been followed for several decades (Gorer, 1967; Jalland, 2010), nonetheless, mourners must usually rely on 'common knowledge' in order to make decisions about what to wear to a funeral since guidance is not commonly given in announcements in newspapers (Holloway et al., 2010). Caswell's (2009) description of attending funerals as part of her

fieldwork refers to being 'appropriately dressed' as if both she and her readers automatically know what that means.

Both the colour and the formality of mourners' clothing are discussed elsewhere in the literature. Unless directed otherwise, mourners tend to wear 'sober' colours: some black, but also other dark colours and grey (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 54; Howarth, 1996, p. 175; Naylor, 1989, p. 289). Despite Weller's advice (1999, pp. 125-6) that in the absence of other instruction mourners should wear their 'Sunday best', dress at funerals is not characterised by formality (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 54). Naylor observed that mourners "simply wore whatever seemed to the individual to be suitable" (1989, p. 287), although she suggests that formal black clothing is still worn at aristocratic and upper class funerals.

Sometimes mourners are asked by those arranging the funeral to dress in a particular way (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 55). Symbolic colours may be requested, which are connected with the deceased person. For example, mourners may be requested to wear pink in symbolic support of a breast cancer charity, or to wear the colours of the deceased person's football team. Alternatively, the request may be for casual rather than formal clothes to be worn. When such requests are made, mourners comply (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 55). However, in the absence of formal invitations (as per weddings) it is not guaranteed that dress instructions will reach all mourners. This observation can be combined with Naylor's comment above to lead to the hypothesis that in the absence of instruction it may well be the individual who makes decisions about clothing based on 'common knowledge', but that the request of those arranging the funeral (who are likely to be among the deceased person's immediate family) takes precedence over both pre-existing norms and the preference of the individual.

Finding the Venue

Transport is one of the aspects of the funeral when hierarchical divisions between mourners can easily become apparent.

'Close' mourners, usually family members, often gather before the funeral at the home of the deceased person or the home of the funeral arranger

(or sometimes at the funeral director's premises) and travel together (Harper, 2008, p. 169; Holloway et al., 2010, pp. 58-9; Howarth, 1996). The hearse is brought to the house, where the cortège is assembled. A route may be chosen which allows the cortège to pass symbolic addresses such as the deceased person's local pub or former home.

In times when the body remained at home between death and the funeral, the departure of the cortège was the journey upon which when the family "prepared themselves for the first and final separation" from the deceased person (Bradbury, 1999, p. 82). With the body now almost invariably stored by the funeral director until the day of the funeral, bringing the hearse to the house creates a reunion, reversing the meaning of the funeral procession. British hearses, with large glass windows surrounding the coffin, resemble vehicular display cases and make the coffin the visual focus of the funeral procession (Harper, 2008, p. 168). Those arranging the funeral will often have hired one or two limousines from the funeral director, which follow the hearse to the funeral venue. Howarth observed that when negotiating seats in the limousines, "the bereaved were forced to consider and categorize one another in hierarchical terms" (Howarth, 1996, p. 180); those who are not seated in the limousines may follow in private cars and thus still be part of the cortège.

Wider mourners, however, are expected to make their own way to the funeral venue. It is not only those from outside the local area who may be unfamiliar with how to find funeral venues, with many municipal burial grounds and crematoria located away from town centres. Walter's (2009b) account of considerable difficulty in trying to attend a crematorium funeral by public transport suggests that neither funeral arrangers nor funeral venues themselves offer much in the way of informative assistance to mourners. The lack of information that crematoria make available, and the lack of concern which is apparent in Walter's account of reporting to those crematoria his difficulties in finding out how to get there, is consistent with the failure of both funeral personnel and academic researchers to consider all but the closest mourners at a funeral.

Many if not most funerals are held at crematoria, at which it is standard for mourners to await the cortège (Caswell, 2009). Crematoria often have more

than one chapel but only one waiting room, with the result that mourners may be uncertain before the ceremony whether other mourners in the waiting room are there for the same funeral[39]. At the same time, it is an area where those who do know each other have the opportunity for informal talk before the ordered ceremony begins. Walter (2009a) reports that in his experience this conversation is both awkward and limited, although empirical research is as yet unavailable.

The funeral director times the pace of travel to the funeral venue such that the arrival of the cortège is a signal to mourners already gathered there that the ceremony will now begin.

During the Ceremony

Where to Sit

The procession into the funeral venue is hierarchically structured: the officiant and funeral director usually lead the way, followed by the coffin[40], the funeral arranger(s) and immediate relatives of the deceased person, other family, and other wider mourners (Howarth, 1996, pp. 193-4; Prior, 1989, p. 171). The coffin is placed on a catafalque at the front of the chapel, while mourners sit in rows facing a lectern usually standing near the coffin; Prior (1989) suggests that the choice of seat is determined by a mourner's position in the procession.

Hierarchies in mourners and where they sit have appeared to be quite evident in previous research by Prior (1989) and Howarth (1996). However, when mourners may not know others at the funeral and their relationships to the deceased person (Walter, 2009a), how are they to know their proper place in this strict structure? Chapter 7 will discuss this question in some detail.

The Ceremony

Over 70% of funerals today are cremations (Cremation Society of Great Britain, 2011). A large proportion of these funerals are held at the crematorium itself;

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[39] Where mourners are unaware that others in the waiting room may be there to attend a different funeral, there is also scope for mistakes to occur and for mourners to follow the crowd into the wrong ceremony.

[40] The coffin may be carried by mourners, but it is often funeral directing staff who act as bearers (Caswell, 2009).

some are preceded by a ceremony in Church or at some other venue such as a funeral director's premises (Harper, 2008). Although crematoria are non-denominational, funerals are held in rooms known as 'chapels'. Many chapels have some form of Christian imagery, which may be covered on request. Cremation itself occurs 'backstage' and in a separate area of the building.

Whatever the denomination, the service tends to follow "considerable conformity to a common pattern in terms of the shape and constituent elements of the funeral" (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 33; see also Caswell, 2009; Harper, 2008, pp. 172-5). These elements include welcoming words, readings, music, and the eulogy, a spoken tribute to the deceased person. The ceremony culminates in the committal, the final farewell to the body of the one who has died. At this point, the coffin would normally be covered from view by a curtain, although it is becoming more common for mourners to request that the curtain not close (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 71).

Crematorium funerals have been criticised by academics and the media for their 'conveyor belt' feel (Davies, 1995, pp. 21-22) whereby the service appears "speedy, impersonal and mechanical" (D. Davies, 1996, p. 25) with funeral following funeral all to a tightly controlled schedule. Commonly, crematoria offer a 30-minute 'slot' for each funeral, of which the ceremony takes up 20 minutes, with the extra time allowed for moving mourners into and out of the chapel, and preparing for the next funeral. While Bradbury suggests that "it is the presence of the next funeral party waiting at the main door… which… engenders that feeling of being 'processed'" (Bradbury, 1999, p. 86), it is only researchers themselves who describe this feeling. Empirical research into mourners' own reports does not confirm the complaint (D. Davies, 1996, p. 25).

When the funeral is a burial, the service may be held in a church, the cemetery chapel, or at the graveside, and the ceremony contains essentially the same elements as a cremation – indeed, it was the form of the traditional burial service that provided the template for cremation services. The burial itself is either in a churchyard or in a municipal or privately-owned cemetery. It is legal to bury on one's own land, but while this does happen it is rare (Walter and Gittings, 2010). The coffin is carried and lowered into the grave by funeral directing and cemetery staff (Harper, 2008, p. 186). The committal at a burial is

spoken by the officiant and marked by the symbolic scattering of a handful of soil by the funeral director onto the coffin; after the mourners have left the grave is filled in by cemetery staff or freelance gravediggers engaged by the funeral director.

Mourners' Participation in the Ceremony

Social scientists have viewed mourners at contemporary British funerals as passive audiences to the performances of officiants and funeral directors. Bradbury describes people arranging funerals as "adopting a passive role in the proceedings" (1999, p. 88) and observes in general "an apparently passive acceptance of professionals' power and practices" (1999, p. 139), while Howarth writes that at the funeral itself "the bereaved lack the knowledge of protocol or the impetus to proceed alone" (1996, p. 187) and wait helplessly to be guided through the event by the funeral director and officiant. These figures, in their turn, "effectively sacrifice the participation of the bereaved in pursuit of the drama and presentation of the funeral performance" (1996, p. 189). Smale argues that funeral directors in particular take advantage of clients' unfamiliarity with funerals to present the service which they provide as "client-oriented, tasteful, dignified, efficient, skilful and representative of 'traditional' beliefs" (Smale, 1997, p. 115) when in fact it is "tawdry, lacking in sensitivity to individual needs, unnecessarily routine in operation, excessively expensive and self-perpetuating" (ibid.).

These characterisations are based on analysis of the experience of the funeral director's client alone, who has intense contact with funeral staff and officiants in the few days between the death and the funeral (Bailey, 2010; Holloway et al., 2010). Other mourners at the funeral, though, have had no such contact with these personnel at all, and do not ordinarily receive direct attention from them at the funeral. Thus, if they are waiting for guidance, it will not come from the funeral director or officiant directly; by what means the majority of mourners establish 'how to go on' at a funeral is one of the major questions addressed in this thesis. In addition we may ask, are mourners really passive, or has their activity at funerals simply not been noticed? Are they indeed passive but frustrated? Are they passive but content?

Caswell (2009) suggests that at least some mourners may not be so inert. With regard to the planning of the ceremony, Caswell finds that many funeral arrangers take an active part. However, this does little to counter the portrayals above, since it concerns only the planning of the funeral, which involves only a small number of mourners. Moreover, the overall picture presented by Caswell is still one in which funeral directors and officiants figure prominently in the design of the ceremony, a finding echoed by Holloway et al. in Hull (2010). By contrast, Naylor (1989, p. 337) suggests that at least some mourners *expect* a 'performance' from the officiant, and it may be the officiant who is dissatisfied with the lack of participation on the part of mourners.

There are, however, a number of ways in which mourners may be active during a funeral ceremony. Indeed, some kinds of activity may be encouraged by officiants and funeral directors (Holloway et al., 2010, pp. 50-2, 126; Howarth, 1996, p. 191). Some means of participation may be shared by only a few mourners, such as bearing the coffin, or giving readings, while others such as lighting candles and touching the coffin may be shared by many but are not common practices (Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010, p. 126).

From such a list, one may wonder what an officiant or even a funeral director is doing at a funeral, since mourners can and do carry out many of the funeral's constituent operations themselves. Overall, though, the researchers who have observed these many different forms of participation in funerals by mourners are still of the opinion that this participation is "generally limited" (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 126).

However, de Witte's argument (proposed in relation to Ghanaian funerals) that "the relation between the form of the funeral – of objects, actions, or texts – and its meaning is never given, but is created by people interacting and grounded in time and space" (de Witte, 2001, p. 12) draws attention to the possibility that when the sphere of meaning-making is taken into account, those present at the funeral may have a far more active and powerful role than it seems to those who consider the funeral mainly in its practical context (e.g. Bradbury, 1999; Howarth, 1996; Naylor, 1989), particularly when the contemporary trends for secularisation and personalisation discussed in the

previous chapter are considered. Furthermore, mourners have gathered because someone has died, and funerals are also emotional occasions.

Emotion in the Funeral

Jalland's (2010) history of grief in England documents the totality with which a silent, hidden style of grief became the norm during the first part of the twentieth century. Public expressions of personal sorrow, such as weeping, were discouraged during and after each war "in favour of a pervasive model of suppressed privatized grieving which became deeply entrenched in the nation's social psychology" (p. 10) and has persisted since (Gorer, 1967; Holloway et al., 2010; Walter, 1990).

Walter (1999) argues that this norm of private grief is now accompanied by other 'scripts'. These include 'personal grief', the idea that the proper way to grieve is however it suits you best, and 'expressive grief', where what was known as 'breaking down' under the private grief script becomes 'letting it all out', and formalities and conventions of mourning are experienced as restrictions on the authentic expression of personal feeling (Wouters, 2002). These scripts endorse, respectively, individual freedom and the 'natural' expression of emotion.

All three scripts – expressive, personal and private – have the potential to become problematic at the funeral. Funerals are public situations governed by social, rather than natural rules, such that even where emotion at funerals is viewed as positive, the range (Howard, 1994) or extremity (Jenny Hockey, 1993) of emotions expressed may still elicit disapproval from other mourners or the funeral officiant, being viewed as inauthentic and fake (Jalland, 2010, p. 264; Walter, 2008). Finding one's own 'personal grief script' may be a popular idea, but in practice many bereaved people seek confirmation that their feelings and behaviour are 'normal' (Walter, 1999, p. 141), suggesting at least some desire for conformity – or perhaps inspiration – rather than unbounded self-expression[41]. Neither is the 'personal grief' script socially uncontested: many

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[41] During my years as a funeral director (discussed in more detail in Chapter 5), I lost count of the number of times I was asked 'What do other people do?' as a response to my offering them a range of options.

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people who are bereaved find that others have an opinion on how their grief should manifest.

At many funerals it is docility rather than volubility that is noticeable in mourners (Holloway et al., 2010, pp. 125-6; Young and Cullen, 1996, p. 148), and in Walter's (1999) view, it is private grief that remains the predominant norm. This norm dictates that

> "grief should be private and not disturb others; it should not go on indefinitely, for this too is disturbing to others. If these are the obligations of the grieving person, the obligation of others is not to intrude upon his or her grief" (Walter, 1997a, p. 132).

To complicate matters, it is not enough to keep one's grief private but in public one must be seen to be doing so, in order not to give the impression that one is not grieving at all. A successful funeral performance, which will evoke such remarks as 'Didn't she/he do well?', therefore involves signalling inward pain without appearing overcome by it: a dignified tear, a cracked voice. Walter notes that for 'chief mourners' (that is, those accorded the highest position in the grieving hierarchy) whose extremely painful feelings need to be moderated, this can make the funeral into "a trial of emotional strength and acting skill" (1999, p. 144). I suggest that it is not only 'chief' mourners but potentially many others present who need to regulate their emotional display in order to observe grief norms.

Perhaps surprisingly, there has been little empirical investigation of emotion at funerals to complement these theoretical contributions. Jenny Hockey (1993) reports that ministers tell mourners that they should 'let it all out', but at the same time try to manage the ceremony so that mourners will not 'break down' and embarrass both the minister and (ministers assume) themselves. Like other funeral personnel (Bailey, 2010), ministers do not allow themselves to cry.

Davies (1990, p. 14) finds that mourners themselves report little difference in the emotionality of burials and cremations, but Holloway et al. (2010) are the only researchers to have used observational evidence to address the question of how mourners express or do not express emotion at funerals in Britain. While this represents some valuable attention to the topic, I suggest that

it may be indicative of a failure on the part of the authors to critically reflect on their own taken-for-granted acceptance of prevailing norms that the section which they present is entitled 'composure' and is summarised: "[i]n the majority of funerals the mourners were composed and if emotion was shown it was very dignified and discrete" (p. 125). The authors add that "inevitably closer relatives such as widows, widowers and mothers frequently broke into quiet weeping at particular parts of the service" (2010, p. 126).

The parts of the funeral observed by Holloway et al. (2010) most often to elicit emotion seem to be those with particular symbolism of the deceased person or of the death: stories with particular meaning to the mourner, the departure or covering of the coffin at committal, and music, often chosen for its associations with the one who has died. Davies (1990, p. 37) reports that of those participants who had been to funerals at crematoria, 65% felt that they had "benefitted" from the music in the ceremony, although 16% said they had not because the music was taped and therefore artificial. 15% could not recall whether there had been music or not.

Interview data from the same study do reveal that some mourners restrained themselves from crying. This is explained by mourners themselves as a continuation of everyday norms of keeping emotion private (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 125). Younger people at funerals "frequently showed more emotion than their elders" (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 126). Older mourners put this down to a 'lack of funeral experience', though whether this refers to an unfamiliarity with funeral norms concerning emotion or a lack of practice in mastering the relevant skills is unknown.

Not all mourners appear to be upset: Holloway et al. (2010, p. 126) report mourners chattering to each other before, during and after the ceremony, even when asked to be quiet by the officiant.

After the Ceremony

Talking to Others

After the ceremony at a crematorium, the congregation is led out of the chapel by the funeral director towards the flower area, where the floral tributes sent by

mourners can be viewed and messages read. Though they remain nearby, the funeral director and officiant do not direct interaction for this period, which usually lasts around ten minutes (Howarth, 1996). For the first time, funeral arrangers are able to interact with wider mourners, and informal conversations are possible. The uncertainty experienced in the waiting room about whether other mourners are attending the same funeral will now be gone, although it is unknown whether people use this part of the funeral as an opportunity to make introductions or whether conversation is generally kept between those who already know each other.

Leaving the Funeral

After this short period of informality, the funeral director signals to their client that it is time to leave the crematorium (Howarth, 1996). The funeral director judges this by reference to the proximity of following ceremonies at the crematorium as well as their own schedule of funerals for the day.

When the funeral is a burial, this structured spatial progression is less easily managed. The funeral director cannot guide mourners away from the grave (which cemetery staff will be waiting to fill) because there is nowhere to guide them towards, neither are burials scheduled to follow one another in quick succession as cremations are. Thus, after a burial, mourners "slowly leave" the graveside (Harper, 2008, p. 186) of their own accord.

The Funeral Tea

Many funerals are not confined to the ceremony: a tea is commonly an important additional event. This may be held at the home of the deceased person or the funeral arranger, or in a venue such as a hotel or pub. Although funeral directors and officiants may be invited (Bradbury, 1999, p. 91), this tea is typically informal and unstructured (Holloway et al., 2010; Walter, 2009a).

Barely any research on the tea exists. This is partly attributable to researchers' unwillingness to intrude into a relatively private event at which their presence would become conspicuous (Holloway et al., 2010), but it also reflects the tendency in the literature to investigate the funeral by researching largely or

only the experiences and viewpoints of 'professional' participants (e.g. Bradbury, 1999; Caswell, 2009; Howarth, 1996; Naylor, 1989) – if participants' experiences or viewpoints are researched at all (e.g. Grainger, 1998a).

Writing in 1980s America, Yoder (1986) argues that a funeral meal serves many important and positive functions at once. Through such a familiar occasion as sharing food and social time, mourners symbolically and actually re-enter the ongoing rhythm of everyday life, in the final absence of the deceased person: but with each other. Plans and commitments for support to those thought to be the 'most' bereaved can be agreed within a network at the tea, and there is time for people who do not often see each other to be together. Davies (2002, pp. 41-2) views the sharing of food after death ritual as a symbolic refusal to succumb to death, an act which may not merely protect against despair but actively increase mourners' will and commitment to life. In Serbia, Stevanovic (2012) reports, both food and ritual laughter affirm vitality at the meal following the funeral.

Empirical data from British funerals, however, does not evoke these themes of communally achieved triumph. Instead, lacking the formality and rule-bound nature of the funeral ceremony which precedes it, the tea is an area of uncertainty, awkwardness and negotiation. Although they may see going to the tea as a way of offering support to the funeral arranger(s) and/or family of the deceased person (Walter, 1994, p. 21), mourners can be unsure whether they should attend without a formal invitation; not know whether the invitation extended to 'everyone' does in fact mean that and include them; and if they do attend can find it an uncomfortable occasion where stilted conversation is made with strangers who also do not know 'what to say' (Walter, 2009a, p. 58). At the same time, funeral arrangers can be uncertain whether it is 'done' to ask the officiant or funeral director to attend (Naylor, 1989, p. 316), how many to cater for and whether to undertake the disruption and work of hosting the event at home or to bear the cost of hosting it in a hired venue; and indeed whether to hold a tea at all – and who should be taken into consideration when making this decision (Holloway et al., 2010, pp. 76-7). Thus, far from the supportive, congenial and affirming ideals, it seems that the contemporary funeral tea "can be a rather isolating experience" (Walter, 2009a, p. 58).

What is the funeral like for mourners? From much of the literature it is only possible to answer that question with reference to funeral arrangers. It seems that for some, it is an unpleasant experience which they would rather not have to be at, but feel that they have to (Naylor, 1989, p. 314; Walter, 1990); for many more it is barely remembered (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 242; Naylor, 1989, p. 312). Common words used by funeral arrangers to describe the funeral in retrospect are 'nice' and 'right' (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 242). Although Holloway et al. assume that these designations refer to the designers of the funeral having "achieved what they set out to do" (ibid.), little evidence is given to support this. Rather, the data which are presented seem more to support the interpretation of 'right' as meaning that the funeral was what the deceased person would have wanted.

Davies (1990) provides the only available data on what mourners' own experiences might be. Drawing on survey data from the late 1980s, he reports that over four-fifths of those who had attended funerals at crematoria thought that the service was well conducted. 9% of respondents felt that crematorium funerals were too short, and 5% that they were too long, but 60% thought the duration just right.

These figures are valuable in that they do give some indication of mourners' own experiences of and satisfaction with some funerals. What they cannot do, however, is offer any insight into what these experiences *mean* to those mourners. Qualitative research, which may be able to consider that in more detail, however, has to date omitted consideration of how the funeral is experienced by wider mourners, and it is this omission which this thesis will address.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented an account of funeral practices in contemporary Britain, giving consideration throughout to what might be mourners' perspective. The account is partial but highlights the division between funeral arrangers and wider mourners, structured around nuclear family relationships; the disparity between the contact that funeral personnel have with their clients and the

contact they have with wider mourners; and the many considerations facing mourners attending a funeral.

Most importantly, this chapter has added to the theoretical work of chapters 2 and 3 to provide the empirical context for the research questions addressed in this thesis:

(1) What are mourners' experiences of funerals in contemporary Britain? Who are mourners, what do they do, and what meanings do they make of funerals?

I argued in the introduction that an account of mourners' experiences was necessary to an understanding of funerary rituals, not merely because they have not so far been attended to but because attending to them has the potential to *alter* our understanding of the social significance of funerals. The second research question therefore follows:

(2) When mourners' perspectives are taken into account, what are the implications for an understanding of the social significance of funerals?

As will be seen as the thesis develops, both sociological (e.g. Walter, 1996c) and anthropological (e.g. Davies, 2002) theory will be considered in the light of the empirical data generated by this thesis. Theories will be used to interpret data and contribute to knowledge, but data will also be used to test and extend theory. The thesis will pay particular attention to the question of authority: who or what can be said to be an authority over the funeral for mourners? Is it the individual, as contemporary literature (particularly Caswell, 2009; Walter, 1994, 1996a) suggests? The funeral director (Howarth, 1996; Smale, 1997), officiant or another expert? Since 'expert' guidance does not seem to be primarily or directly offered to any mourners except those paying for the funeral, does the authority for wider mourners still come from tradition? Religion? Furthermore, how do mourners relate to *one another*? Whereas these questions address mourners' experiences of the funeral as a *social* response to death and are discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, Chapter 8 gives detailed consideration to mourners' experiences of the funeral as a social response to *death*. Does the significance of the funeral inhere in its words, as Davies (2002) suggests?

These research questions clearly indicate an inductive research design generating qualitative data. The methodology and specific methods used to generate these data are the focus of the following chapter.

Chapter 5: Researching Mourners' Experiences and Perspectives Using Mass-Observation Data: A Methodological Discussion

Introduction

This project's research questions have been addressed using data generated in collaboration with the Mass-Observation Project, a long-running and large scale qualitative writing project based at the University of Sussex. 'Correspondents' (the project's participants) respond to 'directives' sent to them three times a year. These are open-ended questionnaires on "themes which cover both very personal issues and wider political and social issues and events" (Mass-Observation Project, 2011).

This chapter begins by giving an explanation of how I came to learn about Mass-Observation (M-O), a method rarely mentioned in textbooks or classes on social science methodologies. I offer a short account of its history before discussing both correspondents and directives/replies in some detail (these terms are explained below). The strengths and limitations of M-O are argued, encompassing a discussion of epistemology, and the implications for the research of my having been a funeral director are considered. I explain the ethical issues involved in using M-O for this project.

This is followed by an account of the design of 'the funerals directive of Autumn 2010', the responses to which comprise the data on which this thesis is based. The analytical strategy and method are then detailed.

Selecting Mass-Observation as a Research Tool

This study asks what mourners' experiences of funerals are, and, when mourners' perspectives are taken into account, what the implications are for an understanding of the social significance of the funeral. Two things were clear from the outset. First, that the study should use a qualitative research design aimed at "producing detailed descriptions and 'rounded understandings' which

are based on, or offer an interpretation of, the perspectives of the participants" (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p. 4). Second, that an inductive strategy should be used, in which theory is the outcome, rather than the driver, of research, and that theorising should be conducted in an iterative process between the data and the literature (Bryman, 2004).

Traditional ethnographic methods, including observation, were considered, but rejected because of logistical and ethical considerations. As Moore and Myerhoff note,

> "[a] fieldworker is confronted with difficult technical problems if he/she wants to ascertain the specific effects on all the individuals present at a collective ceremony" (1977, p. 13).

Observation of funeral ceremonies has been practised by researchers in existing studies (Holloway et al., 2010; Howarth, 1996), and I do not agree with Caswell (2009) that researcher presence at a funeral is inherently ethically problematic. However, my observations would have been not only of the ceremony but of the people attending it, and that is *not* defensible without consent. Even were it justified or permitted, my attendance at a funeral could be made inconspicuous relatively easily, but my interest is also with the less formal event of the tea afterwards. Like other researchers (Holloway et al., 2010), I considered that my presence there, even at the invitation of the people who had arranged the funeral and tea, would be unhelpful. Mourners do not expect to be approached by a researcher at a funeral tea, and the research would not be greatly informed either. I would have no understanding of the people at the reception or their relationships to each other, and would not be able to gain an overview of what was happening.

I learned about M-O fortuitously rather than through research methods literature. In June 2010 I was invited to a study day with the University of Brighton's Death and Dying Research Group, which was going to discuss the responses to the Spring 1994 directive on death and bereavement. My reasons for going were social rather than methodological: this was a study group unknown to me or my supervisors, and I went with the intention of meeting researchers in my field. At the time, I was wondering how access to mourners could ethically and logistically be gained in a way that held any theoretical use.

It was my first supervisor, seeing my enthusiasm at the richness, depth and variety of the M-O data I had seen in Sussex, who suggested that I consider it as the method for my PhD. Encouraged by the information that "accumulated writings by amateurs is recognised as an acceptable resource for scholarly analysis and interpretation" (Sheridan, 2005, p. 148) by funding bodies including the ESRC, I looked further at the method.

A Short History of Mass-Observation

M-O was founded in 1937 by anthropologist Tom Harrisson, poet and journalist Charles Madge, and film-maker Humphrey Jennings. The original aims of the project were to create 'an anthropology of ourselves' by documenting "in great detail and on a nation-wide scale the texture and experience of everyday life in Britain" (Sheridan, 1993a, p. 1). A major motivation for this was the conviction that there was a need to challenge what was seen as the wilful misrepresentation of popular attitudes by the press, which, Harrisson argued, was too ready "to pretend that its *own opinion* is public opinion" (Harrisson, 1940, pp. 376, emphasis in original). M-O originally combined the reports of trained investigators with those of a panel of unpaid amateurs[42] whose role was to document "how they and other people spend their daily lives" (Jennings and Madge, 1937, p. iii). The use of untrained 'ordinary people' in the generation of social knowledge was highly criticised at the time, and remains one of the project's most contentious attributes, as will be discussed in more detail below.

The project's first publication, a collection of reports on the coronation of George VI (Jennings and Madge, 1937), was followed by intense activity during World War 2. Hundreds of observers kept daily diaries for the project during the war, written with no formal instructions and sent to the project on a monthly basis. In addition, over 3000 people responded to directives covering such topics as rationing, evacuation, blackouts and conscription (Sheridan, 2005). This kind of qualitative activity declined after the late 1940s, after which time M-O became more concerned with quantitative market research, becoming a commercial organisation. The company was not a success, and M-O activity

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[42] Although they are often referred to as having volunteered (Harrison and McGhee, 2003), it is not clear how the early project's writers were recruited.

ceased in the mid-1950s. Since 1970, all of its data have been catalogued and housed in the Mass-Observation Archive (M-OA), at the University of Sussex.

The success of this early project, as the period between 1937 and the 1950s has come to be known, is debateable. Sheridan (1993a, p. 3) states that the founders' intentions of giving a voice to working class people was largely unfulfilled, although it did give a voice to a different group of people who were at the time relatively voiceless: young, largely left-wing people – and women. As Sheridan, Street and Bloome (2000) show, early M-O has been viewed by others in a number of ways:

> "It has been characterised variously as a documentary or photographic project (Laing, 1980), as a deeply flawed social survey (Abrams, 1951), as a middle-class adventure at the expense of the working class (Gurney, 1997), as Salvationist (Hynes, 1976), as a people's history (Calder, 1985), and as a life history project which was a precursor to, for example, present-day oral history (Sheridan, 1996)" (Sheridan et al., 2000, p. 27).

Hubble summarises: "M-O has always been an enigma" (2006, p. 1). Such variety of opinion, however, should not be taken as an indicator of widespread scholarly interest in the project: for the most part, its existence has been ignored (Sheridan, 1993a). Indeed, within sociology, the lack of discussion of M-O has been described as "surprising perhaps only because of its completeness" (Stanley, 1990, p. 3). It is perhaps even more surprising given that M-O was not simply "an awkward moment in the study of everyday culture" (Highmore, 2002, p. 146) but was relaunched in 1981 and has been operating ever since.

The contemporary M-O project was launched by David Pocock, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Sussex, as an experiment, "to see whether people in the early 1980s could be induced to write in the same way as the volunteer diarists and directive respondents of the 1930s and 1940s" (Sheridan and Holland, 2003, p. 21). Although the intention was to provide a resource for future historians (Sheridan, 2005), it has been argued that the Archive's material is of value to researchers interested in the nature of contemporary life also (Sheridan, 1996; Stanley, 1981; Thomas, 2002); this is a discussion which will be examined in more detail below. Recruitment to the current project through national and local papers, where people were invited again to write about both their own personal experiences and their observations

of daily life, was met with an enthusiastic response, with thousands of people participating over the next two decades up to the present day. But who participates in M-O, and how?

Mass-Observation: the Correspondents

Since its relaunch in 1981, over 4000 people have taken part in M-O (Mass-Observation Project, 2011). At its peak in the late 1980s, there were around 1000 participants – known as correspondents – although by 2003 this had declined to around 350 (Sheridan, 2005, pp. 146-7). At the present time, the project has around 500 active correspondents (Mass-Observation Project, 2011).

Published data on the demographics of the current panel are unavailable. In 2002/3, there were more female than male correspondents, more middle and lower middle class than working class people, correspondents from all over Britain, and few people from Asian or Afro-Caribbean backgrounds (Sheridan, 2002; Sheridan and Holland, 2003, p. 22). Current Archive staff report that these features still describe the panel today (personal communication). Sheridan (1993a, 1996) has suggested that the diary and archive aspects of M-O may be what appeals more to women than to men, since these kinds of personal and family writing are largely female practices, upon which M-O builds and extends. The project has deliberately targeted some groups for recruitment in an attempt to extend the diversity of correspondents, including the armed forces, literacy groups, unions, prisons, youth and student groups, and ethnic minorities. While there has been limited success in this area, recruitment of gay and lesbian correspondents has been more successful (Sheridan, 1993a, p. 14). The project is currently recruiting men aged 16-44 who live outside of southeast England (Mass-Observation Project, 2012).

Unless actively targeting groups for recruitment, M-O tends to attract and retain older people. Table 1 compares the proportion of older M-O correspondents to the British population from which they come, for the most recent year for which data on correspondents is available. It can be seen that the proportion of older M-O correspondents is much higher than in the general population.

Table 1: Age Distribution of M-O Correspondents and the British Population in 2003

	M-O Correspondents	British Population
Over 50	64%	34%
Over 60	40%	21%
Over 70	33%	12%
Over 80	9%	4%

Sources: Sheridan (2002); ONS (2011).

That the characteristics of the M-O panel do not mirror those of the population is a common criticism of the project, and this issue of representativeness will be given more attention in a discussion below. However, the inclusion of such a high level of actively involved older participants is commendable, since oftentimes research does not include these older individuals unless it is research specifically about them (and sometimes not even then) (Peace, 2002).

The present M-O project accepts new correspondents on the basis of criteria aimed at evening out the gender and age skew. Initially, though, all correspondents are self-selecting in that they volunteer[43], and they have a number of motivations for taking part in the project. These do not (indeed, cannot) include some common reasons for writing such as financial gain or public recognition (correspondents' material is anonymised), and neither does M-O offer the face-to-face affirmation of individual experience that interviews can (Cole and Knowles, 2001; Sheridan, 1993a, p. 18). Rather, it offers an opportunity for 'ordinary people' to take control of history-writing, since correspondents write knowing that their words will be deposited in a public

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[43] I have been unable to find published data on how correspondents first hear about M-O. Discussion with Archive staff suggests three main ways: reading about M-O in the press (recruitment drives through these media are not frequent, but M-O sometimes features in reports); reading publications of the early project's material, including the well-known *Nella's Last War* (e.g. Sheridan, 2005; Sheridan et al., 2000); and word of mouth.

archive. For the same reasons, M-O is a way for individuals to air their views and criticisms.

Although correspondents never meet each other or the Archive staff, there is a clear sense in which M-O is a shared activity. Sheridan writes of the early project that there was "a sense of belonging to something that was seen to have social value" (2005, p. 142), and this collectiveness can validate the usefulness of data on an otherwise unremarkable life (Sheridan, 1996, p. 13). There are also personal rewards: for many correspondents, it is a chance to practice writing, thinking, and observation skills (Harrison and McGhee, 2003; Sheridan, 1993a, pp. 22-4), and as with much biographical and life-history research there can be a pleasure in telling one's own stories (Roberts, 2002). Further rewards include the safe expression of political and social views which would be contentious in everyday life, refreshing the memory and keeping the mind active in older age, and communicating with others – some correspondents send copies of their responses to friends and family (Sheridan et al., 2000, pp. 223-4). Perhaps the most powerful reason for taking part, however, is that of leaving something behind after death, 'for posterity' (Sheridan, 1993b, p. 37).

No special skills (or anthropological training) are needed to be a correspondent: people who write for M-O are 'ordinary people'. 'Ordinary' is not a straightforward term (Barton et al., 1993; Highmore, 2011). Nonetheless, it is used both by M-O and by many correspondents to identify themselves, suggesting a shared assumption that M-O is about everyday life (Sheridan, 1996, p. 9). Where correspondents define what they mean by the term, it is often in negative terms: ordinary people are not those who usually have privilege over the creation of knowledge such as professionals in academia or in the media, and they are not people with power, success, fame or influence (Sheridan, 1996; Sheridan et al., 2000, p. 215). The Archive, by contrast, is located in the University of Sussex: a place which is not ordinary according to these definitions, and this will certainly have an impact on who writes for it. For some people, contact with a university, whether it is construed as 'working for' or being in some control over, will be an empowering possibility; for others it will be offputting enough to ensure their absence from the project (Sheridan, 1996).

The panel of correspondents does include some who hold privilege and power in everyday life, including academics and high-ranking executives. However, Sheridan et al. (2000), on the basis of research conducted through M-O and qualitative interviews, argue that

> "when they write for Mass-Observation they do not write from these positions of privilege... Writing for Mass-Observation enabled them to express something different about themselves, more personal, more experimental, more candid" (p. 218).

Above all, "the composition of the panel, and the kinds of writing which the Mass-Observers produce, are always related to notions of what it means to be a writer" (Sheridan, 2005, p. 147), and specifically the kind of writer who would take part in a project like this. Tautologous though it sounds, only those who already understand themselves to be able to write for this kind of project will participate, and experience has shown that even were it desirable, it simply is not possible to augment correspondents' diversity by imposing M-O on underrepresented groups.

What may not be obvious, but is vital to an understanding of the M-O project and its material, is that correspondents enter into a relationship with the Archive when they take up participation. Indeed, it was in recognition of and respect for this that Dorothy Sheridan, Director of the Archive from 1991 to December 2010, introduced the use of the term 'correspondent' in place of 'observer' or other terms in common social scientific usage, such as 'respondent', 'informant', 'subject' and 'participant' (Sheridan et al., 2000, p. 76). With others, Sheridan herself argues that to restrict the question of who correspondents are to demographic details is to disregard aspects of identity which are active and influential when correspondents are writing (Sheridan et al., 2000, p. 248), and relationships with the Archive and its staff are integral to this expanded understanding. As an institution the Archive is represented in particular ways to correspondents, which in turn influences the responses correspondents write. As mentioned above, the Archive is housed in and staffed by a university, which affects not only who writes, but how they do. Sheridan (1993a) writes that while a university can be a prestigious body, especially for the relatively high numbers of correspondents who work in education, it is also

seen as a judgemental and exacting one, and some correspondents are self-conscious about their standard of literacy, while others take great pleasure in highlighting any spelling errors on directives produced by the Archive. The Archive's geographical site is also significant in its relationships with correspondents. Sussex is not a neutral location, shown by the testimonies of correspondents from Scotland, Wales and the north of England who not only change their idiom but even their native language because they are writing to Sussex (Sheridan et al., 2000, p. 176). The most striking relationship is perhaps that between correspondents and the Archive staff, in particular the Director. When the project was smaller each correspondent received a handwritten note thanking them for their contribution and remarking on points of interest in the material they sent; at the present time about a quarter of correspondents each time will receive such a letter, with everybody being sent a printed acknowledgement 'topped and tailed' by the Director. Although they are acknowledged and appreciated, contributions (and their writers) are never judged, but are always accepted, contributing to a feeling of trust on correspondents' part (Shaw, 1996b, p. 1392). Many correspondents have been part of the project for a number of years, and feel such an intimacy with the Director that many responses are addressed 'Dear Dorothy'. In addition, when the former Director David Pocock left the project in 1990 some correspondents expressed doubts that they would be able to continue writing in the same way to a different person (Sheridan, 1993a, p. 27)[44]. Sheridan argues that these intense feelings can only arise due to the relationships built by M-O (Sheridan, 1993a, p. 28).

Important though they are in setting the tone of the project, the staff of the Archive are not the final audience for correspondents' writing. As mentioned above, correspondents write knowing that their material will be publicly archived, and many have an idealised reader in mind when writing. While the institution or its staff may be the immediate readership, many correspondents write for people in times to come: scholars and students of the future; children,

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[44] Dorothy Sheridan retired as Director of M-O in December 2010. The directive around which this thesis is based was the last that she worked on. It remains to be seen how her departure after over three decades at the Archive will impact on correspondents and the project itself, but I was undoubtedly extremely fortunate to have benefitted from her expertise, and from the warmth and vitality which she shared with M-O correspondents for so many years.

grandchildren and more distant descendents of correspondents who will be able to visit the Archive; and what Sheridan (1993b) calls "spiritual descendents" – 'people like me' in the future, interested in people in the past.

It cannot be emphasised enough that the end audience is visualised not as professional historians, but once again as 'ordinary' people. Correspondents have an interesting relationship to (rather than with) researchers, one in which they claim a degree of power not always attained in qualitative research (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009). Though curious about others' styles and contributions, most correspondents do not visit the Archive or analyse M-O data. However, many are active in other kinds of knowledge production such as oral history and collaborative writing groups, as well as through formal employment, and all are "purposely participating in the creation of an enormous archive over which they have, as an abstract community, a tremendous influence" (Sheridan, 2005, p. 148). As will be discussed in more detail presently, what correspondents say, and refuse to say, shapes not only the data but the nature of research undertaken within the project. That said, the academy retains ultimate control: that is where the resources and the know-how to dominate the production of knowledge through such a project are located. Sheridan (2005, p. 149) argues that M-O nonetheless challenges the hegemony of traditional academic research in two ways. First, it provides both a motive and a means for non-academics to be actively involved in history-writing. Second, by providing academics and society with knowledge "that questions their presuppositions and subverts their theories" (ibid.), M-O offers a genuinely collaborative and democratic form of research (Sheridan, 1993a). As Pocock commented of the early M-O, "whether the observation was *of* the masses or *by* the masses (it was in fact a combination of both) it was certainly *for* the masses" (in Jennings and Madge, 1937, p. 416, emphasis in original).

Directives and their Replies

Sheridan (1993b, p. 34) writes that while M-O resembles letter-writing, questionnaire-answering, being interviewed, writing a diary or writing a life story, it is none of these and in fact constitutes a new genre of writing, none of which would exist without the issuing of directives. Correspondents reply to directives

which are sent to them three times a year (by post or email, as they choose) usually containing two or three themes. Themes are suggested by Archive staff, visiting researchers, students at Sussex and correspondents themselves, and are selected by the Archive Director. They may be personal (menstruation in Spring 1996; 'Close Relationships' in Summer 1990; 'Last Night's Dreams' in Winter 1992) or about public issues and national and international issues and events, such as the Malvinas/Falklands War in 1982, general elections (e.g. Spring 1997), swine flu (Summer 2009), and the 'Big Society' (Spring 2012). Many address everyday practices such as writing and email (Summer 2004) and the celebration of birthdays (Summer 2002), while others are harder to classify, such as 'The Universe and Outer Space' (Summer 2005). Some directives also ask correspondents to send a detailed diary for one day; some special events (the turn of the millennium, a royal wedding) are obvious candidates for such a request but 'everyday' diaries are also sought regularly. No matter what the topic, the whole project's emphasis is on 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) through illustration from personal life (Sheridan, 1993b, p. 30).

As well as selecting or approving the topics, the Director oversees all the wording for directives, ensuring that the questions are inclusive enough for all correspondents to feel that they could have something to say on an issue. For example, two versions of the directive on menstruation were designed, one of which asked for women's experiences and consumptive practices, the other for men's input on a topic about which they are rarely asked (Sheridan et al., 2000, p. 69). Contemporary directives are designed differently from those of the early project. They are longer, providing many more prompts to correspondents as suggestions of points they are invited to address. They are more discursive, and more revealing of the directive's author, whether that be as the Director relating news from the Archive, as a scholar with an interest in a particular topic, or as an ordinary person who gardens and wonders whether others do (Sheridan, 2005, p. 145). While Dorothy's presence in the directives is part of her relationship with correspondents, the extension of directive length is intentional, since it has been found that longer directives elicit longer replies (Sheridan, 1993b), while open-ended questions avoid short, uninformative answers (Sheridan et al., 2000, p. 65).

Correspondents are given little explicit guidance about exactly how to respond, although the mirroring of document length suggests that they take implicit guidance from some aspects of the directive itself. In addition to the length, introductory paragraphs to topics or questions within the directive legitimate some particular items for inclusion, while the tone of the document itself will also establish a register or style which will influence the ways that correspondents reply (Sheridan et al., 2000, p. 225). Furthermore, personal acknowledgements and publications or exhibitions of other M-O material may influence some correspondents (Sheridan, 1993b, p. 35). Correspondents also draw on established conventions for the organisation of their replies, whether this be letter writing (some replies are addressed to a recipient and signed from the correspondent), essay writing or answering numbered questions with numbered answers as in a quiz (Sheridan, 1993b, p. 34). At the same time, correspondents who, as part of their daily work, write within the particular literary conventions known as 'to a high standard' (including academics, journalists and other authors) say that they adopt a different style from their 'professional' one in answering directives (Sheridan et al., 2000, p. 218). There are no word limits and no deadlines, with some correspondents replying within a week and others not until the next directive is sent out.

However, interpreting "external prescriptions" (Sheridan, 1993b, p. 35) is only part of the process (which may of course not go as the author of the directive had expected or intended, neither may this be known to either the author, the correspondent, or the reader): correspondents have their own opinions on what M-O *ought* to cover, both as regards topics and questions within those topics. Correspondents send comments and complaints to the Archive – that a directive was too long, too intrusive, was biased by the author (a directive entitled 'Women and Men' received a high number of comments both amused and irritated by the inversion). Sheridan argues that such criticisms suggest not only that correspondents feel there is a proper way to write and reply to a directive (though they are not agreed on what this is) but also that correspondents do feel at least some ownership over M-O: "correspondents feel themselves to be genuinely participants. It is (also) their project and they are entitled to criticise" (Sheridan, 1993b, p. 36).

It will not be a surprise, then, that correspondents respond in their own ways to directives – indeed, they have to. Directives' structures and contents may indicate some boundaries, but their influence is limited and "correspondents contest and adapt the space that is created for their reply" (Sheridan et al., 2000, p. 75). Even where questions on directives are presented as a numbered list, many correspondents will ignore the list and cover the questions in an essay-style, perhaps addressing all of the issues asked about, perhaps leaving some out, perhaps 'answering' an entirely different directive altogether and remonstrating with the Archive for not asking the proper questions. Sheridan writes, "they tell us *what they want to have documented*, not what we think should be documented" (Sheridan, 2002, p. 73, emphasis in original).

For collaborating researchers hoping for responses which address specified issues, this can be frustrating (Harrison and McGhee, 2003, p. 27). Within the Archive, though, this assertion of agency on the part of correspondents is highly valued. As well as having academic value, Sheridan et al. (2000) argue, M-O has *social* value. At the same time as providing a way for ordinary people's writing to be validated as an important resource to social and historical research, M-O redresses the concern with the powerful in history's traditional themes, and gives ordinary people the authority to be present, to be heard and for their lives to be recognised as valuable (Sheridan et al., 2000, pp. 215, 218). Furthermore, Sheridan argues,

> "… the imbalance of power between researcher and researched cannot be abolished but it is to some extent mitigated by the extent to which the writers are able to use the project for their own ends and rewards" (2002, p. 76).

Mass-Observation: Strengths and Limitations

It can be argued that as a genre of writing, M-O is unique:

> "...the social context for writing that the Mass-Observation Project has established, and that continues to evolve, is important because of how its uses and genres of writing, including who writes to whom for what purposes with what kinds of legitimacy, are positioned against uses of and genres of writing promoted by other social institutions, both those of the

establishment (e.g., government, business, schooling) and those more associated with the private sphere (e.g., family)" (Sheridan et al., 2000, p. 215).

However, as a research strategy, it shares characteristics with others, notably ethnography, life history work, documentary research and qualitative interviewing.

What is created by the interaction of Archive and correspondents has been called an 'ethnography of the people' or an 'ethnography of writing' (Barton et al., 1993) which "provides considerable scope for *qualitative* research on everyday contemporary life in Britain" (Sheridan, 1996, p. 1, emphasis in original), capable of revealing choices and their motives as well as meaning and significance in individuals' lives (Sheridan, 1993b, p. 28). Sheridan argues that the collaborative nature of the project, and ways in which correspondents can and do shape the material, means that M-O is "much more likely to create knowledge that has a significance and meaning not only to the researcher but also to the life-story teller" or correspondent (1996, p. 6). Of course, solicited written accounts form only one aspect – and not the primary one, at that – of traditional ethnographic data sources: Highmore (2002, p. 145) suggests that if M-O is seen as ethnography (either in practice or as a product) then it must be as a radically refigured and expanded one.

With direct observation of funerals ruled out, the observations of those who *were* there are a valuable alternative: "participant knowledge on the part of people in a setting is an important resource for an ethnographer" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1992, p. 125). Accounts written in response to a request from a researcher do not offer the flexibility of an interview where either the researcher or the interviewee can ask questions in addition to those on a directive, and in so doing may clear up some misunderstanding or be able to explore unanticipated lines of thought (Arksey and Knight, 1999; Rubin and Rubin, 2005). Indeed, the very words used in written documents can present difficulties of understanding for a researcher unfamiliar with either a dialect or a culture's customs (Scott, 1990). If this occurs, attempts must be made through further research to understand not only the term but the whole context in which it has been used, and where understanding is uncertain, this must be made visible in the research report. However, the inflexibility of written accounts should not

mean that they are seen as debased oral ones (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1992, p. 165). On the contrary, they may reveal data that would be withheld in a face-to-face interview, offering insights into aspects of experience not usually spoken about. Indeed, correspondents do write that they are telling things to the Archive that they have not told to anyone else (Barton et al., 1993), and a small number of correspondents did make such confessions in their replies to the funerals directive (generally these were admissions of being unimpressed with the event for some reason which they felt it imprudent to mention to anyone else)[45]. Some correspondents wrote about opinions which they had kept to themselves at the funeral itself, though not kept secret afterwards. There were also data, discussed in Chapter 8 (p. 295), which I believe may not have been so readily offered in conversation. In addition, M-O was also able to access what would otherwise have been 'missing data' (Bernard and Ryan, 2010, p. 62) from individuals who decided against going to a funeral, an experience which may be harder to learn about through an interview study on people's experiences of going to funerals.

