University of Southern Queensland

THESIS WRITING AS GRIEF WORK: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNEY INTO IDENTIFYING AND POSITIONING THE BEREAVED SELF IN DOCTORAL SCHOLARSHIP

A Thesis submitted by

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, scholarly literature about bereavement tends to focus on the death of a spouse or a parent, with less historical attention having been paid to the death of a child. Furthermore, this research tends to be empirical in nature and delivers generalised outcomes with minimal thought to the individual participant. This constitutes a form of exploitation and intentional intrusiveness in that researcher enquiry focuses on mining for statistical overviews that leave participants with the emotional fallout from their involvement in the project. Extrapolating from this, it could be said that parents' individual voices are silenced academically.

Written in the vulnerable first-person voice, my study focuses on three distinct dimensions of doctoral writing as grief work: that is, parental bereavement, doctoral processes and personal transformation. Firstly, I examine the concept of trauma from the particularised circumstance of a bereaved mother (parental bereavement). Secondly, a range of issues related to the production of thesis writing is interrogated (doctoral processes). Thirdly, I consider the notion of self-growth as related to progression of the PhD journey (personal transformation). Vignettes of 'conversations' with my beloved pet dog are woven throughout to exemplify my emotional status and also as a vehicle for reflexivity.

This thesis provides a relational and contextual voice that can be added to the (at times) overwhelming environment of death studies. Knowledge is not a static phenomenon to be presented quantifiably as truth. Candidates undertake a doctorate in a multiplicity of personal situations. My story is offered to the community at large as an example of individual agency and purposeful living after a traumatic event.

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS

I Deborah Lee Mulligan declare that the PhD Thesis entitled *Thesis writing as grief work: An autoethnographic journey into identifying and positioning the bereaved Self in doctoral scholarship* is not more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references, and footnotes. The thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Date: 31/01/2023

Endorsed by:

Professor Patrick Danaher
Principal Supervisor

Dr Naomi Ryan
Associate Supervisor

Student and supervisors' signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

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I am much obliged to the communities of doctoral writers, both virtual and face to face, with whom I have celebrated and commiserated over the duration of my research. Thanks for the motivation and for being part of my tribe.

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To my daughter, Katie, in whom I hope I have instilled a love of lifelong learning and a purposeful life filled with adventure and inquiry.

To my son, Rory, whose memory lives on in our hearts and minds. You continue to be loved and missed.

Thank you to my editor, Laura Black, who honed my thesis.

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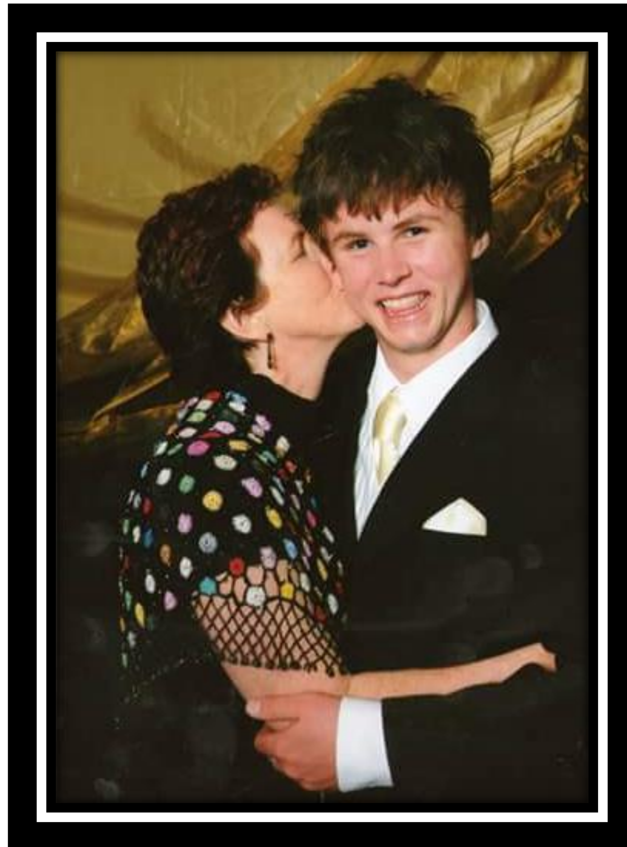
DEDICATION

To bereaved parents everywhere. I hope that you can relate in some small way with the content of this thesis.

To my daughter Katie who continues to be my reason to go on. I hope I am modelling a productive life in the aftermath of death.

To our dog El who dedicated her life to our family.

To my son Rory. Words cannot express the emotions that I feel each and every day and night since you were taken from us.



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ABBREVIATIONS

BCE	Before Common Era
DPM	Dual Process Model of coping with bereavement
DST	Dialogical Self Theory
IRP	Interpretivist research paradigm
MI	Myocardial Infarction
OWLS	Older wiser learners
TOMNET	The Older Men's Network
PGECR	Postgraduate and Early Career Researcher
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USQ/UniSQ	University of Southern Queensland

INTRODUCTION

For Mum

If death was to take me tonight, would you know the extent of the love I would leave behind for you?

Prologue

Once upon a time on a crisp Autumnal day in August in the year 1991, an ordinary woman received an extraordinary gift from the universe.

She was delivered of a baby boy. This woman was not special. She had not climbed mountains nor had she overcome great adversity in her life. She was a typical middle class white female in her early 30s. She was not famous nor infamous. She simply was who she was.

And yet, she was gifted this most precious of souls. He was entrusted into her keeping for the rest of her life and beyond. Being of a pragmatic nature, she did not ask why she was selected for such treasure but accepted her good fortune. She fell in love with this child instantly, irrevocably and unconditionally.

A couple of years later, this ordinary woman was gifted a second child, a girl. Again, love was instantaneous and eternal. The woman's family was complete and she was grateful and contented with life.

But all was not well. Four years after the woman received her first gift, the little boy was diagnosed with a rare bone condition called osteogenesis imperfecta (imperfect bones). In his short life, he was to break every long bone in his body (sometimes twice), as well as countless smaller, but no less painful, bones throughout his body. His ligaments also were fragile and easily damaged.

Nevertheless, the boy was blessed with a sunny disposition and he accepted his fate. Each recovery was a mountain that he climbed steadfastly and uncomplainingly until he reached the peak and life

returned to normal for him. Numerous hospital stays and unconscionable pain could not dampen his enthusiasm for life and his love of family and friends.

Years went by and despite his ill health the boy grew into a fine young man. His smile was broad, his laugh contagious and his life force strong. He turned 18 and his adult life was beckoning.

However, mere weeks later, the universe became restless and, in a chaotic throw of the dice, the boy grew an osteosarcoma in his leg. This cancerous tumour was to take the whole of his right leg three months after diagnosis. But he was a proficient mountaineer and there was no reason to expect that this mountain would prove any different from those that had gone before. Higher perhaps on one leg and more brutal than the others, but nonetheless achievable.

Eventually, though, the day came when the boy's emaciated body tired of the relentless climb. This mountain peak was too high, too distant, too inaccessible, too aggressive in its impenetrable fortress. And so, after wordlessly seeking permission from his loved ones, he quietly slipped away into the next world as his mother held his hand and kissed him for the last time on this earthly plain. She knew that he did not want to go, but equally she knew that his soul would rejoice in the freedom of running, singing, laughing and dancing again – all of which the greedy grasping fingers of the cancer had taken from him.

His family was left to carry on as well as they could. The woman, indescribably bereft, was left silent, broken and empty. Darkness enveloped her and, even when the sun shone, its warmth and brightness did not touch her. She functioned on a basic level and tended to her daughter but found no joy in living.

Six months after the death of her son, the woman was still sitting, staring endlessly into nothingness, a golden Labrador her only companion through the long hours. Then she decided that mere survival was inadequate. If she had no impetus for life, what sort of role model was

she for her daughter? Her precious son was gone but her equally treasured daughter was not. It was time.

Life with purpose was to be resumed. So the woman began her ascent of the steep and uncertain terrain of the PhD Mountain and its twin peaks of academic and personal identity shift. She carried with her the pain of the past and the present, and the hope of the future. Heavy baggage, but she had had 19 years of watching the most supreme mountaineer of all.

The woman was fortunate to be accompanied by the indomitable and courageous spirit of her son, the resolute faith and pride of her daughter and the quiet, devoted companionship of an old dog. Additionally, the woman was provided with two steadfast mountain guides who would scale those peaks beside her and see her through to journey's end. But, even with the unfailing support of these fellow journeymen, the woman knew that ultimately it was up to her own personal resourcefulness and strength to stride, to strive and to succeed.

Overview of the chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the reader to the overall structure of the thesis and to provide some background information as to the importance of the research topic. The prologue in Section 1.1 delivered an insight into the state of my mental health and the circumstance under which I began my first thesis (PhD Thesis #1). It set the tone for what is to come in this evocative autoethnography. Section 1.2 delivers an overview of Chapter 1. Section 1.3 presents an overview of the crafting of the thesis as a whole and the reasoning behind its structural features. Section 1.4 offers further background information by explaining the history of PhD Thesis #1. Section 1.5 delves into the reasoning behind my choice of an evocative autoethnographic delivery, rather than a substantially traditional eight chapter thesis (as per PhD Thesis #1). Section 1.6 highlights the significance of the research. Section 1.7 explains why the research is justified on theoretical and practical grounds. Section 1.8 describes the scope of the research, and states the

study’s research questions. Section 1.9 includes a personal note that reveals key philosophical assumptions around Self and identity. Section 1.10 summarises Chapter 1, and Section 1.11 offers the first of the eight Epilogues to be found within this thesis. Figure 1.1 provides a flowchart of the progression of the chapter.

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Flowchart of the progression of Chapter 1

Overview of the thesis

This is an eight-chapter thesis. It is a hybrid of the elements of a traditional thesis in that it contains an Introduction (Chapter 1); an examination of relevant grounding information in the Literature Review (Chapter 2); an explanation of the Conceptual Framework (Chapter 3); a description of the Research Design (Chapter 4); three chapters that address the research questions (Chapters 5, 6 and 7); and, finally, a Conclusion that ties the previous chapters together (Chapter 8). Each of these chapters is written in a non-traditional autoethnographic style as they relate the story of a number of critical incidents that happened to me in my journey of personal transformation. The thesis overview is presented diagrammatically as steps through the chapters on my journey in Figure 1.2.

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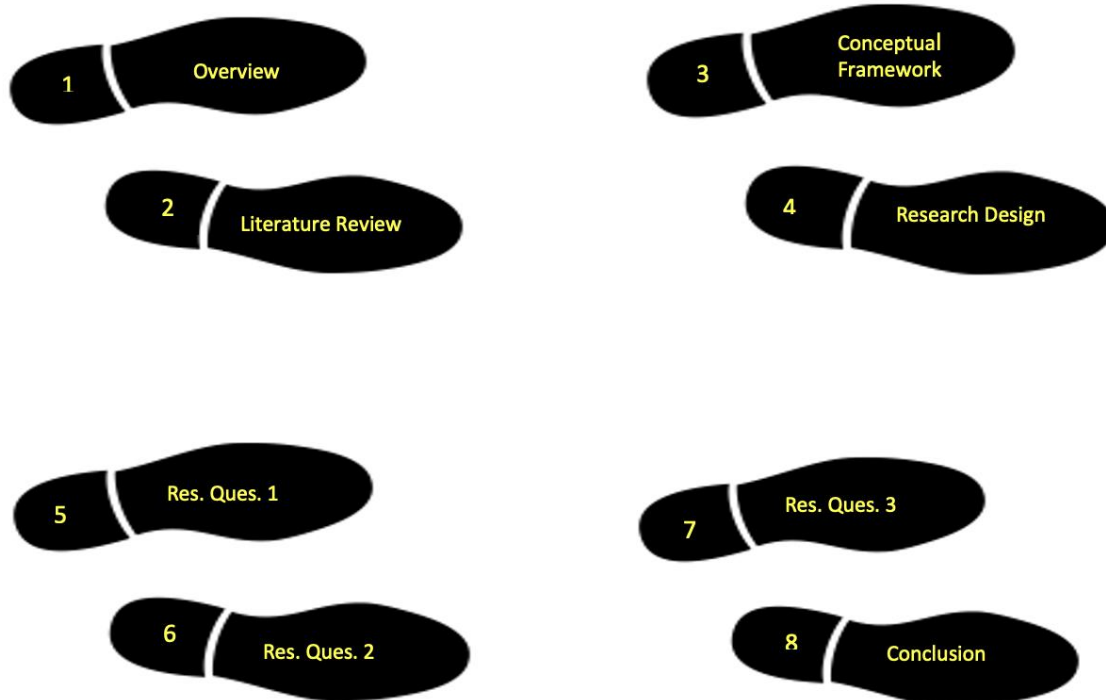
Stepping through the thesis



I have adopted (and embraced) this thesis writing hybrid approach. I am comfortable with this traditional structure, having already completed a doctorate in this format (Mulligan, 2018). It was important to me academically that I felt secure in my writing trajectory and could identify each of the chapters that would step me through my writing to progress this highly personal and emotive story. Autoethnography provided me with an opportunity to personalise my story in a rigorous and authentic scholarly manner. I wanted to utilise the relationality of the first-person voice and to connect with the reader in a way that a traditional, third person thesis does not allow. I found no contradictions or tensions when writing the thesis. In fact, I felt a certain secure freedom in the requirements of the traditional structure and confidence in my sense of how the thesis progression was mapped out for me. This afforded me the

opportunity to corral my data-driven thoughts and emotionality, and to tell my story in a formalised yet individualised manner.