Having said that, the absence of face-to-face contact does remove from the researcher one means of assessing whether much is being left unsaid by a research participant (Harrison and McGhee, 2003, p. 30). Moreover, the sheer numbers of people corresponding with M-O means that the generation of accounts spanning a range of experiences and perspectives, viewed as an important aspect of many interview projects (Rubin and Rubin, 2005) is not only likely but almost inevitable. However, although Thomas (2002) claims that M-O provides naturalistic data which is as unaffected as possible by researcher presence, it is not in fact naturalistic: M-O is *not* an unobtrusive method drawing on writings which individuals produce during the normal course of their daily lives (Kellehear, 1993). Directives make specific requests, to which correspondents respond. The awareness that one is writing for an audience – an awareness which is present for many correspondents when they write – does put a 'gloss' on accounts (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1992, p. 160), and it may not always be obvious what that gloss looks like.

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[45] An example of this may be found on p. 189.

Further to the question of distortion is that of accuracy. In much qualitative research and particularly in life history research (which M-O can resemble), participants' stories draw on their memories (Roberts, 2002), and perhaps not particularly recent ones, nor ones which may be very strong – although Field (2000) found that memories from many years ago were recounted in graphic detail in M-O replies. In some replies to the funerals directive, correspondents were explicit when they could not remember details. However, even when people fully intend and believe themselves to be as complete and truthful as possible, "the representations one constructs of temporally or causally related sequences of events are not always veridical" (Trafimow and Wyer, 1993, p. 365) and can be revised in the light of new information or other recollections. As Kouritzin says, unless individuals are lying, then M-O data come from people who "tell the truth as they see it in the present tense" (2009, p. 24). M-O correspondents have more time and their own choice of space (Anderson et al., 2010; Thomas, 2002) than do interview or experiment participants to compose the fullest reply that they can, and many do reflect on and edit their response until they consider it a satisfactory statement. While some life historians (e.g. Roberts, 2002) view the opportunity to edit and self-censor as detracting from the truthfulness of research, I suggest that it need be seen as no more invalidating than drafts for an article in which ideas and their expressions and connections are modified, amended, cut and transformed into the best an individual can produce before ever they are offered to others to read. Thomas similarly argues that the absence of an interviewer, the privacy and intimacy of writing in a chosen time and place, and the relationship with the Archive, often developed over many years, combine to allow for "greater power to describe their thoughts in their own terms, to edit, think about, emphasize what they want to say" (Thomas, 2002, p. 40) which in turn leads to "particularly rich, intimate and reflective insights into the topic being discussed" (Thomas, 2002, p. 40). This is particularly advantageous to researchers studying topics which people often censor themselves about; Thomas (2002) suggests that others' responses to death is exactly such a topic. As will be discussed in Chapter 8, I believe that this directive did prompt some such writing.

Harrison and McGhee (2003) caution researchers to remember that writing is itself a cultural practice, and that correspondents may not only be concerned with 'telling the truth' but with using literary devices to create atmosphere, convey character and scene, and to build humour or pathos. The relationship that correspondents feel to the Archive may also influence both the content and style of the responses sent (Shaw, 1996b):

> "Writing for an imagined readership that you trust is the source of the deepest writing pleasure, because it allows the fullest test of your writing capacities, the freshest and most honest arguments, the least bluff, defence and ventriloquism, the most play, the least condescension" (Game and Metcalfe, 1996, p. 33).

Sheridan summarises all of these issues neatly:

> "[t]here is always the possibility that a contribution may be, consciously or unconsciously, a work of fiction; or it may be so riddled with self-censorship, or self-aggrandizement, or it may be so heavily structured by the perceived expectations of the Archive, that it bears very little relation to a real life. The same questions arise in the course of all life history work (indeed in all social research) and there are no entirely satisfactory solutions" (1993b, p. 37).

There is no way of validating the accuracy of the final accounts submitted to the Archive, but comparing responses to any one Directive, comparing responses from any one correspondent over time and comparing responses to the findings of other research, does result in a strong impression that "most people take their participation in Mass-Observation seriously and that they are mostly committed to the 'honourable' representation of their lives" (Sheridan, 1993b, p. 37) and that their reports may be taken as sincere representations of their own experience (Scott, 1990), even if their capacity to transmit 'objective' knowledge about the external world is not straightforward (Sheridan et al., 2000).

I do not view correspondents' accounts as "unmediated descriptions of events" (Sheridan et al., 2000, p. 124), but rather as representations of memories, perceptions and interpretations which cannot but be 'glossed', as Hammersley put it above. I take my epistemological position from the subtle realism of Hammersley (1992, 2010), the constuctivist realism of Cupchik (2001) and the work of Charmaz (1995). These authors stand in contrast with

others such as Silverman (2006) and Rapley (2004), who share the rejection of thoroughgoing realism (which views data as unmediated reproductions of events) but suggest that the only alternative is a thoroughgoing constructionism under which researchers' valid concerns can only be with the 'hows' rather than the 'whats' of qualitative data. Hammersley, Cupchik and and Charmaz all argue that we can combine a realist ontology – the assumption of "a social world (or worlds) that is reflected in the natural attitude of daily life and exists prior to and independent of either positivist or constructivist analysis" (Cupchik, 2001, p. 1), and which impinges on us and our participants, and is the origin of our impressions and claims about it (Hammersley, 1992) – with a constructivist epistemology – the recognition that reports about the world, whether research participants' or our own, are reconstructions of the world (Charmaz, 1995), representations which are inevitably located at a particular point of view (Hammersley, 1992). Hammersley summarises that this position

> "retains from naïve realism the idea that research investigates independent, knowable phenomena... Obversely, subtle realism shares with scepticism and relativism a recognition that all knowledge is based on assumptions and purposes and is a human construction" (1992, p. 52).

Applying this position to M-O data means that correspondents may be understood as writing about their worlds, but as constructing these accounts at various stages and in various ways: in their interpretation of what is asked by the directive, in their selection of what to reply with and what to leave out, and through the identities that they present to the reader that they imagine (Sheridan et al., 2000, pp. 122-4).

Adopting such an epistemological stance means that the questions of truth and misunderstanding discussed above do make sense and do matter. Indeed, Hammersley warns that when we rely entirely on others' accounts of things we did not (or, I would add, cannot) witness, we *must* be concerned with the truth of them and must judge it as best we can "both in terms of the likelihood of error and according to how the information relates to our other knowledge" (1992, pp. 53-4). There is little evidence that correspondents themselves care about consistency between or even within the replies that they send to the Archive (Sheridan, 1993b, p. 28), and there *are* judgements that

researchers have to make. The 'other knowledge' that Hammersley recommends we draw on may come from other sources of data (although these are not being generated by this project), from other replies to the same directive, from other literature, or from a researcher's everyday knowledge of a topic under study. This study used both data triangulation and methodological triangulation (Denzin, 1970). Data triangulation refers to the need for data to be generated "at a variety of times, in different locations and from a range of persons" (Macdonald, 2001, p. 208) so that more than one perspective is represented to the researcher. M-O provides a number of perspectives on the same general phenomenon, although at the level of each individual reply no triangulation was possible. Methodological triangulation is the practice of comparing one form of data with another. Hammersley and Atkinson (1992) note that observation is a useful complement to the accounts given by research participants. Observation is able to show that solicited accounts are misleading or naïve, while accounts can be used to illuminate observation. I was not able to make contemporaneous use of observation, but my admittedly non-sociological scrutiny of many hundreds of funerals (see the discussion of 'Insider Research', below) does provide me with an extra 'check' that would otherwise be unavailable to me.

A second implication of this epistemological stance is the acknowledgement that the researcher also constructs the final research product, again at various stages and in various ways. Since this cannot be avoided, it must be made visible (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1992). In this project this means highlighting my influence in the construction of the directive (such as the aspects of funerals asked about and not asked about, the wording used to ask), in the analysis of data (such as decisions about which data to include in analysis and the methods used to analyse it) and in the presentation of the final thesis (such as the interpretation of the data and its implications for academic understanding, as well as selection of quotes from correspondents' replies). This chapter should make visible my influence over the directive; my influence over analysis and the presentation of the thesis should be made visible both in this chapter an in those that follow.

There remain two criticisms specifically of M-O which recur in the literature. The first objection concerns representativeness, and the charge is that its self-selected panel, referred to by Thomas as already "a pretty special bunch" (2002, p. 38) for wanting to be correspondents, does not reflect the composition of the British population. An ESRC rapporteur commented of the project in 1994 that M-O materials come from correspondents who "are not demonstrably representative of society at large, and hence cannot really support quantitative or graphical summaries which make any claims beyond the documentation of the sample" (anonymous ESRC rapporteur, cited in Sheridan, 1996, p. 1). Finch (1986) has noted that the early incarnation of the project "was constantly vulnerable to criticism informed by a view of quantitative and survey work as the standard against which all research should be measured" (p. 99), but it does seem surprising that the contemporary project should, as recently as the 1990s, be criticised for, in essence, not being quantitative. After all, C. Robson (2002, first published 1993) writes that "[i]t is now considered respectable and acceptable in virtually all areas of social research... to use designs based largely or exclusively on methods generating qualitative data" (p. 163). Furthermore, as Thomas (2002) points out, the surveys and polls which this kind of criticism of M-O seems to consider superior are vulnerable to persistent methodological problems of their own, and even where we can have a degree of confidence in their validity, reliability and generalisability[46], what we learn from them can nonetheless be limited. To use Thomas' example, learning the proportion of people who described themselves as 'very upset' following the death of Princess Diana tells us frustratingly little about the nature of that feeling or its causes. (It is also a figure which is likely to be strongly affected by social desirability bias, although not all polls and surveys are quite as likely to suffer to the degree that those on that topic will have done.)

Sheridan (1996) attributes complaints about representativeness to confusion caused by the project's size, although it seems likely that its methods also contribute, since in its appearance and its standardisation between

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[46] As Ritchie and Lewis note (2003, pp. 270-6) these three terms have their origin in epistemological assumptions which are different from those on which qualitative research usually rests. They suggest 'well-groundedness', 'sustainability' and 'confirmability' as alternatives; there are many other proposals for replacement terms and concepts (see Denzin, 1970; Hammersley, 1992; Seale and Silverman, 1997; Silverman, 2006, for further discussions).

correspondents the directive "is like a survey questionnaire or experimental prompt, and what the Mass-Observation correspondents write is like an answer to a survey question or a response to an experimental condition" (Sheridan et al., 2000, p. 124).

Even where statistical generalisation is not an aim, issues of representativeness are nonetheless important. All scholars have to take account of the provenance of their data and its partiality, both in the sense of bias and in the sense of being an inevitably incomplete picture – although not all disciplines consider such partiality such a threat to valid research: both Sheridan (1993b) and Thomas (2002) note that historians deal with it as a matter of course, while many qualitative social scientists will face similar issues. Shaw (1996a) argues that correspondents' unrepresentativeness is precisely what is valuable about M-O data, since these are individuals who are unusually willing and able to offer insight into their everyday and inner worlds. Bloome et al. (1993, pp. 17-8) suggest three other ways in which correspondents' material *can* be understood to be representative. First, the panel does represent some segment of the population, even if it is difficult to determine what segment that is. So, they argue, we can be reasonably sure that correspondents' opinions and feelings do represent those of large numbers of people, even if we cannot be sure who those people are or quite how large their numbers are. Thomas (2002) goes further, arguing that

> "[t]hat the archive does not conform to a statistical standard does not mean that it is of no use, or only of secondary use to the polls, in making broader generalizations... if the same phrases, the same comments, the same experiences, crop up repeatedly in this and other sources then we can assume with some certainty, if not precise statistical accuracy, that these views are representative of wider attitudes" (p. 37).

Second, correspondents often claim to write on behalf of a group, such as working class people or teachers, and when they do so they are "often careful to separate out the personal views from the perspective of the group they are representing" (Bloome et al., 1993, p. 17). Anticipating the objection that conceiving of correspondents as representatives of groups only postpones the question of how a group's views come to be represented to and by any one member, Bloome et al. clarify that again they do not have statistical

representation in mind but rather a 're-presenting' of a group's views, position or experience as interpreted by the correspondent. The group being represented may vary, and is often identified by the correspondent who claims themselves as writing as a member of the working class, as a gay man, as a mother, as an ordinary person: "sensible, regular, decent people in opposition to the intellectual or political elite" (Barton et al., 1993, p. 20).

Third, and perhaps most useful, "[r]ather than conceiving of representation in terms of the individual, it is the slices of life that are viewed as representations of everyday life" (Bloome et al., 1993, p. 17). Barton et al. offer an alternative formulation: the flaw in the standard conceptualisation is that "the quality of representativeness lies not in what they say, but in who they are (as defined by socio-economic characteristics which permit large scale generalisations about the whole population)" (Barton et al., 1993, p. 18). An anthropologist's representations of a community's everyday life are not disqualified because the anthropologist is not a representative individual of the community, and neither need M-O correspondents be statistically representative of their community in order for their material to be valuable.

This leads to the second persistent criticism of M-O. An anthropologist is trained in observation and reporting in a way "that helps them produce valid descriptions and narratives" (Bloome et al., 1993, p. 18). By contrast, M-O correspondents are untrained, a trait which rouses critics' suspicion about correspondents' ability accurately or scientifically to represent others: "[f]rom this perspective the real 'representative' problem is not that [M-O's] volunteers are not ordinary enough, but that they are too ordinary" (Thomas, 2002, p. 39). For the purposes of this thesis, the charge that M-O correspondents are not good informants about others is not too damaging a one, since the thesis is concerned mainly, if not exclusively, with correspondents' accounts of their own activity and experience.

Finally, it is important to reflect on self-selection in this context. It is very common in social research – qualitative and quantitative – that potential participants decide whether or not to take part at the same time that they are informed about the topic of the research and what will be asked of them. Indeed, in qualitative studies individuals are often sought exactly on the basis of

their relevant experience and knowledge (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). I believe it is to the benefit of this project that correspondents were not participants recruited on the basis of having been to a funeral. My reasoning for this is that when I mention my research topic to people I meet, it is not unusual for people to offer to tell me the story of a wonderful funeral they have been to, often the funeral of a parent, or one that has included some unusual aspect (as also found by Walter, 1990). For this project, I believe that this kind of participant self-selection on the basis of topic would have resulted in a stronger bias than the self-selection of M-O correspondents. My hope was that by asking about the most recent funeral attended, M-O data would also include many stories of not particularly 'special' funerals, thus increasing the range of meanings of funerals to mourners that I could analyse. As the discussion below will show, I believe that this aim was satisfied. Moreover, working with correspondents who were not selected on the basis that they had been to a funeral increased the possibility of being able to study accounts of absences (Rappert, 2010), that is, people who decided on a particular occasion not to go.

For all these reasons, this thesis cannot and does not claim empirical generalisability (Hammersley, 1992), although it does claim a degree of generalisation within the dataset (Mason, 1996). That is to say, I do not claim that the thesis extends to the experiences of an identified population beyond M-O correspondents, but I do claim that it fairly represents their generalised material. I also aim for *theoretical* generalisability (Hammersley, 1992) – although not theoretical generalisation. That is to say, empirical data in the thesis are used to contribute to and extend theoretical discussions in the literature (Richards, 2009, p. 138), both of funerals and of wider social life. As Ritchie and Lewis (2003, p. 267) argue, "the relevance of a new or refined theory needs to be established by further empirical research". Nonetheless, this thesis does aim to fulfil Schlechty and Noblit's (1982; see also Patton, 2002, p. 480) three criteria for valuable research contributions. It aims to make the obvious obvious, by confirming some things that were known from the literature or from 'common knowledge'. It aims to make the obvious dubious, by challenging some of these accepted truths, and it aims to make the hidden obvious, by presenting what was not known before this study was undertaken.

Insider Research

I estimate that I have attended something in the region of 1800-2000 funerals. I did not attend these as a mourner but as a funeral director, my occupation for around seven years before returning to university to study for my master's degree. Thus, I have a particular perspective on funerals that most other people do not. I also have a particular perspective that most academics do not (scrutiny of the literature and discussion with my supervisors reveals two other funeral directors in the UK who have completed a PhD in the past 20 years). I have attended funerals as a mourner, although very few – and the last time that I did, it was unavoidably clear how strongly my impressions of a funeral were influenced by my 'backstage' knowledge of how it had been produced.

My 'insiderness' is not that which is usually addressed in the methodological literature. Usually, issues about insiderness are connected with membership of a more or less clearly boundaried group, as here in Merton's formulation from his seminal discussion: "insiders are members of specified groups or collectivities or social statuses; outsiders are the nonmembers" (Merton, 1972, p. 21). Similarly, Griffith suggests that an insider is a researcher whose biography "gives her a lived familiarity with the group being researched". Other conceptualisations of insiderness allow for the fact that "we are all multiple insiders and outsiders" (Deutsch, 1981, p. 102) at different times and under different descriptions. It is assumed that insiders have some special access to knowledge of the group under study, either through shared experience or through special access to informants – and indeed, this is often the case (Chavez, 2008; de Andrade, 2000; Griffith, 1998; Labaree, 2002), although group membership does not automatically confer group acceptance on a researcher (Chavez, 2008; de Andrade, 2000).

While technically the people I am studying in this thesis form a group defined by boundaries, it is not a group with its own culture by which people identify themselves in everyday life. My insiderness is epistemological, not cultural, and my familiarity is with a 'professional' understanding of the funeral. In contrast, what this thesis seeks to understand is the 'ordinary' understanding. I suggest that some of the advantages and disadvantages associated with insider research are salient here.

Advantages include knowledge of practical happenings in the field (Chavez, 2008, p. 479; Labaree, 2006, p. 132) which helped me to design the directive: there were particular activities in mind which I wanted to ask about. I had anticipated that this familiarity would also be an advantage in identifying unusual or special occurrences in the data (Chavez, 2008, p. 479), although in the event, there were not many of these beyond particularly long or short ceremonies.

While some of this may make for a "nuanced perspective for interpretation" of mourners' accounts of their funeral experiences (Chavez, 2008, p. 479), there are downsides of being an insider researcher (Chavez, 2008). Two of these are particularly relevant to the epistemological insider. First is the potential for difficulty in recognising patterns in the data which may be clearer to those not prejudiced by their experience. The risk was that I would be unable to make the familiar strange. Secondly, "researchers need to be aware of the partialness of their insider knowledge and to be wary of assuming that their views are more widespread or representative than is the case" (John Hockey, 1993, p. 199). Without this awareness – and even with it – there was the danger of selective reporting: bias in selecting which themes and experiences to highlight in the construction of a thesis. Funeral directors are (I was) used to seeing themselves (myself) as being the lynchpin of a funeral and the expert on what can, should and does happen, and I was concerned that the absorption of others' points of view – especially if those others, as I have argued in Chapters 3 and 4, have little awareness of or interest in the funeral director – may be more challenging as a result.

I and the project had three safeguards against these two risks: and they are safeguards which were needed, as will be seen. All three were about external scrutiny. The first, also the most immediate and the most effective, was supervision. A recurring criticism from my supervisors early on in my PhD was that I was 'thinking with my funeral director's hat on'. It was not only in discussion that I was liable to do this, but whole sections of writing (especially descriptive writing about contemporary funerals) revealed how easily and unknowingly I assumed the position of a funeral director. While both of my supervisors have some familiarity with funeral directors and their work, their

understandings of funerals are from the point of view of an 'ordinary person' or a sociologist, rather than a funeral director. While it was disheartening to have it pointed out to me that my funeral director's hat had slipped over my sociologist's eyes again, that it did get pointed out reassures me that supervision provided one guard against 'going native' (Gold, 1958). Encouragingly, this criticism arose less and less over the course of the PhD.

Secondly, transparency in the reported research process, particularly regarding procedures followed for analysis (Mason, 1996, pp. 148-51; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, pp. 274-5), opens my work and the assumptions contained within it to wider scrutiny. Finally, the data that this thesis draws on remain available to public inspection and re-analysis. Being less immediate than supervision, it may seem that the second and third 'safeguards' will have been of little effect during the production of the thesis. However, being open to inspection in this way in fact acted as a motivation to scrutinise myself to the best of my ability throughout the research process.

Ethics and Mass-Observation

In the 1990s, Harrison and Lyon (1993) noted that more than half of the BSA's ethical statement concerned relationships, and the same is still true: both in the BSA's current guidelines (2002) and in the literature on (especially qualitative) research ethics (e.g. Ellis, 2007; Israel and Hay, 2006; Rosenblatt, 1995), relationships with research participants, gatekeepers, sponsors and funders are – rightly – given much consideration.

As already discussed, M-O correspondents' direct relationships are with the Archive staff, particularly the Director, and as shown above, the Director and staff make every effort to ensure that these relationships are carefully protected. This extends to the wording of directives, through which relationships with the correspondents is maintained (Harrison and McGhee, 2003, p. 27). Sheridan explained to me that when wording a directive "We and us.... is correct. Strictly speaking the directive is authored by me as the director, hence my prerogative to edit and approve final version. I suspect (but can't prove) that it promotes continuity and the existing long term relationship between the writers and the MOP" (Sheridan, 2010b, personal communication). These relationships are

bounded by further ethical considerations, formalised in the Archive's procedures. These include issues of informed consent, confidentiality, privacy, and ownership of data.

Correspondents are not directly approached but put themselves forward, often following advertising in the press, to be part of the project. Consent can be assumed from their volunteering, but in order for this consent to be informed,

> "researchers need to provide potential participants with information about the purpose, methods, demands, risks, inconveniences, discomforts and possible outcomes of research, including whether and how results might be disseminated" (Israel and Hay, 2006, p. 61).

The M-O Project provides this information to people in a number of ways. Initial guidance when people join the Project is more detailed than press releases or word of mouth, and covers the purposes and methods explicitly. The demands and risks will vary with each topic and each correspondent, but it is made clear in every mailout that people may write as little or as much as they feel able to.

Correspondents are fully informed about the public nature of the Archive, and that it is intended that it should be used for published research as well as for personal interest, both directly after replies are received and in the future. In line with the Project's normal practice a cover letter was sent with the funeral directive which told correspondents that the theme had been suggested by "Tara Bailey, a postgraduate student at Bath University. Tara trained as a funeral director before becoming a student and so has both a professional and an academic interest in your replies" (Sheridan, 2010a).

To ensure confidentiality, correspondents are issued with a M-O number when they join, and their replies include only this number and some basic personal details: their age, sex, relationship status, nearest town, and occupation or former occupation (Sheridan, 1993a, p. 17). Correspondents are frequently reminded not to identify themselves or others, and replies are screened for revealing or identifying data by Archive staff before being catalogued. Revealing material is embargoed by Archive staff, usually for 30 years after receipt, although this is extendable. Material may be embargoed automatically (as in the case of the written 'self-portraits' that new correspondents provide when they join), at the discretion of staff (in the case of revealing material), or at the request of correspondents themselves. This

practice goes toward protecting not only correspondents' and others' anonymity, but also their privacy: new correspondents are asked to consider and inform the Archive of their wishes should near relatives ask to see their material after death. Without specific permission, "we have to assume that material can never be made available under that person's name" (Sheridan, 1993a, p. 17)[47]. At the beginning of their participation in the project, correspondents are asked to agree to share copyright with the Archive. Permission from the Archive must be granted before quotations from the collection may be used outside of academic publications, and permission is not given unless the Archive does have the legal right to give it.

Many correspondents used the first names of other people in their replies to the funerals directive. Where these are common names I have not altered them when quoting; I abbreviated uncommon names to initials without indicating in the quote that I had done so. In some places I have quoted selectively in order not to include revealing names, places or relationships between named people. I have identified correspondents in the empirical chapters by their M-O number, and, of the demographic information that they provide, have included age[48] and sex. This follows conventions of reporting M-O material (e.g. Bhatti and Church, 2001; Field, 2000; Jerrome, 1996; Kramer, 2011; Mcnicol, 2004; Smart, 2011; Thomas, 2002). Since I do not, though, offer an analysis by age or sex, these are reported on the assumption rather than the conviction that they provide useful, rather than prejudicial, information to the reader.

The Archive's formal systems, as well as the personal oversight of the Director, make good provision for correspondents' informed consent, confidentiality and privacy, and for ownership over their material. As with so much of M-O, correspondents are themselves very aware of ethical issues surrounding the possible uses and abuses of their material (Sheridan, 1996, p. 14) and their awareness has contributed to the formalisation of ethical procedures at the Archive. However, there were still responsibilities that I had to take. In particular, responsibilities for distress to correspondents and others, and issues affecting me as a researcher.

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[47] This is a departure from early M-O practice. For a discussion of ethics in 1930s M-O, see Finch (1986).
[48] Some correspondents provided their year of birth rather than an age.

Research into death-related topics is of course a sensitive area, and responding to this directive clearly had the potential to "be emotionally taxing on those taking part in the research" (Dickson-Swift et al., 2008, p. 3). Without the direct contact of interviews, I had to rely on correspondents taking care of their own distress should it arise. Field (2000) reports that in his M-O research on experiences of bereavement some correspondents replied that they found the topic distressing and were unable to respond. Sheridan states that in her experience, "if they find [the subject matter] challenging or difficult they will simply say" (Sheridan (1999), cited as personal communication in Field, 2000, p. 280), and that this seems to be a more common response than not responding at all, since absolute response rates do not vary much by topic (although the length of response varies greatly). This indicates that at least some correspondents do feel able to refuse to respond, although it tells us nothing about whether some correspondents feel unable. Having said that, correspondents are not required to respond immediately or at all, since nonresponse to a single directive or theme within a directive does not jeopardise their continued inclusion on the panel. This suggests that correspondents have as much opportunity as a writing project can provide[49], to give careful consideration to whether or not they will respond. In the funerals directive, a small number (two or three) replied to say that the topic was too painful for them to say any more about. I am glad that they felt able to excuse themselves from fully participating, but I regret that I occasioned that pain.

Responding, even when it does incur some distress, is not necessarily experienced as harmful (Dickson-Swift et al., 2008; Field, 2000; Thomas, 2002). Walter (1990) and more recently Holloway et al. (2010) found that not only did most people gladly agree when asked to take part in research on funerals, but many commented on the value of the opportunity to be heard on a topic which is not always welcome in everyday conversation (Dickson-Swift et al., 2008, p. 29). In addition, some of the people that Walter (1990) talked to saw the publication of their loved one's funeral as a further tribute to the deceased

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[49] A writing project does differ from an interview project, in that correspondents can see all the questions they will be asked before they decide whether to respond, and the researcher cannot see the effect that their questions have on participants. See Rosenblatt (1995) for an excellent discussion of qualitative interviewing on the topic of death.

person. In reply to the funerals directive, some correspondents remarked that writing was painful but did still write; one or two called it 'cathartic' or "a kind of therapy" (M3055, female, 36).

Whereas Walter and Holloway et al. were studying those who had been closely involved with arranging the funerals, this research seeks the experiences of those who have attended funerals arranged by others. While correspondents were asked not to include any identifying details of scenes they may describe, there remains the possibility that the scenes themselves could be recognisable to those who were present at them, and a further possibility that correspondents' comments on those scenes may be experienced as distressing. There is precedent for topics being covered where correspondents' words will refer to other people, including neighbours and family members. For example, previous directives have asked about marital affairs (Spring 1994), 'the ups and downs of friendship' (Winter 2008) and the public mourning after Princess Diana's death (Summer 1997, special directive). My experience as a funeral director suggested that those aspects of funerals which are unusual enough to be identifiable to those present would also be noticeable to Archive staff during the screening process and I expected that these would be censored. Nonetheless, I did read about some 'recognisable' funerals and people; the likelihood of these data being seen by those concerned is unknown. The responsibility for the material that is Archived, however, is shared between correspondents, staff, and me. Responsibility for material cited in the thesis is mine alone.

Finally, there were issues concerning my own wellbeing. One risk for those researching emotionally intense topics is that of desensitisation (Dickson-Swift et al., 2008, p. 48), the dulling or loss of automatic emotional responses to others' distress. Desensitisation was the principal reason for my leaving funeral directing: I began to experience emotional exhaustion in place of compassion for people's grief during arrangement interviews. The literature views desensitisation not only as a risk factor for eventual burnout but also as damage to the researcher in its own right, and I would agree: it is a dehumanising experience, and caused me worry about how heartless I had become and whether I would ever again care about others. Indeed, it was a relief to find,

when I became a student again, that reading about others' grief could still make me cry. Although Harrison and McGhee (2003, p. 33) report that reading sensitive M-O material can be emotionally draining, the risk of desensitisation in this project seemed to me to be relatively low for two reasons. First, I was asking about funerals rather than grief itself, although the two are intertwined. Second, I was working with documents rather than people, and could both pay close attention to and act to protect my emotional wellbeing at all times. In fact I found few replies affecting, and only two brought me to tears – one whose account vividly evoked the awful maw of grief, the other written by a friend who had volunteered their M-O number to me[50]. More problematic, had I been face to face with correspondents, would have been the accounts and opinions that I found objectionable. But of course, my own reactions, whether of discomfort or simply of tiredness, did not need to be 'managed' (Hochschild, 1983) or made presentable as they would in an interview situation. And, as I noted to myself, if in need of an 'emotional break' it is easier to turn away from a laptop than it is from a client or an interviewee.

The second consideration concerned my position as a funeral director. Mistakes do happen, and there are some funerals that I have been responsible for that did not go well. The chance that a correspondent would refer to any of these was very small. I had, though, asked people to describe the worst funerals they have been to, and it seemed reasonable to think that criticisms of funeral directors, whether explicit or identifiable by me, would feature. Funeral directors in my experience generally see evaluation of the funeral as being nobody's business but the paying client's, and I had not been invulnerable to this attitude. Inviting criticism from people I had been trained to think of as insignificant, and reading the effects that I may have had on people of which I was unaware at the time, carried the potential to make me feel vulnerable – to bring on an 'ethical hangover' of guilt (Dickson-Swift et al., 2008). Since funeral directors were barely mentioned in the replies this effect did not come to pass. I write about it, though, because considering my position as a funeral director, and correspondents' position as mourners whose experiences I had as a 'professional' ignored or even dismissed, did have a significant effect on my

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[50] This friend learned about and joined the M-O Project as a direct result of hearing about my PhD research.

relationship to the data. I was very conscious that each of these correspondents had the capacity to teach me something I could not otherwise have learned, and approached the replies with a regard and respect for the correspondents and their experiences that, had I not realised my potential to be defensive about criticism, I think I would have lacked.

Finally, there are issues of relational ethics (Ellis, 2007). Intriguingly, for all her discussion of M-O relationships, Sheridan (1993a, 1993b, 2005; Sheridan et al., 2000), says nothing about her own experiences and feelings towards correspondents. Without experience of the material, I would have thought that I would have no feeling of connection to M-O correspondents at all. They are anonymous and have no presence for me beyond the words which are my data. But this was not the case: each reply is now for me identical with a person, no matter that I do not know who it is. In fact, I have come to look at acquaintances and people on the street with new eyes, knowing that they could be a correspondent and a much thanked contributor to my research.

This was reassuring to me. In previous research projects (Bailey, 2009, 2010) I have felt responsible for representing my participants with integrity, and I had wondered whether some of the emotional commitment to that was the result of having met these people and heard their stories in person. However, once I knew that I would use M-O for this study, reading M-O material which was not even connected to my own research confirmed that I felt the same obligations of fairness to correspondents who would reply to the directive I designed, as I had for interviewees with whom I had shared tea. Like Harrison and McGhee (2003) I found that reading the responses to 'my' directive only strengthened this feeling of connection, gratitude and fondness for correspondents.

As Woodthorpe (2009) has discussed, emotionality like this in a research encounter should not automatically be seen as detracting from the professionality of the research project. Rather, a researcher's emotional response can be seen as an empistemological tool, and should not only "remain at the forefront of the researcher's mind as they pursue their research" (Woodthorpe, 2009, pp. 82-3) but can legitimately be made visible in the research product too. Shaw (1996a, 1996b) goes so far as to argue that

researchers' emotional responses to M-O material should be their main interpretive frame. However, I agree with Harrison and McGhee (2003) that the richness of the data, and the accounts of *others'* experiences which they contain, would be lost if my own responses comprised anything more than a single component of the analytical process.

The Funerals Directive

Over the summer of 2010 my first supervisor and I discussed the relative merits of using M-O in place of or in addition to the other research methods which I had had in mind, and agreed that if it would be possible to use M-O it would offer rich and varied data. In our initial correspondence, Dorothy Sheridan, Director of the M-O Project, was enthusiastic about a directive on funerals, which were, after all, intended to be one of the topics for research in the original project in the 1930s (Sheridan et al., 2000, p. 25) but have not, until now, been studied in this way.

External researchers collaborate with, rather than commission from, the Project, and such collaboration is not unusual (Sheridan, 2005, p. 148). Directives are sent only two or three times a year, and all researchers have to fit into the Project's timetable. At the time that I began to investigate using M-O I was warned that the earliest my directive could be sent would be January 2011, with data being ready for analysis that June. It was agreed that I would meet with Archive staff in September 2010 in order to discuss the directive's purpose and understand more of the process of collaborating; at this meeting I learned that a place had arisen ahead of me in the queue, and I was asked to write a directive ready for issue in two weeks' time.

In those two weeks, eight successive drafts of the directive were written by me, with comments, modifications and suggestions from Dorothy, my supervisors and Archive staff. It certainly was the "collaborative and iterative process" that Dorothy had said it would be (Sheridan, 2010b, personal communication). As with a research interview, my research questions had to be 'translated' into questions that would make sense to those responding to them.

The research questions in this thesis are: (1) What are mourners' experiences of funerals in contemporary Britain? (2) When mourners'

perspectives are taken into account, what are the implications for social scientific theories of the funeral? These questions are broad and needed to be broken down into more specific areas for the directive. The areas that I addressed with the directive were:

- Who are mourners? (Subquestions: who goes to funerals, and to whose funerals do they go? Whose funerals do they <u>not</u> go to? Who is considered to have the most authority, and what kind of authority do they have? How is 'family' enacted, and how do non-family members contribute? What are the 'effects' of being 'family'/non-family/FD's client/...? Is *communitas* a feature of funerals?)

- What do mourners do at funerals, and why? (Subquestions: How do people decide whether to go/where to sit/whether to send flowers/donate/go to the tea? How/do they participate? What sorts of emotions do mourners report having at funerals? How/are these experienced? e.g. a relief to express them, shame at feeling or expressing them...)

- How do mourners experience the funeral? (Subquestions: What constitutes 'the funeral' for mourners? – ceremony only, tea as well, procession to venue, visits to/from family...? How is personalisation interpreted by those who didn't do it? Do non-client mourners do personalising? What might a good funeral be?)

To design the directive these questions needed to be converted into M-O's 'house style', that is, "to use a colloquial style, to avoid 'closed' questions, to stimulate and probe the writers, and to be as inclusive as possible so that everyone feels they have something to contribute on a subject" (Sheridan et al., 2000, p. 69). This presented a number of challenges. On the one hand, Dorothy had suggested that "you don't have to use full sentences, just add a few nouns with question marks as prompts" (Sheridan, 2010b, personal communication), but having seen what I wanted to address, neither she nor I could find a way to undo the questioning style that I had originally used: "it's good to try to avoid too many direct questions (and question marks). However I tried to reduce them unsuccessfully so have altered spacing a bit and left them in. I think it's OK"

(Sheridan, 2010b, personal communication). In the cover letter to the directive, correspondents were reminded not to feel constrained by the form of the questions:

> As you all know, the Mass Observation Project specialises in gathering direct life story material rather than mimicking an opinion poll or a traditional survey so if you find that the way we have phrased the questions doesn't quite apply to you but you can see what we are getting at, then it's up to you to adapt and re-work them. We really appreciate those of you who tackle the directives with candour and imagination. Of course there will be days when you will only have time to give a short answer and it's true that we have never given you a word minimum or maximum. Remember that this is your opportunity to record your views and experiences and to be taken seriously by the researchers who will be reading our replies for many years to come. (Sheridan, 2010a).

In asking correspondents to describe the most recent funeral they have attended, as well as the 'best' and the 'worst', I hoped to generate data about the 'everyday' experience of being a mourner. As I mentioned above, it is common for people to want to tell the story of a funeral that is particularly memorable or special to them, and I hoped to extend the range of types of funeral experience that I would hear about. At the same time, I was mindful that correspondents may reply how they see fit (as indeed they have been encouraged to), and that I needed to be willing for the research topic to shift in response to the data (Thomas, 2002, p. 43). The final directive can be seen in the appendices to this thesis (Appendix A).

Established academics are charged a commissioning fee to contribute to the costs of producing directives and maintaining the Archive. While this fee is often waived for postgraduate researchers, I was encouraged to make what financial contribution I was able. Donations to the project were sought from a large number of sources; in the interests of transparency, donors are identified in the appendices (Appendix C). Donations were sent directly to the Archive.

It was not until after the directive had been issued that I read Harrison and McGhee's (2003) account of M-O collaboration, and their reflections on the effects of their themes being placed second in the directive, as mine was. Both of these authors (who did not jointly work on a directive; rather, each

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collaborated on one separately from the other) suspect that 'their' topic was given less attention by correspondents because of its 'secondary' position. Additionally, both of these themes could be considered 'sensitive' topics ('Having an Affair' (Spring 1998) and 'Gays and Lesbians in the Family' (Autumn 2000)), and some correspondents explicitly replied that they were unable or unwilling to write about them (Harrison and McGhee, 2003). Another potential factor affecting responses is the other theme(s) with which the collaborative topic is placed: the topic of marital affairs was placed after the topic of gardening, and received fewer replies. Whether this was because the topics were so different, because M-O correspondents are more interested in gardening than in affairs, or because gardening was given 'pole position' in the directive is unknown (Harrison and McGhee, 2003).

The theme of funerals was also placed second. I do not intend to try to discover whether this had an effect on the number or length of responses, but I acknowledge it as a possibility. The first theme on the same directive was 'Childhood Illnesses', which may be thought to be less incongruous a match than gardening and marital affairs. My experience also differs from Harrison's and McGhee's in that while the first part of each of 'their' directives was written by Dorothy and looked visibly different from the collaborators' sections, the first part of 'my' directive was also a collaboration and does not differ in appearance. Both I and the other collaborating researcher are named on the cover letter, and identified as researchers from universities.

Replies to the Funerals Directive

As of March 2012, the Archive had received 241 replies to the directive, a more or less 'normal' response rate. 85 of these were from men, 150 from women. 6 correspondents did not indicate their sex. A table of correspondents and their replies is provided in the appendices (Appendix B).

Most funerals written about had taken place within the past 2-4 years, with some correspondents writing immediately after one. Some, but not many correspondents specified where in the country the funeral had taken place. The funerals described were all Christian (including Anglican, Roman Catholic, Quaker and Methodist) or non-religious (including Humanist). It is important to

pay attention to what is absent from data as well as what is present (Bernard and Ryan, 2010, p. 62). Thus we should note that religions other than Christianity were not represented in the funerals described, although one or two correspondents were Pagans. Only one 'green' funeral (with a wicker coffin and held in a natural burial ground) featured. Funerals with no attendees were of course not described, but we should not forget that they occur (Prior, 1989, pp. 172-3).

My early response to the replies was one of surprise at how 'obediently' correspondents had followed the form of the directive. Some who had word processed the directive cut and pasted the questions (including the directive's formatting) into their replies, interspersing the questions with 'the answers'. Many were not quite so formal about it, but the sequence of information in a large number of replies clearly showed that these were written by following the directive. That said, while nearly every correspondent gave details of the most recent funeral they had been to, not all referred to the best or worst that they had attended and some described one but not the other. A number of correspondents rebuked me (or whoever they perceived to be the directive's author) for asking about 'best' and 'worst' funerals, with comments such as "To give a funeral an entertainment rating I find distasteful so refuse to demean with any other answer" (A4127, male, 48).

With one notable exception (noted in Chapter 8), in general correspondents did not supply much information on matters extra to those enquired about. A few ignored the questions completely and wrote about other aspects of the topic such as state funerals, how funerals have changed over time, and how to arrange a funeral. One or two replies appeared not to be about funerals at all, either because they detailed a death or the experience of grief, or because they wrote about another subject entirely. One correspondent sent a hand-drawn cartoon; one or two wrote their replies as short stories (with introductions explaining that that was what they were). Another correspondent sent apologies that funerals was not an interesting enough topic to engage him in writing a response to the directive.

Many was the time during analysis that I wondered what would have happened had I simply asked correspondents to describe in as much detail as

they could their most recent experience of going to a funeral. However, given Sheridan's (1993b) warning that short questions may lead to short replies, and the surprisingly short length of replies actually received in response to the much more verbose directive that I did send, I believe such a question would be more suitable to an interview study where follow-up questions can be asked (Rubin and Rubin, 2005).

In the replies to this directive, then, Sheridan's claim that correspondents "tell us *what they want to have documented*, not what we think should be documented" (2002, p. 73, emphasis in original), was not entirely borne out. When correspondents did recount funerals in detail, the directive very much shaped their replies. This has implications for the thesis in that the findings are likely to represent my own concerns more strongly than those of the correspondents who were mourners. This brings the advantage that the project's research questions do indeed get addressed, but carries with it the disadvantage that the research has not been as inductive as originally I had envisaged and hoped for. Given that the overall research question asks simply what mourners' experiences of funerals are, this does suggest that more participant-led methods might have resulted (and could still, in future research) in different themes and observations. My experience of funerals (discussed below), as well as familiarity with the funerals literature, leads me to feel confident that the directive attended to many key aspects of funerals, such as clothing, donations and going to the tea afterwards, as well as relationships and conversation. However, there were key issues from the literature which I failed to address, including the body/coffin, mode of disposal (i.e. cremation or burial) and what it was that correspondents took time away from in order to attend. A good number of correspondents did refer to, for example, the coffin and the mode of disposal, and this is discussed in the chapters that follow. Few mentioned what they would have been doing had they not been at the funeral, and I am unable to say whether this is because such matters are not a significant part of mourners' experiences of going to funerals, or because the directive did not ask.

With analysis complete and the thesis written, I have one major regret about the directive's wording. I neither asked correspondents what was said at

the funeral nor did I ask for their responses or reflections on what was said. I asked who spoke, and I asked what correspondents remembered of what happened. Quite a few did address the funeral's words (though few said what those were), but given that Davies' (2002) work on 'words against death' became central both to analysis and to the overall thesis, I wish I had sought more detailed data on those words and mourners' perspectives on them.

Not all of the questions on the directive were intended to inform this PhD. The question for those who had never been to a funeral was for the purposes of inclusivity (and worked, since one who replied was in this category). The question asking who or what funerals were for was not intended for analysis because I wanted to base my research as far as possible on experiences rather than opinions or speculations. That question, and those that followed it which asked about correspondents' ideas about their own funeral, were asked because they cover the topics which, in my experience, 'ordinary people' talk about most readily when they talk about the topic of funerals (in addition to the topics already covered in the directive). They were included so that correspondents who had views on those matters would be invited to share them. They were also asked out of a sense of responsibility to other researchers who may come to use these data as a resource for their own work, and who would appreciate the addressing of issues beyond just my research questions. Again, there are topics which I regret not addressing when I had the chance, particularly questions which would have captured something of the historical context of the directive. I could have taken advantage of the seniority of correspondents to ask about changes in funeral practice over their lifetime (some did write about that), and I could have asked about recent and potential changes, such as 'green' funerals, or potential future means of disposal such as promession and resomation[51].

Thus, what are presented as mourners' experiences are strongly mediated through my own concerns as they stood at the time of the directive, with some of mourners' own concerns being volunteered by correspondents

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[51] 'Green' funerals may mean different things to different people, but is likely to include coffins made from cardboard, willow and wool, rural venues for funeral ceremonies, and natural burial grounds (Davies and Rumble, 2012). Promession is the 'freeze-drying' of the dead body prior to shattering into powder (2006). Resomation uses heat and chemicals to dissolve the body into liquid and bone (Li et al., 2010).

themselves, and a lot of uncertainty about what was left unreported and why. Nevertheless, analysis resulted in a number of surprising findings, including a number of themes or experiences which I had never read of or heard about. These will be highlighted in the empirical chapters, and give me some confidence that what I present is not mere confirmation of my own prejudices and assumptions about funerals, but does indeed represent mourners' experiences, if not the full range of these, or of their concerns.

Replies varied considerably in length. The first that I read spanned 15 single-spaced pages; some were a short paragraph. Most were between two and six sides, whether word-processed, typed or handwritten. At first this was a little alarming, as in previous research experience I had been used to interview data, where participants might explain the same thing a number of different ways, or 'interrupt themselves' in order to get their point across, and would elaborate with background information and emphasise with repetition. Unconsciously, I had learned to equate data's 'depth' with its 'length', and worried for some time that M-O data would not prove to reveal much about mourners and their worlds. However, with repeated readings (either of the same reply or of different replies) I saw that while the conversational turns of phrase were not present in the material, elaborations, emphases and depth all were. They appeared in condensed form (when compared with imaginary interviews) but, once I had got used to the format of written, rather than spoken data, were unmistakeable. As an example, notice how this correspondent elaborates on and emphasises what mattered to her about this funeral:

> Now for the BIG ONE. My pal Val died a year ago. She was my dearest friend, confidante and soul sister. Of course, I wasn't her only friend. She was everyone's friend... The coffin was tucked up the evening before. Her husband + family was there. I wept buckets + couldn't stop. She never smoked, hardly took a drink, was a friend to everyone. Life is so UNFAIR... We did not attend the wake, I just didn't want to rejoice. I feel totally bereft. I miss her every minute of everyday. I want to share a joke, tell her my woes, ask her advice. (B1180, female, 82)

At the same time, there were replies which left me with questions unanswered. This correspondent wrote:

D and I had been friends for nearly thirty years – we sat at adjoining desks in 1966, me a young man of 23, she a single mother aged 39 and heavily frowned upon by some of our older female colleagues. There was never anything sexual in our friendship, and we stayed good friends even when each of us found a life-long partner. In 1994 we all went away together but it was awful from day one. D and I never spoke again and I regretted losing contact with L, whom I had known since he was two. Now here he was inviting me to the funeral, saying his mother had wanted to make contact with me several times. These days I am a full-time carer, which gave me the perfect excuse not to travel from London to King's Lynn for the funeral. But I ask you, would you have gone? (D1602, male, 68)

The correspondent seems to take the reader's sympathy with him for granted. Nonetheless, the reasoning which seems to obvious to him escapes me. Had I had the opportunity (as I would have done in an interview), I would have asked for further explanation.

Analysing Mass-Observation Material

The Analytical Strategy

M-O data are publicly archived, and are not available exclusively to collaborating researchers, to whom

> "usual rules governing access to the collection continue to apply... what they 'buy' is access to data produced by a panel composed of people with a high level of commitment to the project itself, which ensures that however popular or unpopular the theme of the directive might be, it still yields a response" (Sheridan et al., 2000, p. 52).

The 'usual rules governing access to data' are those of a standard archive: original material may not be removed, the copying of material is restricted (at the M-O Archive the limit is 50 copies per day, produced by digital photograph), for copyright reasons material may not be quoted without the permission of the Archive, and notes may be taken in pencil only. Laptops are permitted in the reading room.

The sheer quantity of data that M-O generates, and its location in Sussex, had to be taken into account when considering the logistics of analysis.

Field (2000) analysed only half of male replies and one third of female replies; he does not explain his reasons for this but it seems reasonable to guess it was a pragmatic response to reams of data. Savage (2010) draws on material from a number of different directives, and writes that since it was unfeasible to read all of the replies to all of the directives "I could only sample relatively small amounts of any particular directive" (p. 17). Regrettably, while details are provided about which directives were sampled (pp. 251-3), the procedure guiding the sampling itself is not. However, other researchers (Bhatti and Church, 2001; Harrison and McGhee, 2003; Mcnicol, 2004) were able to analyse all replies, and I began with the intention of doing this.

Correspondents reply electronically as well as on paper. To save me some time in Sussex, and by agreement with the Head of Special Collections at the University of Sussex, the 80 emailed replies were sent to me on a CD after screening. These were read and analysed for themes (see below for details of the analysis procedure) before I went to the Archive to see the rest of the material. Three of these electronic replies only referred to funerals that the correspondents had arranged or to funerals held in other countries; these were not included in the analysis. In methodological discussions, colleagues suggested that I base a full analysis on the electronic replies, only using the rest of the material to test the ideas that came of this. However, I was concerned that the electronic replies may not be representative of the rest of the data. I was worried that older correspondents would not use electronic forms of communication, although later familiarity with M-O discussion boards gave strong evidence against my assumption. Nonetheless I was aware that there may be differences between the written and the electronic documents themselves. For example, Harrison and McGhee (2003, p. 33) were able to infer meaning from wobbly handwriting and tearstains, which would not have been apparent on emailed replies.