Definitions of the pivotal terminology used in this chapter and throughout the thesis are provided in Table 1.1.

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Glossary of terms

TERM	DEFINITION	REFERENCE
Bereavement	The ongoing changeability of the mental, spiritual and physical state of a person after a loved one has died.	Author's definition
Dark labour	Purposeful, nonlinear, unpaid and self-regulated emotion work utilised by the griever in professional, social and private environments after a traumatic event.	Author's definition, adapted from Gabriel et al. (2015)
Doctoral study	Engagement in striving for the knowledge and skills required for the fulfilment of the award of a doctorate (in my case, a PhD).	Author's definition
Doctorateness or Doctoralness	Transformational qualities employed to produce a successful and effective academic identity at doctoral level.	Author's definition, adapted from Denicolo & Park (2013); Kamler & Thomson (2006); Trafford & Lesham (2008); Yazdani & Shokooh (2018)
Emotion work/emotional management	Unpaid emotional labour whereby the regulation of the emotions of self and others is warranted in social situations.	Author's definition, adapted from Exley & Letherby (2001)
Emotional labour	"the management of emotions as part of the work role".	Gabriel et al. (2015, p. 2)
Grief (as related to bereavement)	"The emotional, cognitive, functional and behavioral responses to a death."	Zisook & Shear (2009, p. 67)

TERM	DEFINITION	REFERENCE
Grief work	"A contemporary process that refocuses the griever on continuing her or his own life in the present and the future while continuing a relationship with the deceased that does not involve separation of all emotional connection."	*APA Dictionary of Psychology* (dictionary.apa.org)
Griever	A marginalised 'other' who may be physically, spiritually and/or emotionally isolated as a response to a traumatic incident.	Author's definition adapted from Mulligan (2020)
Identity	The public manifestation of a conscious and reflexive Self.	Author's definition, adapted from Oyserman et al. (2012)
Mourning	The "cultural practices" through which physical and emotional expressions of sorrow are manifested after the death of a loved one.	Author's definition, adapted from Howarth (2011, p. 4); https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mourn
Parental bereavement	The ongoing lived experience of a parent after the death of their child.	Author's definition
Personal transformation	Enacting a process of an improved change of emotional/physical/ spiritual state governed by conscious and/or unconscious intent.	Author's definition, adapted from Chopra (2020)
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy – "the highest postgraduate achievement".	https://www.swinburne.edu.au
Self	A conscious, reflexive core that regulates what/who I am as an individual and how this persona can be portrayed publicly.	Author's definition, adapted from Leary & Tangney (2012)
Sorrow	The enactment of misery, anguish.	Author's definition based on Alapack (2010)

TERM	DEFINITION	REFERENCE
Trauma	Life events that have ongoing implications that profoundly negatively impact on an individual's physical, mental, spiritual and emotional states.	Author's definition, adapted from James (2015); van der Kolk (2014)

PhD Thesis #1 – Background information

I began my first thesis after my son, Rory, died. I was 53 years old at the time. I had begun the fulfilment of a lifelong academic dream of completing a Doctorate of Professional Studies prior to Rory becoming ill, but I abandoned it as soon as he was diagnosed with cancer. When Rory died, I was a primary (elementary) school teacher. Staff were provided with up to two years of bereavement leave. I was to avail myself subsequently of approximately three quarters of the amount of this time allocation before returning to my school. Six months after Rory's funeral, I contacted my supervisor from the abandoned doctorate, Professor Glen Postle, and asked if he would consider resuming our partnership. I had no expectations as to his response and, as I was partially nonverbal and quite emotionally and physically impaired at the time, I had anticipated that he would tell me to wait until such time that I could at least string a number of sentences together without crying.

But he didn't and, to my ever-lasting gratitude, he did not hesitate to accept me as his doctoral student. I had given no thought to a topic. Undaunted, he suggested a research interest of his own, and so my first thesis was conceived. The adventure began. Very early on, Glen and I had the great fortune to welcome Professor Patrick Danaher onto our team as associate supervisor.

But the PhD journey mirrors life itself, and, as such, can be fraught with mis-steps and misery. To our immense sorrow, Glen contracted terminal cancer. Patrick and I were to journey mostly alone from that point, and after much collaboration we arrived at the summit of the higher education mountain. My PhD Thesis #1, which focused on older men and suicide ideation, was duly examined and passed with very minor

revisions. It was with much humility and indebtedness that I carried a photo of Glen in his academic regalia in the academic procession on graduation day, as depicted in Figure 1.3.

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Graduation Day

Intellectual life beyond the thesis has been a rich and rewarding one. I have co-edited four books so far with an expectation of several others. I have also solo-authored a book from my thesis. These scholarly endeavours are attributable to Professor Patrick Danaher, who has been my collaborator from the moment that we met. I am indeed fortunate in this respect. I have been actively involved in research practices and remain firmly embedded in the opportunities provided by the university and the research community therein (please refer to Chapter 6).

The next section (1.5) provides information about the focus of my research for this thesis and how I have brought it to fruition.

PhD Thesis #2 – Background information

I have chosen autoethnography as a vehicle for my research. This method is more fully discussed in Section 4.4. My choice was based on the fact that autoethnography forefronts the usage of reflexivity and authorial voice. In fact, my voice can be further heard throughout the

thesis in the form of italicised comments. I do this intentionally to emphasise the highly personalised nature of this research topic.

Written in the vulnerable first-person voice, my study focuses on three distinct dimensions of doctoral writing as grief work: that is, parental bereavement, doctoral processes and personal transformation. Firstly, I examine the concept of trauma from the particularised circumstance of a bereaved mother (parental bereavement). Secondly, a range of issues related to the production of thesis writing is interrogated (doctoral processes). Thirdly, I consider the notion of self-growth as related to progression of the PhD journey (personal transformation). Vignettes of 'conversations' with my beloved pet dog are woven throughout to exemplify my emotional status and also as a vehicle for reflexivity.

Embedded within my thesis is the acknowledgement that these are solely my recollections of the duality of writing a thesis through to completion and of intentionally embarking on a systemic undertaking of my version of grief work. The metaphor of the 'journey' could be over-represented as a tired cliché, but it has currency in that it has both content and contextual positionality, as well as power when related to the parallel journeys involved in grief work and thesis writing. Munby and Russell (1989) referenced the usage of metaphor in terms of its roles of relationality and in enriching the author's voice: "The essence of metaphor, then, seems to be the way in which casting particular experiences brings a richness of vocabulary to describing the experience" (p. 3). They further emphasised that our worldviews are constructed in a metaphorical manner; therefore this schema is entrenched in our humanness. Lakoff (1993) reasoned that "the metaphor is not just a matter of language, but of thought and reason" (p. 208), thus highlighting the reflexivity involved in the production of autoethnographic research. Thomas and Beauchamp (2011) cited Massengill, Shaw and Mahlios, who described metaphors as "analogic devices that …serve as a cognitive device as a means for framing and defining experience in order

to achieve meaning about one's life" (p. 763). Those who favour the metaphor of journeying, like myself, believe in the transcendency of stepping through life mindfully in order to live purposefully. Although I do not – and have never – sought the meaning behind my son's death (as I believe there isn't any), I do seek to live meaningfully with intention and endeavour. This requires space for thoughtful reframing and redefining of my positionality as I react to circumstances beyond my control as exemplified in this thesis. The culturally shared metaphor (Alger, 2009) of "travel" (Pitcher, 2013 p. 6) holds a special significance in the duality of the journey through grief and the journey through the doctorate, although, strikingly, the latter has an end point whereas the former is an eternal series of twists and turns and wearying uphill climbs, as articulated in the walking trail metaphor used in Chapter 7.

The following section (1.6) interrogates the significance of the research.

Significance of the research

Traditionally, scholarly literature about bereavement tends to focus on the death of a spouse or a parent (Bergman et al., 2017; Ding et al., 2021; Elwert & Christakis, 2008; Ytterstad & Brenn, 2015), with less historical attention having been paid to the death of a child. Furthermore, these articles tend to be empirical in nature and deliver generalised outcomes with minimal thought to the individual participant. This constitutes a form of exploitation and intentional intrusiveness in that researcher enquiry focuses on mining for statistical overviews that leave participants with the emotional fallout from their involvement in the project. Extrapolating from this, it could be said that parents' individual voices are silenced academically.

Each year in Australia, 100 children die from cancer. Approximately one fifth of children will not survive after a cancer diagnosis. Australia has one of the highest rates of childhood cancer globally (Cancer Council Queensland, 2018). Children with rare and aggressive cancers, such as sarcoma, have an incidence rate of fewer than between six and 12 cases

per 100,000 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019). In decimal percentage terms, that equates to 0.006-0.012. These children are given a 27% survival rate if the cancer has spread (Cancer.Net, 2021).

Looking more broadly at nonspecific causality, in 2017, males in the United States aged between 15 and 19 years died at the rate of 72.7 deaths per 100,000. Females of the same age died at 29.4 deaths per 100,000 (Child Trends, 2019). Globally, the mortality rate of children and youths aged between five and 24 years is 18 deaths per 1,000 (UNICEF Data, 2020). In percentage terms, that equates to 0.018.

These data do not tell the whole story around bereavement and the loss of a child. How could they? The aim of this thesis is to uncover one aspect of the huge repercussions of these miniscule statistics. What happens to the family when a child dies? Specifically, how does her child's death impact on the mother?

The significance of the study lies in the fact that chronic grief is misunderstood in our Western culture. Grievers who have lost their children become cultural victims. The act of loss constitutes an alterity to life's normative expectations. Those who have never experienced it cannot conceive of its emotionally damaging tendrils. The loudest scholarly thoughts contain the subject of grief in a series of statistics that represent clinical research. Furthermore, these statistics, although valuable in their own right, are written by scientists in a genre that removes them and the reader from the true meaning behind the data. This autoethnographic study offers a circuit breaker away from the detached style of formalised information gathering. The cancer story should not be told by groups of numbers; it is personal and told by individuals who have lost loved ones.

When referring to the death of a child from cancer, Kim et al. (2021) stated that, "Anticipatory grief may make the bereaved experiences of these mothers unique compared to other losses" (p. 390). In other words, the grief becomes layered and prolonged even before you

lose your child. Although anticipatory grief is not directly addressed in this thesis, it should be mentioned here as a mitigating factor in the trauma faced by mothers well before their terminally ill child dies. It could be argued that anticipatory grief is the first step in the chronic grief journey of bereaved parents. Thus, grief work begins well before the finality of the act of death. *To watch your child endure a painful and prolonged death and to know that there is nothing that you can do about it surely constitutes a slow boat to hell on earth.*

The raw heart of the thesis

Throughout this thesis, you will see faces. This is intentional. This is not just another anonymous cancer story. This is my story and the associated stories of those who journeyed alongside me – the ripple effect of trauma – one life inextricably linked with others. As you read, please look at these faces as they are the ever present beating hearts of thesis writing as grief work.

In order to personalise the thesis and tell my story, I have utilised a number of contextual strategies. These were:

A poem written by my son for me when he was told that he was terminally ill (lines from this poem begin each chapter). *For Mum*

A prologue that orientates the reader (Chapter 1). *For the reader*

An epilogue composed of a 'conversation' with my dog to complete each chapter. These are reflexive vignettes of thought (please refer to Section 4.4.7). *For El*

Italics are used as deliberate emotion points (throughout the thesis). *For me*

Photographs of significant faces in the journey have been included in the text. I have done this in part to invite the reader into my world; in part to put warm faces to the repercussions of the cold statistics of cancer; and in part to highlight the raw heart of the thesis: Fellow travellers who have been with me from the beginning. The inclusion

of these faces signifies their continuing presence, their importance and their relevance to my journey (throughout the thesis). *For them*

This thesis provided a range of possible strategies to implement when personally challenged by the diversity of experience located within the PhD journey and beyond. Figure 1.4 depicts a photo of my son on his 18th birthday. This was the last photo that I took of him before he was diagnosed with cancer four months later. *He lived, he died, he matters.*

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Rory on his 18th birthday

The following section (1.7) provides a justification for the research.

Justification for the research

This research is justified based on the following criteria:

Knowledge is not a static phenomenon to be presented quantifiably as truth. “Stories put meaning in motion” (Bochner, 2016, n.p.), and here is my story for the reader to consume as they find appropriate and applicable to their situation. Most importantly, it illustrates the fact that Rory lived and he mattered. *My child is not just a number in a graph.*

My thesis is an opportunity to give one voice to the unspeakable statistics surrounding the death of children from cancer. In doing so, I provide context around the impact of those statistics and the work that is embedded in living with grief. The cultural trope surrounding the brave warrior who survived against all odds is not wanted here. *We did not 'kick cancer's butt'. In fact, cancer consumed us and then effortlessly moved on to another victim.*

I want to tell the story of journeying with grief over an extended time frame. "Tell your tale, because it reinforces that your loss matters" (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005, p. 63). My boy, my child, is dead and I am still grieving him – and that is important. It continues to colour my life and the lives of those who love him and me. As a "seasoned griever" (Zastrow, 2020, n.p.) for over a decade, I have found that my loss is inclined to be diminished by others, including researchers, as time passes. Generally, research interest tends to concentrate on grievers who have lost a loved one within a six-year time frame (Alburquerque et al., 2019; Infurna & Luthar, 2017; MacArthur et al., 2022; Pelacho-Rios & Bernabe-Valero, 2022; Wijngaards-de Meij et al., 2007).