The only practical account in the literature of analysing M-O material is that of Harrison and McGhee (2003), each of whom analysed all the responses to the directives on which they had collaborated. It is a description of the experience rather than a documentation of the technique, but it raises important issues which should be given attention.

Harrison and McGhee suggest that the most fruitful way to handle M-O data is probably to read all the replies first, taking some notes and noticing which replies to come back to and read again (Harrison and McGhee, 2003, p. 31). The temptation to 'binge-read' for colourful extracts, having looked forward to seeing the material for a few months, should be resisted. It is also sensible, they advise, "not to have too many predetermined categories and themes" (p. 31) but rather to allow immersion in and sensitivity to *correspondents'* chosen ways of responding (and not responding) to the directive's topic. Indeed, the authors suggest that the autonomy which M-O correspondents have effectively requires of researchers that they "allow the themes pertinent to the respondents rather than to the researcher (regardless of our encouragement, directions, hints and prompts in the directives) to emerge and unfold" (p. 27). Although this seems to be a redundant instruction in the case of the funerals directive, where correspondents *did* reply in response to the prompts in the directive, it does raise the question whether those questions actually did capture many of the themes pertinent to correspondents, and precluded the need for deviation from the directive to the degree that Harrison and McGhee saw. This remains, though, speculation.

I first visited the Archive two months after reading my first electronic replies, and spent four days there over two trips between May and July 2011. Colleagues and supervisors had warned me against copying all the data for fear of generating an unmanageable amount. I had the intention of including any and possibly all data from older men, since they were not very evident in the electronic replies. Beyond this I had no 'rule of thumb' for deciding whether or not to include data for analysis.

The first surprise (and worry) I had when reading what I think of as the 'paper replies' was how plain some of the descriptions were. I kept a log of the correspondent's number, age and sex, the number of pages to their reply, whose funeral they went to most recently and when, and any details of note in the content. Next to nearly 30 of the entries in my log is written 'uninformative'. Such replies were usually a page or so long at most, in reply to the entire directive. I did not include those replies in my analysis. The replies written as fiction (including the cartoon) were also excluded, as were those which did not

relate to funerals but only to deaths, grief, the dead person or (in one case) racism. Replies from correspondents who were funeral personnel (two clergy and one bearer) were excluded because they were not writing as mourners. Material about funerals which the correspondent had arranged were excluded for the same reason, although their data on other funerals was not. One reply was under copyright restriction; I did not read it. In total, 65 correspondents' 'paper' data was excluded from analysis. In a dozen of those cases, the reply was not included because it seemed to offer no new themes or dimensions in addition to the data that had already been included.

Short extracts from some 'paper' replies were transcribed directly into NVivo. More commonly I took digital photographs of the pages for later transcription. Although some correspondents' handwriting took a little getting used to, it was rare that I was unsure what had been written. Where this has occurred in the material I quote, it is indicated with a question mark in square brackets. Correspondents' misspellings have been reproduced. Quotes from the material were checked against the original during writing up in case I had mistyped, and errors corrected. I did not encounter any terms or phrases I did not understand (Scott, 1990).

Altogether, data from 173 correspondents was analysed. Their replies were not analysed in their entirety. One reason for this is that, as noted above, not all of the directive questions were intended for analysis. The other reason is that, as also noted above, data about funerals that the correspondent had arranged were filtered out. With hindsight, I consider this a flaw in the research. I have complained in Chapters 3 and 4 particularly that researchers document the perspectives of a very small group of mourners (that is, funeral arrangers, the paying clients who are also usually close family members of the one who has died) and pay no attention to wider mourners. By deciding only to analyse data from those who not had arranged the funeral they wrote about, I have represented this previously unrepresented group. But in doing this I have also upheld the division between these two groups, a division which, at the end of the research process, I believe not to be helpful.

Furthermore, the division between funeral arrangers and wider mourners was not as straightforward as I had imagined. As a former funeral director, I had

been thinking of the one person who signs the contract, and the other people who were in the room when the contract was signed, as those whose data would not be analysed. Perhaps predictably, none of the M-O correspondents wrote about signing a contract. Some did write about arranging the funeral and those were easy enough to exclude from analysis. Others, though, said that they had been asked by those who were arranging the funeral to write the eulogy, to read a poem, or to make decisions about music. To a funeral director, these are not people involved in arranging a funeral (!). To a sociologist, they may be.

I now think that my dilemmas about whether or not to include these people's material in the analysis were not, as I thought at the time, just an effect of the 'messy social world' never conveniently fitting into social scientists' ideal types (Walter, 1996a). Rather, I now see them as an indication that my criterion for distinguishing between mourners at a funeral was one that originated in my funeral directing background and reflected my own taken-for-granted assumptions more than mourners' realities.

This is not to say there is no difference in the experience of being a mourner who has contributed to the design of the funeral and being one who has not. However, 'being involved in arranging a funeral' is for a funeral director a binary distinction; I think that for mourners, it may be a hierarchical one. Given the PhD over again, I would not exclude from analysis accounts of funerals arranged by the correspondent. There were not very many – seven correspondents were excluded altogether, although data on a similar number of other funerals will also have been filtered out (see Appendix B) by my excluding correspondents rather than sections of their replies.

I cannot say what difference including these data would have made to the findings and the overall thesis. A major theme in the thesis is the relationships between mourners, and it is unhelpful to have imposed categories on mourners which they do not use themselves – at least, not in the same way. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 7, mourners certainly do distinguish between themselves. Their categories may even elide with mine, much of the time. Nonetheless, the ideal research design would not exclude those data without a theoretically-grounded reason, but rather try to *account for* distinctions

and their consequences as revealed in analysis of an entire dataset. In my favour it is worth noting that the funerals literature focuses disproportionately on the kind of account that I discounted (e.g. Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010; Naylor, 1989), and I have related the thesis to that literature. This does not produce the same effect, however, as having analysed all mourners' data in the M-O replies.

The Analytical Method

This project's aim was to understand what mourners' experiences of funerals in contemporary Britain are, and to consider what the implications of taking mourners' perspectives into account are for understanding the social significance of the funeral. On both counts, an inductive, 'data-driven' analytical method is indicated. Methodology literature often speaks of such methods allowing themes and theoretical insights to 'arise' and 'emerge' from the data (Bernard and Ryan, 2010; Bryman, 2004; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Mason, 1996; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003; Silverman, 2006), although it is important to remember that in practice and at its simplest, 'data-driven' analysis means that the researcher imposes (some) categories on the data after generating it, rather than before. The ideal is to represent mourners' experiences accurately and fairly (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p. 274), thus accounting for the data, at the same time as contributing something *more* than the correspondents have by themselves in their replies (Richards, 2009, p. 138).

Harrison and McGhee (2003) used and advocate inductive analysis of M-O data, but they do not offer technical advice. Faced with the large body of literature on qualitative analysis, it was a relief to read Fielding's claim that "the mechanical procedures researchers use are straightforward and readily summarised" (Fielding, 2001, p. 154). The process begins with one's fieldnotes, or, in this case, M-O replies, one searches for categories and patterns (themes), one marks up the data and re-sequences it to construct the outline of one's thesis. Faced with data from 173 replies to the directive, I thought it wise to plan my analytical process in a little more detail, although as many authors warn, the

process can be an unpredictable one (Bryman, 2004; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Mason, 1996; Silverman, 2006).

Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 9) go into a little more detail in their summary of analytic methods or strategies (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) common to many qualitative researchers and traditions. These include coding data, noting reflections, sorting and comparing material for common themes, then looking closer at themes and comparing with bodies of existing knowledge and theory. For a more detailed explanation of how themes may be derived, this thesis draws on the 'inductive thematic analysis' described by Braun and Clarke (2006). This is an approach compatible with both realism and constructivism which offers a "method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). The authors detail six steps in this form of analysis.

First, the researcher should familiarise themselves with the data. This entails reading and re-reading, and reading actively: with one's research questions in mind at the same time as allowing the data to surprise you (Thomas, 2002) – as M-O data may do. Initial impressions – the main "concepts, issues, themes and questions" (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 51) encountered in each reply – should be noted. Braun and Clarke warn that this is not a phase which should be rushed or skipped altogether, because familiarity with the data provides the bedrock for the analysis which follows.

The second step is to mark the data with initial codes. Codes "identify a feature of the data... that appears interesting to the analyst" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 88) in relation to research questions, concepts from the literature, or otherwise interesting features that cannot yet be related to either of these. Coding was performed electronically, using NVivo. Braun and Clarke advise coding for as many potential themes as possible, on the grounds that "you never know what might be interesting later" (2006, p. 89). My trips to Sussex took place after I had done this first phase of coding on the electronic data, and 'paper' data was transcribed and coded immediately following the trips. This coding is the beginning of an inductive, 'data-driven' approach to theorising, noted by those experienced in M-O research as being potentially very fruitful (Bhatti and Church, 2001; Field, 2000; Sheridan et al., 2000; Thomas, 2002),

and sometimes as stimulating a shift in the focus of the research. Such a shift proved necessary for Field (2000), when correspondents did not address the questions he asked in his directive in the way that he had intended that they would. In my own case it was clarification rather than shifting that occurred, as it became clearer which of the many questions which had constructed the directive could capture something significant both to mourners and to academic knowledge (Richards, 2009, p. 138), and be used to answer the overall research questions of the project.

In the third step, the codes are gathered into themes, where a theme "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 82). Not all codes seem to 'go' with any others, but these data should not be ignored, dismissed or 'tidied away' by not looking at them further. Braun and Clarke recommend a 'miscellaneous' grouping for data which do not seem to fit – but which must eventually, through continued analysis, be assimilated into the picture that is presented of the data. It is imperative that a researcher not 'cherry pick' in order to support a favoured argument (Thomas, 2002, p. 43).

When considering codes and themes, it is easy to work on the basis that prevalence indicates importance. However, this is an assumption that we should be wary of. At least as important is the notion of 'keyness' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 82), which may not be identical with the number of times it arises:

> 'frequency' is not the same as 'significance'... It may be that a single striking word or phrase conveys a meaning out of all proportion to its frequency; and a non-quantitative approach may be better able to grasp the significance of such isolated references. (Scott, 1990, p. 32)

As will be seen in the Chapters 6-9, both prevalence and 'keyness' feature in my analysis. Braun and Clarke write that once themes seem to account for all the data, they should be reviewed for internal coherence and for distinctiveness from other themes. This is the fourth step. Themes may need to be refined or collapsed into each other, until the candidate 'thematic map' adequately reflects the data set. At this stage my technique needed to differ from the template somewhat. While analysing I was writing summaries of the data for supervision,

with rudimentary discussion of the literature and my own ideas. In order to produce these I found each time that I needed to go back to the codes I had created and analyse them much more closely rather than grouping them together yet. For example, in order to write about the single code 'reasons to go to the funeral' I experimented with two or three ways of viewing the data (active choice vs. prevention, for example, or 'going for the deceased/bereaved/other mourners/self'), each of which resulted in over 20 subcodes.

In Braun and Clarke's fifth step, themes are defined and named, and step six concerns the production of the research report, which should include a faithful account of the process used to obtain the results presented (see also Silverman, 2006, pp. 282-4). In my own step five (although this was actually the first stage to feel like a step), and over a series of meetings, my supervisors challenged me to decide what was relevant to my thesis and what was not. Over the past several months it had become clear that my analysis was repeating some key theoretical issues – the individual, the family and the meeting with death – and it is these that structure the remainder of the thesis. I was delighted and reassured to find that, when I attempted step four now, that very few of my original codes were not, on reflection, related to one of these three key themes[52].

While Braun and Clarke's step by step guide is useful in its detail, what is noticeable is the absence of any part to play for theory or the literature. Thus, I intended to combine with their work the guidance of Mason (1996), who recommends early, constant and iterative use of the literature, to give a process of "moving between everyday concepts and meanings, lay accounts, and social science explanations" (p. 142). In the event, I read little but data for a number of months. The real synthesis of data with literature occurred in the process of 'writing up', which in the case of this thesis might more properly be called 'final analysis'. While I had formed my general argument before I began writing, I was not sure of the details or indeed whether the argument really held until I really began to present the evidence systematically.

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[52] The only one of these with a large amount of data in it is about correspondents' accounts of travelling to the funeral. It was not analysed into subcodes. Some of the data is nonetheless accounted for in Chapter 7.

There was a discrepancy between the initial analysis of electronic and paper replies. By the time I came to read the paper replies, I had enough familiarity with the electronic replies to have an ideal type of a 'usual' reply and its content in mind. In addition, although I had no thesis in mind as yet, I was already able to guess that I would not be including, for example, long lists of relatives in the analysis. These were not even copied from the paper replies, even though when they had appeared in the electronic ones they had already been coded under 'who was there'. Moreover, most paper replies were copied partially. None was harvested for 'gems' of sentences, and only rarely (but sometimes) were single paragraphs (with some explanatory context) copied. Most often I copied accounts of one funeral from a correspondent's offered two or more. Extracts were copied on the basis that they contained themes or dimensions not represented in the material I already had.

Because I did, against Harrison and McGhee's advice, carry out this kind of 'cherry picking' I made a final trip to Sussex in March 2012. By this time I knew what my thesis was, and as well as needing to double check the context of some of the quotes I had, I was looking for data which would contradict it, as well as to find out whether my cherry picking was what had in fact constructed it in the first place. This was a very reassuring trip. I found no data which said anything I did not already intend to account for in the analysis, and the visit confirmed that the data that I had left behind in Sussex the previous year would not have produced a different thesis had I included it then.

Conclusion

This chapter has explained M-O as a research strategy, discussing its strengths and limitations and highlighting its usefulness as a data-generating method for this PhD. Epistemological, ethical and 'insider' issues have been considered, and the analytical strategy has been presented.

M-O has proved to be an invaluable means of addressing the project's research questions. The method generated qualitative data which provided detailed and meaningful accounts of correspondents' experiences as mourners. The analytical technique did indeed result in a thematic 'map', albeit theoretical themes rather than empirical ones.

While providing a rationale for using M-O in the thesis, this chapter has also outlined some of the limitations to the method. M-O produces data which are constructions, and although my epistemological belief is that all research does this, it should not thereby be dismissed as unimportant. Recurring throughout the chapter has been the issue of my own positions in the research – as a (former) funeral director, as the researcher, as an individual. This was highlighted at several points, from the questions underlying the construction of the directive, through the concerns and methods directing analysis, to the final presentation of the thesis. Correspondents have also had their positions in the research, which remain far less visible than my own. The three foremost regrets that I have about the methods that I employed are the pain that was caused to some correspondents, my failure to ask for correspondents' responses to what was said at funerals, and my reproduction of a division between mourners that has long been imposed artificially both by funeral directors and by researchers who have used funeral directors as gatekeepers and/or informants.

The analysis of M-O correspondents' attendance at funerals cannot be taken to be representative of all mourners' experiences. However, as was noted above, M-O correspondents' attendance *is* representative of *some* mourners' experiences, even if we do not know what portion of mourners are here represented. Thus, what follows is a *partial* account, in many senses, of mourners' experiences of funerals. Nonetheless, it remains the fullest account that there is.

Chapter 6: The Individual

Introduction

In this chapter I examine how mourners' accounts of funerals relate to themes in existing literature which were reviewed earlier in the thesis, particularly in Chapter 3. In particular I compare the 'authorities' over the funeral found in mourners' data with those found in this literature, where it is argued that the authority of tradition and religion tends to give way to the authority of the individual (Caswell, 2009; Giddens, 1991), via, in the case of death practices, the authority of the expert (Walter, 1994, 1996a) in the person of funeral directors and officiants (Holloway et al., 2010; Naylor, 1989). In the funeral, individualisation has most often and most intensely been associated with personalisation, in particular through choices about music and the eulogy (Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010).

The chapter begins with examining correspondents' relationships to tradition. For mourners, the aspect of the funeral most intensely connected with tradition was clothing. The literature, however, strongly connects tradition with religion, and I will go on to discuss mourners' relationships to religion at the funeral. This is followed by a discussion of mourners' relationships to personalisation in the funeral, and of the eulogy as an important manifestation of personalisation. In the final section, the chapter will depart from existing research by presenting a category of data which have not been reported in previous studies on the funeral in contemporary Britain. These data concern the importance for mourners of the speaker at the funeral knowing the person who has died, irrespective of the accuracy of their eulogy.

The Authority of Tradition

It was argued in Chapter 3 that in general, tradition is not a significant authority for funeral arrangers. Correspondents who were mourners did explicitly refer to tradition in their replies, although in noticeably limited areas. In fact, apart from some comments about the general tenor of the funeral being 'traditional', the explicit mentions of tradition refer with surprising consistency only to the clothes

that mourners wore. Indeed for some correspondents, the colour of clothing was offered as the very indicator of tradition: "It was very much a 'traditional' funeral with everyone in dark clothing" (H2639, female, 70).

An emphasis on clothing contrasts with academic analyses which make no reference to dress in connection with tradition but instead highlight religious worship, community and gendered practices, and burial as the mode of disposal (Caswell, 2009; see also Clark, 1982; Vallee, 1955). On the other hand, it corresponds with the finding that mourners who arrange the funeral may see clothing as traditional, although these mourners may also see other elements such as music and prayers in the same way (Holloway et al., 2010, pp. 23, 43, 54). The identification of clothing and only clothing with tradition is therefore both striking and curious. Many authors have commented on the reduction in number as well as authority of funerary customs and traditions, in comparison with earlier times or more remote parts of the UK (Caswell, 2009; Denison, 1999; Gorer, 1967; Grainger, 1998a; Jalland, 1999, 2010; Littlewood, 1992, 1993; Thompson, 2004; Vallee, 1955; Williams, 1990). However, this must remain only an interesting aside, since we are not here aiming to enquire whether traditions have reduced in number, but whether tradition can be considered an authority for mourners. This section will therefore focus on the ways in which tradition was understood and related to, and whether mourners considered or otherwise related to tradition as an authority, with particular reference to their clothing.

Wearing Traditional Clothing

For a number of correspondents, wearing traditional clothing, whether defined (by them) in terms of colour or style, was simply 'what one does', "self-evidently the actions which are called for" (Shils, 1981, p. 201). For example, R3422 (male, born 1947) replied, "I have no idea what I wore, probably a suit, I do not understand your question about influences, or even a decision. Men wear suits at a funeral."

Tradition and Place

A few correspondents related the idea of traditional clothing to the locale of the funeral and its attending mourners:

> Being a country funeral, we all wore black, with the odd bit of white i.e. a blouse. I wore black trousers and jacket, with a tee shirt underneath. Everyone else present was in black, with all the men in suits with ties. None of the tradition has been eroded yet here. It is expected that everyone attending a funeral will be in dark clothes. (F4125, female, 44)

> Village funerals are always traditional with everyone wearing black. For a cremation in town I often wear something bright. (W2338, female, 78)

> Ours is an old working-class ex-industrial area where people have traditional 'old fashioned' views on such occasions as funeral. As I expected, all the immediate family wore black, I wore a dark, almost black, tweed coat over a matching skirt, black gloves, bag, shoes and tights (no hat) out of respect for the family really. It was not one of the modern 'celebration of life' ceremonies where mourners are asked to wear bright colours, which always seems rather strange to me. (T2543, female, 77)

These extracts have a number of things in common. First, each correspondent directly relates 'tradition' to the place in which the funeral is held (Caswell, 2009). Second, they suggest (the first and last more explicitly than the middle one) that those attending the funeral can be expected to be from that same place and to know the tradition (see Vallee, 1955, p. 128) – although the first quote is actually written by an Englishwoman attending her first funeral in a Northern Irish village, and writes elsewhere in her directive reply specifically about her *un*familiarity with, and socialisation into, local tradition. Third and perhaps most important, each correspondent claims that these funerals are traditional because of the clothes. In each case, the writer goes on to relate a funeral which includes elements of personalisation such as eulogies (W2338, T2543) or pop songs (T2543), or to criticise the funeral because it does not contain enough emphasis on the deceased person (F4125). Where personalised elements are included, none of these correspondents particularly

praises them, but neither do they reflect that the funeral may not be thought to be so traditional after all.

All this is only to say that mourners are not (necessarily) sociologists, and the following section of this chapter will investigate the authority of tradition as manifest through religion, as the literature indicates that it ought to be investigated. However, what these quotes do draw attention to are the limits to the definition of tradition even to those mourners who most think they are consciously defending 'The Traditional' in their realm (Giddens, 1994, p. 100; Thompson, 1996, p. 92). There is therefore a very strong contrast between these ways of talking about and relating to tradition and those of ministers and families arranging funerals in Caswell's (2009) study of the western isles of Scotland, for whom the inclusion of any personalised element could not have gone unremarked, if it were permitted in the first place.

Being a Traditional Person

Another way in which correspondents spoke about tradition was in identifying themselves as 'a traditional person':

> I wore a black jacket and black and white tweed skirt, I know the trend is to celebrate the life of the departed by wearing bright coloured clothes but I'm of the 'old school' Brigade and always prefer black. (S1534, female, 76)

> I was wearing my one remaining work suit which is now only worn for weddings and funerals. This is a dark suit, and was accompanied by a white shirt and black tie. In this respect I am a traditionalist for funeral attire. (S3035, male, 63)

In these examples, tradition has been reduced from an overarching authority to a personal principle. These mourners do not appear to be 'reviving' funerary tradition in Walter's (1994) sense of constructing a personal 'authenticity' through the appropriation of other (historical, geographical, religious, ethnic) cultures' traditions, since these individuals are retaining practices which they understand that others in their position may relinquish. Their very claims to be 'a traditionalist' or 'old school' contain within them awareness of alternative, competing reasons for action, and alternative actions

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themselves. As discussed in Chapter 3, Gross' (2005) distinction between "regulative" and "meaning-constitutive" traditions aims to explain how it is that traditions' having lost authority need not mean that traditions no longer exist – which is to say, how it is that people continue to act traditionally even though they know that they need not. Indeed, Gross argues that "distinguishing between regulative and meaning-constitutive traditions helps make clear some of the ways in which traditions remain of central importance in contemporary societies" (2005, p. 305). Thus, these correspondents' words seem to indicate a shift in the significance of this tradition (of wearing black to a funeral) from its being a 'regulative tradition' with social consequences for non-compliance, to a 'meaning-constitutive tradition' which simply offers one widely recognised and understood way of going on.

These data chime with, but are also different from, Holloway et al.'s (2010) data from mourners who arranged funerals, and who chose such things as music and prayers (as well as clothes) because they perceived these to provide some tradition to the funeral. They chime because of the awareness of options and the inescapability of choice making (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, p. 24), but they differ because the correspondents here do not view themselves as contributing to an overall event in which it would be nice or fitting to have some tradition. (And if they did, the tradition which they displayed through clothing then *would* be a 'revival' in Walter's (1994) sense.) Rather, they are asserting the *strength* of the meaning constituted for them by this meaning-constitutive tradition, a strength of meaning which other practices, for them, did not hold.

Traditional Clothes, Non-Traditional Reasons

Many other mourners who also wore what they themselves described as traditional clothing gave varied reasons for doing so. Such reasons included acting for the sake of other people, including the deceased person and other mourners, both in the sense of intending a well-meaning gesture towards them:

> I wore sombre clothes and a black tie. Out of old fashioned respect for Pete
> and the occasion. (H1543, male, 80)

> I wore a black suit and a black tie on a white shirt. I wore these both for its traditional mourning sense, and also out of respect for others who liked to adhere to this dress code. (E4566, male, 26)

and in the sense of responding to others' imagined expectations:

> I can't remember what I wore, but I think it was black. This would have been because of tradition - they are fairly traditional (though not religious) people, and no dress code had been specified. (B4672, female, 29)

> I wore black as it was a traditional affair and this seems to be the expected dress code. (W3730, female, 43)

> I expected the occasion to be traditional so I dressed appropriately with a black tie. (B2240, male, 89)

> I was concerned that I would be expected to wear all-black (which my family has never been strict about as a tradition) so I bought a new suit from Tescos (£50 or thereabouts from their smart separates range, black skirt & jacket with lovely blue lining) to wear. As a group, those of us from work were mostly in traditional all-black. I guess it's safer, no-one will question sticking to tradition at a funeral. (W4614, female, 37)

Some of these mourners were concerned with avoiding disapproval, and might be thought thereby to be following a regulative tradition (Gross, 2005). However, I suggest not, since all of them are concerned with the expectations of them only at this particular funeral, implying that at other funerals, and under other expectations, other clothing may be worn. The authority here is not tradition (regulative or otherwise), but contingent and contextual expectations. *Whose* expectations is an issue that will be addressed in the next chapter.

Other mourners wore clothes which they did not describe as traditional but which nonetheless outwardly were in accordance with what tradition would dictate, that is, smart, dark clothes. These mourners explained their choices in terms of convention[53], convenience, and respect[54]:

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[53] As Bell (1997, p. 150) notes, appeals (true or otherwise) to 'It's what we've always done' or 'It's just what people do' are commonly heard by anthropologists who enquire of ritual participants why they act as they do.

I was following convention, I suppose. (M3190, male, 52)

…because the last thing anyone wanted to be bothered with was thinking about clothes. Black was easy, and invisible. (M1201, female, 47)

Not because I particularly believe that black should be worn at funerals but these happened to be my good clothes. (K310, female, no age given)

…because I believe you should as a mark of respect. (M3684, female, 41)

So, although decisions about clothing were the primary, indeed the *only*, empirical area in which mourners cited tradition as a reason for action, tradition was only one reason among many for mourners acting in apparently traditional ways. Some mourners attributed traditions about clothing to the locality of the funeral, but it was seen that on other dimensions these funerals were not traditional, suggesting that mourners' interpretation of 'tradition' had been reduced to the one aspect of clothing – or, more likely, expanded to include a personalised eulogy and music as well. For other mourners, following tradition was a matter of personal preference rather than social norm. Others still wore traditional-seeming clothes but for a variety of reasons not connected with following tradition. Furthermore, as will be seen in the following two chapters, many mourners wore clothes which were *not* traditional.

What do these findings tell us about the status of tradition as an authority for mourners at contemporary funerals? How do they compare to the literature?

Importantly, for none of the correspondents was tradition an authority with *moral* weight extending across society, dictating what people *should* do (Giddens, 1994, p. 65). Those who identified themselves as 'traditional people' did not openly criticise others for not adhering to the same conventions. In her comparative study of funeral practices in Scotland, Caswell (2009) shows how mourners who arrange funerals can experience tradition as both an opportunity (to feel part of a familiar and stable community, for example) and a constraint (inhibiting some choices or even preventing them altogether). For those

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[54] Defining 'respect' in connection with funerals is complex (Tapper, 2009) and beyond the bounds of this thesis.

mourners in the present study who wrote of local traditions in funerals, it may seem that tradition appears as an opportunity – although for the correspondent who did not feel herself to belong to the locale the other traditional aspects (absence of a eulogy, for example) were far more of a constraint. For the remainder of the M-O data, Caswell's comment about funerals in Edinburgh is fitting: "tradition did not appear to be a constraint because tradition did not feature to a great extent in discussion of funerals" (Caswell, 2009, p. 206). Twenty years earlier in the north of England, Naylor (1989, pp. 287-9) had also found that tradition did not feature as a strong influence on funeral arrangers' choice of clothing at the funeral. By contrast, Littlewood reports a study from the early 1980s in which mourners who attended funerals wore "clothing which was believed to symbolise bereavement" (1992, p. 38)[55].

Authors such as Giddens (1990, 1991, 1994), Bauman (1998, 2005) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) have argued firstly that in late modernity tradition no longer carries the authority to impose identities, roles or decisions on individuals, and secondly that the practices once dictated by tradition may be actively and reflexively chosen as part of constructing one's self (see also Walter, 1994). These data are consistent with the first part of that thesis, although further investigation is needed to establish whether the second part holds in this case – this will be discussed later in the chapter.

However, the claim advanced by Giddens and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, that reflexivity has replaced tradition, is only one version of the detraditionalisation thesis (Heelas, 1996a). As discussed in Chapter 3, a number of authors accept the premise that tradition has lost an authoritativeness it once had (although Thompson (1996, p. 90) advises caution when making claims about practices and beliefs "allegedly widespread in the past"), but problematise the idea that what has replaced it is reflexive individual decision-making (Campbell, 1996; Gross, 2005; Heelas, 1996a), even with Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) admission that such reflexivity is never unbounded. This is because there are, as we saw above, ways of acting in accordance with tradition simply because one has not given the matter any

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[55] Caswell (2009) and Naylor (1989) interviewed mourners who had arranged the funeral under discussion. Littlewood's (1982, 1992) research participants had been bereaved of a parent, grandparent, sibling or (adult) child, and not all of them had arranged the funeral.

thought, or seen the need to (Campbell, 1996, p. 149; Thompson, 1996, p. 92). Not realising what one is doing or why, one may, should such realisation come about, change one's practice. The comment "I do not understand your question about influences, or even a decision. Men wear suits at a funeral" (R3422, male, born 1947) may indicate such a position – or it may not. Rather, it may reflect the assertion that despite detraditionalisation, in the social practices we use and must use in daily life, in fact "very little is up for grabs" (Campbell, 1996, p. 166). Social change – in this case, changes to traditions, funeral practices and mourners' relationships to those – takes time and is not a simple process, whether at the societal or the individual level. The reasons for dressing in accordance with tradition that we have seen here represent only a small part of the reasons that correspondents gave altogether for choosing their clothes. The wider range of reasons, and the sheer degree of deliberation behind such an apparently simple act, will be discussed in the following two chapters. For now, though, we would do well to consider Adam's (1996) counsel that it may be too simplistic to expect 'either/or' evidence of tradition and reflexivity (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1991) – or whatever we consider may have taken the place of tradition, whether it be unthinking or deliberate conservatism (Thompson, 1996), whimsy or habit (Campbell, 1996), or meaning-constitutive rather than regulative traditions (Gross, 2005). Instead of expecting to be able to divide our data and our concepts into 'either/or', we should remain open to the possibility of 'and', as well as 'neither/nor'.

As mentioned above, what mourners themselves identify as tradition should not be taken as the only indicator of it. Social scientific literature identifies a clear link between tradition and religion, whether in wider society (Giddens, 1994) or in funerals (Caswell, 2009). The next section in this chapter will consider the role of religion in funerals, as mourners saw it.

The Authority of Religion

> ...the god stuff was assumed and not really mentioned much. Which is really as it should be.

If you have a faith I really think you should keep it to yourself. (G4566, female, no age given)

I attended one concerning someone I did not know, who had no real connection to the church and whose mourners were unused to church worship... Just an example how it is the job of the church to be at the centre of a very mixed community and available to provide such service as members of that community require. (W1893, male, b.1924)

These two extracts represent the two extremes of correspondents' views – although it would be more accurate to say that these two are representative of a very few correspondents who expressed absolute views about the properness of a religious funeral.

This is because mourners' greatest concern about religiosity in the funeral was relative rather than absolute. What was important for them was not whether the funeral was or was not (in their perception) religious, but whether the religiosity of the funeral (as perceived by the mourners) *matched* the religiosity of the deceased person (as perceived by the mourners) (Hockey, 1990, pp. 28-9; Walter, 1990) – or, on occasion, whether it matched the religiosity of the mourner themselves.

The service at the creamatorium was conducted by a Methodist minister – a close friend of the family. My aunt and her husband were life-long Methodists and pillars of their local church – so the religious nature of the ceremony was genuine and appropriate. (C3603, male, born 1944)

The funeral was held in the local town church where we all grew up. My friend wasn't religious - in fact he was an atheist - but it was the only building big enough to accommodate everyone. The vicar took the service, but he was very respectful and didn't include any religious elements. (S4002, female, 31)

The best funerals have been, to my mind, humanist funerals, but this is because I have no religious belief. (T2003, female, born 1949)

His wife had arranged the funeral and it was led by a minister who had not really known X. This part was painful because I don't really think X had any

real faith but went along with his wife's thinking possibly for the good of the children. My wife and I just looked at each other thinking why a religious service. (H3821, male, 58)

Correspondents considered the matching of religiosity in the funeral to either their own or that of the deceased person to be appropriate and contributory to a good funeral, while mismatches were experienced as dissatisfying, unsatisfactory and contributory to a bad funeral.

This held no matter what the permutation perceived by correspondents of religiosity in the funeral, the deceased person and the mourner.

Mismatches with the Deceased Person

For mourners, the main result of having a religious funeral where the deceased person was not religious was that religion was perceived to be given the attention that the person should properly have had. That is to say, religion was seen to have displaced the deceased person in the funeral:

> The Roman Catholic service was very impersonal and did not fit my friend who had died - I remember being very frustrated at the importance placed on God, Jesus and that my friend who had died was secondry to this. (I am Church of England - but had not religious upbringing at all, and although I wouldn't say I was an atheist, I'm not sure I believe...) (J4505, female, 28)

In all the replies, there was only one report of a funeral that was not religious when the deceased person had been. It cannot be taken as representative or even indicative of any wider trend. However, it is worth noting that in this single case, the correspondent's complaint was not theological. Her objection to a Humanist funeral for her Christian father was not that he was denied spiritual tending. Rather, the correspondent's dissatisfaction with the lack of religious content in the funeral is one item in a list of complaints about a variety of her father's second wife's decisions regarding the funeral:

> Suffice to say, she wished to control the whole funeral and refused to let my brothers or I have any say in what happened. There was to be no singing (my father had a lovely voice and was forever singing or whistling;) there was to be no religious content (my father was not a man of hugely demonstrative beliefs, but he was a Congregationalist and had his quiet

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belief - he told me so); the event was to be a Humanist funeral, (run by an appalling woman with all the charisma and dignity of a slug!) with some music to listen to (I was allowed to select a Mary Black song - she is an Irish folk singer whom my father and I both enjoyed very much). But the worst thing - and for which even now I cannot forgive her, was that neither my brothers nor I were allowed to speak. To quote: "I don't want anyone getting all upset and crying". My husband was allowed three minutes to say a few words on our behalf! (M3412, female, no age given)

By means of this list of complaints the correspondent does two things. First, by building an argument intended to show the father's wife as being unreasonably controlling, she demonstrates the considerable importance that involvement with, and also exclusion from, funeral arrangements can have (Parsons, 2003). Second, and more pertinent to this thesis, she demonstrates her belief that the various components of her father's character and biography should have featured in his funeral. Religion appears as one of these components, given apparently equal weight with music – a strong feature of the literature on personalisation in funerals (Albery et al., 1996; Caswell, 2009; Francis, 2004; George, 2008; Gill and Fox, 1996; Holloway et al., 2010; Messenger, 1979; Wynne Wilson, 1989) – and less weight than family (discussed in the following chapter).

Mismatches with the Mourner

Where mourners' religiosity did not match that of the funeral, correspondents described feeling awkward and inhibited about participating:

We sat at the rear of the crematorium chapel as we both feel uncomfortable taking part in religious ceremonies. (H1806, male, 85)

I also felt inwardly awkward that I was paying lip-service to beliefs I no longer held.
But I attended out of respect for my late aunt – and her family. And I know that was the right thing to do. (C3603, male, born 1944)

Then there was a hymn, which was 'Onward, Christian soldiers'. This was potentially a problem for me, because I am not a Christian, and it is not as if

> I am a lapsed Christian, an Agnostic or someone just indifferent to religion: being an ordained Pagan priestess, I am hardly sitting on the fence here, and the question of hypocrisy comes to mind… However… I must sing the Christian hymn to the best of my ability, because I love the dead person for whom I am singing it, and I am singing it for him, even if I do not happen to agree with those words. (A2212, female, 53)

In the above quotations, the correspondents' concern is with participating in the ceremony as it is presented to them, that is, adapting themselves to what is given. This is done for the sake of the one who has died. In the following extract, for her own sake, the correspondent introduces the idea of supplementing the ceremony's inadequacies with her own memorialising, that is, adapting what is 'given' to the mourner herself:

> It was hugely fervent and evangelical and icky and not much about M... We went up to the crem… and we were done inside 5 mins and back to the church to do the tea thing. Mum and I thought this was a tad hasty and hoped for a quiet moment to do a bit of thinking minus the God stuff. (G4566, female, no age given).

When mourners discuss experiencing a mismatch between a nonreligious funeral and their own religious position, the idea of supplementary participation also arises:

> There was no God, this humanist approach gave no hope… The tone of the funeral was bleak and I felt quite ill at ease. We did sing Jerusalem at the end. I put everything I had into singing the hymn (just for my friend). I did think of her where I would like to be when I die, regardless of the beliefs of her family, but I didn't tell anyone. (R860, female, 63)

> I have attended some funerals though not many, and am a practising Christian. I'm not sure if I could bring myself to attend a "humanist" funeral ceremony, though if I did I would be praying constantly throughout. (R4286, female, born 1966)

Where the mismatch was with the mourner, then, some saw private modification of the funeral as a resolution.

Negotiating a Match

Religious ministers who conducted a ceremony opposing their own affiliation were praised:

> … his wife arranged a cremation with the service of her own vicar who did not preach a sermon and mentioned the fact that he was an agnostic and wished to be cremated as such. It is rare for me to admire a cleric but I was impressed by his attitude which offended no one. I hoped it did not offend him as well. (H1806, male, 85)

> She was very active in the Humanist movement… and, of course, was an atheist. She was on good terms with her local parson who was aware of her goodness (probably wished a few of his flock came near that standard) and admired her so greatly that he begged to be allowed, in due course, to take her Humanist funeral ceremony, without any Christian propaganda, etc. She had often done verbal battle with this parson without rancour and they were good friends, so she agreed to it. So it came about that an Anglican parson officiated at a leading Humanist's Humanist funeral ceremony... (W1382, male, 86)

In these examples, correspondents are praising both the officiant's willingness to mix the secular and religious in a funeral (Caswell, 2009; Garces-Foley and Holcomb, 2006), and their willingness to do this *in order to tailor the funeral to the deceased person's identity*. Mourners are praising religious officiants for giving the authority of the individual (some) precedence over the authority of religion.

There were no reports praising Humanist celebrants, for example, for speaking prayers or allowing them to be spoken. It is unknown whether this is because such flexibility did not happen at the funerals correspondents attended, or whether it did happen and mourners did not notice, or did not realise that the inclusion of a prayer or hymn contravened the officiant's beliefs.

Criticisms and Compliments

Religious funerals came in for some criticism – and not only from nonreligious mourners:

I found the whole thing distressing as I had not known my aunt at all well and the service did not seem to help matters, and to indeed be about a woman I didn't recognise (my mother confirmed that the eulogy, focussing on her faith, had completely ignored her professional and other achievements). (S3844, female, 36)

Having never been to a Catholic funeral before this time, we were rather upset by the form the service took. The priest seemed to constantly emphasise that he had been born in sin, and the whole service seemed to be a long rigmarole that the priest had to get through as quickly as possible. There was no feeling of comfort or sympathy to the bereaved family.

It was totally unlike our Methodist funerals or even some of the Church of England ones that I have attended. It was only finally near the end of the service that another nephew stood up in church and spoke so movingly about his Uncle, what a marvellous father, husband, and uncle this man had been. (H2639, female, 70)

These criticisms echo those highlighted by Walter (1990; 1997c, pp. 170-1). These were, first, that "people"[56] feel that if the deceased person was not religious then a religious funeral would lack integrity, since it would not reflect the deceased person accurately, and second, that religious funerals are "nowadays felt to be impersonal" (ibid., p. 171) because they are conducted according to a routine.

So it is perhaps surprising that in the M-O data the complaint of routine procedure – at least in connection with the religious content of the funeral – only appears in relation to nonreligious ceremonies:

I have also been to two secular funerals in the past couple of years conducted by the same chap. The first was a bit of a novelty. The deceased was the mother of a friend, and didn't go to church or believe in God. My friend wrote a eulogy which the gentleman read out, and non-religious music was played. The funeral was fine, very dignified, but when I attended the second one, everything had an air of déjà vu about it. It was a bit

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[56] Walter does not indicate whether he is discussing people who solicit funerals, people who attend them, people in general, or another designation.

impersonal in some ways, and yet it was enjoyable, because of the person whose funeral it was! (E743, female, born in 1951)

Correspondents' comments were not all critical. Some praised specifically religious funerals, albeit not for theological reasons (Cook and Walter, 2005, p. 371). These included correspondents who commended Christian ceremonies for offering hope (Davies, 2002, 2005) and comfort to the family of the deceased person, if not the entire congregation or even themselves:

The ex-Rector is not a very impressive looking man but he spoke with convincing certainty of ever-lasting life. I have no doubt it was a great comfort to her husband. (P1326, female, 73)

The family were dry eyed throughout and even sort of radiant 'in the sure and certain knowledge' that they would see him again – though the congregation were less phlegmatic and at the end of the eulogy I definitely needed the handkerchief I had brought. (L4071, female, 67)

The first of the two quotes above was written by a correspondent who refers to herself as Catholic, the second by a correspondent who was raised Catholic and does not give an indication of her relationship to religion now. As well as appreciating the hope offered by a Christian service, there were correspondents who wrote of a lack of hope at non-religious funerals. Again, this is described as having an impact upon both the mourner themselves and the family of the deceased person:

Now Jim was a humanist, so naturally was the funeral itself. The gentleman taking the stranger spoke as if he were a secular priest - by that I mean he spoke exactly as if he were a cleric. But emphasised that as Jim was a humanist - that there was no point in living, no opportunity of life hereafter (not a comfort for his young grand-children), not more reason to live than any plant, or creature anywhere... I remember driving home after the funeral with a depression that didn't leave me for a day or two. I actually thought about seeking company to aleaviate a horrible sinking feeling - but mid-afternoon is not an easy time to find friends. So I was left alone at home to consider humanism (not a bad philosophy in itself) but unable to remember Jim in any positive way - downbeat the funeral certainly was and so were the lingering feelings engendered by this event. (E4111, male, 70)

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There was no God, this humanist approach gave no hope - so I think the relatives had nothing to hold onto.

The gentleman who spoke was the head of the Humanist Ass. and spoke of my friends life and asked us to think of her for a few minutes or if we wanted we could pray for her.

The tone of the funeral was bleak and I felt quite ill at ease. (R860, female, 63)

Neither of the above correspondents identifies their religious position, although other things that they mentioned in their directive replies may be illuminating. R860 sings in a church choir and would like a Christian burial, while E4111 says that a holy man or woman can conduct his burial when he dies.

To summarise: correspondents' writing on religion in the funeral focused overwhelmingly on the need to match the funeral's religiosity with that of the deceased person or, less often, the mourner themselves. When funerals did not match the religiosity of the deceased person mourners perceived this to result in unsuccessful personalisation, whether religion was absent or present. When funerals did not match the religiosity of the mourner themselves, difficulties in participating in the funeral could be experienced – difficulties which could be alleviated through supplementary participation. Religious ministers who mourners perceived to accomplish a successful 'match' by conducting a non-religious funeral were praised. Mourners' criticisms on the grounds of routinisation were aimed at non-religious funerals, which were also criticised (by possibly religious correspondents) for offering no hope either to the deceased person's family or to the mourner themselves. Conversely, religious funerals were praised (by probably religious correspondents) for offering such hope.

How do these data relate to the literature? In Chapter 3 I suggested that societal secularisation and the decline of 'discursive Christianity' (Brown, 2001) might result in an unfamiliarity with religious ritual for non-religious mourners which would produce discomfort. Here we see maybe a little discomfort, although it is not because of feeling inadequately equipped to participate in a religious ceremony, but because of feeling that they should not be required to

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participate in such a ceremony in the first place. Although this thesis is not an investigation of whether or not mourners themselves are religious but how they respond and relate to religion in the funeral, it is also worth mentioning that there was little empirical data about others of the newer concepts in the sociology of religion. I found no data which illustrated the experience of someone who could be said to believe without belonging (Davie, 1994). Correspondents wrote not of spirituality in their experience or expectations of funerals (Heelas, 1996b; Heelas and Woodhead, 2005) but invariably of religion, Christianity or God. Only one of the replies could be argued to relate to 'vicarious religion' (Davie, 2001, 2007), which is the remark from W1893 (male, b.1924) quoted above who remarks that "it is the job of the church to be... available". None of the correspondents (not even the identifiably Christian ones) endorsed any of Billings' (2004) four reasons why mourners may approve of a Christian funeral[57].

These are, in a way, a lot of negative findings. They are worth reporting, but not worth getting excited about – although had I set out to test these authors' theories, or could this study be used to do that, we would have some significant findings on our hands. But I did not, it cannot and we do not. The positive findings show some belief-with-belonging and a clear focus on understanding religion as a single, discrete element in a person's overall individuality. In relation to the secularisation literature this does suggest a strong endorsement by correspondents of the idea that religion not only is but should be an individual, personal matter (see Bruce, 1996, 2001a, 2002, 2003).

It must be remembered that M-O correspondents do not represent the larger population, or cover all the possible positions towards religiosity that may be found. Even more importantly, it must be remembered that M-O correspondents in fact represent a very specific set of similar people. Not only are they disproportionately white, middle-class women over 50 living in southeast England, but they are all people for whom writing in response to directives is attractive. There are relationships between religiosity, positions towards religion, and class (Bruce, 2002), gender (Brown, 2001) and age (Voas

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[57] These were that Christian funerals (1) allow the possibility of reunion with the dead; (2) permit ongoing relationships with deceased people; (3) assert the value of all life; and (4) make forgiveness between the living and the dead possible.

and Crockett, 2005) which are no doubt coming into play in the M-O material, but neither the form of the data nor the scope of the thesis allows analysis of these. Nonetheless, they must be borne in mind when considering these findings.

The purpose of studying mourners' perspectives on religion in the funeral was to discover whether religion can be seen to be an authority for these mourners. Even for many of the correspondents who may describe themselves as religious, it cannot. In Gross' (2005) terms, the most that can be said is that for some mourners, and apparently only religious ones, religion may be a meaning-constitutive tradition, but it does not carry the authority of a regulative one. Instead, what has the authority, where religiosity is concerned? The mourner and the deceased person, that is, the individual.

The Authority of the Individual: Personalisation in the Funeral

Overwhelmingly, mourners valued personalisation in the funeral:

> It was a half hour slot at Mortlake Crem- yet the family made it very personal... It was simple, moving and utterly right for him. (M2986, female, 54)

> Overall I suppose it was a "Good" funeral. Why, because the upbeat element, expressed particularly in the eulogy, reflected John himself which of course his friends who recognise and rejoice in. (E4111, male, 74)

> The personal tribute at the funeral by her son was lovely - it gave all her history (a lot of which I didn't know) and from it, you knew what sort of person she was. That's more my idea of a funeral - celebrating the life of the person, and reminiscing about them. (G3963, female, 38)

> Her best friend also made a person eulogy which added a close personal touch to the proceedings... I feel it is very important at a funeral service to mark the positive, be respectful and reflective but celebrate the person in question... (P4287, male, 54)

It is extraordinary how consistent the data are about this. Qualitative data are renowned for capturing heterogeneous, varied, nuanced and conflicting perspectives on a topic (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1992; Mason, 1996). Indeed, research designs often seek qualitative data precisely in order to explore, describe and explain the complexities and contradictions of social life (Bryman, 2004; C. Robson, 2002). As mentioned above, the panel of M-O correspondents does not represent a wide range of ethnicities, class backgrounds or areas of the country, tends to be concentrated in older age ranges and features more women than men. Nonetheless, one would still expect variation in views on personalisation in the funeral. To be sure, not everyone made a comment regarding the value of personalisation, but of those who did, all but one ascribed it a positive value. It is possible that those who in fact would have ascribed it a negative value are those who simply did not write anything about it. Having said that, correspondents in general are noted to be apt to write critically (Sheridan et al., 2000), and those correspondents who responded to this particular directive were articulate in their criticisms of other aspects of funerals. For example, correspondents wrote critically about officiants, about cremation, about funerals not being personal *enough* – but not about funerals being too personalised, except once.