Candidates undertake a doctorate in a multiplicity of personal situations. This is just one story that provides faces behind one set of circumstances. This research interrogates doctorateness and its application to grief work. Definitions of doctorateness differ considerably (please see Section 2.4.1). This may be due to the complexity of the concept itself. My thesis offers an additional working definition from the perspective of a candidate with my personal history and context.

My story is offered to the community at large as an example of individual agency and purposeful living after a traumatic event. "The idea of purposeful living applies to every human. Each human experiences his/her life in a unique manner and multiple

truths are a by-product of this" (Mulligan, 2018, p. 87). *This has happened; it may have happened to you. Here's what I did. I hope it helps.*

This thesis provides a relational and contextual voice that can be added to the (at times) overwhelming environment of death studies. As is the trend in the early 21st century, avenues for discussion around the topic of grief are provided on social media. Websites such as Facebook: Bereaved Mothers (facebook.com/safehaven.angel), Grieving Mothers (facebook.com/GrievingMothers), Living After Child Loss (facebook.com/groups/livingafterchildloss); and Twitter: Dying Matters (twitter.com/DyingMatters), Grief Speaks (twitter.com/griefspeaks?lang=en), The Grief Toolbox (twitter.com/TheGriefToolbox) are set up by bereaved parents and psychologists in order to reach out to others in a similar situation. These lone voices and the resultant conversations are fleeting, of limited scope and audience, and mostly unsatisfactory for the participant in consequence. The discourse is unidirectional and impotent. Comments are laden with angst (justifiably) and consist, on the whole, of hurt, disoriented, bereaved women attempting to support or reach out to other like-minded women. These sites provide an instant, very short-term mechanism of nonprofessional assistance in the vulnerable and fickle world of social media. Added to this, most of these women are newly bereaved and looking for a sympathetic and understanding forum to express their initial grief, shock and anger. This form of communication can be beneficial to some, but equally can be played out in a very unhealthy environment, the discourse laden with unknown ulterior motives from other voices on the site (Coldewey, 2018; Doffman, 2020; Marín-Cortés, 2021).

What of those women who do not turn to social media but grieve their loss in privacy? What of the long-term grievers, those who have

carried the burden of their loss for over a decade? How can bereaved mothers transcend the initial devastation of the loss and create grief work that can be purposeful and sustaining? *This is the story of my ongoing grief journey.*

The following section (1.8) examines the scope of the research and presents the three research questions.

Scope of the research and the research questions

This thesis provides an insight into the background of one person's PhD journey from inception to graduation and beyond. Gabriel et al. (2015) defined emotional labour as, "…the management of emotions as part of the work role …" (p. 2). In the context of my thesis, this labouring process has been further defined as 'dark labour' – that is, the extreme emotional management processes that necessitated my grief work. I believe that it is only through individual public disclosures that others may gain a range of insights into the level of dark labour that is required to navigate and eventually to succeed in an intense, protracted and challenging period of one's life. This is particularly pertinent with taboo topics such as the death of a child. From an initial position of trauma, the weaving of thoughts and emotions with the everyday praxis of doctoral study provides the reader with a real-world analysis of what it can mean to 'do a doctorate'. This forms the basis of the overriding research question posed within the pages of my thesis:

How does doctoral study function as a form of grief work?

From this fundamental question, three more specific research questions are interrogated:

1. How has the mobilisation of my grief work affected my experience of my bereaved Self?

How has the mobilisation of my grief work affected my experience of doctoral processes?

How has the mobilisation of my grieving Self and my doctorateness facilitated my personal transformation?

These questions have been developed from my reflexive research, and provide an insight into the elements of my enacted grief work refracted through the multiple lenses of my lived experience of embarking on a PhD as an avenue for intellectual and personal growth. Please refer to the Glossary of terms (Table 1.1) for definitions of key terminology used throughout this thesis entitled: *Thesis writing as grief work: An autoethnographic journey into identifying and positioning the bereaved Self in doctoral scholarship*.

The following section (1.9) provides the reader with a personal note that presents acknowledgement of privilege and embedded philosophical assumptions within the research.

A personal note

In the writing of this thesis, I acknowledge the following:

- The privilege of my birth into a middle class, white Australian family. Both socioeconomic status and geographical location generate a degree of opportunity that would perhaps not be available under other birth circumstances.
- The privilege of being born into a family where education was valued, and family life was relatively stable.
- The privilege of living in a peaceful country that has a sophisticated health care system.
- The privilege of living in a country where higher education is accessible, doctoral studies are funded by the government and freedom of thought is not politically condemned.
- The privilege of having the emotional support of loved ones and also being the recipient of random acts of kindness and solidarity from others.

Embedded in my research project are key philosophical assumptions around Self and identity. Firstly, I believe that the Self is elemental and unique to the individual. A few years ago, I learned of another local woman, my age, my socioeconomic status, whose son (in his early 20s) had been murdered while holidaying overseas a year or so before Rory

died. This woman also had a daughter a few years younger than her son. I was told that this woman medicated her grief heavily and that she barely left her house. To this day, she continues with this behaviour. I make no judgement on this mother. We all enact our grief in a manner in which we see fit. I wonder, though, at the impetus for my desperation to enact my grief work in the field of higher education. Why did I choose not to follow a passive, medicated, alternative path – a path that to me was a very valid choice, and one that I could have quite easily trodden? Two women with parallel lives but such differing concepts of Self. Was it my longing for 'things to return to normal' before Rory died? I am 100% positive that this woman had the same longing, so I doubt that it could have been that. I am perplexed by this conundrum and can only assume that, when Self asks fundamental questions to do with self-management and self-regulation, I am driven to answer these questions very differently from her. That, to me, is the essence of how to approach grief work. It is highly individualised. The pattern of life is broken. New questions need to be asked and answered.

Secondly, I see identity in metaphorical terms as the shoes that we select to wear after Self has asked and negotiated answers to questions regarding our future: immediate (as in the next moment); intermediate (as in the next few hours); and future (as in tomorrow and all of those that follow). Early in the grief process, there is but one overwhelming identity: I wore the shoes of the bereaved parent and all that that entailed. In the beginning, they were huge, clumsy, heavy, painful things. I knew that no one else would want to walk in these shoes, but I also knew that these were the shoes that had to be worn at that time. Then, as I got used to wearing them, they moulded to my step and I was able to walk a little more easily. Eventually, I would return to the wardrobe and momentarily slip on another pair of shoes, such as doctoral student, just to try them on for size. These concepts are further interrogated throughout the thesis chapters.

Therefore, from this perspective, in this thesis capital 'S' Self refers to the inner voice that conducts the management of identities. Lower case 's' self refers to management techniques employed by Self to regulate the formation of dynamic identities that are influenced by such psychological resources as self-belief, self-control, self-efficacy, and so forth. This theory is more fully discussed in Section 3.2.

The following section (1.10) provides a summary of the information within Chapter 1.

Chapter summary

This qualitative, interpretive, autoethnographic study has undertaken an analysis of the lived experiences and individualised truths around bereaved parenthood. I have argued that the grief of parental bereavement, particularly that of the mother, is misunderstood and generalised. Furthermore, the avenues for the expression of such intimate grieving are limited culturally and, at times, by the griever herself. In the creation of this story, I provide an additional insight into and viewpoint about the complexities involved in navigating a world of misunderstood and isolating behaviour.

The following two chapters, Literature Review and Conceptual Framework, are divided into two separate and distinct thesis categories. The literature review constitutes an examination of the processes that are indicative of the umbrella terms of grief, doctorateness and grief work. The conceptual framework constitutes an individualised application of the processes of doctorateness and the grieving Self.

The following section (1.11) presents the end of Chapter 1, the Epilogue.

Epilogue

Grief

I was out taking El for her end of evening walk the other night. El's my aged Labrador. As she gets on in years, she doesn't always like going out at night. It's too cold, she's too tired, the grass is too wet/too dry or she

pretends she doesn't hear me when I call her (although she comes running from the far end of the house when she hears food drop in the kitchen). Anyway, this particular night she had to be cajoled to go outside. She was being a bit stubborn.

My son Rory died from an osteosarcoma when he was 19. I know stubbornness. I am well acquainted with its various guises. Sometimes I think of my grief as a stubborn toddler forever wanting to hang off my clothing or hold my hand or demand to be carried. A capricious creature that can't be pleased. The moment you pay it attention it wants MORE. It doesn't care where you are or what you're doing; it just wants.

My grief is always a little girl. Not a boy. I suppose that's because I recognise my grief as a part of myself. I own my grief; it's mine alone. She is always a black and shadowy outline. Like a filled-in stick figure. She's not like the purity of a black night sky or like the mysterious inky darkness of black ocean depths but a deep-space, voidish black that is more resonant and more powerful and more sinister than the other blacks. Her form is a living, pulsating thing. A black hole that sucks in energy and consumes strength.

She is heavy, my grief girl. Sometimes too heavy. I try to carry her around with me but it's too much and I just have to stay in bed for a while longer. I am empty but I am full of grief. I am as light as a feather but I am weighed down by emotion. Too weak and too sick at heart to do anything about it. I am lost, mired in sorrow for what is now and what could have been. Those are the bad days.

"What are you still doing in bed?" My dog doesn't like it when I lie crying. "Get up; the day is waiting for us."

She looks beseechingly at me over the rim of the bed [Figure 1.5], but I can't summon the energy to pat her, let alone climb out from under the bedclothes. "I'm sorry," I tell her. "I can't do today."

"Well, you must," she says. "I need to be fed."

Really? I think to myself. Really? Can't she HEAR me? Why doesn't she UNDERSTAND? Then: why doesn't the UNIVERSE understand? WHY is the sun still shining? WHY can't time stop for everyone else like it has for me? Am I to be FOREVER STUCK in that moment when I held my son's hand as he took his last breath?

No, time won't stop just for me. The dog needs to be fed and human food needs to be bought and life must go on. My son has gone but life must go on. So I drag myself out of bed, even though that is the absolute last thing I want to do. My grief girl taunts me and holds on to me and tries to pull me back. She's thrashing around and wants me to stay imprisoned in bed. El is waiting by the door, wagging her tail in encouragement. I pick up my grief girl and drag her into my arms. She's screaming and flailing around and wants the world to stop and attend to her.

I haul myself outside and I feed my dog. I think about buying groceries but that is as far as I get. I have achieved one thing today. Perhaps I have room for more. Perhaps not. But I have fed my dog and she is grateful. Her waggy tail is a testament to love and a full tummy.

"Any more food?" she asks hopefully. "No," I reply. I stroke her cold nose and silky soft body and smile at her gluttony. The physical contact rejuvenates a piece of my soul and gives me a modicum of strength to calm my grief. "Let's just sit in the sun for a while and then we will go and think about writing our thesis."

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Beseeching El

LITERATURE REVIEW

Would you look to the sky every night to see me smiling down at you with the moon? Would you look to the stars for comfort knowing that I'm home? Would you see my heart in the sunrise?

Overview of the chapter

The first chapter introduced the research problem framing my thesis, which is entitled:

Thesis writing as grief work: An autoethnographic journey into identifying and positioning the bereaved Self in doctoral scholarship

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the literature around which my thesis has been developed. I situate the research within the contextual landscape of journeying through doctoral research alongside the intentional enactment of grief work. The topics addressed in this chapter locate each of the research questions within the parameters of this context.

A search of the extant literature revealed that research into the constituents of doctorateness is a burgeoning field (please refer to Section 2.3). However, research into the grief work enacted by individuals (particularly women) after the death of their child is practically non-existent. Even less well-developed is scholarship around the various guises of grief work and learnings around proven strategies for success elicited by long-term grievers such as me. For the purposes of this thesis, long-term grievers or "seasoned grievers" (Zastrow, 2020, n.p.) are taken to be those who are 10 or more years into their bereavement journey. Thus, "My literature review did not direct my journey[;] rather I have sought out a body of literature that resonates with the position I have reached through deep personal reflection" (Midgley, 2008, p. 184).

Against this backdrop, I use this chapter to identify and interrogate the literature relevant to the research questions posed in Chapter 1, and

to ascertain the gap within the area of bereavement study. I situate my circumstances within the relevant sociocultural and historical contexts of doctorateness and grief work, and I relate these contexts to the construction of my study's conceptual framework, which is presented in Chapter 3.

Section 2.2 positions grief in an historical context and explores major theories to do with grief and bereavement in general. These theories demonstrate the clinical (mis)understandings of the act of grieving and provide context for my circumstance.

Section 2.3 probes the historically contested perceptions of the work of grief and the challenges for an individual conducting this work within academic, social, personal and professional environments. I further explore the role of a companion animal and anthropomorphism as a sense-making exercise within my grief work. The significance of the perception of the identity of the traumatised Self is a key contextual consideration.

Section 2.4 examines thematic discussions that relate to the concept of doctorateness and the elements that constitute successful doctoral progression. Concepts based on the author's synthesis of literature around doctorateness are highlighted under a categorisation schema that I have termed the "6 Ps". The dynamic notion of doctoral identity is also examined as a substantial element of the thesis' contextual framework.