What 'Personalisation' Meant for Mourners

It is worth clarifying what I mean when I say that in principle mourners valued 'personalisation in the funeral'. First, I say 'in principle' because, as will be seen below, the practice was not always successful; this did not lead mourners to write that personalisation should not be practiced, only that it should be practiced well. Second, as I discussed in Chapter 3, 'personalisation' in academic literature can mean one of three things: (i) the exercising of choice, (ii) customising a funeral with the purpose of making it 'stand out' from others, or (iii) the symbolic representation of the deceased person. Caswell's (2011) research suggests that 'professionals' (by which she means funeral directors, officiants, and cemetery and cremation authorities, whether municipal or privately-owned) are concerned principally with the third of these (the symbolic

representation of the deceased person), with the first (the exercising of choice) being seen as a means of achieving it. Funeral arrangers are offered choices on the assumption that the guiding principle behind their choices will have ultimate reference to the symbolic representation of the deceased person (rather than, say, religious, political or cultural influence) (Cook and Walter, 2005).

But what about mourners? Entirely, their interest was in the symbolic representation of the deceased person. None of the correspondents praised a funeral for being unique without also praising it for representing the deceased person as well. None made any reference to the exercising of choice – perhaps unsurprising since my analysis specifically excluded material from funeral arrangers, although it is worth noting that none of the mourners thought that their participation *should* have provided any choices for them.

The symbolic representation of the deceased person, as mourners refer to it, can be analysed into four further categories which are illustrated in the extracts below: representations of the deceased person's (a) biography or life story, (b) character, (c) activities, interests or hobbies, and (d) wishes concerning the funeral:

> She talked about her godmother's early life, her family and then gave us snippets of her life through memories of certain events, favourite things, etc. It was not just a stereotypical chronological race through the deceased's life, which can often appear impersonal. Her oration truly captured her godmother's spirit and personality, and was a positive celebration of her life. (W4376, female, 42)

> A minister led the funeral, and one of Betty's friends made a short speech about her. The minister's bit was pretty forgettable when I look back, I can't remember a single thing he said. Her friend's tribute was lovely – very personal and talked about Betty's qualities as a person. (M4132, female, 44)

> The 'best' funeral, I'd say, was that of a friend of ours who was an Egyptologist. His wife and friends organised an Egyptian funeral for him at which he was placed in an open coffin so people could say their goodbyes and he was buried in a woodland grave. We had a very strong sense that this was the 'right' funeral for him and also a far greater awareness of

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having been part of a meaningful ceremony and of really having paid our respects to this man and having said goodbye to him. (H1745, female, 59)

… brilliant funerals:

Rose had a procession through her home town, she was in a horse drawn glass carriage and followed by 200 + people including her belly dancing group in full costume and bells, her women's Morris Dancing group in full costume and bells (she liked bells) and black face, her drumming group and tons of us holding either sprigs of Rosemary or Roses. (G4566, female, no age given)

I thought that the funeral was a nice send off for Granddad. It would have been better if it had been more personal if he had maybe planned it before he died for example the music, any readings. (T4409, female, 31)

These mourners' accounts certainly seem to confirm Young and Cullen's claim that mourners at a funeral focus on the individuality of the one being mourned, and "respond to an effort to bring him or her alive again at least in words" (1996, p. 185), although it is notable that alternatives to words feature strongly, as they do in the choices and comments made by mourners who arrange funerals (Caswell, 2009, 2011-2012; Holloway et al., 2010; Naylor, 1989; Parsons, 2012). Words and their alternatives will be discussed in much more detail in Chapter 8.

Personalisation versus Religion

But what of the complaint about too much personalisation? It was made by a correspondent who describes herself as a committed Anglican, and it ran as follows:

I have been to two other local funerals quite recently... One went on for over two hours in a very 'happy-clappy' church, with repeated choruses galore and endless talks about the deceased. The whole emphasis was on the person, not God, and to me it felt wrong... (R2144, female, 75)

This objection to personalisation is framed as a case of focussing on the deceased person at the expense of focussing on God, mirroring earlier

complaints from other correspondents who reversed the order of preference. It is interesting to note that despite the findings of some authors that personalisation has the potential to be included perfectly congruently in a religious funeral (Cook and Walter, 2005; although Quartier, 2009, writing in the Netherlands, notes that in practice such congruence may be difficult to attain), and that religious elements can be included perfectly congruently in a personalised funeral (Caswell, 2009; discussed in the US context by Garces-Foley and Holcomb, 2006), some mourners perceived the two to be in competition with one another.

However, the position of the correspondent quoted above is not quite so straightforward when one continues to read her reply. So far, her objection seems to be based on the principle that a funeral, or at least a funeral held in church, simply should have a focus on God rather than on the deceased person – perhaps because this is what would please God. Notwithstanding, she goes on to say that

> The second funeral was at the R.C. church. This was a quieter affair, and at the centre was the Eucharist. The coffin was there and of course the deceased was mentioned, but God was the main focus. I felt that she would have wanted that. (R2144, female, 75)

Here, this same correspondent who had criticised the earlier funeral for focusing on the person rather than God praises a funeral for focusing on God *on the grounds that the deceased would have wanted that*. I am not claiming that this small statement reveals a commitment to personalisation which the correspondent earlier seemed to deny. Much more data on the topic – which we do not have from this correspondent – would be needed for such a claim. My aim is more modest, in that I simply draw attention to the presence of a personalisation discourse alongside a religious one even in the most religiously-privileging data that I could find.

Mourners' Perspectives on Eulogies

The literature views the eulogy as the core of 'life-centred' funerals, funerals which look backward over the life of the one who has died rather than looking forward to their future in an afterlife. What is important about a eulogy to those

arranging the funeral is that it must present a full and accurate representation of the person who has died (Caswell, 2009, 2011; Holloway et al., 2010; Walter, 1990). Mourners concurred with this position, both praising occasions when it happened and criticising funerals when it did not:

> There was music and valedictory speeches by the two surviving sisters. They performed very well under the circumstances and brought out the character of the lady (who I'd never met – I being there to support my wife). (B4318, male, 67)

> I had been impressed at the full description that was given of my aunt's life, rather than just the passing references that you sometimes get in 'church' ceremonies. (D1602, male, 68)

> ... a vicar took the service and talked warmly but quite impersonally, giving the impression that the whole event was a bit perfunctory. (G3423, female, 51)

> I remember the vicar who took the service producing the usual unrecognizable portrait of the deceased, derived from a brief conversation with somebody in the family as to her interests and character (and by this misrepresentation adding to the distress of those in attendance). (B3227, male, 43)

Correspondents were not asked for and did not often offer details about the *content* of the eulogies they heard. Nonetheless, quotes such as these illustrate the importance that correspondents attached to the eulogy, and in particular to its accurate representation of the deceased person's biography, character and identity.

In Chapter 3 I noted that in contemporary society members of the wider group of mourners are likely to know the deceased person in different ways and to have different pictures of them (Allan, 1996, p. 129; Walter, 1990, 2007). I further noted that this carries the potential for those wider mourners to experience attempts at personalisation as unsuccessful (Bosley and Cook, 1994; Quartier, 2009), because it is a very small number of mourners, who know the deceased person in particular ways, who inform the person writing

and delivering the eulogy (Caswell, 2011, p. 251). The data bear this out, on a number of aspects.

Factual errors, particularly with the name of the deceased person, were complained of:

> The priest got M's name wrong at least twice, which I think must be one of the worst things that can happen at a funeral... (H1745, female, 59)

> At my aunt's funeral in Cardiff years ago, her name was repeatedly pronounced wrong, and I could not relate at all to the person being described. (T2003, female, b.1949)

It is not clear from this second quote whether the inability to relate to the person is a second complaint, or the direct result of being given an incorrect "message of identification" (Bosley and Cook, 1994, p. 79) throughout the funeral.

The eulogy may present a picture which is not recognisable to mourners:

> The whole funeral felt very weird – there was nothing in it about his life in the cinema business, yet that was his main interest. (D4101, male, 50)

Alternatively, the representation may be recognisable but seen as incomplete (Frank, 1990):

> I couldn't get out of there fast enough. Trying to pin it down, I think it was a feeling of falseness. Whoever organised it, wrote the eulogy, devised the event, had decided on an image of my friend that was only partially recognisable. Yes she was the things they said, but she was many other things too. (M1201, female, 47)

These data demonstrate that wider mourners' perspectives on personalisation through the eulogy were largely in accordance with those of arranging mourners (Caswell, 2009). That is, what was most important was that the eulogy represent a recognisable picture of the person who has died. When the eulogy failed in this, the result for mourners was extremely uncomfortable, as illustrated above.

This emphasis on the identity of the deceased person, particularly in the eulogy, is entirely congruent with Davies' (2002) writing on 'words against death', which will be discussed extensively in Chapter 8. There was little evidence supporting the idea that a successful eulogy is one which inspires

mourners to reflect on the meaning and value of their own life, biography and choices (Walter, 1990, p. 229). Having said that, Chapter 8 will also discuss data concerning the memories that eulogies (among other aspects of the funeral) could prompt.

Indeed, Chapter 8 will discuss eulogies and identity at much more length. What this section is concerned to demonstrate is the authority which the individual – in this case, the deceased individual – is accorded over the funeral by mourners. This can be seen in the degree to which mourners approve of the principle of personalisation, that is, the symbolic representation of the deceased person's identity. As seen in the quotes above, this may be accomplished through many means, including music, flowers, clothing and the coffin (Caswell, 2009; Harper, 2008; Holloway et al., 2010). It may also be accomplished through the eulogy, the narrative representation of the deceased person's identity. The degree to which mourners value the life-centred funeral with the eulogy at its core was also clear in the data. It should be noted that no correspondents complained that a eulogy was not given at the funeral they attended – although the literature suggests that this is more likely to be because a eulogy was given than because it was not but mourners did not mind (Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010).

Thus far, this chapter has shown that wider mourners' perspectives on funerals are largely in congruence with those of funeral arrangers who organise them (Caswell, 2009, 2011; Holloway et al., 2010; Walter, 1990). That is to say, we have seen that some mourners acted 'traditionally', particularly by wearing black at a funeral, but even those who did this did so with full consciousness that it was an active choice, so that in general mourners related to tradition not as an authority but as an option (Giddens, 1990, 1994; Heelas et al., 1996). We have seen that many considered the proper presence or degree of religion in a funeral ceremony to be contingent on the deceased person's own religiosity, positioning religious content as an element of personalisation rather than an absolute authority over funerals. We have also seen that the principle of personalisation, in the sense of a focus on the life and character of the person who has died, was overwhelmingly approved of and valued. More particularly,

the eulogy was valued as a core part of a funeral, which was considered good or successful if the picture presented of the deceased person was recognisable. Both of these findings indicate mourners' endorsement of the authority of the individual. So far, then, the data from mourners have corroborated and supported existing scholarship which has focused on those who are involved in planning funerals (Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010; Walter, 1990). This is an original finding in itself, since we did not previously know whether what was important to those making decisions about the funeral was also important to those not involved in those decisions. Nonetheless, the data so far have not presented any surprising departures from what had already been found out in research with other kinds of participants.

However, the M-O data also contained a category of data which is not found in existing literature on funerals. This category has to do with the importance of the speaker at the funeral knowing the deceased person. The remainder of this chapter will present and discuss this theme, going on to discuss its implications for the earlier parts of the chapter and for the remainder of the thesis.

Speaking Well of the Dead: the Importance of Knowing the Deceased Person

In many of the funerals described in correspondents' replies, proceedings were led by an officiant who had not known the deceased person[58]. Often those officiants also gave the eulogy during the ceremony. Two criticisms that mourners made of officiants who did not know the deceased person were that the funeral 'was not very personal', meaning that it did not have a strong enough focus on the life or character of the deceased person (Walter, 1990), and that the officiant made factual errors[59] (the worst of which was to get the

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[58] In my experience, it is not uncommon for officiants to tell mourners as part of their opening address whether or not they had known the person who died. Some of the M-O replies explicitly say that the officiant did this, some do not. Whether or not correspondents were in fact correct about the officiant's familiarity with the deceased person is not important for this discussion. What matters is that correspondents believed the officiant not to know the one who had died, and that they gave this a particular meaning.

[59] Of course, simply knowing the deceased person need not preclude mistakes in eulogy – a point that correspondents did not acknowledge. It is also possible that some correspondents heard what they considered to be mistakes in the eulogy and assumed from that that the

deceased person's name wrong or pronounce it incorrectly) (Holloway et al., 2010):

> I have been to funerals were the priest didn't know the deceased. My Nana's funeral was like this and instead of speaking of my Nana, her life and family. He discussed the life of Saint D (her name). It was a tough funeral. (M4122, male, 32)

> … the minister led a very dignified service, focusing sympathetically on the mourners' sense of loss and on the hope of a better life to come. But… [he] didn't know her. In my opinion, it is part of a minister's job to find out what he can about the person for whom he's conducting a funeral and part of that should be to get the facts right. But he didn't seem capable of understanding that as Gran was 98 years old, her life as a young woman would have been in the First World War. He got completely confused and had Gran's husband returning from the Second World War. It was very disappointing. (W1813, female, 60)

> The worst funeral I have ever been to was when the minister even got the name of the person who had died wrong and it was obvious he knew nothing about him. It was really embarrassing. (J1190, female, 78)

A further correspondent complains of a partial or skewed representation of the deceased person in the eulogy (Caswell, 2009, pp. 224, 9), attributing this to the producers of the eulogy not knowing that person well *enough*:

> I had the odd sensation that I'd gatecrashed someone else's funeral, the service for someone I'd never met. The trouble was that only C's parents in this village had known him when well and so they had a totally false impression of who he was. C's parents were obviously distraught and his Mum was completely out of it on medication from the GP, and I don't think they had managed to give the vicar a true account of his life. The vicar had met C a few times in the later stages of his life and just talked about that. It wasn't the C that any of us recognized, and we all felt it wasn't an appropriate or sufficient tribute to him. (A2801, female, 45)

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officiant did not know the deceased person. Again, whether this in fact happened does not threaten the point under discussion.

Such criticisms are perhaps predictable, corroborating as they do the finding by other researchers that accurate representation, perhaps particularly through words (Davies, 2002), of the deceased person's biography, character and identity is crucial to the attribution of a successful funeral (Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010).

There is, however, an entirely novel theme in these data. This is that some mourners complained about officiants who did not know the deceased person, *even though the eulogy they were giving about them was apparently (according to the correspondent) entirely accurate.* This is a theme which has not been seen before in the literature. For example:

> The funeral was a dull affair, conducted by a clergyman who clearly did not know the family. Instead of inviting them to take part he quoted from what his children had told him, when they were sitting there and could have spoken for themselves. (B2240, male, 89)

In this quote, the officiant does not know the deceased person, but is speaking in place of people who do. For the correspondent, it was not what was said that was the problem, but who was saying it. The implication is that speakers who knew the deceased man would have been preferable to this officiant, who did not. It is important to distinguish the nature of this criticism from others that are found commonly in the funerals literature. For example, Quartier (2006), in a study conducted in the Netherlands, found that Christian ministers were very conscious that the eulogies they gave at funerals needed to meet the varying expectations of many unrelated people, people with whom the ministers themselves were not familiar. The criticism from the correspondent above, however, is not that the minister does not know the mourners and their relationships with the dead person well enough to speak accurately of what they have lost, for he is perceived as reporting what the children themselves would have said. The criticism is that the minister does not know the dead person well enough to be qualified to speak at all – and does not know the deceased man's children well enough to be qualified to speak on their behalf.

When mourners identified the consequences of the eulogy being given by a stranger, they wrote about effects similar to the consequences of poor personalisation. That is, some felt the situation to be unsatisfactory for the

deceased person – the correspondent in the quote above went on to say, "I hope [the deceased man] was not disappointed," while other correspondents wrote:

> And so we were stuck with a vicar who did not know her. People grumbled about this afterwards... I remember the dismay with which I heard the vicar describe my grandmother's interest in motor racing and quiz shows; these clumsily applied details were not untrue, but still they seemed to belittle her (B3227, male, 43)

> I couldn't help thinking that if you've survived to 98 and led such an interesting and varied life with all its happinesses and tragedies you deserve better send off than this. (W1813, female, 60)

The situation was also experienced as unsatisfactory for mourners themselves. Correspondents described sharing disappointment with the deceased person:

> ... what I did object to was the fact that the priest didn't know my Mum personally at all. He kept using her birth first name which really irritated me, as nobody called my Mum [that]. She was known to all her friends and family as [another name]. Apparently he had been asked to refer to my Mum as [her known name], but must have forgotten, and was going by his notes and calling her [her birth name]. The service for my Mum was really impersonal, and I hated it. To this day, although I have never shared this with any of my family[60], I regret that my Mum didn't have the kind of funeral service that she deserved... (R4604, female, 46)

Other consequences for mourners included embarrassment, as mentioned in the quote from J1190 above, and even alienation from the entire funeral:

> The vicar spoke and gave a summary of his life, which was very odd as he had never met him. None of his immediate family spoke, which I found surprising... I didn't pay much attention to the funeral to be honest, simply because the words didn't mean anything to me as they were being said by someone who didn't know him. (E4556, male, 26)

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[60] This is an example of correspondents writing about things they keep from others, as discussed on

These represent some examples of funerals where the officiant was thought by mourners not to know the deceased person, and where mourners then experienced or interpreted this as disagreeable in one of a number of ways.

Correspondents also provided examples of funerals where those people who did know the deceased person were described as being able to do a better job than the officiant, who did not:

> Two close friends of his stood up and spoke about him. They knew him well. Afterwards at a local club, we gathered together for a drink – and we all knew each other... We talked about 'A', swapped funny stories, but we also talked about local matters – which is exactly what he would have wanted. He was such an active member of our community. Looking back, I think this was probably the best funeral I have been to in recent years, because the people who took part in the service knew him so well. **And that is very important.** (E743, female, b.1951, emphasis in original)

> … the very worst was… a member of the Humanist organisation, who had not known J, prating on about him in a disinterested way (and I do mean disinterested, not uninterested) about his life and family...
> In a nearby hotel, the event turned into J's real farewell. There were sincere, and hilarious, tributes from ex-bosses, from his family and from a caller who had worked with his barn dance band… everyone remembered the man they had known, not the soulless person described in the crem. (W633, female, 68)

> The worst funeral I went to was a traditional religious service at the crematorium of an acquaintance who the minister did not know and it all seemed pointless to me and it was only afterwards when people started talking did the person 'come to life'. (H3821 , male, 58)

In the first of these examples, familiars appear in the place of an officiant, who was not mentioned at all. In the second two examples, the officiant, who did not know the deceased person, is contrasted unfavourably with mourners, who did. The formal ceremony – the sphere of the 'experts' – is also contrasted with more the informal surroundings of the tea – the sphere of intimates (Allan, 1979, 1989; Feld and Carter, 1998; Morgan, 2009).

Of course, sometimes the officiant at a funeral *does* know the deceased person. When correspondents mentioned having attended a funeral where that was (thought to be) the case, they did so always with approval. Their reasons for approval included those straightforwardly to do with personalisation, namely, that such officiants could be trusted first to get the facts right (again, not referring to the fact that even familiars can make mistakes) and second to present a recognisable picture of the deceased person. There were also two other reasons that correspondents gave for being pleased that the officiant had known the deceased person. The first of these was that it made the officiant capable of adding to mourners' own stock of knowledge about the person who had died (Frank, 1990):

> The eulogy was particularly lovely. My great uncle had been friends with the priest for over 60 years. This led to some nice stories that were enjoyable to hear. (M4122, male, 32)

> The worst funeral I attended was for the husband of a work colleague. I didn't know him and had gone to represent the office. He had died suddenly in his late 30s leaving a family, and the vicar had known him since he was a child so it was very personal. This really made a difference as he recalled the times the deceased had been in the church as a child, for example where he had sat when he was in the choir. (K4417, female, 43)

> I did not know Stan particularly well, and the priest did not seem to know much about him either, so it was rather a disappointing affair. (G4374, male, 44)

These examples seem to suggest that both information and stories may be valued by mourners when the officiant is thought to know the deceased person. The second reason that such officiants were spoken of with approval was that they were perceived to demonstrate authenticity and sincerity in their eulogy:

> The service was led by the local vicar who knew the deceased + it was the same vicar who buried her husband a couple of years earlier. He spoke with genuine interest about the deceased. (W3730, female, 43)

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> … [the officiating vicar] was wonderful. She at least did know my family &
> so she seemed to be totally genuine in her service. (O3436, female, 56)

> The one problem that conditions feelings about a funeral is often the
> performance of the minister. It is easier if they know the person who has
> died and can relay their own feelings. (G4313, male, 83)

By contrast, an officiant speaking on behalf of others, even when it was known that what they were saying was authentic in the sense of being true, could be experienced as inauthentic:

> ... someone in the family had written some anecdotes for the person
> conducting the service to read out. I remember being puzzled through my
> tears as to how this stranger supposedly knew so much about our family
> life and feeling angry that he spoke about my granddad as if he'd known
> him personally. (K4268, female, 29)

In the example above, it is not the presentation of the deceased person which is experienced as objectionable, but the presentation of *familiarity* with the deceased person which, because untrue, is experienced as objectionable. Indeed, it is experienced as even perhaps intrusive, inappropriate to the actual lack of intimacy between officiant, deceased person and mourners.

Taken together, these data indicate that even when the eulogy was substantively accurate, hearing it from an officiant who did not know the deceased person could be experienced as a disservice to that person, and could be unsatisfactory and even alienating for mourners. Contrarily, hearing from those who did know the deceased person, whether an officiant or lay people (other mourners) could be experienced as more authentic and even a 'real' farewell, and was valued for being able to contribute to mourners' own pictures of the person who had died. Throughout, what matters is not the representation of the deceased person but the *relationship* that the officiant does or does not hold to the one who has died.

What sense can we make of these novel data? Earlier in this chapter I discussed Walter's (1990, p. 220) characterisation of the eulogy as a statement of the deceased person's fulfilled potential, and Caswell's (2009) interpretation

of the eulogy as the completion by proxy of the deceased person's project of the self. Under these accounts, what is crucial is that the eulogy is accurate and that it present a recognisable picture of the one who has died – but it should not matter who gives it. According to the data from mourners, though, who says it can be just as important as what is said.

Literature on funeral officiants, as opposed to the eulogy itself, does not offer much more illumination. Funeral officiants have been identified as an example of people doing 'mediator deathwork', "where the professional gleans or constructs information about the dead, edits and polishes it, and publicly presents the edited version in a public rite" (Walter, 2005a, p. 383). In addition to the emphasis on a good enough representation, Walter comments that such mediator deathworkers may need to manage tense social relationships at the funeral, for example, between estranged family members (Walter, 2005a, p. 388). Similarly, Jenny Hockey (1993) discusses ministers' ways of managing mourners' emotions during a funeral ceremony, though not the relationships between them. The officiants interviewed by Holloway et al. (2010) and Caswell (2009) are concerned primarily, if not exclusively, with the family members of the deceased person with whom the funeral is planned. Of this literature it is Walter's concept of mediator deathwork which seems most promising – but, as with the theories of the eulogy, it does not tell the full story. Moreover, Walter takes for granted (2005a, pp. 397-8) that officiants are able to speak on behalf of – and, presumably, to – those present, while this is a qualification that correspondents, as mourners, did *not* accept as taken-for-granted but were instead challenging. The mediator deathworker concept does not advance us in finding an answer to the question, why should it matter whether or not an officiant knew the deceased person, if what they present is a recognisable picture of the deceased person?

I propose that this question can be most fruitfully addressed if we consider Walter's (1996c) *New Model of Grief*. This model of grief is presented in contrast to models which view the path[61] of grief as a normative letting go and leaving behind of the person who has died, models which are familiar in popular

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[61] In the original paper, Walter writes about the "purpose of grief". Following criticism of the new model (Stroebe, 1997) Walter retracted this term (Walter, 1997b), but did not offer a replacement.

discourse (Jalland, 2010) despite having been distorted from their academic origins (e.g. Freud, 1949; Kübler-Ross, 1969; Marris, 1958, 1974; Parkes and Weiss, 1983; see Valentine, 2006, for an informative review). In Walter's model, derived from observation and experience of what people actually do when they are bereaved, the path of grief involves finding a stable place for the deceased person in mourners' memories and their ongoing lives, an emphasis shared with the 'continuing bonds' model of grief (Klass et al., 1996)[62]. In Walter's model, this stable place is accomplished, he argues, through talking about the deceased person – through sharing stories, comparing impressions, reminiscing together – *with other people who knew the dead person*. While Walter himself, as well as others who have applied the model (including Árnason, 2012; Coleman, 1999; Duke, 1998; Woof and Carter, 1997, writing for social scientists, gerontologists, nurses and GPs, respectively), places more emphasis on its biographical, storying aspect, its social and relational aspects seem to me to be crucial. One cannot share stories with someone who does not actually have any.

In the light of this model, I suggest that we can start to see how hearing stories of the deceased person, even though true, from someone who had not known them, would be experienced as not quite satisfactory, and why hearing stories from someone who did know the deceased person – authentically – might be experienced as positive. Indeed, the two extracts quoted above from W633 (p. 190) and H3821 (p. 190), who described the 'real farewell' of the collective gathering after the formal ceremony as bringing the deceased person 'to life', appear to lend strong support to the possibility that for at least some mourners, the social, as well as the biographical, is an important feature of the funeral.

Conclusion

This chapter began by showing that for a large part, mourners' perspectives were in accordance with those of funeral arrangers, already established in the funerals literature. These were that mourners did not relate to tradition or

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[62] The contention of Klass et al. (1996) is that rather than being an indication of 'complicated grief', it can be considered both common and healthy for bereaved people to maintain bonds with, and to continue to relate to, those who have died.

religion as an authority, although either could be a meaning-constitutive tradition (Gross, 2005) for some. The prime authority over the funeral for mourners was seen to be the individual, and almost entirely the individual of the deceased person. Overwhelmingly, mourners valued personalisation in the funeral. In particular, the eulogy was expected to convey the deceased person's life story, their character, their interests and activities, while the whole funeral might be praised if it appeared to follow either what the deceased person would have wanted, or even what they did in fact stipulate. Mourners corroborated the position of arranging mourners, requiring of the eulogy that it be accurate and present a recognisable picture of the deceased person, although we saw that at times, this picture could seem inaccurate, with distressing consequences.

Grand theorists such as Giddens (1990, 1991, 1994) and 'death scholars' such as Caswell (2009, 2011) would link these findings to the advance of, or trends in, modernity[63]. I do not intend to do this. M-O material does not provide enough data on either funerals or correspondents to make valid claims about modernity (and see Walter, 2012c, for a well-constructed critique of this enterprise in the first place), neither is it the aim of the thesis so to do. That said, we should note well that the trend in M-O data from mourners corresponds with the findings of those authors who *do* analyse for 'modernity' (under any of its names) such as Caswell (2009) and Walter (1994, 1996a), and who find the emphasis on the authority of the individual to be indicative thereof.

The data presented in the final section of the chapter showed that even when a eulogy was accurate, mourners could object to its being given by an officiant who did not know the deceased person. These data are important for two reasons. First, they represent a new theme, unseen in the literature until now. Second, consideration of these data leads to an insight which will be built on in Chapter 8 and which is essential to the overall thesis. This insight is this: for mourners, the content of the funeral, its substantive aspects, are necessary for a 'successful' funeral, but they may not be sufficient. It is not only what people say or do which creates the funeral, but the very question of who those people are *matters*.

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[63] Or high modernity (Giddens, 1991), late modernity (ibid.), postmodernity (Bauman, 1998) or neomodernity (Walter, 1994), depending which author is writing.

It may be noted that the authority of experts did not feature at all in correspondents' replies. Funeral directors were barely mentioned, and although officiants' performance of the eulogy in particular could have consequences for mourners' experience of the funeral (Holloway et al., 2010, pp. 244-6), they were nonetheless viewed as agents of, and subject to the authority of, the individual (whether the individual in question was the funeral arranger or the deceased person themselves), rather than as holding authority in their own right. This is evidenced by the praise which they were given for prioritising individuals' wishes and lessening the degree of religious content in funerals. In addition, mourners clearly did not all take it for granted that an officiant was qualified to speak of the deceased person merely by dint of being the officiant. This absence from the data (Bernard and Ryan, 2010, p. 62) marks a stark contrast with extant literature on the funeral which takes funeral directors in particular to be pivotal figures in the funeral (Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010; Howarth, 1996; Naylor, 1989; Parsons, 2003; Smale, 1997). Of course, funeral directors and officiants both remain central figures in the production of the funeral, but these data indicate that in its reception by wider mourners, other sources of authority are central.

One of these sources of authority is, as we have seen, the individual. The following chapter will argue that mourners respond to an authority extra to those identified in the literature (Walter, 1994, 1996a), namely, the authority of the family.

Chapter 7: The Family

Introduction

The previous chapter established that tradition was not viewed as an authority over the funeral, that religion was also not viewed as an authority over the funeral, and that the individual was viewed as an authority over the funeral, although with more social and relational aspects than have been considered by the literature to date.

These kinds of social and relational considerations are key to this thesis, and will be returned to and examined in much more detail in Chapter 8. In this chapter, however, we stay with the question of authority, since, as mentioned at the end of Chapter 6, the individual is not the sole source of authority at the funeral. This chapter will establish that when we take mourners' perspectives on the funeral into account, the family can be seen to be an authority over the funeral.

To do this, I will show first that family is a taken-for-granted category for mourners, and that family is given priority at the funeral. I will do this by examining hierarchical and binary distinctions that correspondents made between mourners. I will go on to show that many funeral practices are simultaneously practices in which family is actively accomplished through 'doing' and 'displaying', and will draw attention to the role of wider mourners in bringing this about. Finally I will show that family is not merely present at the funeral but should be considered an authority.

Distinctions Between Mourners: Hierarchies and Binaries

The literature discussed in Chapter 3 suggested that culturally recognised 'hierarchies of loss' (Robson and Walter, 2012-2013) or binaries of dis/enfranchised grievers (Doka, 1989, 1999), both of which tend to reflect and reinforce a specific, heteronormative image of 'family' (Reimers, 2011), have an impact on how bereaved people experience their grief (Doka, 1989, 1999, 2002b; Littlewood, 1982). This thesis, and the M-O data, are concerned with the experience of being a mourner at a funeral, rather than the experience of grief

or grieving, and transposing these ideas of hierarchies from the grief literature needs to be done with care. Nonetheless, with these caveats in mind, it is still fruitful to ask, do such hierarchies or binaries also influence the experience of being a mourner at a funeral, and if so, how?

Mourning Hierarchies: The Primacy of 'The Family'

M-O data do show evidence for what might be thought of as 'mourning hierarchies' – assumptions not about how particular mourners are feeling, but about what they may or must do. Indeed, some correspondents' replies included hierarchical lists and assumed that these were common knowledge for other mourners too:

> There was nothing like a pre-arranged seating plan (and I have never seen one for a funeral ceremony). Everyone seemed to know the appropriate arrangements, with the widow and her children at the very front, other relatives such as we a little behind, and friends, neighbours, colleagues behind us. (R2143, male, 63)

This list closely resembles those formulated by Robson and Walter (2012-2013), and establishes particular family relationships to the deceased person (spouse, children) at the 'top' of the hierarchy, followed by more general relationship categories (other family, friends, neighbours, colleagues) in descending order. Mourners who did not already take these orderings for granted soon gathered that others may well do:

> I think that at this point I did something wrong, but I didn't realise that at first and after a couple of seconds I was stuck there to all intents and purposes. There was a space in between the entrance door and my mam, and that is where I stood –I just stood in the space, it meant nothing to me, but I suspect that I was meant to have stood outside and so then I would not have been the first family member people would pass on their way out. Maybe it appeared that I was assuming some kind of importance, but that was not the case. A number of people bypassed me, intending to shake hands or hug my Grandma. (E2977, male, 29)

Genealogical relationship alone, though, may not be the only criterion for determining one's position in the hierarchy, which has implications for action

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(Finch and Mason, 1991, 1993). Both beyond families and within them, 'closeness', meaning emotional intimacy or liking (Morgan, 2009), was an important ordering concept:

> After this we were invited to come up front and light a candle for the dead man. At first I thought my link with him was rather tenuous and that it would be presumptuous- but as nearly everybody did I joined in, and was glad I had done so... We were all invited to have some refreshments afterwards in the building opposite, and we did so. However, we did not stay very long because of our more distant status... (D826, female, 60)

> … I didn't bother attending the funerals of two relatives, an uncle and an aunt. I'd have been quite prepared to travel up from London for the funerals but my mother said she thought it wasn't necessary and in the end I didn't make the journeys. Neither had been particularly 'close' relatives, in the sense of personal relationships, which might have been a factor in my mother's calculations. (M3190, male, 52)

These examples support Robson and Walter's (2012-2013) finding that while the idea of a hierarchy associated with bereavement easily makes sense to people, placing individuals (including oneself) in that hierarchy is not necessarily straightforward, and may not be based on the relationship alone but also on the emotional quality of that relationship.

Because hierarchical family positions are not necessarily straightforward, there is the potential for disagreement about them. In the context of the funeral this may be expressed as being to do with control over decisions:

> I think that there was some friction because the wife and the deceased had planned what they wanted and then Gran chipped in and altered things and she always gets her way! She is quite the Matriarch. She is a good, kind person but I think we were all aware that this had ruffled a few feathers... Although there had been intervention in the service from his Mother I thought that the service was beautiful and I was glad that Grans wishes had been accommodated. Afterwards I thought that friction could have been avoided if they had talked about it with her when he was still alive. After all she was always going to want an input - she was his mother. (B4750, female, 35)

It should be noted that while this particular struggle does reflect authors' focus on the potential for conflict over positioning at the 'top' of the hierarchy (Littlewood, 1982; Robson and Walter, 2012-2013), the M-O data contain evidence for politics and discord at the 'bottom' too, particularly with regard to attendance. Finch (1989, p. 178) and Finch and Mason (1993, pp. 97-110) have noted the need within families to provide socially acceptable excuses, ideally by demonstrating inability rather than simply unwillingness, in order legitimately to withdraw themselves from responsibilities. But in the M-O data even some of those who decided against going to a funeral because of not being close enough to the deceased person still felt that they need to provide this kind of excuse for not being there:

> I did not go, nor did P (mentioned earlier) to the funeral of a former news editor, long retired. When we had been young reporters he had driven us both to the point of resignation and, in his general life and social contacts, was an unpleasant man. We decided that, as neither of us could go in the spirit in which one should go to a funeral, we'd stay away. Our excuse? His funeral was on our press day. (W633, female, 68)

Others, perhaps unwittingly, attracted surprise or even disapproval by not attending:

> One funeral I decided not to go to was one for a woman at work. It was a company I had previously worked for and they called me to ask if I would help out as this person had gone off sick and they needed help with the payroll (this was her job), so I went to help out. She and I were not great friends though not enemies either, we just didn't really hit it off. However she eventually died and people were rather surprised that I didn't go to the funeral. I didn't think that covering her job involved me going to her funeral. As we meant nothing to each other it seemed hypocritical to go to her funeral. (W3163, female, 52)

> I decided not to go to the funeral of a friend with whom we used to play Bridge. I was never very keen on her but the other lady in the foursome was a good friend + she was very annoyed with me for not going - so I was sorry in the end. (W2338, female, 78)

Both of these correspondents refer to other people's judgements about their obligation to mourn by attending the funeral. Expectations on mourners are culturally shared, even if not universally agreed, and they concern continuation after death of the respect and reciprocity shared in social relationships during life (Davies, 2002, p. 60).

Some mourners commented on the oddities of their position in the hierarchy without indicating any further difficulty:

> A daughter-in-law is a funny position. You aren't supposed to be so upset in a way. But you are. Not only for the relationship that you have lost, but for the sadness that you know your husband must carry within him. And you can't take it away. And the sadness that your children won't know someone who is so important to him, and you. (M3055, female, 36)

This is one of the few correspondents who clearly inhabits the 'secondary bereaved (helper) status' identified by Littlewood (1982, pp. 105-8) [64]. Once again it should be remembered that M-O data, being limited to accounts of the funeral, do not provide data on grief, which extends over a much longer period of time. Nonetheless we can note that at the funeral it appears that like many of Littlewood's participants who were discussing their overall experiences of grief, the correspondent views herself more as a donor than a recipient of support, and furthermore, that this view "accorded with [her] perception of the appropriate distribution of support in such circumstances" (Littlewood, 1982, p. 108).

Those who wrote about adverse consequences of not being accorded the hierarchical position which they felt was their due at the funeral were all family members, and 'close' family members at that. This might be predicted by the literature (Robson and Walter, 2012-2013), although the content of their objections may not be. For it was not so much the desire for social recognition of their loss which was emphasised, but recognition of their place in the family hierarchy as narrated within the eulogy:

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[64] 'Secondary bereaved (helper)' refers to those who are themselves bereaved of the deceased person, but are also the main support for the 'chief mourner' (Littlewood, 1982) (see p. 77 of this thesis). It is likely that other correspondents would have held this position but were screened out of analysis because part of the support they give includes assisting with funeral arrangements. Many other mourners also constructed their participation in the funeral in terms of helping or giving support. This will be discussed in more detail below.

It was a formal requiem mass with two eulogies by friends – well-written but with no mention of me – his sister in either of them! The pain of that only hit me later. (S2207, female, 58)

All I remember of speakers at the funeral is that the vicar booked to do the service had to send a locum due to illness. The locum spoke only of the last ten years of my father (his second marriage) with only one brief comment on the fifty preceding that, "And we are happily surprised to see all his children from the deceased's first marriage to Alice". As if we were callous and undeserving. NOTHING at all of his marriage to my mother or his preceding fifty years of life. I only remember the anger that my uncles had over this. (A4127, male, 48)

My mother was a teacher like me but not one mention was made of me or following her into teaching - instead it was about how my sister M did this that and the next thing for and with my Mother. How my father looked after her single handedly (I don't think so!) till it nearly broke him. How my aunt V and sister M went on holiday and here there and everywhere with my Mother. How her friend had done this and that for her - it was as if I had not existed. Of course my overbearing father had written it all and I just felt humiliated. (W729, female, 53)

The importance of narrative in legitimating membership of families is acknowledged in the literature (Doucet, 2011; Finch, 2007, p. 77; Finch and Mason, 2000, p. 165; James and Curtis, 2010, pp. 1165-6). Thus it should come as little surprise to us (though it can be an unpleasant surprise for them) that when family members of the deceased person find themselves written out of the ritual narrative of family in the eulogy, pain, anger and humiliation follow. The common complaints about the eulogy from the mourners here are not about poor representation of the deceased person, but about the unexpectedness and the injustice of their public displacement from their rightful place as family members to the deceased person.

Mourning Binaries: The Primacy of 'The Family'

Not all correspondents wrote in terms of hierarchies. A number distinguished in their replies between just two categories of mourner. While these categories did vary slightly, a common factor is easy to discern: those viewed as different in some way from other mourners were named as family, close family, immediate family, or family and (close) friends. The notion of 'the family', meaning the family of the deceased person, was central to these binary distinctions.

Correspondents made these binary distinctions between family and other mourners when writing about a number of aspects of the funeral. Attending the funeral was a recurring one and is discussed in more detail below. Other aspects included clothing and emotional expression:

> At funerals of my own friends that I attend on my own I normally wear smart casual clothes unless I am very close to them. I did wear a suit to my best friend's funeral as I was considered part of the family... (H1806, male, 85)

> I wore a navy coat and trousers chosen because I did not feel full mourning wa necessary since we were not close family members. (H4005, female, 70)

The quote above highlights the idea of 'obligations' incumbent specifically on family members (Finch, 1989; Finch and Mason, 1991). In the context of a funeral, this can mean 'having to' wear particular clothing (or 'having to' attend, or indeed, 'having to' comply with a number of expectations which are discussed in this chapter). Those external to the family are indeed released from such obligations, but at the same time they are curtailed in the execution of some 'rights' (Littlewood, 1982), including the freedom to cry at a funeral:

> I remember trying very hard to keep my emotions in check, as most of the family were doing so and it would have seemed very inappropriate not to follow suit. (R4695, male, 46)

The last of these quotes calls to mind Jenny Hockey's (1993) research into the work that funeral personnel – in this case clergy – do to keep mourners' emotions 'in check' (see Hochschild, 1983). Again we will note that here it is not funeral personnel who are experienced as being the guide to emotional behaviour, nor general cultural rules (Walter et al., 1995) upon which celebrants

might be drawing, but the deceased person's family. This point will be taken up in the discussion of the family's authority at the funeral, below.

A common area in which correspondents distinguished between the deceased person's family and other mourners was in discussion of attending the tea following the ceremony. Walter's (1994, p. 21) claim that for mourners, going to the tea is seen as a way to support the bereaved family, was not unequivocally supported:

> I didn't go to the wake partly from my own cowardice and partly because the family didn't need another guest to worry about, thank for coming, comfort etc. (A3434, female, 45)

> We were invited back to the house for the wake afterwards but I didn't go because I think that generally this is an imposition for the bereaved person. You've already been through the mill at the funeral and now you have to give everyone food and drink. You shouldn't go unless you know the person really well. Then again, what would happen if nobody hung around afterwards and the bereaved person had to go back to their house on their own? It's not easy, is it? (M4463, male, 57)

> There was a reception back at the house but I didn't go. I did drop off a card but made my excuses and left. I didn't want to intrude on the family side of things. (S4429, male, 43)

> ... although the family invited everyone in the church back for some refreshment afterwards, we didn't want to intrude, so instead we went to a nearby pub and had a pint of beer. (P2957, female, 41)

The idea of 'not intruding' on the tea was also mentioned without direct reference to the family:

> Afterwards there was a reception but we never intrude on that. (B2552, female, 78)

Correspondents did write about wanting to refrain from intruding in other contexts, which included not attending the funeral of someone not known to them, and sitting at the back of the congregation. However, it is mentioned most

frequently in connection with attending (or not attending) the tea. What does this tell us?

As noted in Chapter 4, even less has been written about funeral teas in Britain than has been written about the funerals themselves (but for perspectives from other cultures see Grainger, 1998a; Stevanovic, 2012; Yoder, 1986). Nonetheless, it is reasonable to suppose that, held separately from the funerary ritual and with no presiding official, they are less formal occasions than the ceremony itself which, like other rituals and rites of passage, may be strongly rule-bound (Bell, 1992, 1997; Bloch, 1974; Bocock, 1974; Turner, 1969; van Gennep, 1909/1960) and is almost certain to have been produced and overseen by funeral personnel – even if mourners themselves do not notice or refer to these figures (Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010; Howarth, 1996; Smale, 1997). It is not clear how *often* instructions are given to mourners about attending the tea, but where correspondents say that a message was relayed to them, it is always an invitation rather than a message of restriction. This can be contrasted with, for example, explicit instructions which mourners may receive about flowers – instructions which, as we will see below, are designed to separate the deceased person's family from other mourners. As we can see from P2957 above, even when mourners do feel like sharing a drink and each other's company, an invitation may not be enough to override their opinion that attendance at the tea would be an intrusion.

The following correspondent gives one reason why this may be:

> People always seem to be unsure how long to stay at a wake. Go too early and you run the risk of appearing rude, but if you are not part of the family, you do not want to outstay your welcome and intrude into the family's private grief. At every wake, it has always been a relief when the outsiders disappear and everyone can stop attempting to be sociable, and get back to being miserable or getting drunk (the second having become a feature for me at more recent funerals). (K4268, female, 29)

In her explanation of why one might feel that attendance at the tea is intrusive, this correspondent is drawing on the 'private grief script' (Walter, 1999), but with the boundary for privacy constructed around not an individual but the family of

the deceased person. Other correspondents drew on the same script. Discussing the burial of her sister, one correspondent wrote:

> We only allowed family and very close friends to this part of the funeral and
> I think that is right. With so many people watching it is natural to try and put
> on a brave face but you should be allowed to grieve. (J3887, female, 44)

While both of these correspondents endorse the social arrangements associated with the 'private grief' script, their rationale differs from that described in the literature, where the view of this script is that grief should be kept private in order "not [to] disturb others... If these are the obligations of the grieving person, the obligation of others is not to intrude upon his or her grief" (Walter, 1997a, p. 132). The correspondents above appear to agree with the second set of obligations – on other mourners to respect the boundary of the family – without endorsing the first. While the correspondents recognise that bereaved family members are inhibited from expressing their grief in the presence of those beyond the (perhaps modified) bounds of the family, this is presented as a concern not that the family should not disturb others, but to the contrary: that others should not disturb the family.

According to the literature, the foremost effect of a grieving binary is to determine whose loss is socially recognised, and who receives concomitant support (Doka, 1989, 1999). When this recognition is not forthcoming, bereaved people may experience their situation as problematic (Doka, 1999, 2002b; Fowlkes, 1990; Green and Grant, 2008; Littlewood, 1982; Reimers, 2011; Robson and Walter, 2012-2013).

Probably the most obvious reference to a mourner in such a situation in the M-O data is the correspondent who attended a funeral with her sister. The funeral was for a man who had had an affair with the correspondent's sister for over fifty years. Although it is not first person experience, it is worth noting that the correspondent does relate her sister's experience of the funeral in terms that highlight the contrast between what she was 'allowed' to show and what she would have felt:

> ...she didn't find out until just before the funeral that he had collapsed and
> died. We sat in the back row of the church like a couple of strangers,

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remember they saw each other at least once a week and only lived about 10 miles apart. (H1836, female, 66)

Other correspondents also experienced some degree of 'mismatch' between their felt grief and social recognition of their loss:

Now for the <u>BIG ONE</u>. My pal Val died a year ago. She was my dearest friend, confidante and soul sister... Our friend, who helps at the hospice, told us "Family only" posted on her door. Same at the chapel of rest. I accepted it, but felt a bit cheated... The coffin was tucked up the evening before. Her husband + family was there. I wept buckets + couldn't stop... We did not attend the wake, I just didn't want to rejoice. I feel totally bereft. I miss her every minute of everyday. I want to share a joke, tell her my woes, ask her advice. (B1180, female, 82)

For this correspondent it is the exclusion from 'family' spaces – synonymous with proximity to the dying person and her dead body – which is painful. Nonetheless, the correspondent accepts that everyday understandings of friends, as realised in practice, differ in significant and consequential ways from everyday understandings and practices of family (Allan, 2008; Pahl and Spencer, 2004, 2010), and does not seek to challenge or resist her exclusion. At first glance the funeral itself carries none of this sense of exclusion, since the correspondent did attend, and while she describes herself as unable to stop weeping, she does not indicate that this was problematic because she was not close enough to have the right to weep. Furthermore, her decision not to attend the wake on the grounds that she did not want to rejoice could be read as an assertion of her own right to grief. Another reading, though, is that this mourner expected the wake not to allow (for) her sorrow, and was still excluded.

There are both methodological and empirical reasons why these binary distinctions which correspondents made between 'the family' and other mourners should be treated with some caution. From a methodological perspective, it is not possible to ask correspondents how much weight a binary interpretation of their words actually carries with them, nor whether their experience at the funeral actually was one of being 'in' or 'out' of a particular group. This does not need to weaken my argument, which is not that there is such a group, but rather that the concept of 'the family' (meaning the deceased

person's family) informs both mourners' interpretations of and their participation in the social organisation of a funeral. From an empirical perspective, we should be aware that this concept has at least some degree of fluidity, in that mourners' interpretations and participation are influenced in differing ways in differing contexts. For example:

> Being a family member, I sat with the others in the family, at the front of the church... The committal was after the Church Service and was at a local Crematorium. This was for family only. Flowers were for close family only, and therefore, not being "Immediate family" I gave Donation. (M2061, female, 80)

The above correspondent indicates no contradiction between being included in 'the family' binary with respect to seating and attendance at the committal, and being excluded from 'the immediate family' binary with respect to flowers. Thus, while binary separation of family from other mourners is discernible in the data, its rigidity for mourners should not be overstated.

Nonetheless, this discussion of both hierarchies and binaries has demonstrated the irreducible importance of the notion of family in mourners' articulations of the social organisation of funerals. There were variations in whether correspondents wrote in terms of binaries or hierarchies, there were variations within each of these classes, and the consequences of the distinctions also varied. In all variations, though, 'the family' was given prime importance.

In making these distinctions, correspondents were drawing on a particular understanding of 'family', an understanding that did not appear to vary much, if at all. For correspondents, 'family' in the context of funerals was constituted by a structured set of consanguinal and conjugal relationships. In other words, correspondents were drawing on a conventional (and normative – see Reimers, 2011) notion of family. 'Families of choice', for example – "friendships held in an esteem comparable with that of kin in traditional families" (Weeks et al., 2001, p. 198) – or indeed any other notion of family constitution or concept did not figure in the data. Furthermore, correspondents took this for granted, so that even B1180, who so mourned her friend Val on p. 207, "felt a bit cheated" but still "accepted" that she should be excluded from 'the family'.