Section 2.5 provides the conclusion to the chapter and summarises the main points. It includes a synthesis of the concepts of doctorateness, grief and bereavement, and grief work as exemplified in the extant literature.

Section 2.6 contains an Epilogue vignette. This reflexive tool offers the reader an insight into the importance of establishing a common lexicon around grief. Figure 2.1 presents a flow chart of the progression of Chapter 2.

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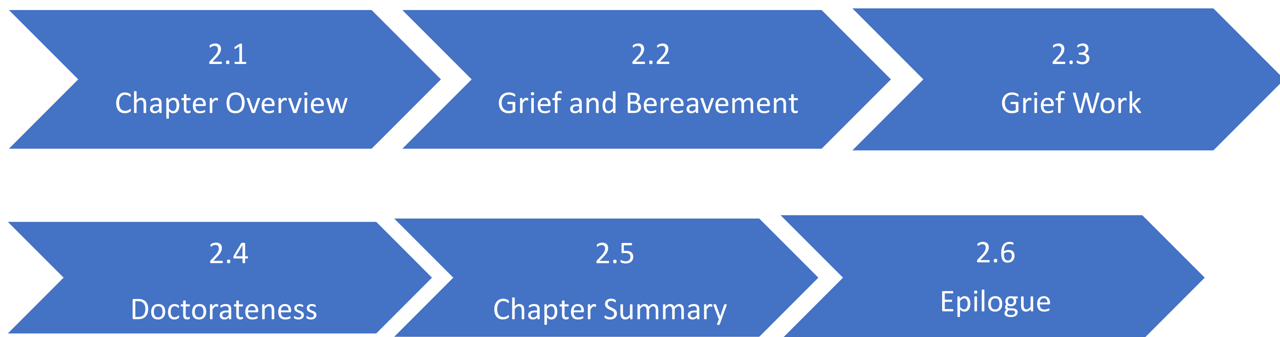
Flowchart of the progression of Chapter 2



Grief and bereavement

This section explores the generalised notions of grief and bereavement. The following questions are interrogated: What is grief and what does it mean to grieve? What are the linkages between grief and bereavement? Historically, how has grief scholarship been enacted? What are the different types of grief? What is the lexicon that is employed when we speak about grief? How does grief manifest itself? How does culture influence grief and grievers? Table 2.1 synthesises the sub categories of this section of the literature review presented in this chapter.

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A synthesis of grief

	CONCEPTS	SECTION	REFERENCES
G	**G**oing back in time	2.3.2	Aires (1974) Kubler-Ross (1969) Mulligan (2022) Neimeyer et al. (2014) San Filippo (2006)
R	**R**elating grief theories of the past century	2.3.3	Alapack (2010) Bowlby (1969) Kübler-Ross (1969) Kübler-Ross & Kessler (2014) Middleton et al. (1993) Silverman & Klass (1996) Stroebe et al. (1996) Tonkin (2009)
I	**I**nitiating a grief lexicon	2.3.4	Alapack (2010) Boss & Carnes (2012) Dominguez (2018) Gray et al. (2004) Matthews (2019) Neimeyer et al. (2014) Paxton (2018) Rogalla (2018)
E	**E**xamining manifestations of grief	2.3.5	Paturel (2020) Raymond (2020)
F	**F**oregrounding culturality	2.3.6	Alapack (2010) Baltussen (2012) Lewis (1961) Neimeyer et al. (2014) Paxton (2018) Silverman & Klass (1996)

Definition

It is important to note that this thesis does not include the topic of death from cancer per se; rather it examines the after effects of the loss of a child. "Death is our constant companion, always on the horizon of life, and a pervasive variable in all that we do or refrain from doing" (Alapack, 2010, p. xi). Death is the cause; Self is the casualty; grief is the result. Often the terms "grief" and "bereavement" are used

interchangeably. This is misleading. “Grief is a natural response to a loss” (Beyond Blue, 2021, n.p.). The concept of loss is an unwieldy one in which the continuum of loss may begin at the losing of a set of car keys (inconvenience causing stress and momentary grief) to the other extreme end of the continuum: the loss of a child (life altering causing permanent, chronic grief). Bereavement refers to the state of having experienced the loss of a loved one (Dryden-Edwards, 2020).

A brief history of grieving

As long as humanity has existed, grief has been a constant companion. Over the millennia, this has evidenced itself in various manifestations ranging from overt and public memorialisation such as that enacted by the Ancients on cave walls, to hidden and private outpourings of grief, as was popularised in the 20th century. Figure 2.2 provides the reader with a very brief history of the enactment of grief in the Western (European) World from the Ancients to the 21st century. This timeline is an important addition to the literature review as it grounds the subsequent subsections, and it provides a potted history of attitudes towards grief through the ages to demonstrate how grief manifestation has changed.

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Timeline of grief

Timeline of grieving in the Western World	
Ancient	"In some of these societies, memories of the dead were kept alive through memorials, rituals, and stories" (San Filippo, 2006, n.p.)
12th century BC	Friends and family were often present at the death (Aires, 1974)
6th century	Mourners wore black (Aires, 1974)
14th century	Royal mourners wore white (Aires, 1974)
18th – 19th century	Extravagant mourning rituals (Neimeyer et. al., 2014) Memorialising the dead was important (Aires, 1974)
20th century	Avoidance and suppression of emotion (Neimeyer et al., 2014)
21st century	Private and time constrained acceptance and enactment of emotion

Popular grief theories: Relating theory to the past century

The 20th century ushered in a number of theories proposing best practice for individuals experiencing grief after a loved one dies. Popular theories have changed over time, and the 21st century has introduced a more liberal view of the grieving process as opposed to earlier notions of pathologising the griever. I have compiled a number of popular grief theories that have had currency in our Western culture from the early 20th century to the present day.

1917 Trauerarbeit (Freud)

Freud's (1917) theory focused on differentiating between "normal grief" (mourning) and "pathological grief" (melancholia). "When the work of mourning is completed the ego then becomes free and uninhibited again" (p. 245). He maintained that the severing of the bond between the deceased and the bereaved would be beneficial as this would release the bereaved to form new relationships, thus offering an enrichment of self (Middleton, et al., 1993, p. 44).

1969 Attachment Theory (Bowlby)

Bowlby (1969) argued that emotional attachments develop early in life (particularly between children and parents). These attachments offer protection and survival for the individual. Bowlby conceptualised grief as a type of separation anxiety. Thus, all ties should be severed with the deceased in order for the bereaved to "adjust and recover" (Silverman & Klass, 1996, p. 33).

1969 Stages of Grief (Kübler-Ross)

On Death and Dying, written by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1969), was offered as an understanding of the non-linear stages that a terminally ill person may experience. These stages were denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. In the years since its publication, the book has been adopted by the medical fraternity as the primer for grief, not only for those who are dying but also for the living bereaved. The stages were presented as a sequential fait accompli for those who are grieving the loss of a loved one. This was not the intent of the book (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014).

1983 Hallucination Theory (Raphael)

United States psychiatrist Beverley Raphael (1983) hypothesised that any interaction by the griever with the deceased could be classified as an hallucination. She believed that this fantasy held by the bereaved blocked any "meaningful attachment in the present" (Stroebe et al., 1996, p. 33).

1990 Family Systems Theory (Bowen)

Murray Bowen's (1990) theory suggested that, after a family bereavement, the living members should sever all ties with the deceased. In this way, the family remains a stable, systematic, emotional unit. If these ties are not broken by an individual, the whole family will suffer. Therefore, the griever should withdraw from the family until such time as

she or he has recovered and is able to resume normal functioning within the family system (Silverman & Klass, 1996, p. 13).

1991 Four Tasks of Mourning (Worden)

Worden (1991) hypothesised a task-oriented concept of grieving. He believed that this was more flexible than a series of phases that had to be successively experienced. These tasks could be reviewed and revisited over time. Grievers were commissioned with,

1) accepting the reality of the loss;
2) processing the pain of the loss;
3) adjusting to the new environment in which they find themselves;
4) finding a sustainable manner in which to mourn while moving "forward with life" (Worden, 1991, p. 94).

1995 The Dual Process Model of Coping with Grief and Bereavement (Stroebe & Schut)

Theorised by Margaret Stroebe and Henk Schut (1995), the Dual Process Model recognised a nonlinear approach to grieving where the bereaved person oscillates between intense yearning for the deceased and coping with the everyday demands of life. This theory constitutes a more practical and intuitive approach to grief work and is more fully discussed in Section 6.6.

1996 Continuing Bonds Theory (Klass et al.)

Klass et al. (1996) hypothesised a complete reversal of the traditional theories that advocated total disengagement from the deceased. They proposed a new way of thinking about the relationship between the deceased and their living loved ones that included a sustained relationship between the two parties. The Continuing Bonds Theory focused on maintaining ties between the dead and the living. Rather than a discontinuation, there should be an acknowledgement of a "construction and reconstruction" (Silverman & Klass, 1996, p. 18) of relational ties.

2009 Growing Around Grief (Tonkin)

New Zealand counsellor Lois Tonkin (2009) suggested a completely new way of looking at a bereaved person's adjustment to grief. She theorised a diagrammatic model where a dark circle representing grief was surrounded by a larger white circle representing the life that the bereaved continued to live. The grief was just as large but, over time, the outer, encompassing circle grew, thereby relieving the griever of the expectation that her or his grief should disappear completely over time.

2014 Meaning-Centred Grief Model (Dezelic & Ghanoum)

Based on Victor Frankl's concept of logotherapy, this theory embraces an open-ended, lifelong engagement with grief. This model focuses on the griever finding purpose that enables them to live with meaning after the death of a loved one. Memories are deemed as having an important role in grieving as they assist the bereaved to restore emotional stability and re-activate a reason to live after loss.

As demonstrated in the discussion above, over the last century popular grief theories have morphed from complete disengagement from the deceased person to maintaining ties and acceptance of the ensuing grief.

Some common terminology used in grief and bereavement

The area of grief and bereavement has been the recipient of much debate over appropriate lexicon for the lived experiences of grievers. To that end, I have compiled the following common terminology that exists in our contemporary world of grief.

'Anticipatory grief' is a symptom of grieving the loss of loved ones before they are actually deceased (Rogalla, 2018). This most commonly occurs when there is a terminal prognosis for an illness such as cancer.

'Brooding' is a term that may be applied to a grieving individual. Alapack (2010) acknowledged that brooding may be a sign of repetitive, obsessive reflection and may obstruct the emotional progress of the

griever. “Brooding is dark thinking and heavy feeling, sinister and menacing” (p. 287).

‘Complicated grief’ is a “chronic” and “pathological” (Gray et al., 2004, p. 67) form of grief. It occurs when the bereaved cannot come to terms with the loss of their loved one and they are fully focused on the deceased for an extended period of time. This can be particularly applicable to bereaved parents. Matthews (2019) wrote that, “losing a child is typically perceived as the worst thing that can happen to a parent, so the grieving process for parents is often long and intense” (p. 3).

‘Disenfranchised grief’ occurs when the griever is shunned socially and the loss is not socially recognised. This may occur when the griever does not fit into the normative cultural rules. “When grieving deviates from these norms and expectations, an individual may encounter disapproval or loss of validation and support from others; disenfranchised grief is a potential consequence of this deviation” (Dominguez, 2018, n.p.). Parents may encounter this when their grief extends the boundary of a designated, ‘normal’ cultural timeframe.

‘Longing’ is nominally a harmless term. However, it can be deceptive in its usage. On the one hand, it may refer to an innocuous desire for chocolate. Alternatively, it can refer to the emotional desperation of a mother to see her deceased child again. When utilised in the context of bereavement, it can have sinister overtones, such as described by Alapack (2010, p. 308):

> Western ideas typically explain away longing as nothing but an inner state, a self-indulgent act of fantasy. Push the thought ever so slightly and longing is reduced to one’s private illusions. Give one more little shove and it is disparaged as pathological.

‘Mourning’ is essentially an explicit experience of grief and is constructed of symbolic acts. It is historically and culturally situated. “Mourning is not primarily an interior process, but rather one that is intricately social” (Neimeyer et al., 2014, p. 485).

‘Moving on’ and ‘seeking closure’ are popular counselling terms. Paxton (2018) cited Berns (2011) when he argued that, “Closure is in particular a fraud on the bereaved, as it preaches that there will – there should – come a moment when the grief is over” (p. 127). He warned that grievers who endeavour to follow this line of thought may curtail important common grief rituals such as attending the gravesite. “Lack of performative guidelines” (p. 112) when referencing the deceased also occurs when adhering to this philosophy. Similarly, Boss and Carnes (2012) referred to closure as a “myth” (p. 456). They asserted that lack of closure allows the griever the freedom to memorialise the deceased while continuing to build new relationships in life.

‘Regret’ is thought to signify a failure of some description and is characterised by its impotence. This essentially a backward-facing emotion references an action that can never be played out in the future. “Regret resembles jealousy, humiliation, revenge and self-pity because it percolates inward” (Alapack, 2010, p. 270).

The physical effects of grief

Paturel (2020) discussed that scientists are now proposing that traumatic loss affects the brain’s circuitry. They assert that sophisticated pathways utilised in the brain prior to the trauma are rewired to access only the most primitive functions – that is, fight, flight or freeze – in order to tolerate the prodigious amount of thought activity that occurs after the traumatic event. The areas of the brain most affected by trauma and grief are the prefrontal (controls thinking) and anterior cingulate (controls emotions) cortexes, and the amygdala (controls fear response). All of this neural activity results in intensified anxiety and loss of cognition. Paturel suggested that this is prolonged when the bereaved suffers complicated grief.