That it appears not to occur to her that the very concept of 'Val's family' might be able to include B1180 herself may lend some support to Pahl and Spencer's (2010) suggestion that 'families of choice' is not (yet) a concept with popular currency – at least among M-O correspondents[65].

In this section, then, I have demonstrated a number of ways in which a particular notion of 'the family' underlies mourners' taken-for-granted assumptions and actions concerning social ordering at funerals. However, following Finch and Mason (2000, p. 164) I argue that mourners are not just reflecting culturally dominant notions, but are actively accomplishing 'family' at funerals. To demonstrate this, I draw on two concepts introduced in Chapter 4.

Doing and Displaying Family at Funerals

The first of these two concepts is Morgan's (1996) notion of 'doing' family through 'family practices', in which families are understood as being constructed by everyday practices rather than by structures of genealogical relationship. In the second, Finch (2007) builds on Morgan's notion by arguing that at some times what people are doing through family practices is 'displaying' family: establishing or asserting a family relationship, or a family-like relationship, by means of a social interaction with another person or people – who then confirm this family-ness by also acting within a 'family' framework. This confirmation of family-ness may be direct or indirect, and may come from individuals or institutions external to the relationship(s) in question (Finch, 2007, pp. 74-5). This section complements more recent empirical work (Doucet, 2011; Gabb, 2011; James and Curtis, 2010; Seymour, 2011) exploring the roles of 'outsiders' in displaying family – a question which Finch's original paper left open (2007, p. 67). It also engages with recent theoretical discussions of the refinement and application of the concept (Dermott and Seymour, 2011a; Finch, 2011; Heaphy, 2011).

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[65] It may be objected that the 'families of choice' concept was originally developed in the context of non-heterosexual people's lives and relationships (Weeks et al., 2001), which are not well represented in the M-O data on funerals (as will be discussed presently). Pahl and Spencer offer 'personal communities' (2004) as a concept for decentring conventional notions of family; Roseneil and Budgeon 'cultures of intimacy' (2004). Correspondents did not draw on these either.

So, how are families done and displayed at the funeral?

Doing and Displaying Family through Attendance

One important way in which the family of the deceased person is displayed is by attending the funeral – by physically being present. Much of the time, attending a 'family funeral' is simply 'doing' family, in that it is simply what one does since one is family (Morgan, 1996), without being overlaid with an extra need to establish family-ness (Finch, 2007, p. 79). Nonetheless, this is not to say that 'doing' family in this way was always unproblematic. 'Close' family members could feel compelled to attend when they would rather not have been there:

> As my husband left the crematorium he said he wouldn't have gone if he thought he could have got away with it and only went for his mum's sake... To say you actually hate rather than dislike your own father is such a huge leap but that's how he and some of his brothers felt about him. (M2486, female, 58)

Yet when correspondents reported criticism of family members who did not attend a funeral, the criticism seems to be that a display of family-ness that was expected did not in fact occur:

> My twin nephews (aged 31 at the time) did not attend their grandmother's funeral which I think was also regarded as very wrong of them. (O3436, female, 56)

> The cousins, two girls, were apparently "too busy" to come, which Paul's mother was very unimpressed by. (P2957, female, 41)

In these examples, not only are the reported critics of the failure to attend members of the family, but so are the correspondents reporting the events. Indeed, generally it is only correspondents who were family members themselves who were actually able to tell whether or not everyone who 'should' have attended a family funeral was in fact there, and who could assess the validity of the excuse provided (Finch and Mason, 1993). However, the following example illustrates that expectations about family attendance were not limited to

members of that family itself, and that other mourners could also expect the family to display their relatedness to the deceased person by turning up:

> It was fairly evident there were no relatives - other than me present. I heard 'muttering' that 'the brother' wasn't there. (M3476, female, 55)

Interestingly, this correspondent goes on to indicate some further features of family display at funerals which seem to be important:

> I was aware everyone present thought no family had turned up so I felt I should approach the executor so I timidly I told him who I was. He & all present seemed delighted. The funeral director came up & shook me by the hand. I pointed out I was fairly distant (niece by marriage) & apologised for my mother's absence. (M3476, female, 55)

In this longer extract, then, we see again an awareness that other mourners notice and attach significance to the presence of the deceased person's family at a funeral. Whether the correspondent, who had to take extra steps to ensure that her display of family was recognised, was trying to ameliorate the other mourners' feelings or improve her own family's reputation by making her presence known is not clear. Notwithstanding, we should also note that she invokes within-family hierarchies (Robson and Walter, 2012-2013) when she apologises for the absence of a closer relative.

Thus we can see that both family members themselves and other mourners had expectations about relatedness being done and displayed by the family of the deceased person. While Finch (2011) acknowledges that her original formulation of the concept of display did not allow for such complexities as misrecognised or even unsuccessful displays, Morgan (1996, p. 192) does acknowledge that doing family through practices need not be experienced positively by those who do it, as can be seen here:

> I could feel daggers of resentment coming from a lady standing close to me (I had a distinct sense that she didn't want to be there but had been 'delegated' by the family as the only available representative). (H1745, female, 59)

There was, though, variation between families on the question of who must go (see Finch, 1989, p. 242 for a discussion of variation in familial obligation). In

contrast with the nephews who were criticised above for not attending, for example, we can recall this correspondent's experience:

> … I didn't bother attending the funerals of two relatives, an uncle and an aunt. I'd have been quite prepared to travel up from London for the funerals but my mother said she thought it wasn't necessary and in the end I didn't make the journeys. Neither had been particularly 'close' relatives, in the sense of personal relationships, which might have been a factor in my mother's calculations. (M3190, male, 52)

It should be acknowledged that it is not *only* family that mourners may expect to see displayed[66] at a funeral:

> All in all it was a 'good' funeral - all her family + friends were there. (W3730, female, 43)

In the main, however, approval about attendance and criticism for absence were directed at family members of the deceased person, highlighting the importance at a funeral not only of *displaying* family but also of displaying *family* (Heaphy, 2011). This is the first step in my claim that family is an authority over the funeral – in a way that other relationships are not.

Just displaying family by being there, though, was not always enough. It was also important to display a 'proper', 'normal' or 'good' family (Heaphy, 2011, p. 21; James and Curtis, 2010, p. 1177) and to display an understanding of shared norms about these (Haldar and Wærdahl, 2009; Pahl and Spencer, 2010); in Finch's words, "to convey the message 'this is my family *and it works*'" (2007, p. 70, emphasis added). This imperative may be especially important when a family is available for scrutiny by others (James and Curtis, 2010; Seymour, 2011), and also when participating in rites of passage which invoke continuity and predictability of family (Gillis, 2004). What kind of family, then, did mourners consider should be displayed at funerals?

The literature tends to suggest that it is family *forms* not fully recognised as conventional which are likely to call most intensely for displays of family (Almack, 2011; Finch, 2007; Gabb, 2011; Heaphy, 2011; Roseneil, 2004;

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[66] The theoretical scope for applying the concept of display beyond family relationships may be limited. As Dermott and Seymour (2011a, p. 18) show, we can easily conceive of displays of friendship, but not displays of acquaintanceship.

Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004; Weeks et al., 2001), especially when in public (James and Curtis, 2010, p. 1166). In the M-O data there was one example of a correspondent confirming others' family-ness in this way, by referring to the funeral as "a gay one" and going on to relate both standard family funeral practices (speaking at the funeral) (Reimers, 2011) and family practices (staying together for many years) (Giddens, 1992) without further reference to any otherness:

> The most recent funeral I went to was a gay one… These two men had been together for more than forty years, having met in the early sixties… the man who died had been a theatre designer and in his speech his partner brought out a number of things to illustrate his life. There was a model of a set he made, some flowers he had planted in their garden, the last loaf of bread he had baked and so on. It restores my faith in the human race when I see people who have been together for so long. Thank God for them. Too many people treat relationships as temporary these days and I think it's very sad. (M4463, male, 57)

What we also find in correspondents' ideas of displays of a 'proper family' (James and Curtis, 2010, p. 1166) at a funeral are expectations about the *quality of family relationships*. The following extract is an example of an attempt on the part of a mother to require a particular kind of display from her daughter – or more accurately, requiring a particular kind of disruptive display *not* to occur:

> The other worst funeral was my maternal grandfather's. He was 91 when he died in 2002 in a nursing home, but I had not spoken to him since 1985 because he had sexually abused me, my sister and my mother since childhood... My mother and sister are still in various stages of denial about it... My mother told me she didn't want me to come to the funeral if I was "going to be foul", which I didn't understand but was hurt by nonetheless... (P2957, female, 41)

It is not clear whether the mother was trying to prevent the 'wrong' kind of interaction just with her (the mother), or with other members of the family or even other mourners. That is to say, the intended 'audience' for this display (Dermott and Seymour, 2011b; James and Curtis, 2010, pp. 1166-7) is unclear.

Neither does there appear to be a need for 'feedback' or confirmation in response to the display (Finch, 2007, p. 75). What is apparent, though, is the importance for the mother of her daughter co-operating in the display of a 'happy family' (Doucet, 2011) by concealing the tensions within the family (Smart, 2007, pp. 133-7). Having family unity displayed may be important not just to members of the deceased person's family themselves, but also to other mourners. The following correspondent, who was not attending the funeral as a member of the deceased person's family, wrote that a 'good' funeral is one in which family conflicts are not apparent:

> This was what I would describe as a 'good' funeral - no unseemly behaviour
> or family feuds... (T2543, female, 77)

In addition to the absence of conflict, mourners may expect there to be evidence of love within the deceased person's family:

> The main feeling I was aware of at the funeral was of some sense of a
> celebration of a life lived but a lack of heartfelt, vibrant, simple love and
> closeness. From talking to J and her daughter, we'd had the impression
> that there had not been a very close, loving bond but more one of duty and
> a wish to do the 'right thing'... It was all a bit flat and unemotional,
> somehow. (H1745, female, 59, neighbour of the deceased person)

Thus we see that both family members and other mourners had shared notions of what a 'good' family looks like at a funeral. First, the right members of that family should be present, and second, there should be harmony and love between the family members who are there.

Doing and Displaying Family through Ritual Participation

At some of the funerals which correspondents had attended, the officiant was the only person to be individually active in the ceremony. The congregation sometimes participated as a whole by singing hymns together. At many funerals, individual mourners were also active in the ceremony, for example through giving the eulogy or a reading, performing music, or placing flowers on the coffin. Such participation was often performed by family members of the

deceased person themselves, and when it was not, may have been informed by them:

> A friend of Grandma and Grandpa said a few words near the start then the vicar read out what my brother had written, and said some words of his own, maybe with a prayer or two. (E2977, male, 28)

> ... so it was a rather disappointing affair, with some rather half-hearted hymns and a bad poem read out by one of his granddaughters. (G4374, male, 44)

> ... the family made it very personal- son played a guitar piece he had written and father liked; daughter spoke, grandson also spoke and younger grandchildren presented flowers and leaves that they had gathered. Wife read The Road Less Travelled and we sang Morning has Broken. Afterwards they gave us a book mark they had made with his initials on it. (M2986, female, 54)

> The grandchildren did readings, but not many of them wanted to, so the service was rather short. (M2486, female, 58)

In the last of the quotes above, the ceremony's brevity (not normally regarded as a positive attribute of a funeral) is explained by the limiting of participation to family, and a single role in the family at that.

As indicated in the first of the quotes above, active participation in the ceremony was not always limited to family:

> It was a very personal service, with readings by J's daughter and her two children and a short life history written and read by a man who had been a student in J's U3A Spanish class which she had taught for some years. (H1745, female, 59)

Indeed, in the following extract the correspondent does not mention *any* active participation of the family, but does say that:

> I remember one of the deceased's colleagues speaking about his working life and realising that I hadn't known he had been so eminent in his field. A friend spoke about his love of tennis. (S4249, female, 42)

When participation is limited to members of the deceased person's family, it may be understood as a family practice, a way of 'doing' family. The active participation of those holding other relationships to the deceased person does suggest that participation is sometimes a way of 'doing' other relationships. We should bear in mind, though, that research into the preparation for funeral ceremonies either finds (Prior, 1989) or takes for granted (Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010; Howarth, 1996) that arranging and partially controlling the content of the funeral is almost universally done by family members of the deceased person. Although the M-O data cannot tell us anything about the process by which friends, colleagues or other mourners came to speak at the funeral, the literature makes clear that it is almost certain to have been subject to the agreement of family 'gatekeepers'. Indeed, the officiant themselves "speaks only by authority of the family" (Cook and Walter, 2005, p. 385) who, through the funeral director, contracts them[67].

Participation is also a realm in which family 'display' can again be observed. In this case, though, rather than a display positively confirming family-ness, the correspondent relates an experience of not displaying (by declining to join in with the rest of the family's religious expression) and thus having her family-ness questioned:

> We were three conspicuous non praying people on the right in the second or third 'family' row. Another thing that would shock the people pulling the whole thing together was that they really inadvertently make you feel you don't deserve to be there! Its in the question "Are you family?" – we clearly didn't 'belong'. (G4566, female, no age given)

Displaying Family through Narrative: the Eulogy

Although correspondents often identified who spoke at the funeral, few of them wrote about the content of the eulogy[68]. Where they did, a number of themes were apparent, including the deceased person's character, paid work, hobbies – and family:

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[67] Allowing for the (small number of) funerals arranged and paid for by people other than the deceased person's family, such as solicitors, nursing home managers, or local councils. These are generally arranged *in the absence of* family (Parsons, 2003; Woodthorpe et al., 2012).

[68] It seems probable that this reflects the prompts in the directive.

> The vicar gave a short address, I could tell from what he was saying that all the information had come from K&D. This was followed by D, her son telling us all about his mum and dad and the happy family life and holidays they enjoyed when they were children. It was so obvious that M was a very much loved mother and friend to many. (H1836, female, 66)

This thesis cannot, and does not aim to, analyse the content of eulogies. However, it is worth noting with reference to the eulogy that it is once again when tensions are present that the eulogy can become a site of display. We saw on p. 202 the pain, anger and humiliation experienced by those excluded from the narrative 'display' of family in the eulogy. It was not only omission from the narrative which correspondents objected to, but also narratives of family, perhaps themselves about 'doing' family, felt to be misleading. This may be because the picture painted was too critical:

> I think that one of the worst was that of my mother in law. It was taken by someone who didn't know her or her late husband or us but he had listened to gossip + made some injuditious + untrue remarks about her late husband which hurt my husband very much + he could hardly stand up + say they weren't true. (P1009, female, 71)

In this case, the power of narrative in displaying family (Doucet, 2011; Finch, 2007, p. 77; Finch and Mason, 2000, p. 165; James and Curtis, 2010, pp. 1165-6) is combined with the power of ritual to assert and legitimate a reality (Bell, 1997, pp. 140, 145), as well as to prevent or hinder dissent from the presented reality (Bell, 1997, p. 140; Bloch, 1974; Rappaport, 1996, pp. 432-3), leaving the mourners objecting but unable to protest.

The complaint about a misleading eulogy could also be that the narrative was too kind:

> One very embarrassing funeral was my mother's, because it was taken by a minister who did not know her, and from somewhere he had got hold of all the nice things she would have liked to hear about herself, but they were not, sadly, true. She was a trouble-maker and very selfish, and acted very hurtfully to her two children and their partners. If you already regret that your mother wasn't the marvel that mothers are supposed to be, you feel even worse when you are assured by somebody you have never set eyes

on before, that she was after all a miracle of care and selflessness. (W2322, male, 66)

Here, the eulogy's inaccuracy compounds difficult feelings resulting from the failure of the 'families we live with' to live up to the cultural ideal, the 'families we live by' (Gillis, 1996).

Doing and Displaying Family through Emotions

So far, much of the family-ness under discussion has been about members of the deceased person's family and their relationships to one another, or their role in the story of the family. But mourners also needed to 'do' and 'display' their relatedness to the deceased person. As with attendance, both family members and other mourners had shared understandings of how this could be accomplished, namely, through emotions and their expression.

In the following extract, a correspondent notices the differences between the ways in which her boyfriend's family and her own family are 'done' in the context of a funeral:

> It was my boyfriend's granny's (his mum's, mum) funeral... After the Church service we went to the cemetry in the car - this is the only time I saw b.f. mum cry and noone really spoke to each other at all... I just kept thinking that if this was my granny's funeral then I would very, very sad and that my mum would have been very involved - and that people would be talking to one another. (J4505, female, 28)

Another correspondent illustrates the 'givenness' of family practices, explaining that even a funeral (a 'family' funeral – she describes the funeral of her aunt) is not a reason to depart from what her family 'does' in terms of emotional expression:

> Then each row went to the coffin to pay their last respects - which I found very difficult. I couldn't bear to look at the coffin or anyone else and just stared at the floor. I didn't want to start openly really crying as no-one else was. We're not a family to show feelings of any sort. It would have been embarrasing to see me crying. (W3994, female, 38)

Emotional expression could also be a component of display, and once again, could be noticeable for its absence:

> Both me and my husband were in tears, but what was strange was my husband's sister looked quite relaxed and impassive. She showed no emotion at all. (R4365, female, 29, describing the funeral of her husband's grandfather)

In this quote, the correspondent is assessing how mourners display their family-ness to the deceased person through emotional expression. She compares her sister-in-law who was not crying with her own husband, who was, and it is the husband who is considered to be in line with the norm. What that norm is is not made explicit, but it seems safe to suggest that it has to do, as in the discussion above, with culturally held ideas about 'proper', 'normal' and 'good' families, and about emotionally close relationships being an important factor in this idea.

In the following extract we can see this being experienced from the other side, where a member of the deceased person's family felt pressure to display his family-ness through emotional expression, precisely because there were witnesses present and he knew he may be being compared to the cultural norm (James and Curtis, 2010, p. 1166):

> The only funeral at which I wept was my father's, and I could just as well not have done so, except that I had overheard my mother remarking to the Macmillan nurse a few days before that I still hadn't cried; and so I felt guiltily lacking in the proper feeling and responses. There was also, sitting in the chief mourners' pew, visible to everyone behind me, an element of reacting appropriately to public observation. (B3227, male, 43)

This quote in particular draws attention to the role of the 'audience' in family display[69]. The other mourners in this case did not so much (perhaps not even) confirm the family-ness of the correspondent's tears as a son at his father's funeral, but were instead the reason for a display of family which, it seems, may otherwise not have occurred. This is a significant departure from Finch's original formulation of the concept of display, which, it has been argued, "downplays the way in which cultural expectations about family and familial relationships are

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[69] In addition, the correspondent's use of the phrase 'chief mourner' lends some validity to Robson and Walter's (2012-2013) claim that the term captures something of mourners' everyday experience of hierarchies connected with bereavement.

formed by members of society in general" (Haynes and Dermott, 2011, p. 156). As James and Curtis (2010, p. 1165) note, display does not take place within the vacuum of a single family but within shared systems of meaning (Morgan, 1996) and expectation. The above examples illustrate both these expectations (mourners' judgements of others' family-ness, based on emotional display) and the way in which they influence the very production of family displays.

Doing and Displaying Family through Material Objects: Flowers

Families other than the deceased person's family also 'did' and 'displayed' their own families at funerals. One way of seeing this is by looking at the practice of sending flowers.

> I think we did flowers together as a family – not sure about a donation. Mum will have sorted it and we will have chipped in. (G4566, female, no age given)

> I don't know what happened about flowers - I just left that to Paul as it was his family and assumed that he would sort it out with his mother. I don't think he did... (P2957, female, 41)

The two extracts above highlight different aspects of family practices, of 'doing' family. In the first, we can see the regularity, the givenness and the routine nature of practices (Morgan, 1996, pp. 188-92). The correspondent, at the same time as stating that she does not know what happened about flowers, is able to say that Mum will have sorted it – the implication is that Mum will have sorted it because this is the kind of thing that Mum does. In the second, we can see the correspondent's assumption that it is for *family* members to arrange flowers for *their* family funeral – arranging flowers is presented as a *family* practice, for *family* people to do.

Flowers can be understood as one of the material objects through which family was displayed (Finch, 2007, p. 77), both in the sense that a single floral tribute often represented various members of one family, and in the sense that such representations could obscure the 'backstage' negotiations through which individuals decided to display their family-ness rather than their individuality:

> When I asked about flowers and donations my husband said his aunt was doing the flowers from all of us, and his mum had sent a cheque to the nursing home from all of us - I was really annoyed about this as I'd wanted to do something myself in memory of this man. But my husband said it was best not to interfere. (T4715, female, 39)

This example departs somewhat from Finch's (2007) presentation of 'displaying family' because it highlights the potential for tension, conflict and a measure of unwillingness on the part of the correspondent, whose outward actions could otherwise be read as simply 'doing' family. In Finch's presentation, someone acts in a family-like way, and their display of family-ness is explicitly affirmed by others, or implicitly confirmed by others' also acting within a family-like framework. For Finch and other authors (e.g. the collected authors of Dermott and Seymour, 2011b) the original display (as opposed to its confirmation) often emerges from the actor's concern to establish that this relationship is a family (or family-like) relationship, and is especially likely to occur where there is a possibility that uncertainty concerning the family-ness of a relationship has arisen or could arise, whether within or outside of that relationship. In the above example, though, there is no obvious reason to suppose that the family-ness of any of the people involved was in question in any way. Neither had the husband's aunt or mother taken especial care to be sure that the correspondent knew she was included in the flowers or donation. The correspondent relates no direct interaction between the aunt or mother and herself, but instead presents the conversation with her husband as the situation within which she learned of what now *becomes* a display of family, because the correspondent decides not to disrupt it.

Direct observation of this particular floral tribute itself (assuming it was sent with a card identifying the family) would not have revealed the complexities of negotiation which had gone on 'behind the scenes'. Moreover, it would seem possible that had the aunt or mother written an account of sending flowers or a donation these would also be interpreted as a straightforward case of 'doing' family – doing what families do, and what our family does. What this correspondent's data reveal, though, is not only that the process of displaying family can entail much more ambiguity, tension and conflict than Finch originally

supposed, but also that interactions which at first sight appear not to be displays, precisely because there is no obvious call for them, can in fact be so.

Sending flowers is not always a family practice. Some correspondents sent flowers individually rather than collectively – although I did not find any examples of this happening when correspondents had attended the funeral with other members of their family. That is to say, I did not find any evidence of any mourners acting in the way that the correspondent above wished to. Neither did correspondents write about selecting their flowers with the intention of displaying the deceased person's relatedness to them, through buying floral tributes in the shape of the word DAD, for example (Harper, 2008, p. 179).

With these qualifiers taken into account, we can see that the practice of sending flowers to a funeral could be a site for both the 'doing' and 'display' of family, and was notable for being one area where families other than the family of the deceased person 'did' and 'displayed' their own family-nesses.

Very often, though, flowers were another means through which the family of the deceased person again 'did' and 'displayed' their own family, because they excluded other people's flowers. Many correspondents described being asked not to send flowers but to make a donation to charity instead. While donations can be made on behalf of one's family, as indicated by the correspondent above, it is not common practice in Britain for donors and their donations to be publicised (c.f. de Witte, 2001). Thus, restricting the sending of flowers to the family of the deceased person, becomes another way in which the doing and displaying of family becomes the domain of only one family: that of the deceased person.

Doing and Displaying Family through Spatial Segregation

The distinction between what mourners referred to as 'the family' – that is, the family of the deceased person – and other mourners can be seen in correspondents' descriptions of spatial arrangements at the funeral. These accorded with observations in the literature that the family is given a particular priority in the spatial ordering of a funeral (Howarth, 1996, p. 180). Here we will build on that observation by drawing on both Finch's (2007) concept of 'displaying' family and Morgan's (1996) concept of family practices.

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Ordering bodies carries a great deal of power in ritual (Bell, 1992, p. 180) not merely to reflect realities, but to create them (p. 85) even while participants experience themselves as 'just doing what you do' (pp. 108-9). One of the main means of spatial segregation of 'the family' and others was through seating: all mourners took it for granted that family members of the deceased person would have the seats at the front of the congregation:

Being a family member, I sat with the others in the family, at the front of the church. (M2061, female, 80)

As the surviving relative, I sat uncomfortably in a front pew. (F1560, female, 89)

Due to the position he was our father my siblings, partners and I sat front row left. My step family front row right. (A4127, male, 48)

The front pews were earmarked for close relatives, so my wife chose to sit in the fifth row back, behind some people who were already there (friends of the deceased's parents). (S3035, male, 63. The deceased person was the correspondent's wife's cousin's daughter)

Along with other neighbours we sat at the back of the church. Funerals are mostly family affairs. We were there to support Pete's widow, not intrude. (H1543, male, 80)

Although she was my aunt we stood toward the rear of the congregation. I think this must be because I have felt detached from the family for a long time. (P3209, male, 71)

As the final quote above makes particularly clear, sitting towards the front or back was, then, a means through which some mourners (and not others) could display their family-ness – or felt absence of it. Like narratives, this spatial symbolism can hold a great deal of meaning for mourners, as can be seen when it is disrupted:

Where we sat at the funeral was a bit of a point of debate. When the coffin was brought in the immediate family followed in the coffin bearers. That

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group consisted of my husband's gran, mother and the deceased's wife and their two sons and the eldest son's wife. My husband, my daughter, me and my brother and sister in law stood back some way at the brother in laws insistence. All of the rest of the friends then followed into the crematorium after the coffin and we who were also immediate family were left behind. We therefore were not sitting with the close members of the family at the front and to the left, in front of the pulpit, as we should have been and the brother in law was getting very vociferous about this. (B4750, female, 35)

Other examples of segregation included following the hearse to the church, cemetery or crematorium (this is something that not all families did, but when someone did it, they were family), and, when the funeral was a burial, going to the graveside for the interment:

We only allowed family and very close friends to this part of the funeral [the burial] and I think that is right. (J3887, female, 44)

... after the service he was buried in the church yard, which we didn't go to, as we felt it wasn't our place to go, only the family. (I1610, female, 66)

As these quotes indicate, there seems to be less certainty about whether the segregation between the deceased person's family and other mourners automatically holds for the burial – the above statements are expressed in terms of 'thinking' and 'feeling' that the burial is or should be for the deceased person's family only. A similar uncertainty could hold about when the coffin was taken to a crematorium for committal after a ceremony elsewhere:

After the service, the coffin was taken to the local CREMATORIUM for the final act.

  (I didn't attend this is it was/seemed to be for immediate family.) (L1002, female, 64)

However, it is not so much the definition of which places are for family only that I want to highlight, but the way in which any such segregation can be accomplished. Funeral directors have been observed to "first seek out the principal mourner" (Prior, 1989, p. 171; see also Howarth, 1996, p. 180) and to segregate family from other mourners, but correspondents who were mourners at funerals did not describe being ordered or directed by funeral personnel in

this way. Rather, the distinctions that they made were either observations of the social ordering happening within the congregation (as with the correspondent who decided against attending the crematorium committal), or on already taken-for-granted assumptions about the proper ordering at a funeral (as with many of the correspondents writing about seating).

Thus once again we must consider the role of the audience in producing displays. We saw earlier that in the cases of attendance, presenting a 'happy family' and expressing emotions, other (non-family) mourners were not so much legitimating or confirming family displays, since they were not providing direct or even indirect feedback. In fact, the 'audience' role in these cases seemed to precede rather than follow the display. We saw that other mourners (and possibly other members of the family, as we saw in the case of the mother concerned that her daughter not display disunity in the family) in a way policed the display, in the sense that it was the threat of their disapproval should the display not be done, or done well enough, which could prompt the display in the first place. In the case of spatial segregation, there was a kind of legitimation going on because through their own actions other mourners literally made space for members of the deceased person's family to show their family-ness. Here, the successful accomplishment of 'the family' depended not only on both members of that family and other mourners operating on culturally shared understandings of the proper places for family members at a funeral, but also on those other mourners taking an active or at least co-operative, rather than responsive, role in the accomplishment of 'the family' at funerals. This can be seen in the quotes above in which it is clear that mourners did quite consciously avoid the front rows if they were not family (Clark, 1982, pp. 139-40), and did forego attendance at the burial if they felt it was for family only to attend.

It may seem that this says nothing new or significant: it is not a novel discovery that members of the deceased person's family get to sit at the front at a funeral. What I want to draw out, though, following Morgan's (1996) idea that eating practices or hygiene practices can be *simultaneously* family practices, is how consistently mourners who were 'just doing what you do at funerals' with regard to spatial segregation were *simultaneously* contributing to the establishment of family – one particular family – no matter whether they were

members of that family or not. Indeed, as I discuss below, spatial arrangements join other practices in being revealed as being simultaneously practices which support and enable the demonstration of family-ness at funerals.

In this section I have demonstrated a number of ways in which families, particularly the family of the deceased person, were 'done' and 'displayed' at funerals. Two contributions to the methodological discussions around the application of Finch's concept of 'displaying' family (Almack, 2011; Doucet, 2011; Haynes and Dermott, 2011; James and Curtis, 2010; Kehily and Thomson, 2011; McIntosh et al., 2011; Seymour, 2011) can be proposed. The first of these is to note how often the question of display comes into focus more sharply when its success is threatened. The second, as discussed in the case of the correspondent who submitted to being included in the family's flowers and donation, is to draw attention to the potential for what seems to be straightforwardly 'doing' family from one perspective to be understood as an actively negotiated 'display' from another.

This section has also problematised the role of the 'audience' to a family 'display', demonstrating that in many cases display does not follow the format laid out by Finch's original exposition of the concept, in which any audience to the display would legitimate the family-ness of the relationship(s) in question only in response to an original interaction. We saw this problematised, for example, when we saw the audience – other mourners – being the condition for a display of family through emotional expression which may otherwise not have occurred. We also saw mourners co-operating with culturally-shared ideas about the spatial segregation of family and other mourners, independently or in advance of, rather than in response to, any action from family members. These observations have an important implication, which is that other mourners, not just family members, actively contribute to the production and reproduction of culturally shared notions of family at funerals through display.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this section has made visible just how many standard funeral practices – including travelling to the venue, taking seats, sending flowers, expressing emotion, participating in the ritual and even attending in the first place – can be *simultaneously* family practices (Morgan,

1996; Reimers, 2011, p. 194). These are practices which both effect and reinforce a distinction between 'family' and others.

This chapter has so far demonstrated a number of ways in which family can be seen to be present as a guiding influence over mourners – both family members of the deceased person and other mourners – at the funeral. There is more work to do, however, to demonstrate that family should be considered an *authority* at the funeral for mourners.

The Authority of the Family

In this section I will argue that family can be considered an authority for mourners at the funeral. It is important to be clear at the outset: I do not argue that family is the *only* authority over the funeral, nor even the primary one. My aim is more modest than that. I aim to demonstrate that for mourners, family is a significant authority alongside others – most notably that of the (dead) individual, an authority already recognised in the literature (Caswell, 2009; Harper, 2008; Walter, 1994, 1996a, 1996d, 2006) and in the previous chapter.

Why Do Mourners Do What They Do?

In order to build the argument, I will first present data concerning the influences over mourners' decisions and actions at funerals, including decisions about clothing, flowers, donations and attendance. I will show the range of influences over these decisions, and the role that family – in particular, the family of the deceased person – played.

Clothing

As seen in the previous chapter, for some mourners the question of what to wear at a funeral simply did not arise. For others, though, a great deal of deliberation went into the decision:

> I found it very difficult deciding what to wear on this occasion. There were
> quite a few things to take into account: that it shouldn't be colourful because
> most people at this funeral would be following tradition and wearing black;

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that I didn't want it to be all black because that would be too depressing; that it needed to be smart; there was also a certain amount of wanting to look better or at least smarter than some of my relatives who we don't necessarily have such a good relationship with; and finally, despite it being in mid March, the weather was due to be quite sunny and warm. (G3988, female, 27)

This quote illustrates the attention that mourners can give to a whole range of social, symbolic and practical considerations.

It is not clear why, for the correspondent above, what other people wear influences her decision. Other correspondents' replies suggest two possibilities. The first is a desire to fit in:

With a purple sweater, dark green tartan skirt and navy jacket I was pretty inconspicuous I hoped. (P1326, female, 73)

My choice of dress was Black jacket, Beige Trousers and white top... I felt comfortable with my choice. It blended with everyone else there. (M3476, female, 55)

I felt very self conscious during the funeral as I chosen not to wear all black... but very few people wore anything but back, in fact, when I was looking I could only find one person, who also had a purple top on. (K4417, female, 43)

The second is others' presumed expectations. This may be a general 'other', or particular expectations of either the deceased person or, more often, the funeral arranger(s):

I wore black as it was a traditional affair and this seems to be the expected dress code. (W3730, female, 43)

I was concerned that I would be expected to wear all-black (which my family has never been strict about as a tradition) so I bought a new suit from Tescos... (W4614, female, 37)

My rule for funerals is to dress the way you'd think the deceased would have wanted you to dress. My late uncle was a stickler for protocol and I'm

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sure he'd have been scandalised if anyone had shown up to a funeral wearing brown shoes or a red tie. (M3190, male, 52)

I can't remember what I wore, but I think it was black. This would have been because of tradition - they are fairly traditional (though not religious) people, and no dress code had been specified. (B4672, female, 29)

It was also common for mourners to base their decision on explicit requests, which may come from funeral arrangers (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 54) or the deceased person themselves:

What did I wear?
My son-in-laws mother said to make it a celebration of her mother-in-laws life & not to wear BLACK.
So I went in a GREY COAT & RED BLOUSE & BLACK SKIRT. (L1002, female, 64)

I have black but seldom wear it a funerals unless requested by the family. (C108, female, 76)

Betty had asked that people wear bright colours to her funeral. So, most people did. (M4132, female, 44)

Whilst ill, and knowing she would not live for much longer, the lady who had died had planned her funeral and one main wish was that everyone should wear something bright. I wore a long red scarf, my friend a red jumper and many other people in the congregation wore something bright as well, making a wonderful riot of colour in the church. (W4376, female, 42)

The following correspondent indicated that 'the family's' request would take precedence over his own sense of respect for the deceased person:

I wore a dark suit and a black tie. I would always do this at a funeral really out of respect for the person who has died. If the family ask for bright clothes then that would be worn. (G4313, male, 83)

However, for others the situation was more complicated:

We wore black to the funeral. That was quite interesting because the [deceased] Uncle had stipulated that he wanted people to dress in bright

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colours and not wear black at the funeral and some people came in bright colours but my husband's grandmother said that she wanted us to be respectful and to wear black. It was her rule and we all followed really what she wanted. I think that we didn't want to upset her any more. I realise now that as long as we were smart she probably wouldn't have worried about what we were wearing. The uncle's wife was wearing blue and purple. I thought she looked really nice. I think I would have liked to have worn more lively clothes. I think that the person whose funeral it was would have really liked it and it suited him better. (B4750, female, 35)

Here the wishes of the deceased person, his mother and the correspondent herself are all given consideration. The correspondent gives the deceased person's wishes priority in the final balance and with hindsight, but at the funeral itself, it was the wishes of the deceased person's mother which were followed.

Other correspondents suggested that they would also follow the wishes of funeral arrangers:

I have sometimes seen reports about the funerals of children, or people otherwise characterized as unconquerably optimistic, where the mourners have been requested to wear pink or other bright colours, and although the rule must always be to go along with the wishes of those most directly bereaved, I don't like such exceptions. Black is the proper uniform in which to meet death. (B3227, male, 43)

Not all correspondents agreed that the wishes of funeral arrangers or 'the family' should be given precedence:

Though the bereaved family asked those attending to wear bright clothes, I, like most others, was sombrely dressed, though I did sport a bright tie. (B4318, male, 47)

Yet at the same time as disavowing the authority of the family's wishes, the above correspondent is yielding to it in his clothing, as well as more subtly conceding it by constructing it as an influence which he resists.

Flowers and Donations

As mentioned above, the request 'family flowers only, please' is common at funerals. Some correspondents spoke about this being requested, without specifying where the request came from (although following it):

> [Did you send or take flowers?] Not on this occasion, no, as we'd been requested not to do so. (M3190, male, 52)

The source of the request was very occasionally identified as the deceased person, but most often as 'the family' or its members:

> The family wanted only family flowers so we didn't send or take them. (W729, female, 53)

> We did not send flowers because his widow asked for donations in his name to a local charity. (H2639, female, 70)

Mourners would certainly follow this request when it was made, even if they would prefer not to:

> I would prefer to buy flowers in truth, but these days no one seems to want you to do that, so a donation it had to be. (R1025, female, 67)

The collection of donations in aid of charity is a common practice at funerals nowadays (Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010). Only one correspondent clearly identified this as the request of the deceased person:

> No flowers were requested but a donation to charity as this was my fathers choice. (A4127, male, 48)

Other correspondents viewed requests for donations as coming from those arranging the funeral:

> Auntie's husband died after having been ill for a considerable number of years... Auntie said that she did not want people to send flowers, but wanted donations to go to the British Heart Foundation, so we paid a donation there... (A2212, female, 53)

Again, mourners followed these requests even when they had reservations:

> Donations were to be made to the hospice... I felt a bit awful as the hospice wasn't in our area but had been the only one with a bed. I feel that the family made a snap decision about what charity donations would be made

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to, as this had hit them very hard. I do give to charity, but as I can only give so much I do tend to choose the ones closest to my heart. That said, if I was going to any funeral I would donate to the charity of the family's choice. (K4417, female, 43)

Most correspondents preferred the practice of giving donations to that of sending flowers. Almost universally the 'show' of flowers was compared unfavourably to the usefulness of a charitable donation:

Later all four of our family collectively donated money to a charity whose name I cannot remember, we all dislike the show of flowers as it seems such a waste of money when there are so many needy organisation connected to illness. (H1806, male, 85)

There were very few flowers around as most of us gave donations to the Hospice where my 'Sister' spent her last few months. The Nun's were so wonderful to her in her last hours, even giving her a birthday party the day before she died. (MAGIC!!) They run their Hospice's on Charity donations and so deserve every penny they can get. Flowers fade and die!! (H260, female, 80)

My partner & I didn't take or send flowers, we rarely do so as we both consider it a misuse of money. There was no collection at the funeral service so we later asked the widow about donations, & we sent a cheque in T's memory to the local Air Ambulance Service. (T2543, female, 77)

It can be noted in the last of the above quotations that the correspondent consults the widow for guidance, in spite of the widow's apparent indifference to donations indicated by the absence of a collection at the funeral[70], and in spite of the correspondent's indication that it is her own policy to refrain from 'misusing' money.

These were the avowed reasons for mourners' preferring to send donations. However, drawing on Davies and Rumble's (2012) work on gift

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[70] The absence of a collection almost certainly indicates the active decision against one, on the part of the funeral arranger. Flowers and donations are essential options covered in the arrangement process by funeral directors, who, if a collection is to be held, usually take a donation box with them. Had the funeral director forgotten, an announcement for alternative arrangements would have been made to the congregation. Some ministers do not permit collections for charity at funerals in their churches. This funeral was held at a crematorium.

theory (Mauss, 1954/1990) in the context of death and funerals, mourners' giving of flowers and donations can be seen from another perspective.

Gift theory concerns the ways in which social relationships are formed and maintained through the reciprocal giving and accepting of gifts – objects which, through being exchanged in this way, come to symbolise bonds of solidarity between donor and recipient (Mauss, 1954/1990). So fundamental are these transactions to social life that Mauss speaks of the 'obligations' to give, to receive, and to reciprocate. It is a fourth obligation which is used to illuminate Davies and Rumble's work on natural burial, and which will in turn be used to illumine correspondents' writing about flowers and donations. This is the obligation (which may be experienced as an impulse) to give 'to the gods', which Mauss himself understood to mean giving to society at large (see also Godelier, 1999).

Applying gift theory to the field of death studies, Davies and Rumble argue that natural burial can be understood as a gift to society and social values, since those who choose natural burial often understand themselves as 'giving something back' to nature, from which future generations will benefit and upon which they depend. Being gifted in this way transforms the corpse from being physical waste which must be disposed of, to being both a symbol and a source of renewed and ongoing life.

Davies and Rumble further draw attention to the discomfort that many feel about the relationship between money and funerals in contemporary Britain, arguing that this discomfort arises precisely because the monetary transactions connected with funerals are very commercialised, "open[ing] up questions of economic cost in relation to personal worth" (p. 104) which are inevitably problematic[71]. When natural burial is chosen, these questions arise with less force, since the body's status as a commodity within the funeral industry is lessened when it is viewed as a gift to the natural world and to the future.

With these arguments in mind, correspondents' general preference for donating money to charity rather than buying flowers for a funeral may seem understandable. By *donating* money, mourners transform a little of the funeral's

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[71] Davies and Rumble note that such questions are not opened up universally. In India, for example, the cost of a funeral may be determined by the spiritual condition of the one who has died rather than by market forces (Davies and Rumble, 2012, p. 104).

commercialised nature. Beneficiaries of donations were not criticised for profiting financially from death and funerals in the way that funeral directors sometimes can be (Parsons, 2003; Howarth, 1996). But it is also significant that mourners donate to *charities* rather than to, say, the deceased person in the form of gravegoods placed in their coffin (Harper, 2008) or on their grave (Woodthorpe, 2010), or to their family (de Witte, 2001). Mourners' donations are a gift in Mauss' fourth sense, in that the recipients are causes valued by wider society – although these causes are *selected* not by social convention or by the mourner themselves, but by the deceased person or, more often (in the accounts of mourners) by their family.

Scholars of gift theory suggest, however, that money is not always unproblematic as a gift. Giving money does not require the same degree of thought (or, sometimes, time) on the part of the donor as other, material, gifts can (Cheal, 1998). Indeed, it has been argued that giving money "depersonalizes what should be personal" (Osteen, 2002) and is less conducive to promoting social bonding. Perhaps it seems odd, then, that donations were so often experienced by mourners as a more satisfactory way of 'giving' on the occasion of a funeral than sending flowers – which are tangible, can be chosen, and routinely include a handwritten message from the giver(s). However, as was noted in Chapter 4 (p. 92) the experience of sending flowers to a funeral may not in fact be very personal for mourners. The style of tribute will usually be chosen by the giver, but the actual sprays will not, and may never even be touched by those they come from, or indeed those they are sent to. The gift of flowers is conventionally addressed to the relatives of the person who has died (or sometimes to the deceased person themselves) but it is also conventional for flowers to be left behind after the funeral so that the recipient gets little from them (except, perhaps, in the case where the recipient is perceived to be the deceased person and that person has been buried, with flowers left on the grave).

Donations, by contrast, *could* be personal. Many correspondents knew which charity had received their money (although others did not, or did not say), and many of these charities were thought to be connected to the deceased

person, either because they were patronised by them in life, or because they reflected something of the death:

> I gave a donation to her favourite charity The Osteoporosis Association. (H1836, female, 66)

> I made a donation at the end.   It seems a kind to do, to contribute to a good cause that meant something to the person who died. (M4132, female, 44)

> Cheques made out to the Royal Institute for the Blind, as that is how the Departed was when he died. (N403, female, 73)

> I made a donation, after the funeral, to the Hospice where the deceased had spent sometime. (M1571, female, 79)

The common linking of donations with the cause of the person's death suggests something of the 'it shall not have been in vain' stance which Davies and Rumble (2012) interpret as giving to the future.

'It shall not have been in vain' is also the sentiment which Davies (2002, p. 22) identifies as 'against death'. Although 'donations against death' may seem quite a conceptual distance from the 'words against death' theory as it was presented in Chapter 2, Chapter 8 will demonstrate how many elements of funerary practice can in fact be understood to be 'against death', and I here suggest that donating to charity in this way is one of them. Additionally, and especially when the charity was one patronised by the deceased person themselves, the quotes above suggest that donations offered mourners a way to connect with the one who had died, actively to participate in personalised memorialisation.

Some correspondents found such meaning in sending flowers, too, choosing tributes which reflected the deceased person's character or their favourite flowers (Goody, 1993; Walter, 1996), or flowers with cultural meanings (Drury, 1994). It was this visual representation, rather than tactile contact and bodily giving (Walter, 1990, 1996) that made the sending of flowers meaningful for mourners:

I bought two large floral displays. One was from me and contained roses, rosemary, dianthus – all plants associated with remembrance. The other was from my sons – they wanted something loud and colourful as that is how they saw their aunt so we went for tropical bright flowers. (J3887, female, 44)

I'd sent a floral display of freesias, my friends favourite flowers... (S1534, female, 76)

Nonetheless, when sending flowers or donating to charity, whether the recipient was understood as the deceased person, their family, or social good in the form of a charity, the family of the deceased person represented for mourners an authority over what to do, while the deceased individual represented an authority over how to do it.

Attendance

We have already seen many ways in which attendance is related to family at the funeral. I do not intend to re-rehearse those here. Instead, I want to show a new way in which family can be considered an authority for mourners. In the cases of clothes, flowers and donations, the authority under consideration has been very much of the 'what would they want me to do?' kind. When we look at mourners' motivations for attending the funeral, though, following instructions is not a theme.

When asked why they attended, correspondents gave two major reasons: because of the deceased person, and because of the deceased person's family.

With regard to the deceased person, mourners wrote that they attended in order to show or pay respect (Tapper, 2009) and to say goodbye to people whom they had loved, liked or regarded well:

I suppose it's my way of paying my final respects to someone I've known (and in some cases loved) and giving me, in my own conscience, the chance to say a final thank you.

Our purpose was to pay respect to a popular member of our community. (H4005, female, 70)

With regard to the deceased person's family, overwhelmingly correspondents said that their attendance was intended to support them:

> We went because we always like to give support to the family and to show our respect to the person we have known and shared things with. (J1890, female, 78)

> I went (with husband) as Rotary and Inner Wheel always go to the funerals of members, both to give support to surviving family, and out of respect for the deceased. (M388, female, 80)

> My friend rang me to let me know her dad had died and I decided I would like to go to be a support for her and to help out with my godson (her son) should she need it. (S4249, female, 42)

> Occasionally I have wandered about going to friends' parents' funerals even if I didn't know them in order to offer some comfort to those left behind. (A3434, female, 45)

Here, then, we have a form of authority which is less to do with the family's having a mandate (Morgan, 2002) to issue instructions than with mourners actively and willingly directing their consideration towards the deceased person's family. Mourners' support could also take a 'negative' form, as in the cases of mourners above who decided against attending the tea in order not to be a burden. While this form of family authority is similar to the 'right' of the 'primary bereaved' status identified by Littlewood (1982), its focus is inverted. In Littlewood's analysis, the emphasis was on the right of the 'primary bereaved' to receive support. The 'primary bereaved' meant those at the top of what Robson and Walter (2012-2013) would call the grief hierarchy, which in practice always meant that the person occupying this 'primary bereaved' status was a member of the deceased person's family. In these data, the emphasis is on the concern of mourners to show and give their support to the proper recipients: 'the family'.

Who Should be Satisfied by the Funeral?

This sense of family being accorded authority by mourners themselves is also evident in correspondents' writing on whose wishes or needs should be met by the funeral.

Some suggested that a component of a good funeral was the benefit that it would have for the deceased person's family:

> One of the ideas I really liked about the funeral was that as we were waiting to go in we could go to a little room and take a printed card and put our name on it and write a special memory of the person who had died and what relationship we had with him. That would be really good for his family to read later on. (J1890, female, 78)

Others implicitly contrasted this family with other mourners, while again focusing on the importance of the funeral being of benefit to 'the family' rather than any other mourners:

> Those that come to mind as being "good" funerals are those where the Clergy person officiating, has taken the trouble to talk with the family about the deceased, and by so doing makes the occasion one of real thanksgiving for the life of someone special, if only to their family. (M2061, female, 80)

Others still explicitly contrasted the deceased person's family with other mourners, and just as explicitly made clear the comparative authority of the family:

> My mum's friend died last year, and her family decided not to have a funeral. There was no announcement, no service, no wake. Her body was disposed of by the local council. I was stunned by this, and found it shocking and disrespectful. But, if I defend my own thoughts on this, then the funeral isn't about her, it's about who she leaves behind. And, if they didn't feel the need for that ceremony, then who am I to judge them? (M4132, female, 44)

These correspondents, then, all viewed the funeral as being 'for' the family of the deceased person[72]. In other words, 'the family's' wishes and satisfaction

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[72] The directive did ask correspondents (in a separate section from the detailed questions on experiences of going to funerals) "What – and who – are funerals for? You don't need to have

with the event were viewed as being most important. The replies made clear that this was *because* they were family, rather than being because they had likely paid for the funeral, for example[73].

There were also other perspectives in the data. Some correspondents identified specifically the wishes of a single person as taking priority, recalling the idea of a hierarchy (Robson and Walter, 2012-2013) with, at its top, a 'chief mourner' (Littlewood, 1982; 1992) who is perceived to be particularly close to the deceased person and who is thereby both the authority over what should happen in response to the death, and the proper recipient of support:

> Since this was my Grandpa's passing a lot of the people were of a different generation than I am. I didn't mind it at all, although this part vaguely bored me, but since I was not important it did not matter what I felt. Like a lot of what went on at the time, all that mattered was that my Grandma was alright. (E2977, male, 28)

> After the ceremony I had intended to leave, but my former father-in-law was insistent that we should go back to the house, where refreshments were available. I would rather not have done this but on the other hand felt that his wishes were more important than mine, so we went. (F3409, female, 63)

As we would expect, given the literature (Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010) and data already seen in this chapter and the previous one, correspondents also considered the deceased person's wishes and preferences to hold authority:

> It was a "good" funeral, but would I think have been better had she said what she wanted a bit more, it had to be guessed at... (K3164, female, 32)

> I go to funerals because I think it is the last thing I can do for the person involved. (G4313, male, 83)

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been to a funeral to have thoughts on this." The data discussed in this section are *not* those obviously given in response to this relatively abstract question. The data discussed in this section are data relating to correspondents' *experiences* as mourners, rather than their opinions as 'ordinary people'.

[73] Castrén and Maillochon (2009) found similarly that authority in weddings did not derive from paying for them.

... my answer when I ask myself what I am to do as a Pagan at a Christian funeral must be... I must sing the Christian hymn to the best of my ability, because I love the dead person for whom I am singing it, and I am singing it for him, even if I do not happen to agree with those words... it is his funeral, not mine, and my own ego has absolutely no part to play there. (A2212, female, 53)

In this last quote above, the deceased person is clearly given priority over the mourner herself.

Other correspondents focussed on the role of the funeral in meeting perceived needs of people who were grieving in response to the death, including correspondents themselves:

I think funerals are split into 2 types (for me anyway). There are the ones you go to because you are personally grieving for the person who has died. Then there are the ones you go to where you are supporting a person who is grieving. (M4132, female, 44)

I went to the funeral because I felt I needed to see other people who had know LD to make it all a bit more real... (S4002, female, 31)

It's a necessary part of the grieving process for those left behind, and I have found funerals helpful in that. After C's funeral, I felt flat, empty and disappointed. I still feel I haven't actually been to his funeral, that I haven't had the opportunity to say goodbye to him properly. I have felt quite angry about it. (A2801, female, 45)

Finally, correspondents took account of other mourners at the funeral:

The overall tone of this funeral was wonderful, very warm and loving, and those who attended seemed happy to be there. (A2212, female, 53)

... his new wife and very religious family turned it into a shocking god fest that had all our mates and Clive's own family ostracised and virtually removed from the proceedings. If it helped his wife it certainly harmed others. (G4566, female, no age given)

Would I call it a good funeral? I really don't know what constitutes a good funeral. The family were generous with food and drink and there was a

convivial atmosphere, so in that respect I suppose it was. (R1025, female, 67)

Here we have seen the range of figures at the funeral to whom mourners assign some degree of 'authority', expressed in the idea that such figures should be satisfied by the funeral. Some by now familiar figures featured in this discussion. Family and those high up the 'mourning hierarchy', and the deceased person themselves, were predictable appearances, but we also saw some mention of other people who were grieving, as well as other mourners. Where comparisons were made between the perceived wishes or needs of these groups, two were given precedence by mourners: the deceased person, and their family.

Why does 'the family' have such authority for mourners? We have already seen the cultural significance granted to family, and the ways in which mourners cannot but help reinforcing the family's authority merely by following such standard funeral practices as sitting down. The M-O data, though, point towards another dimension, which I have called 'feeling' family.

'Feeling' Family

I think the whole day was infected by the great sadness of a large family of 7 reduced to one old woman (me). When I was told over the phone that my brother had died, I suddenly felt lonely. This large, squabbling group of people you've known all your life has disappeared. My beloved family of course rally round + give me great comfort, + now + again you see aged faces - a schoolfriend, still recognisable, looms up! But being the last is salutary. (F1560, female, 89)

This correspondent describes what it feels like to lose family[74]. What I want to draw attention to with the term 'feeling' family is that other mourners are conscious of this at the funeral. They are conscious of the interiority of family

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[74] As noted in the methods chapter, replies from correspondents who had arranged the funerals they were recounting were not analysed. Since funerals are arranged usually by close relatives, especially children, of the deceased person (Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010), one likely effect of this analytical decision is the filtering out of other data such as this, where the correspondent has become 'the last' in a family.

relationships (Gabb, 2011) as well as external display. Walter (2007) notes that sympathy and support can sometimes be expected not to come only from those who know the deceased person or the funeral arranger(s), but from those who know and understand the nature of the nature of the loss being endured. Correspondents considered the loss of family to hold a particular quality (Finch, 1989, p. 242), with particular consequences, not usually shared by the bereavement of other relationships:

> I felt sad for the adult children of the dead man who would miss him so much. (D826, female, 60)

> I did feel dreadfully sorry for Granddad at Grandma's funeral, and was quietly crying myself, because I sympathised with his grief. (A2212, female, 53)

> There are a number of funerals that have been very painful. The first was when I was at College in Oxfordshire. A friend on the course died of breast cancer. She left a husband and 2 sons who were about 10 and 12 years old. It was unbelievably moving to see her sons there... It was the sadness of knowing that her sons would have to grow up without this fabulous woman. She adored her sons and so it was the pain of that which made it so hard. (J2891, female, 46)

> I felt particularly embarrassed as I could not stop crying the whole way through. I was upset most of all for his wife and children, particularly my ex-boyfriend.
> I also felt very sad that the deceased's mother should have to live to see her son die. (B4672, female, 29)

Mourners – including those who were themselves members of the family – contrasted their own feelings of sorrow with the feelings of those 'closer' to the deceased person, according closer relatives more sympathy than they claimed for themselves:

> ... my aunt had played a significant part in my life – so I did feel sadness. And I felt particular sadness for my (widowed) 91 year old uncle – who was

having to cope with the end of his 64 year marriage. (C3603, male, born 1944)

I felt sad that I had lost my last Great Uncle but I felt more upset for my Great Auntie than anything else. (R4100, female, 42)

It should be noted that it was not only family that correspondents sympathised with, although when others were included it was not without acknowledging the family's loss:

The saddest funeral I can recall going to would be that of my cousin - she died aged 35 leaving three kids aged under 10. Now that was sad, not just form a personal and family point of view but seeing the misery on her friends faces. (S4429, male, 43)

Mourners felt sorriest for the deceased person's family. It is a simple point, but one that is crucial if we are fully to understand the authority that family holds for mourners at a funeral, since, as Morgan (2011, p. 123) has noted, "any account of family that excludes emotions will be defective".

In this section I have argued that the authority of family for mourners at funerals can be seen in a number of ways. I considered what mourners do at funerals and why. I showed that the expectations and requests of other people, including the deceased person's family as well as the deceased person themselves, influenced mourners' decisions about clothing, flowers and donations. I showed that when deciding to attend a funeral, mourners were not responding to a request but actively and willingly showing respect for the deceased person and support for their family. I examined whose satisfaction with the funeral correspondents considered to be important. Again, the deceased person and their family (including 'chief mourners') featured strongly. From these considerations it is clear that family dominates mourners' accounts – not in the sense that it is always the most powerful influence, but in the sense that it is always present. 'The family' pervaded these mourners' experiences of funerals. Finally, I suggested that this could be explained not only through standard

cultural and funerary practices, but through mourners' own sympathy, through 'feeling' family.

Even while 'the family' holds authority, that authority is not total. Within the chapter there have been examples of family members themselves being constrained by the actions or expectations of other mourners (Caswell, 2011, pp. 251-2). These included the mourner who cried so that others could see, and the mourner who waited until only family members remained at the tea before getting drunk.

Conclusion

This chapter began by showing that 'family' is a taken-for-granted category (Heaphy, 2011) for mourners. Correspondents employed both hierarchical and binary distinctions between mourners at funerals, in either case 'ranking' the family of the deceased person above others. It went on to show how family, and in particular the family of the deceased person, is actively accomplished through 'doing' and 'display' at the funeral, both by members of that family and by other mourners. It was observed how many standard funeral practices are simultaneously practices which promote the accomplishment of family in this way. Finally the chapter demonstrated how the deceased person's family can be considered an authority for mourners, both in the sense that it is viewed as the source of instruction and guidance, and in the sense that mourners themselves view that family as the proper recipients of their support. It was suggested that 'feeling' family played a part in mourners' willingness to offer support to the family of the person who had died.

Thus we have seen that when mourners' perspectives are taken into account, 'the family', meaning the deceased person's family, emerges as a significant authority over the funeral. Little attention was given by correspondents to elective relationships (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1992; Weeks et al., 2001; Weston, 1991), by which I mean not only more recently recognised family forms (which are apparently under-represented in the data) but also friendships. Despite the dominance, or pervasiveness, of

the theme of family in correspondents' replies, the data do not fit Prior's characterisation of contemporary death practices as "a monopolisation of death by the family" (Prior, 1989, p. 146). *The family* does not monopolise death, but mourners actively collaborate in prioritising, accomplishing and feeling family at the funeral. Neither is the funeral *monopolised* by the family, which comprises but one authority among others, most notably that of the deceased individual.

Yet while it is one among others, the family is an authority distinct from any of those (tradition/religion, expertise, or the individual/the self) identified by Walter (1994). Again, it was notable that funeral directors barely featured at all in correspondents' replies. This need not undermine the position of authors such as Smale (1997) and Clark and Szmigin (2003), who argue that funeral directors' power is largely invisible to their clients (let alone, presumably, wider mourners), but it may challenge funeral directors' own view of the authority they claim over the funeral (Caswell, 2009; Harper, 2008; Jenny Hockey, 1993; Holloway et al., 2010; Howarth, 1996).

This concludes our investigation of mourners' perspectives on authority at the funeral, an investigation which has engaged mainly with sociological literature. The following chapter engages with discussions in anthropology, investigating the funeral as the site, for mourners, of a meeting with death.

Chapter 8: The Meeting with Death

Introduction

Funerals are not only social gatherings. They are also, indeed, they are primarily, social responses to death (Metcalf and Huntington, 1991). This dimension of funerals has been explored to date primarily by anthropologists, and it is with anthropological theory that this chapter primarily engages.

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section shows that mourners do encounter death in the funeral, in a number of ways. The second section analyses those encounters using Davies' (1997, 2002) 'words against death' thesis.

The chapter examines not only substantive but also practical and, especially, social dimensions of funerals, and reveals the taken-for-granted conditions upon which successful 'funerals against death' in contemporary Britain depend.

Mourners' Experiences of Death in the Funeral

A number of scholars have argued that death in contemporary society is sequestered (Mellor and Shilling, 1993) contained (Blauner, 1966) or hidden (Giddens, 1991). One might think that these claims, made about wider society, could not possibly extend to funerals which, after all, only take place in direct response to a death. Indeed, anthropologists have long theorised funerals, including funerals in contemporary Britain (Hockey, 1990; Metcalf and Huntington, 1979, 1991), as *signifying* death (Grainger, 1998b, pp. 130-6 in particular) and symbolising the endurance of society and its values in the face of individual death (Bloch, 1992; Bloch and Parry, 1982; Durkheim, 1915/1976; Hertz, 1907/1960; van Gennep, 1909/1960).

Nonetheless, some scholars, particularly those with a comparative perspective, *have* argued that death in contemporary British funerals is in some way sidestepped. Cook and Walter (2005) show how Church of England funeral liturgy is now sanitised in comparison with earlier centuries. Christie Davies (1996) suggests that the practice of cremation, which accounts for nearly three-

quarters of all British deaths (Cremation Society of Great Britain, 2011), can be understood as a symbolic attempt to avoid death and its effects, in comparison with the predominant American practice of burial which symbolises a denial of death. By contrast, Grainger (1998b, pp. 105-15) argues that no matter what its content, the very fact of holding a funeral *is* confronting death. Harper (2008, 2010) has argued that in English funerals the dead body takes on a greater visibility and agency (in the sense of having the capacity to affect others) both than it possesses during the days preceding the funeral, and than does the body in American funerals. Others suggest that although British society may conceal the process of cremation (Davies, 2002, pp. 77-9), the ashes which result from this process are popularly employed in personalised ritual which may be understood as an engagement with a 're-enchanted' death (Prendergast et al., 2006).

It is in the context of such debates that we will examine mourners' experiences of death in funerals in contemporary Britain. It should be remembered that this is not a survey study of funerary content and I make no claims about the symbolic presence of death in funerals *per se*. The evidence I present concerns mourners' written accounts of funerals and the presence of death in those.

Death as a Reason Not to Attend a Funeral

In some replies, anticipation of being confronted by death was given as a reason for deciding not to attend a funeral.

In some cases this was explained by reference to another recent bereavement:

> I have made a conscious decision not to go to a funeral. This was in the early days following the death of my Husband. It took several months before I could face another funeral... (M2061, female, 80)

> One was only about a month after my husband's so I wasn't expected to go to that... (H1705, female, 59)

The first of the above correspondents suggests that funerals do indeed represent a meeting with death which can be hard to bear while one is still

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suffering from a painful loss, while the second takes this to be common knowledge.

It may not be a single devastating bereavement such as being widowed which leads people to be unwilling to attend funerals, but rather repeated deaths:

> Recently I have decided not to go to funerals. Too many of our friends are dying. One couple we know seem to go to a funeral nearly every week - even of remote acquaintances. (W2244, female, 81)

It is not clear from this quotation why 'too many' is a reason not to attend – whether the logistics of going to a funeral nearly every week were unfeasible for this correspondent, whether the emotional toll was considered too great, or some other reason. However, writing at least 12 years after her husband's death referred to above, the following correspondent offered this explanation:

> At the very beginning of this Directive, I wrote that I had been to four funerals in a very short space of time. I could have been to a fifth, but decided I just could not go. This was to do with having reached an age where those dying were my age. Having coped with four, I felt I was becoming very depressed, and the funeral on this occasion was for a church member who I did not know very well, though I did know her family. Thankfully, my depression has lifted now we are into a New Year, and Spring approaches. (M2061, female, 80)

This extract explains that repeated funerals are to be 'coped with' and that since they bring reminders of one's own mortality they are hard to bear[75]. That said, the correspondent views such a reaction as a temporary state, not one which will only worsen with increasing age – as long as funerals are not too frequent, perhaps.

One correspondent's reply did suggest that not attending the funeral was a way of avoiding death altogether:

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[75] It is perhaps surprising, given the demographic of M-O correspondents, that very few referred to their own deaths as imminent – although some did write about their own mortality (discussed below). Field's (2000) analysis of attitudes to death among Mass-Observers aged 65-80 years found that "[c]orrespondents did not generally describe any great personal fear of death... However, neither were these older people ready to die" (Field, 2000, p. 277). Field's analysis should not be taken as a reliable guide to the attitudes of correspondents cited in this thesis. Few of the correspondents cited in Field's article replied to the funerals directive, and it may be that some have now died.

> My step-granddad I saw just before he died, two weeks before, and he and
> I and everyone knew he was going. I got to say goodbye to him with a good
> conversation in his house, in his favourite room with a view over the valley,
> and he was in a good mood and lucid. It would have ruined it to come back
> for a funeral. This is how everyone should be able to say goodbye. (W4467,
> male, 35)

There are many aspects to this extract which could be discussed. What I want to highlight here is the idea that the best goodbye happens without death intruding, and that to attend a funeral defeats such an idyllic memory[76]. For this correspondent, such an admission of death as attending a funeral was reason enough not to go.

For those correspondents who did attend funerals, much was written about the deceased person.

Death in Mourners' Accounts: The Deceased Person

The directive asked correspondents to "describe [the funeral] in as much detail as you can remembering to avoid including too much identifying information. It's your relationships to other people that we're mostly interested in. Whose funeral was it?"

As detailed in Chapter 5, in general correspondents did not volunteer information beyond that which was explicitly requested by the directive. This question, though, was the notable exception, and the information which was volunteered concerned not only significant discussion of the identity of the deceased person, but also the manner of their dying.

When correspondents did supply information beyond identifying their relationship to the person who had died, many of them referred to the deceased person's character and interests:

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[76] Interestingly, this correspondent is a screenwriter. Any relationship between this tiny extract of his reply and his professional sense of 'scene', 'story' and 'ending' is of course conjectural, but fascinating to speculate on.

He was a lovely, jovial, happy, kind and gentle person whose eyes sparkled and he had a mischievous element to him that was really lovely. (B4750, female, 35)

She was a difficult, unhappy woman, with a probably quite depressive, disappointed temperament, and other than in early childhood, I was never able to relate to her with anything but awkward self-consciousness. (B3227, male, 43)

The most recent funeral I attended was that of a lady who attended the art club that I belong to. It was at the local church and was well attended as she had been active in our community, lately in the MS Association as she had looked after her husband with the disease for many years. (B2605, female, 79)

Noticeably, such information reflects the focus in many eulogies on the deceased person's pre-death identity (Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010), although just as noticeably, correspondents rarely wrote anything resembling a biography of the deceased person (as eulogies also often do). Neither did they often write of deceased adults' working identities or physical appearance, despite these being primary dimensions of personal and social identity during life (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999; Hahn, 1988; Pliner et al., 1990).

One of the most noticeable features of correspondents' replies was how often they wrote about the end of the deceased person's life. Many stated how the person had died:

He was in his late seventies and had died of cancer. (G4374, male, 44)

The most recent funeral I attended was for a well-known architect who died from motor neurone disease. (B2552, female, 78)

Others recounted the story of the death, some by starting with circumstances that they appeared to consider to have been 'the beginning of the end', forming retrospectively-constructed versions of what Strauss and Glaser (1977) call the 'dying trajectory':

He had been in a car with his brother and sister when his father had to swerve to avoid an oncoming vehicle. The car rolled and ended up in a

ditch. The boy was not wearing a seatbelt and died instantly. (A3434, female, 45)

He collapsed ad died from a massive Heart Attack at one of his photographic meetings. There was a Doctor in the audience but despite all his and the paramedics efforts the cousin could not be saved. (H2639, female, 70)

18 months or so after I met my future husband, a friend of his was taken suddenly and seriously ill with a brain tumour. C was barely 50, a kind man with generosity at his core. The next time we met him, at a drinks party of a mutual friend, it was clear that although outwardly well, C had mislaid a large part of his functional memory. He had no idea who I was for example. (N3181, female, 35)

She was in her early 80s and had been fighting cancer for around 9 months when she died. She had felt very ill in the Easter so had some tests done which revealed that she had cancer in her lungs, liver and stomach. The doctors gave her 3 months to live but she held on until Christmas and died early Christmas morning. (W4421, female, 25)

There are striking parallels between correspondents' accounts and those of women interviewed about what it is like to live as a widow (Bennett, 2004; Bennett and Vidal-Hall, 2000; Valentine, 2007, 2008; van den Hoonaard, 1999). The similarities begin with the fact of the accounts at all: both in this study and in those cited, the stories of the dying itself and the circumstances leading up to it were not directly sought but produced unsolicited. Van den Hoonard (1999, p. 69) argues that stories and statements offered voluntarily rather than in response to prompts or direct questions have greater "evidentiary value" (Becker, 1970); whether such material has greater value than solicited data can be debated, but its existence does seem to indicate significance to correspondents (see also Sheridan, 1996, p. 6). Furthermore, the quantity of unsolicited data on the topic of the end of the person's life was often considerable, and these 'answers' to an unasked question frequently contained more writing than responses to questions that the directive did ask. Bennett and Vidal-Hall similarly found that "The length of [widows' accounts of events that

led up to their husband's death and of the death itself] often contrasts with the remainder of the interview, where there are much shorter conversational turns" (2000, p. 413).

There were also thematic similarities with the widows' accounts as collected by Bennett and Vidal-Hall (2000). These researchers found four major themes, namely the expectedness or unexpectedness of the death, saying goodbye, place of death, and the emotional impact of death. The M-O data did not exactly mirror these themes, but there were certainly links and overlaps. The principal themes in correspondents' narratives of the dying trajectory were the expectedness or unexpectedness of the death, the place of abode before death, and the health of the person who had died in the period (sometimes years) before death:

> The other worst funeral could be the last one I attended. A friend of many years standing had died quite suddenly. He was a bachelor with very little family - just a half-sister and her daughter who lived a long way away. He'd not been well for a while and was almost reclusive - he would wait for others to phone or call. In fact, he died as unobtrusively as he'd lived. (F3641, female, 70)

> The last funeral I went to was a few months ago, and was that of the mother of a close friend. I did not know her well, but had seen her at Christmas a number of times when my friend, J had her parents to stay... Last autumn J's parents moved from Cornwall to be near her in [Hampshire]. They settled happily, then her mother was diagnosed with mouth cancer and was dead within a few months. Very sad. (T2003, female, 61)

> I was mainly grateful that up until the last two weeks she had been able to get out & about with her friends & that she never had to have a long stay in a hospital or a home. She lived in her marital home up until the final illness. (O3436, female, 56)

Quite why correspondents included the dying in their accounts of the funeral is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore, although there are a number of

possibilities[77]. What is important to notice, though, is that the story of the death is at the forefront of correspondents' minds when they come to explain whose funeral they went to.

Death in the Funeral: The Deceased Person

Many correspondents wrote of the deceased person's presence in the funeral itself. None mentioned visions (Davies, 2002, pp. 170-2), and few correspondents wrote in terms of a sense of anything resembling a soul (Davies, 2010), tangible existence (Bennett and Bennett, 2000) or ongoing awareness (Holloway et al., 2010, pp. 139-44) on the part of the deceased person, although some did:

> I do not want to sound foolish, but I have a feeling that the spirit of Granddad may have been presiding over the funeral and the gathering in the garden... (A2212, female, 53)

> Everyone filed out of the house and I thought that the sight of the coffin might upset me, but it didn't. On the contrary, I had such a feeling that wherever my grandad was, he was happy that I really didn't feel that I should be sad, even though I was. (W1813, female, 60)

> ... and when my voice started to break as I was reaching the closing sentence, I could feel them (and perhaps my uncle) willing me on to get to the end without breaking down. (D1602, male, 68)

More often the deceased person was spoken of as being symbolically present. For some correspondents, the content of the funeral was understood as the fulfilment of the dead person's wishes and, as such, as an extension or representation of their identity (Caswell, 2011):

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[77] For example, while correspondents do seem to be producing their own narratives, as opposed to drawing on any recounted to them by the deceased person themselves (Exley, 1999), they may still be completing the 'story' of the deceased person's life, just as some individuals take care before death to write "in a metaphorical sense… the last chapters of their autobiography. And they want it to be a story that makes sense" (Marshall, 1986, p. 139). Nadeau (1998, 2001), Corr (1998-1999), van den Hoonard (1999) and Walter (1996c) all suggest that such sense-making is necessary in grief, although I am not confident that all M-O correspondents who provided dying trajectories would characterise their state at the time of writing their reply as 'grieving'.

He had planned the funeral himself + you could feel him there as there were so many little touches which were typical of him. (P1009, female, 71)

Some attributed the deceased person a kind of agency (Harper, 2008, 2010) in the execution of their funeral:

Rose brought the town to a standstill and Annie took us to a stunningly beautiful natural burial ground and had a bamboo coffin of exquisite beauty. (G4566, female, no age given)

Some correspondents were conscious of the deceased person's nearness rather than presence (Holloway et al., 2010, pp. 143-4):

We sang. She had had a beautiful singing voice so every hymn was laden with emotion and sadness. But we all tried to sing. Her sister has a beautiful voice too so it was almost as if she was there too. (M3055, female, 36)

Others, without postulating a presence, nevertheless invoked the deceased person's satisfaction in their discussion of the funeral:

My dad's funeral had some unintentionally humorous moments that he would have enjoyed. (D4101, male, 50)

I wore a black skirt with small white spots, a white blouse and black linen jacket as I knew D would have thought that correct. (W633, female, 68)

He would have been furious if he knew what was going to happen... He once said he wanted a funeral where no-one came, well he would have been very disappointed indeed. (M2486, female, 58)

These aspects of the presence of the dead person at the funeral all focus on the pre-death identity and personality. Correspondents also wrote, though, of the physical indication of death in funeral, in the presence of the coffin (Harper, 2008). Walter (1994, pp. 179-80) argues that to be considered successful, a funeral must address the fact of the coffin. Correspondents, however, suggested that they would dispute this.

Many correspondents wrote about their distress at the sight of the coffin:

Standing outside the crematorium, a hush descended on the crowd as the funeral party drew up. Highly polished black cars dispatched horrified family

members into the grounds, and of course, the coffin. This was the moment that I had dreaded, and I recall it still with a shudder. (N3181, female, 35)

I was on the inside of the isle and the coffin went past me which was horrible. (R4365, female, 29)

I ended up sitting in the big black car right behind the hearse and it really freaked me out having to drive along looking at the coffin. (P3213, female, 44)

I stood with my parents and brother and was horrified to realise that when the double doors to the room opened, not only did the vicar come in, but also the coffin. I had never realised that the coffin and the deceased's body was at the funeral. I don't know why I had never been aware of that fact but it definitely shook me up when I saw the coffin wheeled in. (W4376, female, 42)

In these extracts, it is not clear whether the mourners' distress is connected with the "contaminated corpse" (Howarth, 1996), that is, with the corpse as a symbol of pollution (Douglas, 1966), danger (Prior, 1989), or, most fundamentally, the threat of death (Hallam et al., 1999). However, some correspondents' distress was clearly connected to the coffin as a symbol of the *particular* death that had occurred:

The worst funeral I attended was my first. I was aged twenty-seven... I'll never forget the feeling of seeing the coffin and knowing how I felt about the person who was inside it, yet there was nothing to be done about it, I had no choice but to accept the situation and simply let it play out before my eyes. (R4695, male, 46)

When the deceased has been someone special to me, the point at which it seems to hit home that they're no longer physically going to be with us is when the coffin is brought in. This is when I tend to weep... (V3773, female, 48)

Many mourners wrote about the visual or physical removal of the coffin. Again, this was consistently spoken of as a distressing occurrence:

After that we went on the Crematorium in Doncaster. That was mainly family and was a matter of saying a few short words from the vicar and, of course, that god awful moment where the curtains draw in front of the coffin and that's it, never to be seen again. (B4561, female, no age given)

His wife read the poem then walked to the switch that drew the curtains- I could not have done this- and I saw his sister crumple and be hugged by her husband. (M2986, female, 54)

Nobody had told me that at the close of the service at the crematorium – his coffin would suddenly move out of sight and the curtains would close behind it. I was shocked by that. I felt utterly empty... At other funerals in recent years (including my own sister's) – the coffin has remained still and in sight – and it is the congregation that leave before the coffin moves. I coped much better with that arrangement. (C3603, male, born 1944)

In all of these quotes there appears to be a strong awareness of (and resistance to) the symbolic re-enactment of death in the crematorium, although Grainger (2005, pp. 32-3) argues that such dissatisfaction is as easily attributable to an unsettling uncertainty about the actual fate of the coffin following its disappearance from view as to a philosophical or existential distaste for the depiction of death.

The 'death' of the deceased person's social role (Davies, 2002, p. 5) was also written about, although in a very specific way. A number of correspondents referred to the death as ending a generation:

She was the last of my parents' generation and so it was significant to me. (P3209, male, 71)

My aunt was the youngest of six children (my mother was the eldest) – and the last of the siblings to die. (C3603, male, born 1944)

It felt to me like the last link to my grandmother's generation had been lost. Auntie K's two brothers and two sisters (including my Grandma) had died before her and she had been very proud of outliving them all! (A2801, female, 45)

As monarchs' deaths can end a national era (Jalland, 1999), these deaths bring to a close a familial era, which correspondents use to locate their own lives (Kramer, 2011) as well as those of the deceased person.

Other Dead at the Funeral

One striking aspect of the M-O data was how mourners wrote about *other* dead in their accounts of an individual's funeral. As Jupp (2004, p. 28) notes, people's feelings about funerals may be influenced by their prior experiences, and correspondents often wrote that attendance at a funeral, or particular aspects of a funeral (including the venue), brought back sometimes painful memories of earlier funerals or bereavements:

> ... though I have attended many, many funerals since then – they all take me back to the funeral of my own father. (C3603, male, born 1944)

> One of the hymns she had chosen was 'How Great Thou Art', which brought back memories of my mother's funeral, as it was one of her favourite hymns too. (D4101, male, 50)

> My main feelings were nerves and I was sad as the only other funeral I had been to was my dad's in 2006 and it brought back horrible memories. (R4685, female, 24)

> The body left to the hymn 'Walk with me oh my Lord'. This is the benchmark funeral exit hymn for my family. It always evokes memories of previous funerals. (M4122, male, 32)

> I felt most upset when my Grandma, Ivy, was mentioned and inevitably it brought back memories of her funeral and my Grandad's as they were held in the same church. (A2801, female, 45)

Funerals also prompted thoughts of mortality for mourners – the mortality of those close to them, as well as their own (Davies, 2010, p. 209; Littlewood, 1982, p. 195):

> ... it does make you think about your own parents and family in the future. (K3164, female, 32)

I remember my partner saying this was a kind of rehearsal for my father's funeral; which I suppose it was and it did make me think how his funeral might be and how I would feel. (S4249, female, 42)

I remember feeling quite tearful and also feeling somewhat scared. Going to funerals always reminds me of my own mortality and that of my own immediate family. As I have quite aged parents, I wonder how long it will before I am attending one of their funerals, an event I can't imagine how I will cope with. (R4695, male, 46)

After the funeral, some correspondents made a visit to a nearby family grave:

I managed to bring myself to visit my grandparents' grave, but found it very difficult and didn't stay long. (A2801, female, 45)

We also paid our respects to my Mother's cousin who had died of cancer a few years ago and who's ashes were buried in the grounds. (B4561, female, no age given)

Walking through the paths and looking at all the headstones it finally struck home with me how brief and fragile life is. There were all ages interred there, 8 years, 92, 26, 65, 43, 4, men, women and children all loved and cherished and people had stood around the grave and mourned for each of their loved ones as I still missed my husband and am bereft at his going. (I am crying again now). We stood around on the path and some people stood on other graves to get near enough to hear the vicar. My aunt (my cousin's and my mums' youngest sister) had brought flowers for her sister's grave and we looked for it, it was in the row behind, so they were lying head to head, one pointing East and the other West. (W632, female, 69)

These data clearly demonstrate that the person whose funeral is being held may be far from being the only person whose death in is mourners' minds and hearts at the funeral. For many mourners the funeral was an event associated not only with the deceased individual, but with others who had died earlier, as well as with all who are to die. The funeral they attended was not a discrete occasion isolated from the rest of life, but one instance of potentially many such occasions, interconnected with the rest of death.

But there is something further to draw attention to, as well as this simple but important evidence that funerals can act as a reminder for mourners of other dead than the person whose funeral it is (Davies, 2002, p. 175) and of mortality. The other, past and future dead, were present in these funerals but publicly unacknowledged. This is not inevitable. Clark (1982) writes that because visiting family graves in Staithes (a northern English village) is an everyday custom,

> "... every funeral takes on a wider significance. Transformed from a rite of passage for one individual, it becomes a remembrance of the entire collectivity of the dead. A powerful bond is thus created between the world of the living and the world of the dead" (Clark, 1982, p. 138).

Yet compare Clark's words with those of these correspondents, quite explicit about keeping their awareness of other dead private:

> My thoughts were very much with my parents who died many years ago and with friends who died more recently. I shed a tear but not so much that anyone would have noticed. (H4005, female, 70)

> Attendance at any funeral inevitable makes me think of other funerals I have attended - notably my mother and also my cousin. So the emotions stirred were more to do with memories of them. I didn't express them at this funeral, just had my private thoughts during and after the service. (S4429, male, 43)

> There was, as there always is under such circumstances, a heavy and gloomy feeling that one may be the next to be despatched on the journey to the unknown... I did not express my own emotions to anyone; it seemed neither the time nor the place to ramble on about one's own forebodings. We were there to pay homage elsewhere. (R2143, male, 63)

My purpose in making this comparison is not to argue that the customs of Staithes were once widespread and are now lost, nor that mourners must suffer (Gorer, 1967) from the absence of explicit and communal recognition of death and the company of the dead at funerals such as may be found in other cultures (Sturgis, 2012) (although it is more than possible some did, and that in general, some do). What I want to draw attention to is these mourners' assumption of privatisation, their assumption that such recognition and acknowledgement is

the concern of the individual rather than the community (Blauner, 1966; Littlewood, 1993, p. 69), an assumption reflected in the form and content of contemporary funerals – and the presence, privatisation notwithstanding, of these other dead.

The past and future dead may be absent (Walter, 1990, p. 63) from the content of a funeral which celebrates the life of only one individual (Caswell, 2011). The funeral may be a rationalised event (Walter, 1994, pp. 23-4) held in a culture which dismisses experiences of the nearness of the dead as 'not real' (Bennett and Bennett, 2000). Death may be euphemised in funerary liturgy (Cook and Walter, 2005). Even so, both death and the past and future dead remain present in the experiences of the mourners at those funerals.

This section has demonstrated a number of ways in which, for mourners, the funeral can be said to hold a 'space' (Davies, 2010, p. 213) for the presence of death. Mourners avoided funerals as a way of avoiding death. Correspondents wrote unasked about the dying, as well as writing of the spiritual, symbolic, social and physical presence and death of the deceased person at their funeral. In addition, mourners' accounts revealed an awareness at funerals of other dead and of personal mortality.

The remainder of the chapter will discuss how mourners expect and experience a response at the funeral to this meeting with death.

Funerals Against Death: Mourners' Perspectives

This section will consider mourners' data in relation to anthropological theory, in particular the 'words against death' thesis (Davies, 2002). This thesis, as discussed in Chapter 2, is "a shorthand description of the way human beings use language so as not to let death have the last word" (Davies, 2005, p. 20). Death being a threat to self-consciousness, humans draw on language, a primary symbol of self-consciousness, to make a targeted response to death – particularly in funerals. This response has an existentially transformative effect (Bloch, 1992; Davies, 2002), infusing those present with a new hope (Davies,

2002, 2005, 2011) and capacity to live. Davies argues that in secular and post-modern societies characterised by eclectic rather than systematic religious belief, and by the value placed on the uniqueness of each individual (Bloch and Parry, 1982, p. 15), this renewal is not likely to be oriented towards ancestorhood or an afterlife. Rather, "by engaging with death through ritual, the identity of the dead will be turned to some positive effect in the ongoing memory of the living" (Davies, 2002, pp. 237-8).

It is clear from the data that mourners did expect funerals to provide some form of 'hope' in the face of death by means of a celebration of the deceased person's life, resulting in a feeling of being uplifted[78]:

> No-one enjoys funerals, but it does make you feel strangely better if the funeral is a celebration of someone's life... (A2801, female, 45)

> It was an alright funeral, not really a celebration of her life, and rather sad. (W3967, female, 42)

> I attended a good one last March. The deceased was a real character and the church in Evesham was packed as he knew lots of people. He had a very upmarket willow coffin which was carried out of the church at the end by his family to the recording of Michael Ball singing 'Love Changes Everything'. So we all left the church feeling thoroughly uplifted. (P1009, female, 71)

There were those (a minority) who apparently would have preferred to evade the discomfort (Cheal, 1988, p. 284) of facing death at the funeral:

> On reflection, I would say it had been a good funeral. Starting with light, airy music as an introduction, to the coloured clothing and the positive oration given, the funeral did not make me feel at all sad or upset. (W4376, female, 42)

> It's awful feeling sad and solemn, I don't like grief, doesn't do any good does it? Wearing black, so dreary. Come on. (A883, male, 77)

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[78] It is also clear that mourners did largely *experience* funerals as providing this hope.

> ... a poor or sad funeral seems to evoke negative feelings, the last thing needed at these difficult times. (E4111, male, 70)

It should be noted that the above quotes are not about a desire to avoid 'breaking down' (Jenny Hockey, 1993; Jalland, 2010; Littlewood, 1982, pp. 83-4; Walter, 1997a) but apparently a desire to avoid grief altogether.

There were also correspondents who resisted what they experienced as a dominant discourse of celebration (c.f. Howard, 1994, who found anything but the endorsement of uplifting funerals silenced and "unsanctioned"), and who suggested that 'hope' had no place in a funeral:

> I know that there's been a trend towards more cheerful funerals that 'celebrate someone's life' rather than mourn their death, but personally I think this is just another sign that modern people deal badly with death and is a way of fooling themselves into believing that death doesn't really happen. For me, funerals are for mourning a loss and they should reflect that. (W1813, female, 60)

> I don't go in for all this being cheerful at funerals and 'celebrating' the person's life, funerals are for the living and I think it is important to mourn the loss of someone you care for. (W3163, female, 52)

The majority of correspondents, though, emphasised the need for a balance in the funeral between confronting death and affirming life:

> I have luckily only been to a few funerals and I genuinely think that despite the obvious sadness of the occasion, if at all possible it should be about celebrating the person's life as much as mourning their death. (W4456, male, 32)

> A typical funeral, a "good" one is a strange mixture of deep sadness but also great joy and gratitude for a person's finished life. (R4286, female, born 1966)

> The minister said that we were there to celebrate the life and mourn the death of my husband's grandfather, which was far more appropriate than saying that we were there only to celebrate. (A2212, female, 53)

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How, then, did mourners find affirmation of life in the face of the meeting with death? For mourners, can funerals be said to be 'words against death'?

Words Against Death

In short, funerals *can* be said to be 'words against death' from mourners' perspectives – but only partly. 'Partly' in that words were far from being all that were posited against death at funerals in mourners' experiences. And 'partly' also because how words worked against death for mourners extends into territory left umapped by Davies.

In Davies' thesis, it is words with rhetorical intent or effect – that is, words which confront the fact of the death and which challenge its extinguishing power (Davies, 2002, pp. 2-3; see also pp. 22, 45, 215-216) – which are 'against death'. Language is often "deployed as if it were a weapon against an enemy. Occasionally, however, the words seem to be friendly and to welcome death, and that, too, must not be ignored" (Davies, 2005, p. 20). As noted above, Davies argues that such words will take different forms in different societal contexts. In our own society they are no longer only religious, and may use secular ways of building a positive identity for the deceased person in mourners' memories (Davies, 2002, p. 3; 2010, p. 122). In addition, 'words against death' which invoke a 'significance realm' (pp. 215-6)

> "are now equally likely to be poetic or explicitly therapeutic. Still, through them all the process of adaptation and social evolution continues through expanding patterns of the rhetoric of death" (Davies, 2002, p. 209; see also Bauman, 1998).

Mourners' accounts of funerals did support Davies' thesis. For example:

The best funeral

I was dreading attending the funeral of a dear friend who died of cancer in August 2009. It was hard to say goodbye to her in one of her last lucid moments - she was heavily sedated in the last few days.

Her son-in-law, who was very close to her, and always called her "Mum" gave the address and turned the service at the Crematorium into a tribute and celebration of a long life well lived. She was a life-enhancing person

who made friends wherever she went, and she had left a big gap in many lives, including mine.

I think I recollect correctly in saying that the congregation applauded his address - I've never known that happen before - Princess Diana's funeral excepted. (M1395, female, 80)

In many ways, this is a classic account of 'words against death'. The correspondent details her trepidation at being faced in this funeral with a death which had deeply disturbed her. Yet through his words affirming the dead woman's contribution to others' gladness, and through his words affirming the value of preserving this in memory, the son-in-law fully reversed what had been a dreaded occasion into an accomplishment worthy (to other mourners also) of applause.

We have already seen in some detail how recurrent a theme is mourners' approval of a eulogy which captures the deceased person's personality (in Chapter 6) and of a funeral which does not avoid death but which imparts a sense of worth both in the life lived and in continuing life (in this chapter, above), often through that eulogy. But eulogies are not the only form of 'words against death' at a funeral. As Davies notes, funeral services often include poetry (Cook and Walter, 2005), and this made some impression on mourners:

Printed in the Order of Service was the following
"Words of Comfort"
['You can shed tears...' attributed to Anon]
I hadn't come across this before but thought it very helpful. (P1009, female, 71)

The poem that this correspondent refers to, originally written by David Harkins, is (in various adapted forms) a popular funeral poem. Indeed, it was read by Queen Elizabeth II at her mother's funeral (Seaton, 2002). The version provided by this correspondent (reproduced in full in Appendix D) consists of a series of choices presented to mourners between grief and hope, a hope which is presented as sanctioned by the deceased person themselves. This is clearly an example of 'words against death', and one which the correspondent appreciated.

The formal funeral ceremony may contain 'words against death' in addition to the eulogy and poetry:

> There were sympathetic words for those who mourned him and a call to move on from mourning to celebration of a long and eventful life. (W1813, female, 60)

There were also many such informal words. These included condolences and the sharing of memories (Davies, 2010, p. 122) of the deceased person's life and its value:

> Al I did say was that I was so sorry we were meeting under these circumstances which appeared to me to be the best thing I could say. (P2915, male, 52)

> Many of her relations came from Poland to attend, I knew some of them and was able to give my condolences, even though they couldn't speak English and I couldn't speak Polish. (S1534, female, 76)

> We did go to the reception afterwards in the deceased's flat where we met his family and were able to say how much we appreciated the work of their father. (G4313, male, 83)

> After the service I introduced myself to the widow and told her how I found out about the funeral and how much I owed to Ken in past years. She introduced me to their children and other family members and was clearly pleased that I had come. (B2240, male, 89)

Some mourners did find it difficult to offer condolences:

> I never know how much to say. I don't like to upset people and you never know when you're going to put your foot in it and say the wrong thing. (B4750, female, 35)

However, there was little evidence for Gorer's (1967, p. 57) assertion that without conventional phrases and responses most mourners are at a disabling loss to know what to say.

For some mourners, though, words of condolence intensified, rather than assuaged, their distress (Walter, 1996c, p. 15):

I also felt angry at the strangers who kept approaching me at the wake (held at my granddad's house) to tell me what a wonderful man he had been. I already knew how wonderful he was and they couldn't have felt that as much as I did... I understand that people offer platitudes when talking to grief-stricken relatives simply because there are no adequate words that can possibly console, but at the time, I had rather they simply left me alone. (K4286, female, 29)

Some correspondents suggested that after the formal ceremony words may lead away from grief:

It's difficult to know what to say to people at a funeral without it sounding clichéd but everyone is in the same boat and so naturally you start to talk about other more normal everyday things. I think this is a relief, particularly to the family members as it's all too much otherwise. (W4456, male, 32)

Thus words in both the formal and the informal parts of the funeral could act 'against death', confronting and overcoming the assault of death. Mourners used their own words (Davies, 2002, p. 17), in the form of condolences and shared memories given as comfort against grief. It may be noted that, in keeping with Davies' thesis (2005, p. 122) few of these words offered any kind of overarching meaning to be made of death, a meaning which many other scholars have suggested that 'words against death' at funerals may offer for those present (Grainger, 1998b, p. 97; Hass and Walter, 2006-2007; Holloway et al., 2010; Littlewood, 1992; Naylor, 1989, p. 350; Williams, 1981). Mourners' concern was not with the cosmological meaning of death, nor even, much of the time, the meaning of the individual death, but with the value of individual life (Quartier et al., 2004). Nonetheless, through words (their own and others'), mourners faced and symbolically overcame death.

However, once again the words themselves are not the full story. We saw in Chapter 5 that who spoke the words could matter to mourners as much as what the words were. Here, a correspondent adds another dimension:

The best I have been to was a most difficult funeral for a young baby who died after 10 weeks... The minister was superb... He tried to explain the comfort in the death that although was a nonsense to an atheist like myself I am sure gave some comfort to the believers. God's plan is not ours to

understand was the gist. It was not what he said but the way that he said it that carried it off. (H3821, male, 58)

Here the transformatory power was not inherent in the words themselves but depended on their delivery. This correspondent was far from alone in admiring the speaker of the words, although he was unusual for commending an officiant. Other correspondents' admiration for speakers who were fellow mourners was focused on the meaning not of their words, but of their very speaking:

The most admirable thing that I have seen at funerals is people who are brave enough to stand in front of their friends and family and speak. Speaking in public is something that most of us do not have much experience of and it can be very intimidating. Add to that the grief that you are feeling at a funeral, which makes it even harder to stand up and speak. I can offer nothing but praise to the people that are prepared to do this small but beautiful last act of kindness to the memory of a deceased friend or relative. (K4286, female, 29)

My brother in law surprised us and stood up and spoke about my sister. I remember admiring him incredibly. (J3887, female, 44)

J's daughter and grandchildren did readings. I admired their ability to do this on what was a very sad occasion. (M4122, male, 32)

The reasons for mourners' admiration fell into two broad categories. The first was that speaking in public is difficult, and some speakers may be expected to have particular difficulties with the task:

... his younger son, who is not literary minded, read out a tribute he had written, which expressed his gratitude to his father exactly. He had sweated for ages producing it, and it was very affecting. (W2322, male, 66)

My ex-boyfriend then read a Christina Rosetti poem (I think it was Remember). He read it perfectly despite having a fear of reading out loud, and even of reading altogether, since he was made fun of at school for being a slow reader... I felt saddest when the two readings took place, especially my ex-boyfriend's because I was so proud of him... (B4672, female, 29)

In these examples, the work of producing speech was what mourners admired and considered a tribute to the person who had died – a tribute *in addition to* the actual words said.

The second reason for admiring speakers at the funeral was the emotional challenge which they were seen to take up and, largely, overcome:

> Then it was my cousin's turn – and the poor chap could hardly speak. He told me afterwards that he had been quite composed until I'd started to falter, when suddenly the full force of the situation suddenly hit him for the first time. He was standing there, desperately fighting back the tears and almost gasping for breath, and we all just sat there and watched. I wanted to go up and put my arm around him for support, but my British reserve held me back. Then suddenly he was all right and delivered a very creditable speech that had us laughing in some places and close to tears in others. (D1602, male, 68)

> Her three children and two of her grandchildren spoke at the funeral. Actually I thought it was a bit too much speaking by the family especially as her daughter broke down at the end of her talk which made me cry also... (H1705, female, 59)

> It was hard in that funeral. I think that there was a huge sense of it being too soon for the deceased to part from us and a real sadness that here was someone who was so lovely and it was hard and painful, especially when his son spoke. I think that was when most of us felt really upset, it was mostly because he was so utterly brave and strong in saying what he was saying. We could all sense that he was in tremendous pain. I was full of admiration of his strength of character in being able to say what he did. I can't remember the poem that he read or the verses. It was beautiful though. The elder brother got up to support his younger brother and that was also lovely to see. (B4750, female, 35)

While in these extracts the words themselves are somewhat appreciated, the real emphasis is on the admired ability of the speakers (all of whom are mourners rather than funeral personnel) to do two things. The first is individually and publicly to be the one to face death with words – to have the 'strength of character' to be 'brave and strong', that is, not to 'break down' or succumb to

grief in the moments of delivering the words. In these quotes, it should be noted, correspondents were not invoking 'grief scripts' (Walter, 1997a), since their concern was not to do with how (or whether) grief may be expressed in general, but with these few minutes during which someone speaks against death. Successful management of emotion (Hochschild, 1983; Jenny Hockey, 1993; Scheff, 1977) during this act was appreciated by correspondents as skilful and effortful work. We might think of it as 'speaking against death', acknowledging the practical aspect of this manifestation of 'words against death'.

The second thing that speakers against death are doing for mourners is acting in a way as a proxy. These speakers are no ritual character standing symbolically against a figurative death. They are fellow mourners, confronting *the* death, of the one who has died and is mourned at the funeral. Their self-control for those minutes can assist other mourners to defy the effects of death and grief; their loss of self-control can precipitate others' defeat by grief. *This* is what officiants who do not know the deceased person cannot do, no matter how good their words. They cannot do it because they simply are not relationally eligible; they just are not a mourner whose speaking against death can model speaking against death for all mourners. These speakers are not 'mediator deathworkers' acting on behalf of the dead (Walter, 2005a), but 'mediator mourners' acting on behalf of the congregation. When speakers act in this way (which need not be deliberate on their own part or that of other mourners) their utterance is indeed performative (Austin, 1961; Davies, 2002, pp. 8, 20, 22, 216), although it is the act (rather than the content) of the utterance which is performative – that is, which brings about the very state of affairs for which it stands.