Raymond (2020) claimed that grief can affect the body in the following ways: digestive issues; lack of concentration; reduction in energy; increased exposure to illness; increased sensory sensitivity; unexplained pain; sleep disruption; weight fluctuation; and lack of body

temperature regulation. Schor (2022) stated that the "risk of fatal MI [myocardial infarction] increased by 36% for bereaved parents" (n.p.) owing to the resultant physical and mental effects of grief.

Section 2.2.6 discusses the uncertainty and fear by which this seemingly aberrant behaviour plays out in our Western society. It examines the societal and cultural impact that the death of a child has on grieving parents.

The culturality of grief

The pathologising of grief has become an embedded phenomenon in our Western medical system. Alapack (2010) referred to the medicalisation of the sadness felt by grievers: "Western culture sedates the bereaved, as if pills were some gifts of the gods" (p. 13). He posed the question, "Does our culture give grief its due?" (p. 176). This question raised the issue of grief recognition and the lack of meaning that we ascribe to the manifestations of bereavement. Medication dulls the senses and postpones indefinitely dealing with the cause. Long-term meaning-making is sacrificed for this "short term success" (Alapack, 2010, p. 177).

Baltussen (2012) referred to "the culturally embedded dynamics of human responses to death" (n.p.). Further, Neimeyer et al. (2014) posited that "simply stated, society polices bereavement. It controls and instructs the bereaved how to think, feel and behave" (p. 493). Grievers must conform to the cultural norm lest they are labelled as deviant and dysfunctional. Paxton (2018) acknowledged that culture influences the manner in which grief is spoken about and acted upon in different communities. This then influences the grieving process and the attitudes towards the deceased.

The omnipresent myth of stoicism was addressed by Silverman and Klass (1996) when they referred to attitudes towards grief manifestations by onlookers. The authors claimed that this notion of picking "themselves up by their bootstraps" (p. 15) and rejecting emotion disregards the loving association between the deceased and the bereaved. This emotional separateness is harmful and necessitates "a mechanistic view

of human functioning that fails to appreciate the importance of connection and relationship" (p. 15).

Lack of a meaningful lexicon with which to console the griever (and others) is an issue in our Western culture. Platitudes such as "(S)he's happy now" or "(S)he's at peace" are popular comments in lieu of silence. After the death of his wife, C. S. Lewis (1961) spoke of the awkwardness of other people when they met him. "I am a death's head" (p. 10). Neimeyer et al. (2014) referenced the cultural expectations by the nonbereaved of behavioural rules associated with the public acknowledgement of grief and death.

Conclusion

Section 2.2 has examined the dual concepts of grief and bereavement. Section 2.2.1 presented the reader with a generalised discussion about grief and bereavement, and it provided definitions upon which the section is based. Section 2.2.2 presented a brief history of enactments of grief in the Western (European) World. Section 2.2.3 interrogated popular theories around the treatment of grief and the bereaved. Section 2.2.4 imparted a range of common lexicon to which grievers are exposed. Section 2.2.5 exposed the physical effects of grief on the body. Section 2.2.6 represented the manner in which grief is a construction of culture in the Western World. Section 2.2 is represented in Figure 2.3.

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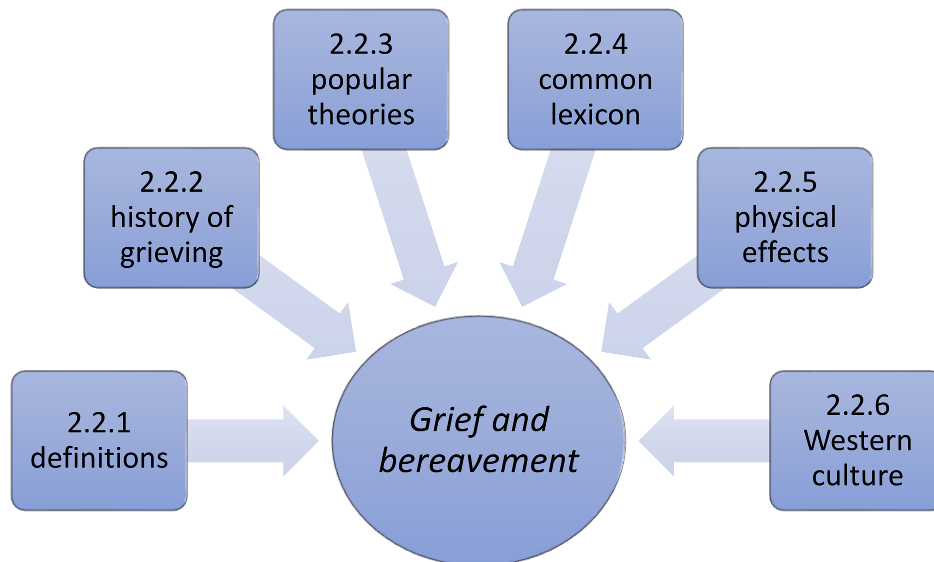
Subsections of Section 2.2 Grief and bereavement



Grief work

Grief work is a nebulous construct that has evolved and transformed over time. Theorists such as Freud (1917) and Bowlby (1969) (please see Section 2.3.4) espoused detachment hypothesises where the bereaved was advised to sever bonds with the deceased. In the 21st century, the juxtapositional idea of continuing the bond with the deceased (please see Section 2.3.4) has been presented. Pivotal to all of these theories is the correlation between bereavement, disease and death. As evidenced historically, protection for the bereaved from these by-products of chronic episodes of grief has been a major topic of research (Stroebe et al., 2005).

Another commonality among grief work theorists is that the work of grief is time consuming and that the process cannot rushed (Cacciatore et al., 2021; Clark, 2004; Schor, 2022). This section examines the concept of grief work as it applies to my particular set of circumstances.

Definition

Grief work was described by Rosenblatt (1996) as "a cognitive process of coming to terms with a loss through confronting the loss and

restructuring thoughts about the deceased, the events of the loss, and the world as it is without the deceased" (p. 23). Stroebe and Schut (1999) hypothesised grief work as "the notion that one has to confront the experience of bereavement to come to terms with loss and avoid detrimental health consequences" (p. 199).

Grievers may be forced to socially maintain an illusionary façade of calm in their enactment of grief work. This may be particularly so in the workplace, lest others are threatened by the presence of one who has suffered a bereavement. Bento (1994) referred to this aspect of grief work as involving "emotional, psychological, and most importantly, spiritual labour" (p. 35). The author further hypothesised grief work as a transformative experience whereby grievers begin as "'homo sapiens' and subsequently change into 'homo poetica': man, the meaning maker" (p. 35).

Even though the idea of grief work has been highlighted by psychiatrists for decades and has been viewed as pivotal to bereavement 'recovery', definitions are transient, opaque and insubstantial in that there is no contemporary acknowledgement of a definitive definition. Indeed, the concept of grief work has been challenged in that the process of attempting to work through grief may be disadvantageous and even harmful for grievers (Stroebe & Schut, 1999, p. 200).

Theories

The idea of grief as work was first proposed by Freud in 1917 (Hamilton, 2016). His theory of Trauerarbeit translated as "work of mourning" or "process of grieving" (en.bab.la/dictionary). Freud believed in the three task criteria of grief work: sever ties with the deceased; adapt to life without the deceased; and establish new relationships. Adherence to this formulaic grief work supposedly allowed the griever to return to normality as soon as possible. Ironically, Freud did not apply this process to himself after his daughter died (Hall, 2011).

Grief work was also theorised in 1944 by Erich Lindemann, who reinforced the proposal of three tasks involved in overcoming the

"syndrome" of grief (*The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 2006, n.p.). His theory stressed detachment from the deceased and the imperative of the establishment of new relationships, but he further theorised the importance of meaning-making in bereavement. Additionally, he sought to comprehend the common physical and psychological symptoms of grief. These include breathlessness and exhaustion as well as emotional reactions such as guilt and apparitions involving the deceased (Williams, 2017).

The 21st century has ushered in a new era of attitudes towards grief work. Stroebe et al. (2010) discussed a new model of integration for the adaptation process of bereavement. This included linking the hypotheses presented in Attachment Theory and Continuing Bonds Theory (please see Section 2.2.3). Importantly, within the proposal of this new theory was a threefold caveat. Firstly, grief is multifaceted and highly individualised. Therefore, in the presentation of any new model of grief and bereavement, there resides a "risk of over-simplification" (p. 266) in assuming that one model may be best practice for all grievers. Secondly, the authors stressed that the application of the processes of grief work will shift for the bereaved over time. Thirdly, they highlighted that the contextual features of the bereavement (such as suicide, murder or prolonged illness) are an important facet of the manner in which grief work is conducted by the bereaved (p. 266).

To this end, Stroebe and Schut (1999) proposed a nonlinear "Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement" (p. 211) as an enactment of grief work. One of the major elements of this model focused on the particular anxieties associated with bereavement. They referred to "loss-and-restoration-oriented coping" (p. 212) whereby they hypothesised that grievers do not spend all of their time trying to survive the loss of their loved one. The authors referred to a "waxing and waning" (p. 213) of grief-related emotion, rather than a phase-based experience. This phenomenon was labelled as "loss-orientation" (p. 213). "Restoration-orientation" (pp. 213-214) focused on the reintegration of the bereaved

into society to reduce the effects of loneliness and solitude. Stroebe and Schut (1999) claimed that this "secondary consequence of loss" (p. 214) was an additional source of stress for the bereaved. Originally formulated around spousal loss, the authors claimed that this model is equally suitable to other types of bereavement. They further claimed that grief is gendered and that each sex reacts differently to the stressors of bereavement.

Building on Worden's 1991 task model of grief work, Stroebe and Schut (1999) refined and renegotiated the criteria that Worden emphasised as the necessities for grief work. In doing so, the authors recognised the beneficial experiences of intermittently rejecting and/or ignoring grief and the effects that the passage of time has on the griever. Table 2.2 compares the two models.

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Worden's (1991) Grief Work Tasks reworked by Stroebe & Schut (1999, p. 215)

TASK	WORDEN (1991)	STROEBE & SCHUT (1999)
1.	"Accept the reality of the loss."	Accept the reality and the altered world in which the deceased is no longer physically present.
2.	"Experience the pain of grief."	Experience the pain but also take some respite from it.
3.	"Adjust to the environment in which the deceased is missing."	Adjust to and reinterpret the new environment.
4.	"Relocate the deceased emotionally and move on with life."	Establish new "roles, identities and relationships".

Section 2.4.3 builds on the discussion of grief work by acknowledging its individualised nature. A discussion of the benefits of a companion animal that co-constructs the narrative of grief work is timely and pertinent to my personal enactment of grief work.

Anthropomorphism

Anthropomorphism has an extended historical significance. It was first applied by the ancient Greek philosopher Xenophanes, who lived during the late 6th and early 5th centuries BCE (Lesher, 2021; Nauert, 2019). As a concept, anthropomorphism defies a neatly categorised definition. However, broadly speaking, scholars agree that it occurs when humans attribute humanlike behaviours to inanimate or animate nonhuman creatures. Viviers (2014) described the phenomenon of anthropomorphism as "an irresistible taboo" and claimed that its "roots lie in the human capacity for self-reflection and self-knowledge" (n.p.). For the purpose of this thesis, anthropomorphism is defined as "the situated direct perception of animal minds (or other human properties) in the behaviour or bodily expression of animals, by someone who is engaged in a specific process of activity" (Servais, 2018, n.p.).

This definition was chosen as highly applicable in my context. The interwoven concepts of self-reflection and self-knowledge as an enacted process were significant elements in my grief work quest in that it was intentional, reflexive and process driven.

The therapeutic role that companion animals play in a person's wellbeing is thoroughly documented and firmly established in the scholarly literature. A healthy relationship with a pet is beneficial for reducing stress (Amiot et al., 2016). The companionship of pets provides physical and emotional comfort to an individual (Brooks et al., 2018). Hoy-Gerlach et al. (2020) discussed the social connections that pets provide to their owners when attempting to re-establish their community ties. It is through the positive mental effect that pets provide that individuals may reach their human potential and make productive contributions to society (Powell et al., 2019). Pet ownership can impact positively on one's personal, professional and social identity (Trigg et al., 2016).

To this end, it is important for me to include the role of my thesis writing companion animal, my Labrador dog named El. The connections that people feel to their companion animals have a powerful influence on their understanding of the world and on their mechanisms of communication (Brooks et al., 2018). The anthropomorphised relationship that an owner shares with his/her pet is grounded in a particular type of interaction. This modality consists of an "imaginary dialogue" (Airenti, 2018, n.p.) established between (in my case) my dog and myself. El not only aided in my emotional sense of meaning-making, but also her presence allowed me the clarity and courage to communicate in both oral and written forms.

Respected and honoured through time, dogs have become firm fixtures in the contemporary lives of human beings and, as such, they continue to play a pivotal role in the health and wellbeing of their owners. This is particularly so in times of stress and, in my case, the death of my son. Each chapter of this thesis includes an Epilogue. This consists of a

reflexive tool in the form of a vignette that echoed my mental state as I journeyed through the dual challenges of doctorateness and grief work. These vignettes add to the narrative of my storytelling (Humphries, 2005) and are fundamental to my research design, which focused on meaning-making. “My narratives and reflections serve understanding” (Alapack, 2010, p. xii). My Labrador, El, acted as a wellspring into which I poured my thoughts about the new alien and unwelcome life that was thrust upon me.