Davies argues that

"individuals may simply not belong to a suitable speech community able to voice powerful ritual words. This is precisely where the established funeral professions move into action and provide various sets of traditional words against death, whether from the churches, from the funeral-directing world, or from death counsellors" (2002, p. 17).

These data from mourners challenge Davies' adherence not to the idea (shared by Walter, 2005a, pp. 407-8) that individuals may be unable to produce 'words against death' (for we do not know how widespread a practice it is for mourners to speak them at a funeral, and it may be that correspondents commented on it precisely because it is unusual), but to the idea that the power in ritual words is in the words alone. The words can be spoken, and it can be an act against death so to do. Furthermore, mourners recognise that belonging to a suitable speech community to produce the words is not on its own enough to deliver the words to and on behalf of the gathered others. It takes emotional, not just cognitive skill, to perform words against death.

Davies' thesis is not limited to spoken words against death. Music, visual art, and drama are all encompassed by the theory. What other aspects of funerals did mourners experience as 'against death'?

Music Against Death

The literature would suggest that music would be a powerful resource against death. Music can be a portal to transcendence (DeNora, 2003) of grief (Davies, 2005, p. 106) by containing the spiritual meaning of shared relationship with the one who has died (Adamson and Holloway, 2012); communal hymn singing can represent the strength of ongoing social life against individual death and grief (Caswell, 2011-2012; Davies, 2002, p. 199); and both hymns and the popular songs which comprise much of the music in contemporary funerals (Caswell, 2009, 2011-2012; Holloway et al., 2010; Parsons, 2012) may contain words which lend their own power against death (Davies, 2002, p. 202).

Mourners' writing about music in funerals, however, draws a different picture. Those who commented on producing music themselves – that is, on singing hymns – tended to comment on their enjoyment of or self-consciousness about singing in general, rather than about singing in the context of the funeral. Most of the discussion was about the consumption of music performed by others (Walter, 2012a), almost all of it pre-recorded. Correspondents did not object to music being pre-recorded (c.f. Davies, 1990, p. 37), and did know or assume that this music was meaningful to the deceased

person, either by dint of its having been chosen by them or because it was their favourite. Believing this, correspondents in the main approved of the musical choice at funerals for its contribution to personalisation as well as its effect on mourners' feelings – although this approval was not universal, and there was also scope for uncertainty or confusion about the meaning to be attributed to music (Bosley and Cook, 1994, p. 79; Quartier, 2009; Turner, 1996, p. 526):

> One of the best and simplest I have been to was run by the family of the deceased and it consisted of a selection of his favourite jazz songs. A good way to go everyone left in an upbeat mood. (H3821, male, 58)

> Two year's ago I attended the funeral or the husband of my wifes cousin. The coffin was carried in to the chapel to the strains of "Oh Yes Im the great pretender" played at full volume. I was quite shocked, it was horrible.
> At the end of the service they played 'Rock around the clock"This also was horrible in my opinion, but not as bad as the first one.
> They were keen on rock and roll dancing, but I think there is a time and place for everything. (G3655, male, 71)

> ... one of the ones which was played was 'Onward Christian Soldiers' which I presume is a favourite of my Grandma's, or one with special meaning for her. (E2977, male, 28)

> We also sang "Jerusalem" because my mother wanted to sing, though there were some puzzled questions afterwards as to the significance of this (there was no significance)!! (T2003, female, born 1949)

Many mourners, while not explicitly disapproving of the choice of music, nonetheless were unable to experience it as effective 'against death' – not because of poor choice but because of the very nature of music:

> My nana asked for a really lovely song to be played at the end of the funeral which upset me a great deal. (B4458, female, 31)

> I was surprised at how upset I was because I was taken by surprise by the music being played. My husband had asked for an operatic piece as his mum loved opera. We didn't know what had been selected. They were

> playing Nessum Dorma sung by Pavarotti & it seemed more than I could bear. (O3436, female, 56)

> As we left the song "Time to say Goodbye" was played and up to that point I'd kept my tears at bay, but hearing that song rendered me to a sobbing friend, I had known her for 25 years, we were always there for each other. (S1534, female, 76)

> I coped all right during the spoken parts and the hymns, but Elgar always makes me cry, so during Nimrod I couldn't stop. (L1691, female, 61)

In these cases, perhaps particularly when it appeared at the close of the funeral, rather than acting against death music drew mourners into the pain of their loss and left them there. For all the mourners quoted above, the overall experience of the funeral was one of strength from overcoming the encounter with death, but music was not a source of this strength.

There is a further aspect to funeral music that correspondents wrote about:

> ... I got particularly upset during the contemplative time where my Mum had chosen to play 'Moonlight Serenade' by Glenn Miller. I know the piece of music very well and while I never used to associate it with my Nanny, I will now. (G3988, female, 27)

> My granddad was Scottish and there were bagpipes played at the service - now whenever I hear bagpipes I think of the service and my granddad. (J4505, female, 28)

We saw above that ceremonies held in the same venue as previous funerals can bring back memories. What correspondents draw attention to here, though, is the potential for music to bring back memories of the funeral once the mourner is away from the funeral context (DeNora, 2012; Walter, 2012a, p. 82). In other words, music was invested with new meaning for these mourners – whether positive or otherwise is not clear. Music was not the only component of the funeral to have such effects – other mourners wrote of never wearing again the clothes that they had on at a particularly distressing funeral, for example – but it was the only component to have this effect which is also a component of

everyday, shared, cultural life[79]. Clothes with new significance after a funeral may be cherished or rejected as the individual sees fit, but Moonlight Serenade and bagpipes cannot be avoided so easily, should someone wish never to be reminded in this way. Caswell's research suggests that while some officiants[80] may recognise this possible consequence of ceremonies incorporating popular music which is ubiquitous in wider culture, and warn funeral arrangers against creating such associations for themselves (Caswell, 2011-2012, p. 331), the effects on wider mourners are not considered, and future associations are anyway unlikely to be a factor influencing many decisions about music at funerals.

Pictures Against Death

Several correspondents wrote about the role of photographs in the funeral:

> I had brought a photo album of their family, with lots of pictures of my friend and her mum from their wedding, and pictures of her children growing up. The two children of the oldest brother had joined us, and with my friend's two boys, they seemed to enjoy the album. (W3967, female, 42)

> After my father in law died in 2008, his sons had put together a photo montage of his life, with music, to play for all the attendees after the funeral. J's family had done the same and it was a beautiful tribute to him and his life and loves. It provoked many comments, and stories about his life. (M1201, female, 47)

> They had made a collage of photographs which provided a source of reminiscences. A mixture of sadness & happy thoughts, and a lovely way to say good-bye. (L2281, female, 77)

> Also provided was a TIME LINE - a series of photographs showed John from childhood to recent years. These reflected not only a growing career,

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[79] Of course, words are also part of shared cultural life. Many forms of words which feature in funerals, such as eulogies and readings on loss, are unlikely to be encountered unexpectedly in other contexts. That said, the reading of the deceased person's favourite poem could also have the consequences that playing music has had here. No correspondents reported this.
[80] As Walter notes, decisions over music in the funeral are taken by the funeral arranger(s) and overseen by officiants with "little or no musical training" (2012a, p. 88).

but changes in hair-style and dress through the last 5 decades. So a note of hilarity broke through the sadness, which of course is just what John would have wanted. (E4111, male, 70)

For these correspondents the photographs they saw were not images which directly confronted the topic of death and provided a literal vision of hope (Davies, 2005, p. 110), but rather appeared to act as a kind of visual eulogy, representing the biography and identity of the one who had died and thereby providing a form of 'pictures against death'. Another site for photographic display of this kind was on an order of service (Caswell, 2009, p. 154):

We were all given a hymn sheet and order of service combined, with a lovely photo of him on the front, with his date of birth and death, and at the back a photo of him with the sheep & sheep dog. (I1610, female, 66)

Not all mourners, however, were able to relate to the challenge against death offered by a photographic version of the deceased person's life (Harper, 2008, pp. 155, 225-8), finding it too unrealistic to be effective:

A new thing now, in the computer age, is to print the order of service with a photo of the dear departed. They are barely recognisable. The fashion is to use a photograph of them as young and vibrant. The person we knew and saw everyday is not that. (B1180, female, 82)

As this correspondent makes clear, an assertion against death, whether stated through words, music or pictures, must be convincing for those who apprehend it, if it is to accomplish its task.

Time and Place Against Death

Both burial sites and crematoria were criticised by wider mourners for evoking too dominant a sense of death:

After the service we then went to the cemetery to bury the body. This was really awkward, not like it is on TV[81], there wasn't enough room around the hole and the emotion was gone by then. I don't believe in burials, I always

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[81] Thompson (1996, pp. 98-9 in particular) has commented on the replacement of inter-generational transmission of traditions by transmission through the mass-media of formerly traditional practices, resulting in the 'de-localization' of said practices.

think they look morbid and I can't remember someone I cared for by visiting a hole. (R4365, female, 29)

Things did not improve. The crematorium itself was a dreadful place built of grey concrete and with thick black smoke issuing from its chimney. It looked like a blockhouse or, worse, like pictures I'd seen of Birkenau death camp. (W1813, female, 60)

Funerals held at crematoria in particular were criticised for the restrictions of time, and resultant restrictions on personalisation and celebration of the deceased person, which they were perceived to impose upon funerals:

It was in the local crematorium and therefore brief and joyless. (D826, female, 60)

The funeral was for a great uncle and it was held in Manor Park Crematorium. I remember the music starting (which I'm sure came from a CD player) and then a man said a few words and then a coffin disappeared. The whole service lasted about 1 minute, if that. I remember thinking how sad it was... This just felt as though it was too quick and didn't really say a lot about my uncle's life... I wouldn't have called it a 'good' funeral it was probably one of the worst I have been to as it was so short. (B3635, female, 35)

... listen to the Eulogy that A has written, she attempted to condense mums life into the short time allowed in the procedure (T3155, male, no age given)

Throughout the short service there 'Time to say Goodbye' was played at our request as Nan had always liked Andrea Bocelli. Although Mum and I joked later at the irony of it as because it was such a short service, it was over before it came round to his part! (B4561, female, no age given)

Correspondents also drew on the 'conveyor belt' criticism of crematoria (D. Davies, 1996). Correspondents' concern was with not with any objectification of the body (Davies, 2006, pp. 237-8) or mechanisation associated with its processing (Walter, 1994, p. 175), but with the proximity of other mourners:

A large number of people, some who were family, some friends, some members of Gran's chapel, were gathered at the door, about fifty in all, and as this party was going in at the back, the previous funeral party was just vacating the chapel at the front. Talk about a conveyor belt. (W1813, female, 60)

Something else about the funeral that slightly impressed me was that it was not hurried. I have been to a number of funerals in Derbyshire (where there are only two crematoria) and you have your half-hour slot and then the next funeral is queuing outside. This is not a good solution. (T3775, male, 74)

My parents' funerals took place in crematoria and I hate them, such a perfunctory and businesslike dispatch with the next crowd of mourners waiting outside the doors – I hated them. (L4071, female, 67)

The congregation were a little concerned as we could now hear the arrival of some members of the next funeral' Death waits for no one at the impersonal crematorium. (H3821, male, 58)

This final correspondent's remark suggests that one source of this dissatisfaction with overlapping funerals may be the destruction of any sense of uniqueness and singularity about the funeral (Heessels, 2012) and, by extension, the death and the life (Walter, 1990, p. 113) of the individual who has died – and by further extension still, the individuality of every human being (Grainger, 1998b). There was no evidence for the idea "that one funeral party might be supported by the fact of the grief of other mourners" (Davies, 1995, p. 36).

This criticism, of the funeral place not respecting individuality, was also levelled against burial sites (Rugg, 2000):

I also remember how close the grave was to the adjoining one, almost touching which I hated. (J3887, female, 44)

Places were not only criticised, though. Some mourners referred to the contribution of place to 'good' funerals which had successfully challenged death through the celebration of individuality:

The other both moving and enjoyable one was to my Fathers... Never went to church my Father, but he'd persuaded the vicar to reserve him the best plot in the large graveyard at the West end of the church, which he'd done. My Father could be persuasive. So we all trooped up to a beautiful spot, trees, long grass on an incline, centred on the church. (A883, male, 77)

The best funeral I have been to was two years ago when a friend lost her battle with cancer and was buried in Pembrokeshire. The funeral took place on a day after a week of very bad weather but the day turned out to be beautiful. The church stood overlooking a beautiful bay... My friend was buried in a plot overlooking the bay... It was truly a wonderful tribute to a wonderful person. (H4005, female, 70)

Other mourners also referred approvingly to the beauty of funeral sites (and also the weather, a component of 'good' funerals quite outside expert or even human control):

... it was so much better to arrive at a building surrounded by beautiful gardens and that looked almost like a church. It was such a contrast to that dreadful concrete bunker where Gran was taken. (W1813, female, 60)

On a dull January morning the church was quite beautiful still being decorated with silver stars from Christmas celebrations. (M1571, female, 79)

It was a beautiful May day and the sun and blue sky brought out the best of Harrogate's Stonefall Cemetery. More modern and open that Rawdon's, it has a less formal and a more pleasant feel to it. (Z4682, male, 56)

Mourners appreciated the contribution of place to the symbolic and emotional construction of funerals. Interestingly, we find here a number of references not to the 'rebounding violence' (Bloch, 1992; Davies, 2002) of confronting, challenging or triumphing over death, but to peace:

The Cemetery was really beautiful and I remember thinking that it was a peaceful place to have a funeral in. (B4750, female, 35)

It was a cool & windy day but the sun shone & our friend joined her husband in the same grave under a tree with many flowers & grass around, a peaceful haven off a busy road leading into St. Albans. (L2281, female, 77)

The graveyard is just off the main street, with no church next to it, just a lovely peaceful area full of gravestones (F4125, female, 44)

Of course, the term 'violence' is used metaphorically by Davies, although Bloch's use is literal (Bloch, 1992, p. 6; and see Rosaldo, 1986, for a discussion of how literally the will to violence can be a feature of acute grief). Nonetheless, these references to peace in the face of death (present in the overt references to graves) hint at the possibility of a less oppositional and combative, more allowing and calm, dimension of mourners' relationships to death in funerals.

To sum up so far: in this section we have explored some of the substantive components and parameters of a funeral, including words, music, photographs, time and place. In every case, mourners experienced and valued the potential of these to act as a 'resource against death', particularly by contributing to a celebration of the deceased individual. In every case, though, there was something else to take account of. Words were given by speakers, who themselves stood against death in the act of speaking. Music could fail as a resource against death particularly at the end of funerals if it drew mourners into sorrow without transformation. Photographs could be experienced as inauthentic. A consideration of spaces suggested the tantalising possibility of 'peace with death' rather than resources against it.

We now extend our analysis beyond these substantive components and parameters to the practical and social aspects of the funeral written about by correspondents.

Participation Against Death

Various correspondents wrote about participating in the funeral ceremony. While some of those that did focused on their relationship to religious ritual, others discussed their participation as relating to death:

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After this we were invited to come up front and light a candle for the dead man. At first I thought my link with him was rather tenuous and that it would be presumptuous- but as nearly everybody did I joined in, and was glad I had done so. In fact it is a gesture I often carry out to honour the memory of my parents, especially my mother, when I'm in a church looking round. (D826, female, 60)

Afterwards we went to the graveside and anyone who wished to do so was invited to place some earth on the coffin... My partner and I both placed earth on the coffin and thought this was a good thing to be able to do as it allowed us to say a final goodbye. (H1745, female, 59)

What I want to draw attention to with these examples is not the substantial dimension to what they relate – the candles and the earth – but the *practical*, in order to make an observation which is all too easy to take for granted. For resources against death to be successful, whether they are words, music, space, or ritual elements, it is not only that they must be 'deployed', as Davies (2005, p. 20) puts it, but someone must actively deploy them. And those doing the deploying are *people*.

Mourners Against Death

Interestingly, one of the ways in which mourners can be said to be 'against death' at a funeral is in the way that they may depict the life of the deceased person. In the M-O data, those attending funerals in addition to family members included friends, neighbours, colleagues and former colleagues, acquaintances, fellow members of societies and clubs, charities, churches, sports groups, social services and civic and political organisations, as well as community figures such as police officers and well-known local shopkeepers (c.f. Holloway et al., 2010, p. 123). Such representatives of the deceased person's affections, interests and activities can combine to produce representations of a life:

I attended as a representative of the village amateur dramatic group, which was started by R over twenty years ago. Many of the other people attending were also representing local societies and charities that R had been involved with. (D4104, male, 50)

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> There was standing room only and the crematorium was filled with people from all the different areas of his life. He had a very rich and varied life and his funeral reflected that. (J2891, female, 46)

> I sort of enjoyed it to see so many different people together, who all were in some way connected to my mother. In a way it represented the network of my mother's life, but then including a time dimension; people were together from different periods in her life. I found this an impressive experience, which at the same time was very sweet and gentle towards my mother. It showed she was loved by many people. (V4648, male, 57)

In the same way that photographs could be a visual story of the person's life and identity, so these constellations of people were experienced by correspondents as a kind of configurational eulogy to the person who had died, with mourners' attention on the *relational* aspects of the deceased person's identity (Finch and Mason, 1993, 2000; Smart, 2007) rather than, or in addition to, the biographical. As the above correspondent's words illustrate, rituals such as funerals both occasion gatherings significant in their composition (Castrén and Maillochon, 2009), and lend extra power to this significance by capturing and 'immortalising' (Gillis, 2004, p. 99) a set of relationships and their meanings. Mourners themselves saw the congregation as a tribute to the value of the life that was being commemorated (Grainger, 1998b, p. 97; Holloway et al., 2010, p. 124):

> Yes, it was a good Funeral, and would, I think, have surprised the deceased, to see just how many lives he had touched during his own life. (M2061, female, 80)

Indeed, making the deceased person's value visible to others was often a motivation (among others, discussed further below) for attending the funeral (Walter, 1994, p. 180):

> I went to the funeral because I felt I needed to see other people who had know LD to make it all a bit more real and support his family and show them how much he touched other people's lives. (S4002, female, 31)

> I felt I ought to go to show that we valued the lady & were sad that she had gone... (B2605, female, 79)

We found out about it because his sister phoned us and told us about it + we wanted to go to demonstrate our respect + love for such a brave + honourable man. (P1009, female, 71)

A large attendance at a funeral was considered by correspondents to be one of the most important factors in a 'good' funeral precisely because it was taken to signify the value of the one who had died:

My father-in-law funeral was amazing, there were hundreds of people. (S3342, male, 57)

It may also have been the best, as the crematorium chapel was packed and so many people turned out of genuine respect and liking for Dad. (Z4682, male, 56)

By the same token, a lack in attendance could lead to a 'bad' funeral:

One of the saddest funerals I have been to was that of an old lady who lived alone in our road... Only a handful of people attended, which is why I found it so sad. (D1604, male, 50)

The worst funeral I have attended was that of an elderly second cousin, who was a widow and had no children. My husband and I plus her nephew and his partner were the only people there. It was in the local crematorium where she lived, and although an old clergyman who had known her took the service it was extremely bleak. Afterwards we just went back to her sparsely furnished bungalow and had a cup of tea. It is awful if there are insufficient people to remember the dead person. (D826, female, 60)

In the following two quotes, we can see how mourners' very presence was 'against death':

It was undoubtedly A Good Funeral in the sense that it gave an opportunity for a very large number of people who really had felt connected to the deceased to show their respect and appreciation of the man. I doubt the church had been as full for many years, and this enhanced rather than detracted from the occasion. (V3767, male, 72)

> I think the worst funeral, and in some ways also the best funeral I have ever been to was that of one of my two best friends in 2003. I class it as the worst funeral that I have been to as it was just so sad, because my friend had only been 35 when she died, and of course being one of my best friends, I was heartbroken. I consider it the best funeral I have attended because it was a great tribute to my friend, there were 100s of people there, including consultant doctors who had treated my friend for years. She had made such an impact on everybody who knew her, even if they only knew her for a short time. (R4604, female, 46)

In the first quote attending a funeral is written of as an 'opportunity', a way for people actively to make a contribution to challenging the annihilation of an individual identity. The result of such a contribution is seen in the second quote, where the funeral which would otherwise have been the worst because of the death was transformed into a tribute not by words, music or any other substantive component, but by the gathered mourners, each of whom had made the resolve to attend, and whose presence asserted in the face of death the ongoing value of the life lived.

While large attendances were universally experienced as 'tributes' (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 259) which provided some hope because of the meaning of the number of mourners, *who* attended could be as significant as how many (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 246):

> All in all it was a 'good' funeral - all her family + friends were there. Everyone paid tribute. (W3730, female, 43)

> For me, it was a good funeral. Those present knew and loved J. (M4122, male, 32)

> It was a 'good' funeral in that there were many mourners who genuinely wanted to be there, with personal memories of the deceased. (S3035, male, 63)

In these extracts it is not only mourners' roles in relationship to the deceased person which constitute a 'good' attendance, but their familiarity with the deceased person, and their authenticity as mourners whose affirmation of the

deceased person's value can be taken to be reliable. This was a notion repeated by other correspondents:

> Yes, it was a good funeral. There must have been near a couple of hundred people there. There was no doubting their sincerity and she will certainly be missed. (P1326, female, 73)

Even the correspondents who wrote about anything resembling regret about having attended a funeral related this to the fact that the relationship between the person who attended and the person who had died did not truthfully 'merit' the attendance:

> I have felt a bit of a hypocrite on occasions if the person was someone I found difficult to deal with. (P1009, female, 79)

Avowing the value of the deceased person's life was not the only reason for attending. One of the principal reasons was to support other people, whether the deceased person's family (Walter, 1990, p. 68; 1994, p. 21) as discussed in Chapter 7, or other mourners known to the correspondent:

> Our (my husband and I) attendance at the funeral was really to support our friend, though I suppose also to "pay our respects" to her mother. (T2003, female, born 1949)

> I had to take a day's holidays to go there because I wasn't eligible for compassionate leave. I was happy to do that so I could be there and support Paul... but for my own part I wasn't particularly upset by her death (P2957, female, 41)

> We found out about it from our immediate neighbour... As we thought it would be very sad for this man to go to another funeral on his own we suggested we all go. However, we also wanted to pay our respects and offer support to the family. (D826, female, 60)

Correspondents who had never known the deceased person sometimes attended funerals. When they did, it was invariably explained not in terms of regard for their humanity (Grainger, 1998b, p. 128) but in terms of support for other mourners:

I had never met granny, but went as support to my boyfriend. (J4505, female, 28)

The most recent funeral I attended was that of the mother of a friend of my wife... (who I'd never met – I being there to support my wife). (B4318, male, 67)

Strangely it was the funeral of someone I had never met. The wife of my employer died in March 2006 and I attended her funeral - a church service in the East Midlands. I went with a number of other people from work, I guess mainly to show support to our boss. (S4429, male, 43)

The 'support' which mourners understood themselves to be offering rarely (though occasionally) took the form of practical assistance (helping with childcare at the funeral, for example). Rather, it was intended in Grainger's sense, in which "we go out of fellow-feeling, out of sympathy for the grief-stricken, to give them the assurance of our *emotional* support" (Grainger, 1998b, p. 128, my emphasis) in the face of death.

Mourners intended to confirm the value of individuals by attending, and others recognised them as doing so. But correspondents also intended to sustain other mourners by attending, and while we do not know whether the intended recipients felt supported, we do know not only that funeral arrangers who are families of the deceased person do often feel supported by the congregation (Holloway et al., 2010, p. 259), but also that *other* mourners' experience of the funeral and the death can also be transformed by a meaningful assembly. For mourners, a meaningful assembly was one which, in their perception, stood testament to the value of the deceased person's life. This value was viewed by mourners to be evident both quantitatively (how many were there) and qualitatively (who was there). Furthermore, a meaningful assembly meant contributing to collective support, for the family of the deceased person and for other mourners. In these ways, we begin to see the extra contribution to mourners' experience made by 'people against death'.

Togetherness Against Death

It was not only in attendance that individuals offered and found support for one another as mourners of a death. As well as being symbol-manipulating, humans are emotional and corporeal (Davies, 2011), and these elements of humanity were also present in correspondents' accounts of funerals. A number of correspondents wrote of the potency and (sometimes literal) support in others' physical touch:

> Before the service we waited in a small room where I was happy to see our oldest friend. His presence was comforting to me & I was pleased he had made the effort to attend. I remember hugging him & feeling a great wave of emotion washing over me. (O3436, female, 56)

> I found it very moving and it reduced me to tears, I cried on his wife Pam's shoulder. (R470, male, 76)

> My sister needed a hand, so we stood holding hands as we had done when we were little. I found that moving. (I1610, female, 66)

> ... somehow I ended up in the second row with my aunt. A lovely 70 old lady who grabbed my hand and didn't let go throughout the service. I think she kept me standing. (J3887, female, 44)

Just as fortifying for mourners as bodily touch was a sense of 'togetherness against death':

> These funerals were a delightful mix of tributes, tales, songs and togetherness... They spoke entirely of the person they honoured and were utterly accessible to all... (G4566, female, no age given)

> There must have been over a hundred people there, most of whom I didn't know personally, but everyone was warm and friendly to everyone else on general principle, since we'd all known and loved Ros. There were all sorts there: former work colleagues (Ros and I met at work), people from the fringe theatre world, a deputation of nuns from The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, and a sizeable contingent from the vegan/animal liberation world. (I hadn't seen Ros for a year or so before her death and hadn't realised that she'd taken up with a guy who a few years later got himself

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jailed for ALF terrorism). On the day, however, that didn't seem to matter... I remember that funeral well for a number of reasons, chief among them being that, while there were moments of great sadness during the service, at no point were we ever sombre. Ros was gone, and I don't suppose anyone there believed in an afterlife; nonetheless, we sent up a great shout of love and loss into the void. (M3190, male, 52)

Drawing on anthropological data, Durkheim argued that "[w]hen an individual dies, the family group to which he belongs feels diminished, and in order to react against this diminishment, it assembles" (1915/1976, p. 296). What is described by the correspondents above, however, is not a pre-existing group of the sort referred to by Durkheim but may be a collection of strangers (Walter, 2007). While it can be argued that Durkheim's reification of the group, and his somewhat teleological presentation of group behaviour should both be treated with some caution, it may nonetheless be noted that neither did the mourners above seem to be gathering 'in order to' create such a togetherness, but instead seemed to be taken a little by surprise by it, so that the funeral becomes notable and memorable precisely because of it.

Mourners experienced *communitas* (Turner, 1969) in the temporary unimportance of social identity or status (such as having been jailed for ALF terrorism) as a means of distinguishing between members of the gathering, who instead related to one another as fellow members of a temporary symbolic community (Garces-Foley and Holcomb, 2006; Roberts, 2004; Wouters, 2002, p. 225). This community was created in a funeral centred on the life of the one who had died. As Cook and Walter state, "personal funerals still bring mourners together and bind them together" (2005, p. 386), and they can do this *through*, rather than in spite of, a focus on the deceased person (Walter, 2009a).

In all of these examples, what was being affirmed was not the continuation of society (Durkheim, 1915/1976), community (Walter, 1990, p. 62; Wouters, 2002) or even relationship (Jupp, 2004, p. 28), but the endurance of the deceased person's influence. This was what was accomplished by means of 'togetherness against death'.

The experience of togetherness had strong effects on mourners. A correspondent who was unable to attend her friend's funeral wrote:

I was talking to his mother who said that K would have loved to have had the Dr Who theme tune played at his funeral. With the wonders of internet technology our mutual friend M was able to find a recording of the theme tune & it was played at K's funeral at the crematorium. Not only that, but because this tune was available online, we all downloaded it & at the time of K's funeral, around some 60 people played the Dr Who theme tune at their homes dotted across the UK & some other countries, lit candles & held him in their thoughts. I cannot hear the Dr Who theme tune without thinking of him, but then think of all of us, connected in our hearts to him & all listening to the same music at the same time. Amazing. I am not a fan of modern technology but that was special. (H4611, female, 37)

While music was being used here 'against death', it was the experience of connectedness with others that provides solace for the correspondent, against the music's propensity to bring reminders of the death[82]. This correspondent in particular, absent from the funeral itself, may agree with Davies when he argues that "[c]ommunal support overcomes the sense of helplessness of the individual who might otherwise have to stand alone" (2002, p. 16). In addition, Walter's claim that "individualistic society clearly has problems generating communal ritual" (1991a, p. 304) is problematised, since it is precisely affirmation of the individual (through representing the deceased person in the funeral's content, and through following his wishes) which is being *used* here to generate communal ritual. We may contrast the above example with this correspondent, also absent from a funeral:

So I didn't go. In hindsight I could've travelled part of the way & met my brother or parents & got a lift. I wished I had. Instead, at the time of the funeral I drove to the garden centre & bought some seeds, came home & planted them - it was all I could think of to do, because my cousin loved flowers. My aunt thought it was a lovely idea. But I've never felt that I've said goodbye, and as much as I hate funerals, they're a way to do that. I also felt I missed out, that the rest of the family had been able to share their grief but I'd been left to cope with it on my own. (T4715, female, 39)

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[82] Indeed, although it involves those who were not part of the ceremony's physical congregation, this tale provides an intriguing example of a way in which listening to music rather than producing it need not destroy communality (Walter, 2012a, pp. 81-2).

Here the correspondent found that mourning alone, even with the aid of meaningful ritual focused on the identity of the one who has died, was qualitatively and significantly different from mourning with others, and failed to address the fact of her grief in a way that she had hoped for. What she could not give herself was 'togetherness against death'.

Tea Against Death

Davies (2002) argues that the effect of 'words against death' is a renewed ability to live in spite of (the) death. This renewed ability may be expressed at the tea following the formal ceremony, he argues, by a shift in mood such that it becomes "a time of life-affirmation, often when stories may be told about the dead person to reflect happy times. The positive aspects of the deceased's life will be emphasized as part of life-affirmation rather than, say, the period of suffering preceding death" (Davies, 2002, p. 41). Yoder (1986), on the other hand, writing in the US, suggests that the tea represents a return to normality – or, more accurately, a return to a new normality in which the deceased person is left behind while mourners 'move on'.

Correspondents' accounts of the tea certainly did not leave the deceased person behind:

> The wake afterwards at the family home was also a time of sadness and laughter, with so many people there all of whom had known J - and each other for so long. We talked about J of course - his acting, his jokes, his wonderful capacity as a family man; but also we talked of other shared memories - of our lives growing up in Guildford, the shared memories we all had of many happy years. In short, it was a wonderful occasion - one which we all felt J would have enjoyed immensely. (M3412, female, no age given)

> It was announced that those who wished to do so could repair to a near-by theatre, there food and drink, would be provided. As it turned out it was a very generous offer, welcome for two reasons. First, on a very cold day a funeral can induce a "spiritual" chill. Second the meeting of people after the service gives a chance to give a face to a name. We had hear of several of the people attending before, now an opportunity to exchange stories about

> John and sense [?] their sadness in his parting, also a pride that we had shared time together in this life. (E4111, male, 70)

> I think it is important to be able to come together and talk outside of the formality of the service. It doesn't have to be about the funeral, or even the departed; what's important is the feeling of togetherness and the re-establishing of support networks and friendships... It was nice to see my girlfriend and her family interacting with each other and remembering the person they had lost with laughter and smiles. That's how I remember her so I felt it was a fitting tribute. (W4456, male, 32)

Mourners took full advantage of being able to share stories and memories with others who had known the deceased person (Walter, 1996c), and indeed, as was seen in Chapter 6, the tea could even 'repair' a funeral spoiled by the authoritative (Walter, 2005a) but dissatisfactory eulogy given by an officiant who did not know the deceased person:

> In a nearby hotel, the event turned into J's real farewell. There were sincere, and hilarious, tributes from ex-bosses, from his family and from a caller who had worked with his barn dance band. There was an impromptu folk music session from mourners who produced instruments from their cars and everyone remembered the man they had known, not the soulless person described in the crem. (W633, female, 68)

It will be remembered from Chapter 7 that some mourners avoided the tea for fear of intruding on the deceased person's family. Among those who did attend, there was little mention of the kind of awkwardness described by Walter (2009a), suggesting that while that experience might be common, it may not be the norm. Rather, for correspondents the tea was very much an occasion centred on celebration of the deceased person (Holloway et al., 2010, pp. 79, 248). Not all mourners experienced this positively, though:

> At the after party thing, my mum wanted me to meet members of the family I didn't know so I had to put a brave face on and be sociable. I drank alcohol at the tea to get through it and there was tea and coffee and a buffet. After the event you just have to act normal again which can be hard. I went and put on a brave face though because my nana is from that war generation where you just have to get on with things and she wouldn't have

wanted people to be upset or feel like they couldn't cope, she would have said 'well Becky we all have to do things we don't want to'. So I put a smile on my face and talked to people and then cried a lot on my partner when I got home. (B4458, female, 31)

A buffet and drinks were held at a local pub where C used to play cricket... Personally, I found the idea of making small talk over a frothy beer and plate of crisps a slightly odd way to sign off a life. We drove back to work in the afternoon, and it was with huge relief that I walked back into my office, normal life, and talked about work with my colleague. I wanted to put the whole experience behind me as quickly as I possibly could. (N3181, female, 35)

For neither of these mourners was the tea a period during which they were invested with new strength having met and challenged death in the funeral, but there were differing reasons for each of these mourners' discomfort. In the first case, the correspondent's sorrow was still the focus of her experience but was allowed no place in the event. In the second, the tea was seen as not a 'fit' conclusion to a meeting with death. Furthermore, the entire funeral was experienced not as transformatory, an event after which life is reinforced, but as a trial to be endured (Walter, 1990), after which normal life can be resumed.

In the main, however, the tea was indeed experienced as a life-affirming conclusion to a meeting with death:

After catching up with everyone, telling stories about my uncle and the family, we went on our way feeling that things had gone well and that now the family could go on, learning to live without yet another member. (W1813, female, 60)

Funerals Against Death

Of necessity, this section has analysed 'resources against death' one by one, but it should be remembered that for mourners, funerals are not such compartmentalised occasions. A single funeral can contain both triumphant and ruinous aspects, and those that were presented as successful 'funerals against death' generally did not derive their success from a single resource:

... an enlightening piece about the life of someone you thought you knew well; people you have never met who clearly really cared about the deceased; a touch of humour; some apt hymns or songs; standing with the others in the graveyard whatever the weather; something to eat in the deceased's local. In other words where the dead person would have been so at home that you forget they are not there and turn round to talk to them. (T1843, female, 61)

Often, it was a combination of resources which resulted in a 'funeral against death'.

Conditions of 'Funerals Against Death'

In the data and discussion above, it has been shown that mourners experienced many aspects of funerals as 'against death', and highly valued being able to do so. Further analysis of the data, however, reveals what makes such strengthening commemorations of individual lives possible – and impossible.

One impediment is a 'bad death' (Bradbury, 1996, 1999). In the M-O data two categories of bad death were particularly apparent. The first was suicide:

The worst funeral that I have been to was my boyfriends when I was 18. It was a very hurried affair. He killed himself, and therefore his estranged family decided not to invite anyone. I insisted on going. I was emotionally very unstable. Only his Mother, Father, Grandmother and brother attended with me. It was at a horrible crematorium in Crawley. His coffin seemed very small, and I kept imagining his corpse inside as it had been in the bath: lifeless and cold. I vomited outside and his family left without speaking to me. I remember hearing his grandmother sobbing throughout. It was quite possibly one of the worst days of my life. (E4556, male, 26)

However, one of the saddest funerals I have attended recently was that of the father of my son's fiancée, who committed suicide... The church was full, of family and his many friends, none of whom seemed to be there for him at his time of great need. There weren't enough hymn books, but just the same, no-one seemed to be singing the hymns. It was the saddest thing I have ever witnessed. Even the child's funeral that I had attended in 2004 was a celebratory affair, at the request of the boy' devastated parents.

> But this one was awful. A church full of people, each asking themselves, I imagine. how they could have helped him; a vicar who had never met him, no doubt thinking the same thing. (E743, female, born 1951)

Davies notes that "suicide is, in many respects, the opposite of a proper death as far as the idea of death-transcendence is concerned" (2002, p. 71; see also Bloch and Parry, 1982, p. 16). In the above example, the large turnout that would usually be experienced as 'against death' had no power against suicide, and even made the situation more acute.

In the second category of 'bad deaths' are the deaths of those considered 'too young':

> The directive asked if I thought it was a good funeral. It wasn't but then how could it be when you are burying someone in their prime. I can see that some funerals of elderly people who had have full lives might be considered good but not this one. (J3887, female, 44)

> If you can have "good" funeral for a 12 year old then yes it was. But normally you'd use that expression for someone who had actually lived a life. (A3434, female, 45)

While most of those considered 'too young' to die were children or in middle age at most (congruent with the findings of Littlewood, 1982, pp. 81-2), some were not:

> ... her death had been very sudden and unexpected, and she was only seventy-nine... (A2212, female, 53)

Such examples corroborate Littlewood's claim that "'timeliness' may be both culturally and personally determined, and appropriateness at one level does not necessarily imply acceptance at the other" (Littlewood, 1982, p. 195).

Thus, individuals' deliberate allying of their biography and identity with death undermined any possibility of mourners' using that biography or identity in attempting to withstand death and its effects. The lack of a 'full' biography in the first place was similarly disruptive. By contrast, 'good deaths' could contribute to 'good' funerals:

> ... my great great Aunt's funeral was much happier as she had lived to 94, and it seemed like a real celebration of her life. (E4556, male, 26)

The overall 'tone' of the funeral was sad, but also feeling that getting to 90 and being so active til just the year before was very good (she was going abroad on her own til she was 88). (K3164, female, 32)

It was in all senses a "good funeral", in that we felt that his suffering was over + he had been awarded proper respect + honour. (P1009, female, 71)

We all returned to my grandad's house for the wake. There was much talk of his life and a lot of laughter. There was much sadness too at his loss as he'd been part of our lives for so many years, but the sadness was for ourselves. My grandad had lived a long and fruitful life and everyone felt that he would have been content with his passing at a time when he was still looking after himself and had all his mental faculties. (W1813, female, 60)

Just as disruptive as a 'bad death' was what might be termed a 'bad life' – a biography or character which mourners could not celebrate:

The most soulless funeral I have ever been was to was that of a contemporary of mine in a crematorium in North London. She was only 39 when she died and her life had been a terrible misery of drink and depression. She had had a terrible life and had made her parents' and siblings' lives very difficult... It was so terrible because there was no life to celebrate, and there was a ghastly mixture of unspoken relief and guilt. (A3434, female, 45)

This lady who was in her 80's had lived all her life in the hospital. She was really unwell mentally but there was something about her which was warm and touching. Her funeral was in a small, cold chapel, there were about 2 relatives and about 4 hospital staff. The sadness was that her whole life from her twenties to her 80's had been spent in the hospital. She had no choices, no options. It felt like it was a life denied. (J2891, female, 46)

The worst funeral I have attended was of a client, who had no friends or family because of his past behaviour and activities. I was one of only four people at the funeral, all of us professionals who had worked with him. A very sad end to a wasted life. (M4698, male, 43)

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I think the general tone was restrained and reflected the fact that there was a great degree of frustration and sadness at the way my father had behaved. It was such a waste. It wasn't a good funeral' as I think those are about celebrating the dead persons life and their contribution to the lives of others. I think my feelings and those of my mother, siblings and many others were that my father was a difficult man who could and should have done much more with his life and quite frankly could have been a better husband and father. (B4484, male, 48)

Conversely, a 'good life' made possible the experience of a funeral against death:

The best funeral I've been to was that of a teacher at a school I used to work at... She had been the kind of person who found joy and interest in practically everything; which was probably why the church was so packed. (P2957, female, 41)

There were one or two moments when it got a bit emotional - in my case I found the singing aroused emotion + a few tears but on the whole it was a tribute to a life well lived and to an outstanding man who had suffered enormously during his life + yet had come through it all with bravery and humour + above all no bitterness so it wasn't really a sad occasion. (P1009, female, 71)

I think the best 'funeral' I have been to wasn't really a funeral at all. It was a remembrance service for an elderly neighbour who had left his body to medical research. It really was a thanksgiving service for his life, and he had lived! He always had a story for him if I met him in the street, and I was amazed at the service to find out that he was a member of the same tennis club as my grandparents. The congregation also contributed with stories, and it was a brilliant occasion. (K4417, female, 43)

Other authors have noted the significance of the 'good' or 'bad' death for the experience of grief (Seale and van der Geest, 2004), and it is not surprising that such constructions should affect how funerals are experienced also. However, what has not been documented before is the significance of the 'good' or 'bad' life. Taking these data into account, it is not so surprising that such

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constructions should affect how funerals are experienced, when funerals so routinely use references to the biography and character of the deceased person as a resource against death. What *is* surprising is the appearance of such constructions at all, and in particular the admission that some lives can be difficult to mourn, some deaths difficult to be sorry for. These admissions are surprising not only because such data have not, to my knowledge, been considered in other theoretical (Davies, 2002; Grainger, 1998b; Walter, 1990) or empirical (e.g. Caswell, 2009; Harper, 2008; Holloway et al., 2010; Naylor, 1989) literature on funerals, but also because of a general reluctance to 'speak ill of the dead' (Scarre, 2012). It is possible that the relative privacy of M-O, where correspondents can write without being seen and without seeing the response to their writing, allows space for such admissions in a way that face-to-face methods may not (see p. 123).

Walter (1990, pp. 220-1) does interpret life-centred funerals as expressing "the notion that a full human life is one in which the person's full potential is attained" (p. 220), and these mourners would appear to assent to this notion. But Walter takes it for granted that such potential *is* attained, and that life-centred funerals are experienced positively by mourners:

> "The funeral's job is to state what that uniquely fulfilled potential was: the last thing we can do for her, or him, is to make a final statement of who she, or he, was. Without a statement of who the person was, his or her project of self-actualisation is incomplete... the bereaved themselves see it as doing one last thing for the deceased" (pp. 220-1).

The potential problem in a life-centred funeral highlighted by Walter here is that the project of self-actualisation should remain incomplete, that is, that a eulogy stating who the person was should not be forthcoming. For the mourners above, the problem is not that a eulogy accurately representing the life was not forthcoming, it is that a eulogy accurately representing the life cannot present it as one in which the person's full potential was attained. Even *with* a statement of who the person was, the project of self-actualisation is incomplete, and *making* that statement makes the fact painfully obvious. The 'bad life' is a problem for life-centred funerals, which hinge on countering death by using an

accurate representation of the deceased person to celebrate the life that was lived.

These data also draw attention to what mourners did *not* seek to have set 'against death'. As noted above, mourners' interest in having explicit meaning made of death itself was not strong. Religious meanings were tolerated as long as they coincided with the deceased person's and mourners' own religious position. Secular meanings were not mentioned, perhaps they were not made. Mourners did not seek therapeutic discourse on living with grief, nor, indeed, any words or other resources which squarely addressed death. As this chapter has shown over and over again, a large proportion of what mourners experienced as 'against death' could also be described as 'about life'. The life that the funeral for them was about was the life of the one who had died, and the success of the funeral depended on that having been a 'good life'.

Notably, the features of 'good lives' – biographies and characters which can be successfully appropriated against death in a funeral – did not include materialistic achievement. There was some highlighting in the 'good life' accounts of goodness to others, and contribution to human happiness which leaves others with fond memories. However, accounts of both 'good' and 'bad' lives did have the value of self-satisfaction as their basis. Those who had lived 'well' were seen as having made choices fulfilling primarily for themselves, while the lives of those who had not, or had not been able to, were described in terms of 'waste'.

Thus we have seen that a good enough life to permit celebration, combined with the absence of too bad a death to prevent it, form two conditions upon which any kind of stance against death at a funeral in contemporary Britain depends.

Transcendent Death

As we have seen above, stances against death were not always successful. Some mourners were not strengthened by the encounter with death at the funeral:

> I don't remember anything of the service itself, not who spoke or what hymns we sang. It is a total blur. I was just too upset and shocked to take any of it in. (P3213, female, 44)

> We did not attend the wake, I just didn't want to rejoice. I feel totally bereft. I miss her every minute of everyday. I want to share a joke, tell her my woes, ask her advice. (B1180, female, 82)

Other correspondents did not even consider a stand against death to be possible:

> I have only been to three funerals they were all what they are, sad events. No matter how much you try to make them a celebration of life they are always sad. (B4458, female, 31)

> Rating a funeral is something beyond my capabilities, they all seem equally sad and I always return with the same feeling of helplessness. (H1806, male, 85)

> I would not say that there is any such thing as a good funeral. (O3436, female, 56)

> I am not sure there have ever been good funerals. (M3055, female, 36)

Correspondents' views, and mourners' experiences, were not homogenous. In mourners' experiences, funerals were not always 'funerals against death'.

Conclusion

Writing in America, Frank asserts that "the modern funeral ritual integrates as each responds not to the common threat of death, but to a common affective focus, the life of the deceased" (Frank, 1990, p. 203). This chapter has shown that in contemporary Britain, mourners respond *both* to the threat of death and (thereby) to the life of the deceased person.

The chapter began by demonstrating that awareness of and contact with death is indeed a feature of mourners' experiences of funerals. Correspondents themselves wrote about the dying trajectories of those who had died, as well as various ways in which the deceased person could be said to be 'present' in the

funeral. This presence was not restricted to the individual whose funeral was being held, since mourners were similarly conscious of other dead at the funeral, as well as holding an awareness of their own and others' mortality.

In the second section of the chapter, it was shown that mourners do indeed experience funerals as 'against death' in a number of ways, and appreciate the hope offered by an uplifting funeral which successfully stands against death. Such funerals were shown to rest upon the condition of a good enough life and death, which allowed the celebration of the deceased person's pre-death individuality (as distinct from an afterlife; see Bradbury, 1999, p. 116; Davies, 2006, p. 230) by means of a number of 'resources against death'. These were many. Words, music, photographs and time and place, which may be termed 'substantive' components and parameters of funerals, all had their significance, and all were employed in the celebration of the deceased individual.

Such substantive dimensions of the funeral were anticipated by Davies (2002), although this analysis has presented a number of new themes not seen before in the funerals literature. These include the notion of 'speaking' against death, where it is the act as much as the words themselves which do the symbolic work; the associations with death which can be formed for mourners hearing music at funerals; and the suggestion in mourners' comments about burial spaces, of a 'peace with death'. These themes are in addition to the identification of a 'good life' as a condition for a 'funeral against death', and the discovery of the presence of other dead in mourners' experiences at the funeral.

Theoretically, this chapter has built on Davies' groundwork by contributing an analysis of the practical, emotional and social dimensions of 'funerals against death'. These included in particular the support given and felt by 'mourners against death', and the solidarity in 'togetherness against death' which enabled mourners to feel that they had faced and survived the encounter with death. As Walter (1990, p. 74) argues, "[h]owever much we believe in the private individual, we shall never prevent people facing the insult of death together".

Overall, this chapter has shown that in order for a funeral to be experienced by mourners as a successful 'funeral against death', the deceased

person must have had a good enough life and a good enough death; the substantive components of the funeral must contribute to a good enough celebration of the deceased person's individuality; and the funeral must be attended by a good enough congregation – large enough, sincere enough and connected enough.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

The empirical chapters have addressed in detail the first of this project's two research questions. This question was what mourners' experiences of funerals in contemporary Britain are, and each chapter has offered an in depth account of these. In this concluding chapter, the findings of these empirical chapters are drawn together to address the second research question: what are the implications of mourners' experiences and perspectives for an understanding of the social significance of funerals?

The thesis can be stated in short thus: when mourners' perspectives are taken into account, funerals in contemporary Britain can be understood as 'people and their relationships against death'. Of course, such a brief statement of the case obscures much of the detail. Let us review the evidence for such a thesis.

In Chapter 6 it was shown that, as suggested by existing literature (e.g. Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010) neither tradition nor religion were authorities for mourners at funerals. As discussed in much of the same literature, the individual did feature as an authority. Mourners valued personalisation, particularly the accurate representation of the deceased person's life in the eulogy. It was shown, though, that an accurate eulogy was, for some mourners, not sufficient, and who said the words could be as important as what was said. This was the first indication that there may be more to mourners' experience of funerals than substantive aspects alone.

Further elaboration on that point was postponed in order to explore the question of authority more fully. Chapter 7 showed that both through hierarchies and through binaries, mourners differentiated between 'the family' and other mourners. Analysing the data through the concepts of 'doing' (Morgan, 1996) and 'displaying' (Finch, 2007) family, we saw how all mourners actively accomplished family at the funeral, and that many standard funeral practices are simultaneously family practices. Finally, the family, particularly the deceased person's family, was shown to be an authority for mourners. This was both because mourners regarded the family as a proper source of direction, but

also because mourners, because of the sympathy engendered by 'feeling' family, regarded the family as the proper object of their support.

Acknowledging that funerals are occasioned by more than just family, Chapter 8 showed how death featured in mourners' subjective experiences of funerals. Mourners experienced and valued various components of funerals as a response 'against death' (Davies, 2002). This response centred over and again on the representation and celebration of the life of the one who had died, a life which, it was shown, needed to have been a life which could support celebration by having been fulfilled and not wasted, or not marred by the circumstances of death. Once again, the substantive components of the funeral emerged as being not the full story of a 'successful' funeral, nor of personalisation itself, already understood by Caswell to be "many layered and complex" (2011, p. 248). Correspondents' accounts highlighted funerals' social and emotional dimensions, such as the 'togetherness' of mourners and support both offered and experienced. An additional practical dimension was revealed in the importance to mourners not of what was said at a funeral but the (f)act of its being *spoken*, while once again, who it was that spoke the words (this time mourners) could have great significance.

People and their Relationships Against Death

The 'people' in the claim that funerals can be understood as 'people and their relationships against death' refers to a number of aspects of the data. Firstly, 'people' refers to the deceased individual. This study has corroborated recent research which argues for the significance of the individual in funerals in contemporary Britain (Caswell, 2009, 2011, 2011-2012; Cook and Walter, 2005; Holloway et al., 2010; Naylor, 1989; Walter, 1990, 1994, 1996a). In general, mourners expected and valued symbolic representation of the deceased person and celebration of their life. Many mourners desired to act in accordance with the deceased person's wishes at the funeral, whether by wearing clothing or donating to charity. Mourners expected and intended their presence at the funeral to be understood as an indicator of the value of the individual who had died. In these ways, the individual, and the representation of that individual, can be said to have been an authority over the funeral for mourners. Walter (1994)

allows that there may be two strands of this 'authority of the self', one in which the individual is the lone authority and one in which professionals may facilitate self-expression, and acknowledges that the two may co-exist. These data, however, suggest that the first of these versions of the authority of the self can co-exist at the funeral with an authority further to those of tradition/religion, expert and self identified by Walter (1994, 1996a).

For as Chapter 7 showed, the funeral is a particularly *familial* event (c.f. Castrén and Maillochon, 2009, on weddings), and mourners also related to 'the family' as an authority over the funeral. Mourners considered the wishes and feelings of the family of the deceased person to have great importance, and influence over other mourners' own actions. Chapter 1 argued that given the decline of shared mourning customs, the decline of religion as a cohering factor in both society in general and funerals in particular, and increased variety in funeral form and content over recent decades, it was uncertain what authority mourners would draw on in order to make meaning of and decisions about their participation in funerals. Chapter 6 demonstrated that the individual provided one source; Chapter 7 demonstrated that the family provided another. The identification of this source of authority for mourners really adds to our view of the funeral, which has until now only been informed by researchers and authors who implicitly rely on it (by using members of the deceased person's family as their key informants) (e.g. Bradbury, 1999; Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010), but do not explicitly examine it, thus presenting a view of the funeral which emphasises only one of its 'authorities', namely, that of the individual.

It is important to be clear that the authority of the family as seen in this thesis is indeed a new, or, more accurately, a further authority to those identified by Walter (1994, 1996a). Specifically, what mourners were *not* doing when relating to the family as an authority was selecting the accomplishment and endorsement of family as an option from amongst others, in the manner of mourners selecting from others' funeral customs on the basis of consumer preference (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Walter, 1994, pp. 199-202). Neither were they reverting to the authority of tradition (Giddens, 1991). Mourners' accomplishment and endorsement of family was at most willing, based on the experience of 'feeling' family, and more often unwitting, based on

taken-for-granted notions of family which may or may not be useful as sociological concepts (Edwards and Gillies, 2012; Heaphy, 2011, p. 34; Jamieson et al., 2006, 4.1; Jerrome, 1996, p. 3; Morgan, 2002, pp. 153-4; Silva and Smart, 1999, p. 10), but which retained meaning for mourners and a structuring effect on their actions.

In mourners' experiences at funerals, the authority of the family sat side by side with – not in opposition to – that of the individual. This presents a challenge to such authors as Giddens (1991, 1992), Bauman (2005) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), who argue that traditional sources of authority, including that of the family, give way in late modernity to the authority of the self. The M-O data suggest that in the context of the funeral, at least, authority may not be a zero-sum equation. This analysis has not been able to study changes over time. Nonetheless, we know from other literature that the authority of the self in funerals is relatively new (see, for example, Gorer, 1967; Howarth, 1996; Naylor, 1989; in whose work can be seen the authority of tradition and of the expert, rather than of the individual). It might be surmised, since it is often identified with tradition (and since all authors who write about funerals, including Gorer, Howarth and Naylor, write about families), that the authority of the family at funerals is not entirely new. Thus, it seems possible to conjecture, on the basis of some evidence, that the authority of the family may not give way to, but rather co-exist with, that of the individual.

Having said this, it is important to recognise that those who identify the authority of tradition with 'the family' (including Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1990, 1991) can be criticised for such an identification, and that these scholars' claims concerning family and authority should be treated with some caution, since they are lacking in empirical grounding and may even run contrary to empirical research (Smart, 2007). Indeed, Gillis (1996, 2004) demonstrates that such ideals of family are indeed ideals more than realities, and are relatively recent, extending back no further than the Victorian era. Furthermore, research into memorialisation of British soldiers killed in Afghanistan in recent years (King, 2010) reveals a distinct shift *towards* the authority of the family. On this evidence, then, it might be conjectured that the

authority of the family, if not entirely new, is not age-old either, but rather historically located and contingent.

Even so, there is no need to conjecture in order to make the more modest claim that at least in this 'snapshot' of how contemporary funerals are experienced by those who attend them, there appears to be no particular tension between the authorities of the family and of the deceased individual. All mourners at the funeral actively and largely without apparent objection contributed to the accomplishment of family at the funeral, and took for granted the automatic placing of family at the top of hierarchies (and binaries) of mourners. Moreover, mourners consciously and explicitly endorsed this privileging of 'the family', which they accounted for with reference to empathetic understanding of the special experience of being bereaved of a family member.

As well as there being no tension between the authority of the family and the authority of the individual, there was little tension between the authority of the family and any of those who might be considered 'elective' intimates of the deceased person (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). There were several correspondents who attended funerals as friends of the deceased person. While some were unhappy with the decisions about funeral arrangements perceived to have been made by the family of their friend, all considered it the family's prerogative to make such decisions.

Thus 'the family' is the second set of people, and the first set of relationships, referred to in the claim that funerals are 'people and their relationships against death'.

We saw in Chapter 8 that mourners' experiences could indeed be called 'funerals against death'. The final reading of 'people and their relationships' in the thesis statement refers to the finding that the resources which for mourners stood against death were not only substantive. I do not attempt to refute Davies' (2002) theory of 'words against death'. The data did not point in that direction, and even if they had, it would take more than sociological data from a single context to rebut an anthropological theory generalising from multiple sources (Davies, 2002, p. 3). Neither do I aim to undo any of Davies' theoretical claims. Instead I have shown how they can be adapted and extended for use in the particular context of funerals in contemporary Britain. Perhaps I complement the

theory of words against death, since Davies writes that "[w]hile I will certainly not ignore non-verbal forms of communication within funerary rites, I do wish to emphasize these linguistic factors in this book. I am well aware of the significance of non-verbal aspects of human life" (2002, p. 7).

One reason for Davies' emphasis on linguistic responses to death is "because of the contemporary British trend of down-playing words in an attempt to stress behavioural aspects of life. Some individuals emphasize the importance of simply being with the bereaved, giving physical comfort through touch or by hugging them" (2002, p. 9).

This thesis has not aimed to emphasise any one aspect of funerals, but rather to analyse mourners' experiences. In so doing, it has found that linguistic components, especially to the extent that they contribute to the representation and celebration of the deceased individual, are essential to mourners' experiences of funerals, and of 'good' funerals. As such, this thesis supports Davies' work, as well as the work of others who have focussed on not only words but also other substantive components of the funeral, such as music, clothing, flowers and other material objects (Caswell, 2009, 2011, 2011-2012; Cook and Walter, 2005; Holloway et al., 2010; Parsons, 2012). The thesis makes additional contributions, however, by highlighting that such substantive components may be important, may even be necessary, for mourners' experiencing the funeral as successfully standing 'against death', but may also not be sufficient. Mourners did emphasise the importance of being with those they described as 'the bereaved', and with one another (Carsten, 2004). However, the level of deliberation that went into mourners' decisions to attend a funeral, as well as the amazement expressed by some at the results of togetherness, suggest that this is more than "*simply* being with the bereaved" (Davies, 2002, p. 9, my emphasis).

Moreover, mourners' experiences of words at the funeral could not be separated from the behavioural aspects of life. For them, the power of words in the funeral lay not only in the words themselves and the work that they undeniably did against death, particularly (though not only) by representing and celebrating the deceased individual's life. The power also lay in who spoke the words, and whose stand against death, and what kind of a stand, was thereby

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symbolised. At the end of Chapter 6 it was seen that an officiant who did not know the deceased person could be criticised for giving an (accurate) eulogy, and it was proposed that this be understood through the lens of Walter's (1996c) social and biographical model of grief. Under this view officiants who had not known the deceased person were experienced as unsatisfactory because they themselves, despite their words, could not participate in social and biographical mourning. In a complementary finding, Chapter 8 used Davies' (2002) theory of 'words against death' to suggest that lay speakers may be valued because they stand as proxy for the rest of the congregation, and face not death with words as their tool, but *this* death, with the act of speech as their means. It was argued that standing for other mourners in this way was also something that officiants who had not known the deceased person were simply unable to do, and it may be that this contributed to mourners' objections to them (where those occurred). The criticism of officiants who did not know the deceased person, and the admiration for mourners who spoke 'against death', were not dominant themes. Nonetheless, there is evidence in M-O data of an experience of mourning which values not the intercession of 'expert' workers against death but the sincerity of personal (as distinct from individual – see Smart, 2007) work against death.

Authentic Mourning

This concern with sincerity and 'authenticity' is a theme which, while not predominant, is 'key' (see p. 156) in that it has recurred throughout the thesis in one form or another. In relation to funeral personalisation and in particular the accuracy of the eulogy, it is already well noted in literature (Caswell, 2009, 2011) which views expression of who a person 'really' is as characteristic of the authority of the individual (Walter, 1994). However, as we have seen above, mourners' concern goes beyond this. For in addition to the representation of the deceased persons' character and biography through personalisation, mourners valued an accurate representation of the deceased person's *relationships* as represented in the congregated mourners. Furthermore, 'sincerity' in mourners' attendance, that is, the perception that mourners had come because they valued the one who had died, was approved of, and mourners themselves both

avoided funerals when they felt that their relationship to the deceased person did not 'really' merit it, and felt 'hypocritical' for attending funerals of those with whom they did not have a comfortable relationship. Finally, I argued that mourners who spoke at funerals were admired and approved of not merely because of any contribution their knowing made to the accuracy of what they said, but because their 'authenticity' as mourners enabled them to stand for the whole congregation of mourners and speak against death.

Authenticity itself is not a new theme. However, the ways in which it was important to mourners *are* new[83]. As well as the emphasis on personal expression noted above, scholars have discussed authenticity in relation to ways in which mourners may behave (Jenny Hockey, 1993; Jalland, 2010; Walter, 2008; Walter et al., 1995). However, these discussions are limited to a single aspect – and it is an aspect which barely figured in mourners' own accounts. That aspect is the public expression of grief, and authors have noted that even where emotional expression at funeral is viewed as positive, mourners must conform to a limited range of emotion (Howard, 1994) and forms of expression (Jenny Hockey, 1993) if they are not to be judged as 'faking' grief (Jalland, 2010, p. 264).

In the present study, mourners were not concerned with this kind of 'authentic grieving'[84]. Rather, I contend that this theme represents a concern with 'authentic mourning': according significance to the *relational* (Finch and Mason, 1993, 2000; Smart, 2007), not only the biographical, aspects of the deceased person's and mourners' own social identities, through the genuineness and sincerity of people, and their relationships, in the funeral against death.

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[83] One way was not new. Walter (1990) noted 'hypocrisy' as a major complaint about religious funerals for people who were not religious, and correspondents also complained about such an outcome, viewing it as a failure in authentic representation of the deceased person. However, mismatches in religiosity between the funeral and the deceased person were not the locus for the theme of authenticity in these data. This, it would seem, *is* new.

[84] Correspondents rarely mentioned the 'appropriateness' of expressions of grief, and where they did their concern was about the display of family-ness or the prerogative of 'the family' to determine other mourners' emotional expression.

On these grounds, this thesis claims that when mourners' perspectives are taken into account, funerals can be understood as 'people and their relationships against death'.

In Chapter 1 I argued that studying mourners' experiences of funerals could offer illumination both about what is 'transmitted' in funerals and what is 'received'. In this chapter I have shown that 'people and their relationships against death' captures not only what mourners 'received' but also what they themselves 'transmitted' or 'expressed' at funerals. By this I mean that 'people and their relationships against death' refers to the meanings that mourners made not just of *others'* (that is, funeral personnel and arrangers') contributions to the funeral, but of their own actions as well.

As noted in Chapter 1, I do not argue that mourners' perspectives constitute the entirety of funerals' social significance. Neither do I argue that since wider mourners often make up the largest group of people at a funeral, their experiences or perspectives should be given more weight than those of funeral arrangers or personnel. However, this thesis has added *qualitatively* to our understanding of funerals' social significance, since on the basis of empirical evidence it has extended both Walter's (1994, 1996a) work on sources of authority around death and dying, and Davies' (2002) work on how funerals may be experienced as a symbolic withstanding of death.

Implications of the Thesis

The thesis has wider implications for the literature, and I will discuss four of those here. The first derives from the absence of funeral directors from mourners' accounts of funerals. This may be a function of the directive design, which did not ask explicitly for comments about funeral directors. Yet while correspondents on the whole followed the format and topics provided by the directive, they did offer some unsolicited material. There was much individual variation in this, although almost every correspondent included in the analysis offered unsolicited information about the deceased person (as discussed in Chapter 8), suggesting that mourners were not actually hindered from writing about topics of importance to them, or perhaps considered to be part of the

convention of discussing a funeral. Still, while other funeral personnel such as officiants were discussed to some degree, funeral directors did not figure. For the clients of funeral directors, satisfaction with the funeral may depend on their perception of these figures' carrying out of instructions (Holloway et al., 2010, pp. 244-6); for wider mourners it did not. (Furthermore, other personnel such as officiants who may have been judged by their clients as having carried out instructions perfectly could still come in for criticism from wider mourners.) Funeral directors may hold a good deal of power over the funeral's production, but they do not control its interpretation by those who attend, and neither did they figure centrally in this interpretation.

Why does this have implications for the literature? Because the funerals literature has to date maintained a strong focus on the role of funeral personnel, particularly the funeral director, and the importance of understanding this role for understanding the overall meanings of funerals in contemporary Britain (Bradbury, 1999; Caswell, 2009, 2011, 2011-2012; Jenny Hockey, 1993; Holloway et al., 2010; Naylor, 1989; Prior, 1989). I do not dispute the importance of understanding the roles played by funeral personnel, and indeed, consider that empirical investigation of officiants and their practice has long been neglected. Neither do I deny the influence over funerals which such personnel have (Howarth, 1996; Parsons, 2003; Smale, 1997), an influence which may be undetectable to even their clients, let alone wider mourners. However, I do question the weight which has been accorded to this personnel-centric view of the funeral. Funeral directors in particular simply did not register on mourners' radars. Funeral directors may argue that this is not a sign that their importance is less than has been argued in the literature, but rather an indication of a job well done on their part. Nonetheless, that funeral directors are barely noticed by the majority of those attending the funeral calls for a reassessment of the significance which academic literature accords funeral personnel.

The second implication of the thesis builds on and complements the first, since it calls for greater scholarly attention to be given to the entirety of a funeral's participants – and this means recognising mourners as active participants. This, in turn, means rejecting the view that mourners are passive

recipients of a performance (Bradbury, 1999; Howarth, 1996), or the assumption that the only sources of data on the meaning of funeral ritual in contemporary Britain are those who have decision-making powers over a funeral's content (Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010). This point has force both on principle, following Turner's (1996, p. 526) reminder of the importance of considering a complete range of views when analysing a ritual's meaning and significance, and also *ex post facto*, when we take into account the complexity and novelty of the data generated from wider mourners.

In these data, mourners were active in a number of ways. In addition to making meaning of the entire event – a not insignificant activity in itself (Grimes, 2002; Moore and Myerhoff, 1977; Turner, 1996) – they took decisions and action with consequences (Holloway et al., 2010, pp. 126, 143). A considerable degree of deliberation was evident in mourners' decisions on attendance, clothing, flowers, donations, and the tea. Even without deliberation, mourners actively (though unawarely) contributed to the accomplishment of family at the funeral through many practices and actions. Without mourners' presence and collaboration, this production would not be achieved. Furthermore, mourners themselves were major contributors to 'authenticity' in the funeral. Such findings refute the remark of the funeral director who told me that mourners were 'sheep' (see p. 13), and uphold Bell's (1992, pp. 208-9) argument that all ritual performers are still people with individual expectations and inclinations who engage with and may resist (for example, by not acquiescing to a request for bright clothing) or negotiate (often inwardly – for example, by settling with oneself whether or not to sing hymns of whose words one does not approve) their participation in ritual.

In a third implication, funerals were largely experienced by mourners as significant and meaningful, strongly challenging Howarth's (1997a) claim that Britain's middle classes no longer have meaningful funerals. As noted in Chapter 5, these data do not allow a class-based analysis, however, the replies were consistent enough, and the M-O demographic is middle-class enough, that Howarth's claim is vulnerable. Furthermore, Howarth's assumption that meaning in funerals is only to be found in the expression of emotion (ibid.) is also vulnerable, in the face of this analysis. Similarly vulnerable is Walter's

(1994, pp. 177-80) argument that what explains mourners' dissatisfaction with funerals is too great an emphasis on talk and too little an emphasis on the soul and body of the deceased person. As has been noted several times now, talk was indeed important to the mourners in this study, although for reasons in addition to the gaining of any information or ideas conveyed via the words. While the deceased person's soul was hardly ever referred to by correspondents, their identity and life was clearly the lynchpin of the funeral for mourners. Moreover, mourners experienced both their own attendance at funerals, and the symbolic representation of the deceased person there, as a tribute and service to the one who had died (Walter, 1990). However, the absence of the body as a central focus of the funerals attended by correspondents did not result in dissatisfaction, and mourners were more than able to experience as meaningful and satisfying funerals which stood against death without using the body as a means to this.

The final implication extends beyond the funerals literature to the wider study of death and dying. The emergence of the family as an authority in the funeral calls for analysis of the authority of the family (or lack of it) in the wider application of Walter's (1994, 1996a) work and the study of 'traditional', 'modern' and 'postmodern' or 'neo-modern' types of, or approaches to death (e.g. Lee, 2002; Mackendrick, 2005).

Implications for Practice

I identify two implications for practice. The first of these is relatively simple, and follows from the finding that mourners strongly endorsed 'life-centred' funerals with their focus on the character and biography of the one who had died. Indeed, the very life of the one who had died, in addition to the representation of that life at the funeral, was the ultimate source of mourners' experience of the funeral as an event 'against death'. For many officiants, this is a finding which confirms the value for mourners of how they work. For some Christian ministers, however, it presents a challenge to current practice[85]. While some ministers accommodate and even welcome personalisation, and consider the eulogy

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[85] The same may be true for officiants of other religions, but this thesis has generated no data on religions other than Christianity.

crucial to the funerals they conduct, others maintain that a funeral should be primarily a religious service (Caswell, 2009, 2011; Holloway et al., 2010).

I do not argue that Christian ministers should change their practice merely to suit mourners' tastes, or that religious practice should be determined, even influenced, by popularity. However, I observe that it is overwhelmingly through personalisation that mourners find both meaning and comfort in the funeral, and that to dismiss this, far from emphasising the love of God, will deny some mourners both comfort and meaning. Researchers in the Netherlands (Quartier, 2006, 2009; Quartier et al., 2004) have explored, with ministers and mourners, how funerals can incorporate and even unite religious and personal symbols – although it is clear from this research that such an enterprise is not an easy one, nor is it always successful.

There is a further non-academic implication of this thesis, which derives from the understanding of funerals as 'people and their relationships against death', and in particular from the notion of 'authentic mourning'. This implication concerns the finding that while officiants may well be able to deliver *accurate* personalised funerals, their ability to bring about *authentic* funerals may be lesser than that of mourners themselves.

In the US, it is common for funerals to feature a number of eulogies given by mourners who knew the deceased person (Garces-Foley and Holcomb, 2006). In New Zealand, officiants at some funerals are logistical co-ordinators of the order of events, with all speaking being done by mourners (Schäfer, 2011). In the UK, such mourner participation is currently not so common. Officiants maintain that they are in favour of it (Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010), but this does not find its way into practice.

One reason for this may be the time constraints on typical funeral ceremonies. Funerals that are held in crematoria – that is, the majority of funerals – are likely to have a limit of 40 minutes at most, and commonly only 20 (Caswell, 2009). Over-running runs the risk of causing distress to mourners waiting to attend the following funeral, and disruption to organists, funeral directors and the officiants themselves, all of whom may be scheduled to attend other funerals that day with little leeway for being held up. Keeping to time when

speaking in public is a skill which depends on practice and experience, which most mourners cannot be expected to have. Conscious of this, officiants may not encourage mourner participation as strongly as they would without such constraints.

A possible remedy for such constraints is to hold the funeral in a church or non-religious venue such as a village hall, community centre or conference room. In addition, the ceremony may be held separately from the cremation or burial of the body, so that the necessarily strict timetables of funeral personnel need not encroach so much on mourners. Walter (2009a) has suggested that funerals in which the formal committal of the coffin is preceded by the informal gathering and sharing of memories of the tea may promote a sense of 'togetherness against death' which can be transported into the committal itself.

Officiants themselves indicate a further reason for relatively low uptake of mourner participation. This is a worry (on mourners' and officiants' parts) that participating, and speaking the eulogy in particular, may prove 'too much' for mourners (Caswell, 2009, p. 191), by which is meant that mourners may 'break down' to the degree that they are powerless to speak, in front of the congregation. Correspondents were not unaware of the degree of difficulty that speaking at a funeral carries. Indeed, this was the very reason for their admiration when mourners did accomplish it. As noted in Chapter 8, Davies (2002) suggests that in addition, mourners "may not belong to a suitable speech community able to voice powerful ritual words" (p. 17), suggesting that the finding and performing of the words may be beyond some mourners. This is likely true, and grief also will certainly render some mourners unable and unwilling to speak. However, the notion that 'belonging to a suitable speech community' is to do with being able to voice powerful ritual words must be challenged. Mourners' perspectives suggest that being *relationally eligible* also matters.

Arrangers' decisions not to speak are almost certainly made in this context of ignorance about the significance that *their* speaking, as 'authentic mourners' *could* have for the funeral as a whole. While officiants (and perhaps other funeral personnel such as funeral directors) are in an ideal position for explaining the effects both of speaking the eulogy and of deciding not to, current

funeral practice makes it entirely possible that officiants are oblivious to the significance of authentic mourning.

Holloway et al. (2010, p. 121) found that few religious ministers and no secular officiants had any contact with arrangers after a funeral. Funeral directors may receive feedback from their clients (ibid., p. 100) but officiants did not report this. Even were officiants to seek comments from funeral arrangers, research suggests that the feedback that they would receive would be uncritical on the dimension of 'authentic mourning'[86]. Arrangers interviewed after funerals in general speak well of the officiant, including of their performance of the eulogy (Caswell, 2009; Holloway et al., 2010). But funeral arrangers are in a different relationship to the officiant than wider mourners are, having met with them at least once before the funeral. Indeed, in the late 1980s, that the duty officiant (invariably a Christian minister) at the crematorium did not know the one who had died *was* a common complaint from funeral arrangers (Walter, 1990). For arrangers now, though, officiants may not be intimates, but they are not total strangers either. Furthermore, arrangers have input into (perhaps even veto over) what is said, so that for them, the officiant may be an agent of communication. When they judge the officiant's performance, it may be on how well the officiant mediated what the arranger wanted to convey (Walter, 2005a). While some wider mourners in this study judged the officiant not on their oratory skill but on their relational eligibility to speak authentically, in the eyes of arranging mourners, speaking on behalf of the arranger(s) may *confer* such relational eligibility on an officiant. Thus funeral arrangers may be more concerned with accuracy than authenticity, and may not experience the dissatisfaction that some wider mourners may. Whether they do or do not, it seems that officiants themselves are likely to be unaware that the funerals over which they officiate may not be fully successful.

Putting the Thesis in Perspective: Limitations and Contributions

The limitations of this thesis, discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, should not be forgotten. Hockey (2001, p. 186) wonders whether social scientists should

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[86] Anecdotal evidence suggests the same. Officiants who are members of the Institute of Civil Funerals do receive feedback from arrangers, and this feedback is indeed "overwhelmingly positive" (Walter, 2012b, personal communication).

even try to provide "a coherent account" of death ritual in contemporary life, because both ritual and life are so diverse. It is certainly true that while the thesis contributes a view hitherto absent from the literature, and contributes original knowledge by so doing, it represents a partial view of mourners' experiences of funerals. In particular, and as noted above, the analysis takes no account of class. Class is known to influence funerals' content (Howarth, 1996, 1997a, 2007), but how it influences experiences and interpretations is neither known, nor demonstrated in this thesis. Mourners' relationships to the authorities of tradition, religion, experts, the individual and family, authorities which the literature suggests have had shifting influence over recent decades, were not analysed by age. Neither does the thesis offer a gendered analysis (Walter, 1994, p. 178), a form of analysis which may contribute much to a more nuanced understanding of funerals in contemporary Britain, particularly by giving attention to the topic of emotional expression. For a thesis with such an emphasis on the role of family, it is regrettable that replies to the funerals directive produced so little data on families not routinely considered conventional. In the light of the demonstration here that mourners collaborated in producing and reproducing 'family' at the funeral, more targeted research would be valuable for exploring the *kind* of families produced and reproduced. Reimers (2011) argues that the heteronormativity endemic in (Swedish) funerary practice is a way in which the sexuality which Bloch and Parry (1982) claim to be absent from contemporary western funerals is in fact present and taken for granted; this is a claim which this thesis has left unaddressed and which future researchers would do well to investigate. Furthermore, the funerals represented are more or less homogenous in other ways: all were Christian or non-religious events, held at churches or crematoria. Funerals and mourners of other religions, apart from two Pagan correspondents, were not represented in the data. Neither were 'green' funerals (Davies and Rumble, 2012) or 'DIY' events which did not utilise the services of funeral personnel. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, while this thesis has investigated the experiences of a previously unresearched group, it has in the process reproduced the artificial distinction between those mourners who arrange the funeral and those who do not.

Nevertheless, there are a number of original contributions within this thesis which bear witness both to the merit of researching mourners and to the value of M-O as a research method. The thesis has yielded a number of empirical topics new to the funerals literature, all of which bear further investigation. These are, in order of appearance, the significance of the officiant (not) knowing the deceased person (Chapter 6); the inversion of the family's role in the 'private grief' script (Walter, 1997a) (Chapter 7); the meanings of donated money at the funeral (Chapter 7); the presence of other dead at the funeral (Chapter 8); the significance of lay speakers at the funeral (Chapter 8); the effects of forming associations between music (and other components) and funerals or deceased people (Chapter 8); peace, rather than opposition, as a stance toward death (Chapter 8); and the significance of a 'bad life' for a funeral (Chapter 8).

The thesis also contributes to discussions in family sociology. Chapter 7 demonstrated that some apparent cases of 'doing family' may be revealed to be negotiated 'display'; showed that 'displaying' family is usefully studied at the points where its success is threatened; and showed that the role of 'audience' to a family 'display' may not be one of responding and legitimating, as Finch (2007) envisaged, but of prompting the display in the first place. In addition, it was argued that at funerals not only do mourners draw on culturally-shared notions (Gillis, 1996; Smart, 2007) of what families do, but they sympathise with what they imagine to be the subjective experiences of those who were family to the one who had died. The term I gave to this, 'feeling' family, would seem to have potential as an addition to the 'toolkit' (Finch, 2007) of concepts in family sociology, since, as Gabb (2011) has noted, sociological research on the interiority of family relationships is underrepresented in the literature.

Finally, the thesis has highlighted the social and relational dimensions of funerals, arguing that authenticity in mourning is a significant contributor to 'people and their relationships against death'.

Overall, this thesis has shown that mourners at funerals in contemporary Britain are not mere 'sheep'. A 'successful' funeral depends in part on their presence,

and mourners have been shown not only to interpret but actively to contribute to funerals' countering of death. This countering has been seen to derive less from the authorities of tradition, religion or 'expert' personnel than the authorities of the individual and the family, and the authenticity of mourners themselves.

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Appendices

Appendix A (overleaf): Mass-Observation Directive Autumn 2010

As explained in Chapter 5, funerals was the second topic of two in the directive of Autumn 2010.

Both parts of the directive have been reproduced here. This is in order that the reader may see the instructions regarding identifying information which were included on the directive itself. The reader may also make their own judgement as to any effects of the funerals topic being placed after the topic of childhood illnesses.

The Mass Observation Project

Autumn 2010 Directive

Part 1: Childhood and illness

This directive is designed to get you writing about childhood and illness – perhaps your own experiences as a child - but also your memories of other children in your family, at school or in your communities. Even if you personally did not suffer from any serious illness as a child, we would be pleased to have your general reflections on other people's experiences and your views on the treatment of sick children, past and present.

> As usual, please start each part of your directive reply on a new sheet of paper with your MO number (NOT name), sex, age, marital status, the town or village where you live and your occupation or former occupation.
>
> Remember not to identify yourself or other people inadvertently within your reply.

First - about your own childhood

Please note down here where you grew up so we have a context for what you write. It would be useful to ensure you have given us your year of birth (see box on right).

Was it in the UK? If so where.

If not, where were you living?

Was it a rural or an urban area?

Your personal experience of illness

What was the most serious illness you had as a child?

Do you have any memories of how you felt?

How did illness affect your relationships with other people such as parents, brothers and sisters, other relatives, or friends?

Healthcare professionals

What are your early memories of contact with health care professionals? Please record as much as you can – and give dates and places so we can tell how old you were and place your experience within the history of health care provision.

Doctors	Dentists
Nurses eg in school or hospital	Pharmacists
Health visitors	Other professionals?

Where did these interactions take place? At home, in a clinic, in a health centre, at school or in hospital? **PLEASE TURN OVER**

Did your family ever pay for healthcare? Please describe.

Medicines
Did you take any medicines, herbal remedies or tonics such as cod-liver oil as a child? What did they taste like? Were they effective?

Where did they come from - were they made at home, bought at a chemist's, or dispensed by a doctor?

At school
What provisions (such as a special room) were made for children who were ill at your school (if you attended school)?

What was the attitude of school staff to children who felt ill or had accidents? Did you have much time away from school because you were ill, and what was the main type of illness?

In hospital
How would you describe your experience of hospital, either as an outpatient or an inpatient?

What do you recall about visiting times, hospital staff, the building, the treatment you had, the food, the beds, and your feelings about going home? Did you have an anaesthetic at any stage, and what was this like?

Disability
Would you say you had a disability of any kind as a child? This could include short sight, partial deafness, as well as more serious conditions.

How effectively do you consider this was treated, and how did it affect your experience of childhood and growing up?

Changing patterns of illness have affected the visual impact of disability on society, for example children with callipers are a rarity since the introduction of the polio vaccine. Do you have thoughts on how the visual appearance of the 'sick child' in society has changed?

Difficult memories
When you were young, did you have any experience of children dying? What do you remember about this?

In conclusion.....
Do you have any views on how changing patterns of illness have affected the experience of childhood, past and present?

Do you think the treatment of and services for sick children have improved or deteriorated over your lifetime? If so, how?

Part 2 continues on the next page

Part 2: Going to funerals

This directive is about funerals in general but also more specifically about your own experiences of funerals. We realise that some of you may never have attended a funeral so the first set of questions is for you.

If you have *never* been to a funeral

Please write about what you think a typical funeral is like. Please say what you are basing your ideas on – perhaps stories you have heard from other people, or portrayals of funerals on the television, in films or in books?

If you were called upon to help organise a funeral for someone close to you, what do you think would be important considerations for you?

At the end of this section are questions about what you would want for your own funeral, so please answer them if you can. If this is not something you have ever thought about before now, please say so.

For people who *have* been to funerals

If you have any professional experience of funerals, please mention it and explain. It would also help us if you included information about your religious beliefs and customs – if you have any.

A recent funeral

When was the most recent funeral you attended? Please describe it in as much detail as you can remembering to avoid including too much identifying information. It's your relationships to other people that we're mostly interested in.

Whose funeral was it? Roughly when and where was it held? How did you find out about it, and why did you go?

Were you there on your own? Who else was there? Did you know any of the other people? Was anyone notable by their absence?

If you are able to, please draw a diagram showing where you were during the funeral, and explain why you were where you were. Include as many other people and features as you can.

Did you speak to other people? At what points did you speak to whom, and what did you talk about?

What did you wear, and what influenced your decision about clothing?

Did you send or take flowers, or make any donation? If so, why? If not, why not?

Who spoke at the funeral? What do you remember of what happened? How would you describe the overall 'tone' of the funeral?

What sorts of feelings did you have at the funeral? Did anything in particular arouse emotions for you? Did you express your emotions? If so, how? If not, was there a particular reason why not?

After the funeral

Did you go to a reception or tea, or wake? If so, why? If not, why not? If you did go, please tell us about it.

Would you have called it a "good" funeral? If so, why? If not, why not?

Other funerals

What have been the best and the worst funerals you have attended, and why?

Have you ever decided against going to a funeral? Please say why.

Your thoughts on funerals more generally

What – and who – are funerals for? You don't need to have been to a funeral to have thoughts on this.

Your own funeral

Have you thought about your own funeral?

Who do you think should make decisions about what happens?

If you have your own preferences, what are they and why do you have them? Have you told anyone else about these?

How important is it to you that the things you would like to happen do happen? Have you taken any steps to try to ensure that they do?

Don't feel constrained by our questions – you may want to raise other questions or deal with issues that we have not covered. As always with these directives, the intention is to get you thinking and writing and to find out what matters to you on these themes so if we miss things which are important to you, then please say so.

_____

Please post your response to:
The Mass Observation Archive, FREEPOST BR 2112, The Library, University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 1ZX   Or by email to: **moa@sussex.ac.uk**

Appendix B: Correspondents who Replied to the Funerals Directive

M-O number	Electronic, paper or not used	Sex	Age	Deceased in most recent funeral	When	Reason for leaving out
A0883	P	M	77	Friend of partner or spouse	2009	
A1292	X	F	77		nd	Not about funeral
A1706	P	F	64	Local figure	2000	
A2212	E	F	53	Grandparent of partner or spouse	2008	
A2801	E	F	45	Aunt	2010	
A3434	E	F	45	Unrelated child	2010	
A4127	P	M	48	Parent	2003	
A4384	X	F	41		nd	Uninformative
B0072	P	F	66	Neighbour	nd	
B1180	P	F	82	Friend	2009	
B1426	X	M	75		nd	Uninformative
B1442	X	M	87	Arranged (son)	1988	Arranger
B2240	P	M	89	Society or club member	2010	
B2552	P	F	78	Society or club member	nd	
B2605	P	F	79	Society or club member	nd	
B2710	X	M	81		nd	Professional
B3227	E	M	43	Grandparent	2000	
B3635	P	F	35	Great uncle	1999	
B4290	P	F	41	Grandparent	nd	
B4318	E	M	67	Friend of partner or spouse	2010	
B4458	E	F	31	Grandparent	2009	
B4484	P	M	48	Parent	2000	
B4527	X	F	30	Colleague of partner or spouse	1997	Uninformative
B4561	P	F		Grandparent	2010	
B4563	X	F	43	Arranged (parent)	2009	
B4672	P	F	29	Relative of ex-family	2003	
B4718	X	F	20			Never been
B4750	P	F	35	Aunt or uncle of partner or spouse	2010	
C0108	P	F	76	Society or club member	nd	
C1191	X	F	55	Friend of partner or spouse	nd	No new info
C2579	X	F	65			Uninformative
C2888	X	F	55	Parent	2009	Uninformative
C3167	X	M	35	Aunt	2000	Uninformative
C3210	P	F	30	Friend	2009	
C3513	P	F	51	Grandparent	1999	
C3603	E	M	67	Aunt	2010	
C3901	E	F	43	Grandparent	2000	

C4371	X	M	42			Sent a cartoon
C4472	X	F	39	Arranged (parent)	2009	Arranger
C4479	X	F	35		nd	Uninformative
D0156	E	F	58	Friend of partner or spouse	2009	
D0826	E	F	60	Neighbour	2010	
D0996	X	F	83	Relative of colleague	2010	Not about funeral
D1602	E	M	68	Uncle	2005	
D2585	X	F	68	Neighbour	2010	Uninformative
D3157	E	M	55	List	nd	
D3644	X	F	28	Society or club member	nd	Uninformative
D4101	E	M	50	Society or club member	2010	
D4700	X	F	44	Parent-in-law	2011	Uninformative
E0174	X	F	86	Sibling	nd	Uninformative
E0743	E	F	60	Local figure	nd	
E2977	E	M	28	Grandparent	2010	
E4111	P	M	70	Friend	2010	
E4556	E	M	26	Great-uncle	2009	
F0218	X				nd	Uninformative
F1373	X	F	78	Arranged (spouse)	2009	Arranger
F1560	P	F	89	Sibling	nd	
F1589	X	F	78		nd	Not about funeral
F2218	X	M	81	Parent	1976	Not about funeral
F3409	P	F	63	Parent-in-law	2009	
F3641	P	F	70	Friend	nd	
F4125	E	F	44	Relative of colleague	2009	
F4605	X			Arranged (aunt)	2008	Arranger
G0226	X	F	69	List	nd	Uninformative
G2134	X	M	91	Son	2009	Not about funeral
G3042	E	F	52	Arranged (parent)	1998	
G3187	X	F	40	Parent	nd	Uninformative
G3423	E	F	51	Arranged (parent)	2007	
G3655	P	M	71	Sibling-in-law	2011	
G3963	P	F	38	Aunt	2009	
G3988	P	F	27	Grandparent	2010	
G4304	X	M	46	Relative of friend	2003	Uninformative
G4313	E	M	83	Society or club member	nd	
G4374	E	M	44	Aunt or uncle of partner or spouse	2010	
G4530	E	M	21	Grandparent	2006	
G4560	E	F	40	Grandparent	2002	
G4566	E	F		Aunt	2010	
H0260	P	F	80	Sibling-in-law	nd	
H0266	X	F	87	Sibling	2010	No new info
H1541	X	M	66	Famous person	2010	Fame
H1543	P	M	80	Neighbour	2009	
H1705	P	F	59	Friend	2010	

H1745	E	F	59	Neighbour	2010	
H1806	E	M	85	Cousin of partner or spouse	nd	
H1836	E	F	66	Friend	2010	
H2410	X	F	81	Neighbour	2009	Uninformative
H2634	X	M	65	Professional	nd	Professional
H2637	E	F	71	Cousin of partner or spouse	2006	
H2639	P	F	70	Cousin of partner or spouse	2001	
H3070	X	M	41	Local figure	nd	Not about funeral
H3784	X	M	38	Grandparent	1995	Uninformative
H3821	E	M	58	Friend	2009	
H4005	E	F	70	Local figure	nd	
H4123	X	M		Spouse	2006	Not about funeral
H4519	P	F	31	Friend	2009	
H4611	P	F	37	Relative of friend	2003	
I1610	P	F	66	Neighbour	2010	
J1890	P	F	78	Friend of partner or spouse	nd	
J2891	E	F	46	Friend	nd	
J3248	P	M	63	Arranged (parent)	nd	
J3887	E	F	44	Sibling	2009	
J4505	P	F	28	Grandparent of partner or spouse	2006	
K0310	P	F		Colleague	2009	
K0798	X	F	59		nd	Not about funeral
K3164	E	F	32	Grandparent	2009	
K4268	E	F	29	List	nd	
K4417	P	F	43	Neighbour	2010	
L1002	P	F	64	Relative of in-law	2010	
L1504	P	M	84	Sibling	2010	
L1625	X	F	88	Sibling	nd	Uninformative
L1691	P	F	67	Sibling	2011	
L1696	X	M	93	Sibling	2010	Uninformative
L1991	E	F	74	Arranged (spouse)	nd	
L2281	P	F	77	Friend	nd	
L3298	E	F	53	Relative of friend	nd	
L4071	E	F	67	Local figure	2011	
L4388	X	F	24	Aunt or uncle of partner or spouse	nd	Uninformative
M0348	P		80	Friend	nd	
M0388	P	F	80	Society or club member	2010	
M1201	P	F	47	Aunt or uncle of partner or spouse	2010	
M1381	X	F	78	Arranged (spouse)	2008	Arranger
M1395	P	F	80	Sibling-in-law	2010	
M1571	P	F	79	Relative of friend	nd	
M2061	E	F	80	Relative of partner or spouse	2010	
M2164	X	F	83	List	nd	Uninformative

M2290	X	F	81	Local figure	nd	Uninformative
M2486	E	F	58	Parent-in-law	2010	
M2986	E	F	54	Friend	2010	
M3055	E	F	36	Parent-in-law	2010	
M3190	E	M	52	Uncle	2009	
M3231	X	M	61	Arranged (parent)	2011	Arranger
M3320	X	F	44	Former landlady	2011	No new info
M3408	X	F	62	Friend	2011	No new info
M3412	P	F		Relative of friend	nd	
M3469	X	F	47	Arranged (parent)	2002	Arranger
M3476	P	F	55	Relative of in-law	2010	
M3584	X	F	40	Arranged (parent)	2010	Arranger
M3684	P	F	41	Colleague	nd	
M4122	P	M	32	Great-uncle	2010	
M4132	E	F	44	Relative of ex-family	2010	
M4463	P	M	57	Friend of partner or spouse	nd	
M4698	E	M	43	Colleague	nd	
N0403	P	F	73	Colleague of partner or spouse	2008	
N3181	P	F	35	Friend of partner or spouse	nd	
N3396	X	F	55	Friend	nd	Uninformative
N3588	E	F	49	List	nd	
O3436	E	F	56	Parent-in-law	2009	
O3871	E	F	36	Stepparent	2004	
O3932	X	F	44	Cousin	2009	Uninformative
O4706	P	F	35	Aunt or uncle of partner or spouse	nd	
P1009	P	F	71	Friend	2010	
P1282	X	F	72	Neighbour	nd	No new info
P1326	E	F	73	Society or club member	2010	
P1796	E	F	64	Friend	nd	
P2034	X	M	83	Colleague	nd	Not about funeral
P2138	X	F	91	Arranged (spouse)	nd	Not about funeral
P2546	E	F	85	Sibling	2009	
P2915	P	M	52	Colleague	2010	
P2957	P	F	41	Relative of partner or spouse	2008	
P3059	X	F	32	Grandparent	2000	Uninformative
P3209	E	M	71	Aunt	2010	
P3213	P	F	44	Grandparent	1986	
P4287	P	M	54	Aunt	nd	
R0470	E	M	76	Friend	2005	
R0860	P	F	63	Friend	2010	
R1025	P	F	67	Society or club member	2010	
R1227	E	F	66	Parent-in-law	2010	
R1321	X	F	64	Arranged (parent)	nd	Arranger

R1418	X	M	88	List	nd	About olden days
R1760	P	F	80	List	nd	
R2143	P	M	63	Cousin of partner or spouse	2004	
R2144	E	F	75	Society or club member	nd	
R3032	P	M	68	Neighbour	nd	
R3422	X	M	63	Parent	2000	Uninformative
R3546	X	M	46	Parent-in-law	2010	Uninformative
R4100	P	F	46	Great-uncle	2010	
R4286	E			Friend	nd	
R4365	P	F	29	Grandparent of partner or spouse	nd	
R4526	X	M	50	List	nd	About olden days
R4539	P	F	39	Aunt	nd	
R4573	X	F	28	Grandparent	2010	Uninformative
R4604	P	F	46	Relative of friend	2010	
R4685	P	F	24	Grandparent of partner or spouse	2010	
R4695	P	M	46	Relative of colleague	2010	
S0459	X	F	29		nd	Uninformative
S0496	P	F		Sibling-in-law	nd	
S1399	X	F	61		nd	Quotation not allowed
S1534	E	F	76	Friend	2008	
S2083	X	M	80	Society or club member	nd	No new info
S2207	E	F	58	Arranged (parent)	2006	
S3035	E	M	63	Relative of partner or spouse	2010	
S3342	E	M	57	List	nd	
S3844	E	F	36	Aunt	2007	
S4002	P	F	31	Friend	2010	
S4249	E	F	42	Relative of friend	2005	
S4278	E	M	45	Arranged (parent)	2004	
S4311	X	M	64	List	nd	Professional
S4381	P	M	22	Relative of friend	2009	
S4392	P	F	39	Cousin	nd	
S4429	P	M	43	Relative of colleague	2006	
T1411	X	F	89	List	nd	Not about funeral
T1843	P	F	61	Cousin	2008	
T1961	X	F	63		nd	Uninformative
T2003	E	F	61	Relative of friend	2010	
T2543	P	F	77	Friend of partner or spouse	2010	
T2741	X	M	89		nd	Uninformative
T3155	P	M		Parent	2010	
T3686	E	M	74	Neighbour	2010	
T3775	E	M	74	Society or club member	2008	
T4409	E	F	31	Grandparent	2005	
T4525	E	M	31	Grandparent	2007	

T4715	P	F	39	Unrelated child	nd	
V3767	E	M	72	Local figure	2008	
V3773	P	F	48	Colleague	nd	
V4648	E	M	57	Parent	2006	
V4661	E	F	20	Grandparent	nd	
W0632	P	F	69	Cousin	2002	
W0633	E	F	68	Colleague	2010	
W0729	P	F	53	Colleague of partner or spouse	2010	
W1382	P	M	86	Arranged (parent-in-law)	nd	
W1813	P	F	60	Uncle	2009	
W1835	X	F			nd	Uninformative
W1893	P	M	87	Society or club member	2010	
W2107	X					Uninterested in directive
W2174	X	M	66		nd	Not about funeral
W2244	P	F	81	Society or club member	2000	
W2322	E	M	66	Society or club member	2010	
W2338	P	F	78	Local figure	2010	
W3163	E	F	52	Relative of friend	2008	
W3176	P	M	69	Colleague	2010	
W3730	P	F	43	Relative of in-law	2010	
W3967	E	F	42	Relative of friend	2010	
W3994	P	F	38	Aunt	2010	
W4376	P	F	42	Colleague	nd	
W4421	E	F	25	Great-aunt	2007	
W4448	X	F	17	Great-uncle	2000	Uninformative
W4456	P	M	32	Grandparent of partner or spouse	nd	
W4467	E	M	35	Parent-in-law	nd	
W4614	E	F	37	Colleague	2002	
Y2926	P	F	52	Uncle	2004	
Z4682	P	M	56	Aunt	2010	

Appendix C: List of Donors

AW Lymn The Family Funeral Service Ltd

Burial and Cremation Education Trust of the Institute of Cemetery and
   Crematorium Management

Centre for Death and Society, University of Bath

Churches' Funerals Group

Dignity Funerals Ltd

Dying Matters

Appendix D: Full Text of Funeral Poem Written Out by P1009

"Words of Comfort"

You can shed tears that he is gone,

Or you can smile because he has lived.

You can close your eyes and pray that he'll come back,

Or you can open your eyes and see all he's left.

Your heart can be empty because you can't see him,

Or you can be full of the love you shared.

You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday,

Or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday.

You can remember him and only that he's gone,

Or you can cherish his memory and let it live on.

You can cry and close your mind, be empty and turn your back.

Or you can do what he'd want: smile, open your eyes, love and go on.