It is no wonder that dogs hold a special place in the hearts and minds of people in all cultures as they have become revered as companion animals for humanity. The exact time in history signifying the initial domestication of dogs is a contentious issue among historians. Botigué et al. (2017) placed the date some time within the Palaeolithic era. The actual time in history when dogs became pets and when their role was firmly established in family life is less controversial. Two centuries ago in Europe, dogs were being featured in paintings of domestic life (Walsh, 2009). Table 2.3 synthesises an approximate progression of the dog from wild creature of coexistence with humans to adored family pet.

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Approximate timeline of the domestication of dogs

YEARS AGO	HISTORICAL AND/OR GEOGRAPHICAL POSITIONING	REFERENCE
100,000	Middle Palaeolithic Europe	Dogs/wolves co-existed in settlements and co-evolved with humans (Newsome, 2018).
20,000-40,000	Upper Palaeolithic Europe	The oldest remains of a domestic dog were found (Botigué et al., 2017).
15,000	Upper Palaeolithic China	Dogs were used as guardians and herders and for transporting goods. They were regarded as "liminal beings who bridged the span between the realms of the living and the dead" (Mark, 2019, n.p.).
8,000	Neolithic Europe	Dogs were utilised as animal herders and provided protection for the village (Walsh, 2009).
5,020-2,352	Neolithic Ancient Egypt	Evidence was found of embalmed and mummified dogs as sacred guides in the afterlife. "When a pet dog died, the owners shaved off their eyebrows, smeared mud in their hair, and mourned aloud for days" (Walsh, 2009, p. 463).
3,210-1,544	Neolithic Ancient Greece Bronze Age Ancient Rome	Dogs were commonly kept as hunters, herders, guardians and pets (Walsh, 2009).
1,000	Peru	Chiribaya dogs were kept as the guardians of llamas (Walsh, 2009). Dogs were buried with blankets and food.
200	Europe	Pet dogs became important actors in everyday family life (Walsh, 2009).

A North American legend from the Ojibwa people relates the story of the immense chasm that separated all animals from humans caused by

the Great Spirit. At the last minute, the dog leapt across the divide to be reunited and rejoined physically and emotionally with the humans. Thus was the strength of the dog's bond with humans (Pearce, 2012, p. 71).

The relevance of positive interaction with the personal environment was discussed by Servais, who claimed that "to make sense of something is to be able to share a story with it, and this is how people make their environment … *relevant*" (2018, n.p., emphasis in original). Through my interactions with El, I share the story of my grief in an effort to comes to terms with it, and also as an avenue for my grief to be articulated to a safe and non-judgemental audience. This mirrored Servais' concept of relevance to a deeply personal extent.

Theories

The notion of the "pet owning self" was introduced by Trigg et al. (2016, p. 26). The authors hypothesised three self-psychology perspectives to do with anthropomorphism: self-extension (p. 27); symbolic interactionism (p. 30); and self-object relations (p. 31).

The self-extension theory posits that animals become symbolic extensions of one's own character. This includes self-image and self-identity. Companion animals operate as what anthropologists term "fictive kin" (Trigg et al., 2016, p. 27), and essentially compose an extension of the self. Fictive relationships (ties with those who are not blood relations) are based on mutuality and trust, and are emotionally significant (Spruill et al., 2014).

Symbolic interactionism considers companion animals as representational symbols in our lives. "Our experiences, knowledge, and relationships are inevitably mediated through our symbols" (Wood, 1992, p. 17). This theory posits that companion animals become central to a person's sense of self as they are afforded a heightened sense of meaning in the person's life. In this way, individuals are connected to the society in which they live through their interactions with community (Redmond, 2015).

Initially a theory postulated on the needs of infants, the theory of self-object relations in this context posits the notion of the animal as a significant relational other and a necessary element of an individual's self-identity. The core concept around this theory is that the object is outside the self and is highly dependable, and as such serves as "a provider of self-cohesion, self-esteem, calmness, soothing, and acceptance" (Brown, 2015, p. 329).

Anthropomorphism is a "basic human attitude that begins in infants and persists throughout life", according to Airenti (2012, n.p.), who further theorised that anthropomorphic interactions occur in particularised circumstances such as in times of uncertainty and ambiguity. In other words, these dialogical interactions help individuals to make sense of their tenuous physical/mental environments. Interactions are relational and, as such, our attachment to our pets becomes a trigger point for anthropomorphism.

It can be contended that anthropomorphism is a particular case in point of the theory of the mind (Servais, 2018, n.p.), in that individuals interpret behaviour and emotions intentionally as a reflection of their mental state at the time. Individuals may construct their own mental state as well as that of others. Similarly, the author addressed affordance theory (n.p.) as it relates to anthropomorphism. This theory is applied to the sensitivities that a human may have towards a companion animal, and that may accordingly afford or generate an opportunity to utilise the animal in a personally beneficial action. Servais (2018) further reflected on the use of imagination theory (n.p.) when applied to anthropomorphism. The creative, imaginative human psyche allows the perception of the animal as a relational tool for relevant connectivity when applied to an individual's circumstances.

Anthropomorphism provides an ontological framework that enables the actor to connect with the nature of being. This is particularly relevant in times of traumatic lived experience. The existence of my companion animal, El, as a reflexive tool helped me to understand better the

connections between the philosophy of existence and the nature of bereavement.

Conclusion

The term 'grief work' has developed as a contemporary process that refocuses the griever on continuing her or his own life in the present and the future, while continuing a relationship with the deceased that does not involve the separation of all emotional connection. Grief work can manifest in multiple schema but at the heart of the process lay the tenets of acceptance of the altered reality, an experiential approach to management of the pain, environmental adjustment and the seeking of new identities. Grief work involves reflexivity and the stratagem adopted is completely up to the discretion of the griever. Subsections of Section 2.4 are diagrammatically represented in Figure 2.4.

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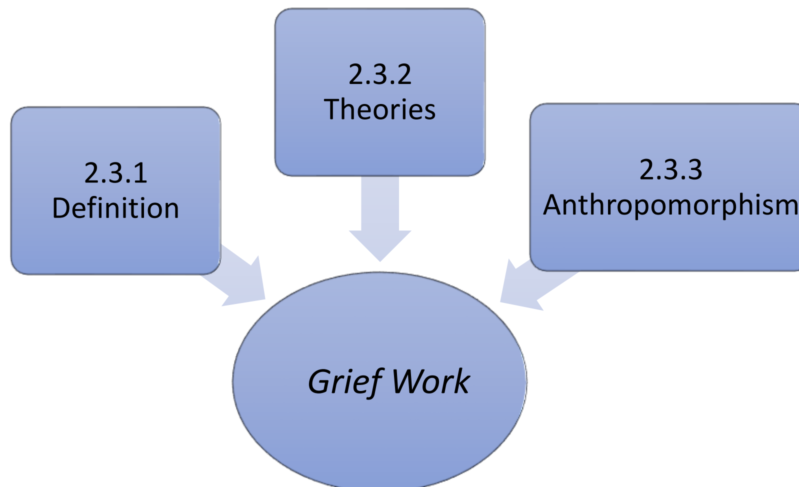
Subsections of Section 2.4 Grief work



Doctorateness

This section explores the contested notion of doctorateness. It is one that has a burgeoning range of academic opinions. What are the elements that constitute doctorateness? When does a candidate really know that she or he has attained the essential characteristics of doctorateness? When does the supervisory team acknowledge that the

candidate has 'come of age' in a doctoral sense? When does the institution deem it appropriate to reward doctoral effort? If doctorateness is achieved, what does this mean for the candidate?

Definition

Yazdani and Shokooh (2018) claimed that the term 'doctorateness' was "an immature[,] unclarified concept" (p. 31). This is demonstrated by the vast array of academics who have theorised the problematic nature of defining doctorateness and who have proposed their own set of criteria to be applied when one searches for an all-encompassing definition. Among these scholars, Denicolo and Park (2013) suggested personal qualities such as passion, dedication and adaptability. Frayling et al. (1997) considered affirmative and rigorous peer review as confirmation of doctorateness. Park (2007) asserted that the original contribution to knowledge is the most important element of doctorateness. Poole (2015) believed that doctorateness should be measured by the number of academic publications attributed to the candidate. Thorne (1999) prized the attributes of independence and autonomy. Trafford and Lesham (2011) likened doctorateness to a jigsaw puzzle that is complete only when all the pieces have been connected (p. 34). Wellington (2013) posited that searching for a definitive definition of doctorateness was akin to a search for the Holy Grail.

The elusiveness of ascribing one set definition to doctorateness indicates that it is a multifaceted and complex construct. Yazdini and Shokooh (2018) utilised the terms "prerequisite" (p. 39), "purpose" (p. 36), "process" (p. 36) and "product" (p. 37) in their synthesis of conceptual areas to do with doctorateness. Itzkovich and Dolev (2021) applied four pillars of lifelong learning. I propose that the idea of lifelong learning is a key dimension in the debate around the conceptualisation of doctorateness, particularly in my situation as an older doctoral candidate. In my context as one who pursues learning in an ongoing and voluntary basis well into my 60s, lifelong learning plays a vital role in my self-efficacy.

Building on the work of Yazdini and Shokooh (2018) and Itzkovich and Dolev (2021), I have broken this section into six categories within which I argue that the true multi-dimensional nature of doctorateness resides. To that end, I have collected and collated the extant literature around the elements of 6 Ps. These are: prerequisite needs; purpose and intent; process frameworks; the final product; people involved in the journey; and, finally, the pillars of lifelong learning. Table 2.4 presents the schema of the associated concepts located within these categorical elements.

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The 6 Ps

ELEMENTS	SECTION	CONCEPTS	REFERENCES
PREREQUISITES (before beginning a doctorate)	2.4.2	criteria	Yazdani & Shokooh (2018, p. 38)
		philosophical values	Jones & Somekh (2011, pp. 131-132)
		emotional intelligence	Nelson et al. (2017, p. 197)
		intellectual curiosity	von Strumm et al. (2011, p. 576)
PURPOSE (initial phase of the doctorate)	2.4.3	becoming	James (2011) Miles et al. (2019)
		belonging	Mantai (2017)
		direction/intent	Yazdani & Shokooh (2018)
PROCESS (throughout the doctorate)	2.4.4	skill acquisition	Mowbray & Halse (2010) Yazdani & Shokooh (2018)
		agentic constructs	Hauss (2020)
		environment	Castro et al. (2011)
		intellectual virtues	Candiotto (2017) Mowbray & Halse (2010)
PRODUCT (culmination of the doctorate)	2.4.5	output	Poole (2014) Trafford & Leshem (2011) Wellington (2013) Yazdani & Shokooh (2018)
PEOPLE (throughout the doctorate as well as post doctorate)	2.4.6	social/academic relationships	Alexander et al. (2014) Batty et al. (2020) Woolston (2019)
		supervisory practice	Chamberlain (2016)
PILLARS of LIFELONG LEARNING (throughout the doctorate as well as post-doctorate)	2.4.7	definition	Delors (1996) Drewery et al. (2020) Nyi Nyi Pe (2012) UNESCO (2015)
		older learners	Cronhom (2012) Mulligan (2020)

Prerequisites

Before beginning a study that is as academically immense and as emotionally laden as a doctorate, Yazdani et al. (2018) suggested that candidates should consider three prerequisite criteria based around their conceptual field of study (p. 39). Firstly, candidates should have fulfilled the requirements of "prior study" (p. 39). This establishes their scholarly credentials and acts as a taster for the academic precision that is a signature of the doctoral process. Secondly, "personal commitment" (p. 39) is essential in order to endure the physical and mental rigours of doctoral life. This commitment will be tested over time as career, family and doctorate form a triumvirate of three powerful forces that at times can sit uneasily together and can create tension in a person's work/life balance. Thirdly, candidates should have an "aptitude" (p. 39) for the doctorate. They should be academically competent with a full range of skills mastery.

I argue that doctorateness should be a valued-laden philosophical concept. "Begin with the end in mind" (Covey, 1989, as cited by Harrison, 2009, p. 2). Preconceived epistemological, ontological and axiological assumptions that one brings to a research project influence the manner in which the project progresses and has currency regarding the values that the researcher places on stakeholder input. Researcher subjectivity and bias (both conscious and unconscious) influence the observational choices and the manner in which data are analysed and recorded (Jones & Somekh, 2011) during the process.

Nelson et al. (2017) hypothesised that emotional intelligence was a necessity for effective doctoral study. The authors cited five skill areas that are essential for competence (p. 197). These have to do with relational and communicative competence, self-awareness, leadership capabilities, organisational capability and the ability to problem solve.

von Strumm et al. (2011) referred to "epistemic curiosity" (p. 576), which described an attribute of individuals who intentionally seek out "opportunities for intellectual engagement, acquiring facts and

knowledge" (p. 576). They posited that these individuals are driven in their quest for knowledge. This is the essence of intellectual curiosity.

Purpose

Miles et al. (2019) stated that a high proportion of the literature focusing on doctoral scholarship highlights "competencies, policies and processes" (n.p.), and that the transformational notion of 'becoming' has been relatively understated scholastically. They maintained that doctoral studies are similarly about "an affective journey of transformation and becoming" (n.p.) as the candidate journeys through a period of intellectual development and discovery. James (2011) suggested that "pedagogy is fundamentally about *becoming*" (p. 36; emphasis in original). As a consequence, the production of writing stimulates a transformation within the student.

The concept of 'becoming' a researcher was discussed by Mantai (2017), who referred to the establishment of an academic identity forged through interaction with a diverse group of others primarily inside the academic community. "Becoming a researcher does not happen in isolation" (p. 636). Thus, the identity of doctorateness is reliant on networking and interacting within an academic group into which one is welcomed and can belong.

Process

Mowbray and Halse (2010) discussed the epistemological idiosyncrasies of the definitive list of skills that students should develop during the doctoral process to prepare them for postdoctoral employment. Indeed, the exact definition of the word 'skills' in this context is ambiguous (p. 654). The authors did, however, offer the following broad description: "the acquisition or development of specific capacities, abilities, aptitudes or competencies" (p. 655). Yazdani and Shokooh (2018, p. 39) summarised the doctorate as a lengthy and formalised process whereby the student intentionally and purposefully acquires the skills involved in academic management, pedagogical advancement, individual development and academic credibility from peers.

Agentic practices undertaken by doctoral students add to their feelings of doctorateness, as do the perceptions of others. Active participation within the academic community, such as participation in conferences/seminars/symposia/workshops, adds to a sense of doctorateness not just from the student but from the students' peers as well. The sharing of knowledge through presentation and discussion not only refines the student's skill acquisition but also builds up a respect for the student within the academic community. This concept of the generation of research impact was discussed by Hauss (2020). The development of emotional resilience can lead to feelings of ownership and empowerment, particularly in challenging circumstances where the student's supervisory team has been altered. Wisker and Robinson (2012) suggested that this new tension could be beneficial in that it could lead to academic resilience and new learning opportunities that promote the student's personal and intellectual growth.

Castro et al. (2011) explored the notion of academic resilience and defined it as "the ability to achieve in an educational setting despite exposure to risk factors" (p. 53). They believed that a salutogenic environment is important for nurturing doctorateness. This is one in which a student's strengths are fostered through positive mental health practices conducted by the institution. The authors posited that such an environment is characterised by: promotion of the reputation of the student; provision of skill training in conflict resolution; modelling of good academic practice; and development of the student's self-esteem.

The notion of intellectual virtues – that is, practical, theoretical, scientific, productive and intuitive knowledges (Mowbray & Halse, 2010) – is significant when theorising the doctoral process. Candiotto (2017) explored the controversial role of epistemic emotions when applied as a motivating force for the act of "knowing" (p. 8). The author claimed that emotions are managed within decision-making, and that intellectual virtues provide a stabilising influence in the operation of our emotions.

Candiotto (2017) further linked intellectual virtues with the acts of tenacity and academic integrity.

Product

Trafford and Leshem (2011) cited doctorateness as a "synergy" (p. 38) among the 12 elements of "contribution to knowledge, conceptual conclusions, research questions answered, cogent argument, engagement with theory, clear/precise presentation, applicable data collection, appropriate methodology, explicit research design, conceptual framework, explicit research questions and stated gap in knowledge" (p. 38).

Wellington (2013) hypothesised that the most valuable element of doctorateness resides at the level of knowledge contribution. He also referred to the impact that it may have on the academic field in which it is located (p. 1503).

Poole (2014) highlighted the different conceptualisations of doctorateness globally. He drew the reader's attention to examiners who indulge in academic "gate-keeping" versus those who prefer "academic community building" (p. 13). The author also hypothesised that, if doctorateness were to be viewed as a personal attribute of the candidate, this aspect of output should be considered in the examination of that output.

Yazdani and Shokooh (2018) listed product outcome as a demonstration of doctorateness. This is a dissertation or thesis that displays mastery of research, doctoral aptitude, disciplinary knowledge and higher order thinking skills. Furthermore, the dissertation should be an "original contribution, conceptualised, well-written, voluminous, peer-examined and publishable" (p. 39). Added to this were the personal attributes of independence, career progression, doctoral identity and mental dexterity (pp. 37-38).

Thus, the extant literature targeting the product of doctorateness reflects an output exemplar that focuses on expanding and enhancing the knowledge economy, as well as the personal transformation and intellectual growth of the candidate.

People

The effective performance and successful enactment of doctorateness can hinge on the networks of people with whom the candidate frequently interacts. An international survey published in 2019 claimed that, out of a pool of 6320 responses from doctoral candidates, 36% sought help for mental illness that was caused by their study (Woolston, 2019). Therefore, an equally important component that influences doctorateness could be the impact of the people surrounding the doctoral candidate. This could refer to the quality of support from both the academic community such as supervisors (advisers)/peers and others unrelated to academia such as family/friends.

Effective supervisory and peer relationships, and sound mental health were cited by Batty et al. (2020) as three of the four predictors of doctoral completion (the other being financial stability) (n.p.). The authors further hypothesised that non-academic relationships are foundational to the promotion of healthy doctoral behaviour.

Supervisors (advisers) play a pivotal role in the life of a doctoral researcher and act as academic role models. Chamberlain (2016) stated that "effective supervision can significantly influence the quality of the PhD and its success or failure" (n.p.). The author listed three key functions that supervisors may enact during their time with the students. These are the functions of teacher (skills), mentor (emotional health) and patron (career) (n.p.).

Peer relationships are an important aspect of the doctoral experience. Strong connections with like-minded people within the academic fraternity help students to develop professional identity and provide opportunities for informal learning. Mulligan (2023) discussed the benefits of finding an academic "tribe" of scholarly others. The key element included a sense of belonging where the student is welcomed and accepted. "Connection is a prerequisite for survival, physically and emotionally" (Rutledge, 2011, n.p.).

The role of significant others was addressed by Alexander et al. (2014), who stated that "communities of family and friends serve to reinforce a sense of belonging to an academic community" (p. 166). The authors posit that this relationship presents an important juxtaposition between the academic identity and the social identity where one reinforces the other in their separate enactments. Mantai (2017) stated that "people are a valuable source of validation" (p. 644).

In the world of mental health, isolation plays a major role in the functioning of academic capacity. Sibai et al. (2019) stated that over 60% of PhD candidates in the United Kingdom reported feeling isolated. Further, approximately half of the students surveyed suggested that loneliness was one of the foremost challenges to their mental health. Geographical distance, cultural boundaries, technological challenges and globalisation were all contributing factors to isolation.

Thus, it can be argued that doctorateness is sustained and enhanced through the maintenance of supportive relationships both inside and outside the academic community.

Pillars of lifelong learning

The term 'lifelong learning' has a long and contentious history, with the generalisation of the notion rendering it with "such a wide set of parameters as virtually to empty it of all meaning" (Aspin & Chapman, 2000, p. 2). Dewey's (1966) emphasis on education as "a constant reorganising or reconstructing of experience" (p. 76) is one of the earliest framings of the concept. It was first examined by UNESCO in 1960 (Nyi Nyi Pe, 2012). The "four pillars of learning" terminology was coined by Delors (1996). More recently, it was utilised in the 2015 UNESCO publication in a report that aimed to provide a roadmap for worldwide educative principles and policies. The four pillars consisted of "learning to do, learning to be, learning to know, learning to live together" (UNESCO, 2015, p. 83). Drewery et. al (2020) defined lifelong learning concisely as "the process of embracing learning throughout life" (n.p.).

Lifelong learning can occur both informally (Mulligan, 2020) and in formalised settings such as a university. Cronholm (2021) referred to the latter as structurally positioned and as "intentional from the learner's perspective" (p. 38). Yamashita et al. (2015) cited by Cronholm (2021) hypothesised that, even though "mature adults" are more resistant to learning, they may adopt this practice when influenced by "personal or environmental factors" (p. 41).

Conclusion

Section 2.4 presented the construct of doctorateness and provided the reader with a 6P framework upon which the literature search was based.

Building on the literature review above, and in order to bring clarity to the term 'doctorateness' as it applies in the specific context of this thesis, I have divided the concept into the two subcategories of Personal Qualities and Academic Qualities as presented in Table 2.5. Whilst I acknowledge differences between my point of view and the opposing counterpoints of other sources of literature around age, culture and gender, from my perspective, in my particular situation, I have defined doctorateness as having the following characteristics:

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Qualities of doctorateness

DOCTORATENESS	
PERSONAL QUALITIES	commitment emotional intelligence intellectual curiosity
ACADEMIC QUALITIES	intentionality competency resilience open-mindedness willingness
Doctorateness is ageless, cultureless and genderless.	

The personal qualities of commitment, emotional intelligence and intellectual curiosity are the cornerstone elements of doctorateness. From these foundational characteristics, the academic qualities of intentionality, competency, resilience, open-mindedness and willingness are developed. Commitment signals intentionality of thought and direction. Emotional intelligence fosters a desire for competency and a strategically resilient mindset. Intellectual curiosity affords an open-mindedness to embrace new ideas and a willingness to be mentored and guided by supervisors. The enactment of the doctorate is (given appropriate personal circumstances) ageless, cultureless and genderless. This signifies its enactment as one of a human endeavour that has unlimited possibilities for those whose personal circumstance supports further study.

This table links with the 6P framework in that the personal qualities reflect aspects of character that have to be embedded in the doctoral student as prerequisite traits. From there, the academic qualities are engaged by the successful student, who then sees the doctorate to completion and beyond. Subsections of Section 2.4 are diagrammatically represented in Figure 2.5.

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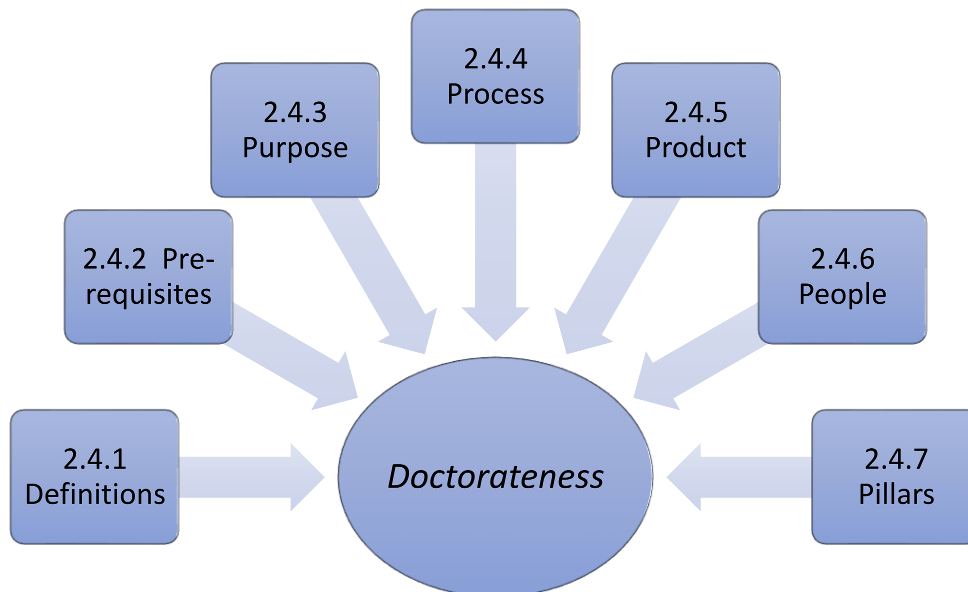
Subsections of Section 2.4 Doctorateness



Chapter summary

Chapter 2 began with an overview and presented the topics that have been covered within the parameters of the literature review (Section 2.1). Section 2.2 introduced an array of concepts related to grief and bereavement. Some popular theories and terminology around grief were offered, as well as a discussion of the physical effects and the culturality of grief. Section 2.3 depicted some major theories of grief work and discussed the concept of anthropomorphism as integral to my individualised enactment of grief work. The final part of the literature review, Section 2.4 offered a discussion around the concept of doctorateness. From this discussion, I presented my own broad notion of the elements of doctorateness (Table 2.5).

The following section (2.6) presents the end of Chapter 2: the Epilogue.

Epilogue

Grief literacy

Ok. I'm just going to come out and say it: WE NEED A SHARED UNDERSTANDING.

In a world where there's English literacy, maths literacy, health literacy, financial literacy, visual literacy, blah blah blah … We need grief literacy.

I'm chatting to my dog, El. She's an aged Golden Labrador and has a lot of wisdom. You don't get to 84 human years and learn nothing about life. I value her insights on this matter. We have had many conversations about grief in the long years since my son died from cancer.

Mostly, she follows my train of thought, although her mind wanders if I get up to make a cup of tea. I am then entering the most hallowed room in the kingdom of the house: the kitchen. For her, forbidden as she is to enter (lest there be an accident), this is a site of nirvana, and she looks longingly at the action contained therein.

But, mostly, she follows my train of thought.

I had a text once about six months after Rory died. That was when I was coming to the tail end of my inability to talk to anyone other than certain people in my family. How does a mother speak the unspeakable?

The text read, "I don't know what to say". It came out of the blue. In retrospect, I had not heard from that person since the funeral, but in those days I wasn't cognisant of so many things going on around me.

Now – with distance – I think, what a shame. For me and for that person. Perhaps that person wanted to reach out, and that was all they could come up with.

Not "I'm so sorry for your loss", which I always found to be a grossly inadequate sentiment anyway. I mean, where do you take it? "Yeah, so am I. But Rory would have to be the sorriest of all."

We need a shared understanding and a shared discourse around grief and what it is to be the griever and the 'other'. Something more personal. Something that means something more. Something substantial that builds a connection. Something that doesn't dwell …

If we build a shared lexicon, we need to speak in terms of positives as well as negatives. Something that represents the multifaceted nature of the grieving process that goes beyond the tired discourse of anger, denial, acceptance, etc. The latter term I reject completely as I will never accept the death of my son. But there are also moments of happiness – or at least contentedness and peace as the journey grows ever longer.

I say this as I look at my old dog, who has grown weary of my ramblings and has decided to chew on a tennis ball resurrected from her bedding [Figure 2.6]. She is at peace with herself and I am fortunate indeed that she demonstrates what it is to be mindful and to live in the moment.

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Mindful El

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As the grass grows would you lay with me and feel me hugging you tight?
Would you sing with me as the birds do?

Overview of the chapter

Chapter 1 provided the introduction to the thesis. Chapter 2 presented a review of the extant literature on grief and bereavement, grief work and doctorateness. Chapter 3 focuses on the concepts of Self and identities in the cultural context of a bereaved mother who became a doctoral candidate in an effort to perform one element of the multiplexity of grief work. In telling my story, I recognised that loss is layered. The physical presence of my son was no more, and the ripples of the resultant grief travelled ever outwards and spread throughout the dangerous and murky waters of my damaged psyche. Re-adjustment of Self was required, as was the reframing of my identities.

Self is capitalised in this context as it reflects the essence of me, the person. Just as I capitalise the individuality of my own name (as befits grammatical tenets), I capitalise Self as my unique identifier. It is an embodied element that enables, informs and motivates my behaviour. It is immanent in its contextuality and transcendent in its ability to distinguish me from others. Self underpins and influences my identities that accompany those of a griever and those of a doctoral student. In my argument, Self is a singular entity that manages multiple dynamic identities as my grief work progresses.

The foundations for this study's conceptual framework outlined in this chapter included grief work, doctorateness and personal transformation. The interplay of these three key elements constituted the journey of grief work and thesis writing that led to my eventual personal transformation. The initial steps taken from the circumstance of overwhelming trauma and emotional and physical instability ultimately led me on a journey to a more balanced life perspective. This journey from

the singularity and isolation of immense emotional (and at times physical) suffering to the nuanced and dynamic doctoral student (and, consequently, recipient of the doctoral award for PhD Thesis #1) was an arduous one.

Each of the sections in this chapter reflects the underlying assumptions that I have developed during my grief work journey. Section 3.2 introduces the nexus of what I contend to be a successful strategy when dealing with grief. Section 3.3 presents the basic human needs required to live a fulfilling and rewarding life. These needs underpin my notions of relationality (to my family both living and deceased), and my overriding desire to be a positive role model for my daughter. Section 3.4 explains reflexivity as it applies to my situation and highlights my crucial interpretation of my experiences in order to provide options for the future. Sections 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7 form a sense-making triptych that offers theoretical and practical depth to the conceptual framework that is elucidated in Section 3.8. Sections 3.9 and 3.10 constitute the conclusion of the chapter as a whole.

These sections chart the landscape of the philosophies that led me to this study's conceptual framework. Figure 3.1 depicts the progression of this chapter.

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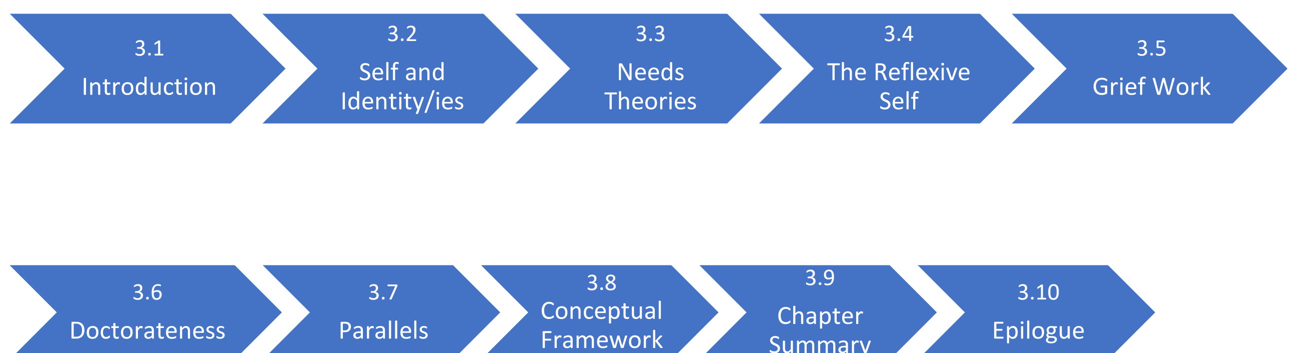
Flowchart of the progression of Chapter 3



Self and identity

The terms *Self* and *identity* feature prominently within my conceptualisation of grief work and doctorateness. "One cannot deal with a loss without recognising what is lost … [W]hat is lost is more than just a person[;] it is also a social role" (Silverman & Klass, 1996, p. 18; emphasis in original). While I am in agreement with the sentiment behind this statement, I would suggest that the plurality rather than the singularity of the term 'role' is more appropriate. In my context as a bereaved mother, more than just one social role (and its identifier, identity) was lost. *Who am I now? What am I now?* Liu and Yeo (2022) posited that this multiplexity involving contextuality and relationality foregrounds significant challenges to mental health.

My professional identity, which encompassed much more than a career equation, leaked into my social orientation when interacting with others: *Hello, nice to meet you and what do you do? Well, I used to be a teacher …* Similarly, my status as a mother equated to my identity as the mother of two living children: a teenage son as well as a teenage daughter. *And how many children do you have? Well, I have a son and a daughter, but my son is dead.* How does one articulate (to oneself and others) such a momentous shift in identities? Reflexivity and resilience are necessities for personal transformation.

A robust, resilient and flexible sense of Self is a requirement for successful life re-adjustment after a bereavement. Self is required to adjust the questions that she asks in order to position herself securely in this terrain of tension and disillusionment. This is demonstrated in Chapters 5 to 7 where the research questions are interrogated. Additionally, Chapter 4 (Research Design) considers data collection and modes of analysis. These chapters strengthen the underlying assertions that constitute the foundation of my conceptual framework.

Self

Historically, definitions of the notion of Self have been "bogged down in a conceptual quagmire as muddy as any in the social and

behavioral sciences" (Leary & Tangney, 2012, p. 3). However, some commonality has ensued in its usage. Leary and Tangney (2012) cited the following as generally held assumptions about Self:

- holistic: "Self as a total person" (p. 4)
- character trait driven: "Self as personality" (p. 4)
- cognisant: "Self as experiencing subject" (p. 5)
- perspective-focused: "Self as beliefs about oneself" (p. 5)
- agentic: "Self as executive agent" (p. 5).

An exploration of the scholarship around these commonalities revealed a range of attitudes and assumptions:

- The holistic Self: an "inner representation of themselves [as a person] and their world" (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 3).
- The character trait driven Self: "the dynamic psychological organization that coordinates experience and action" (McCrae & Costa, 1999, p. 142).
- The cognisant Self: "self as knower"; "the inner psychological entity that is the centre or the subject of a person's experience" (Leary & Tangney, 2012, p. 5).
- The perspective-focused Self: "the self is socially constituted" (Bandura, 2001, p. 15).
- The agentic Self: "The self is not a passive, indifferent, or unresponsive entity. Rather, the self is active, involved, responsive, intentionally engaging in volitional processes to change, alter, or modify its thoughts, feelings, responses, and behaviours" (Baumeister & Vohs, 2012, p. 180).

At its most basic, Self is a "shaper of behaviour in situations" (Oyserman et al., 2012, p. 70). Delving more deeply, Leary and Tangney (2012) hypothesised Self as "a set of psychological mechanisms or processes that allow organisms to think consciously about themselves", and, further, as "the ability to take oneself as the object of one's attention and thought" (p. 6). Self-evaluation is a tool utilised by Self as a protective mechanism that influences and encourages growth and

wellbeing (Mann et al., 2004). I argue the agentic mechanics of Self as a self-regulated nucleus that continually evaluates and addresses what I consider as the key emotional processes of self-awareness, self-belief, self-care, self-concept, self-control, self-discipline, self-esteem and self-image. Thus, Self is situated in the moment, and it is this core that determines how we present both to ourselves and/or to others at a particular point in time through multiple, dynamic identities.

Building on these definitions, I have conceptualised Self as the following:

A conscious, reflexive core that regulates and positions who I am as an individual and how this persona can be portrayed publicly as an identifier of emotion.

The foundational concept of this individualised definition recognises the validity of alternative theories to do with multiple selves. However, my conceptualisation of Self foregrounds my particular emotional processes.

I have elaborated upon my argument and framed this conceptualisation in Table 3.1.

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Self as evaluator and regulator

SELF AS EVALUATOR AND REGULATOR		
EMOTIONAL PROCESSES	**DEFINITION**	**MY PERSONALISED ELABORATION OF THE CONCEPTS**
Self-awareness	The challenge of managing emotions, behaviours and actions (adapted from Palaganas et al., 2017, p. 427).	You can't stay paralysed by grief like this. This is not how you want to live your life. A thesis will give you purpose.
Self-belief	The efficacious thoughts that promote action (adapted from Beshwate, 2021, n.p.).	You can make your way through this grief. Do this. Your supervisors believe that you can do a thesis. Believe in yourself.
Self-care	"Self-care is a proactive, holistic, and personalised approach to the promotion of health and wellbeing through a variety of strategies, in both personal and professional settings" (Mills et al., 2018, p. 1).	You have been crying a lot. You are exhausted. Don't forget to drink your water. Why don't you have some now? You have been writing for over an hour. It's time to take a break. Can you go to that meeting today? Are you well enough?
Self-concept	"The sum of an individual's beliefs and knowledge about his/her personal attributes and qualities" (Mann et al., 2004, p. 357).	You are smart and you know yourself well. You are competent. You have prior knowledge of struggle.
Self-control	"The set of skills, capacities and behaviours" (Gillebaart, 2018, n.p.) that regulate our behaviour.	Stop those thoughts – they are harmful. Think about something else. Go and work on your thesis.
Self-discipline	"People's intentional plans to improve or better themselves" (Baumeister & Vohs, 2012, p. 182).	How are you going to work constructively on your grief? Time to work on your thesis for an hour.
Self-esteem	"People's feelings about and actions in their relationships	You are respected in your professional, academic and social communities.

SELF AS EVALUATOR AND REGULATOR		
EMOTIONAL PROCESSES	**DEFINITION**	**MY PERSONALISED ELABORATION OF THE CONCEPTS**
	with other people" (MacDonald & Leary, 2012, p. 364).	
Self-image	A personal perspective determining the positioning of oneself into personal, professional and academic environments (adapted from Bailey, 2003).	You are a well-educated, middle class, financially stable, white female. You have privilege. Use it to benefit yourself and others.

It is important that these different conceptualisations and applications of Self are acknowledged within this thesis as these were the foundations upon which my journey of personal transformation was based. Each of these emotional processes contributes to the stability of the essential Self. They are the foundations upon which the framework of Self, as a unique identifier of personality, is built. They constitute the capricious humanness of the individual.

It was necessary to have a self-awareness of imagined future identities in order to begin the journey. This emotional process encourages/forces the first step. The challenge is in the asking and the answering. *This is your life situation at the moment. Are you comfortable with what's going on? If not, what are you going to do about changing it?*

Nested within the umbrella term of self-belief sits self-efficacy and self-confidence. I chose to use the term self-belief as, in my experience, it can thrive for grievers only if others around you believe in your abilities as well. In a landscape of trauma and uncertainty, belief in myself was a tenuous first step. *Well, you've studied successfully before … How are you going to manage your doctorate?* But I needed help to put on the shoes of a doctoral candidate, and this came primarily from my supervisors and also the peers with whom I shared the triumphs and challenges along the

way. Belief that I could learn to live with my grief also sprang from my knowledge that Rory knew me so well: *"Mum likes a project."*

Self-care was second nature to me. I knew what I had to do. As a carer (to varying degrees) for my son for 19 years, I had always chosen to keep myself as fit as I could be both physically and mentally. Also, I looked upon good health as one of my primary nurturing roles as a mother to model the benefits of a healthy lifestyle for my children. *What are you going to do to help yourself? Grieving is hard work. Prepare yourself mentally and maintain your physical stamina.*

Self-concept dwelt within my imagined future. *Where do you see yourself in five years' time?* My self-concept was based on my past and present lived experience and treated as an investment in my future.

It is my contention that one does not progress emotionally without the mental process of self-control. *Do you really need the drugs given to you by your doctor?* This involves the will to ignore certain seductive paths along the journey *(take the drugs; stay on them; they will dull your grief)*, in favour of negotiation of an alternative and more realistic (for me) and applicable path *(take the drugs but use them as an intermittent tool; do not stay on them permanently if at all possible; they will dull your mind; you have things to do)*.

Self-discipline is the physical manifestation of self-control. Living with grief requires an immense amount of willpower and psychic energy to translate thought into action. *What do you need to do now? Go for a walk with the dog; get out of the house. Do not sit in his room.* Studying requires certain phased strategic psychic negotiation to enable doctoral production. *Set the timer for 15 minutes, half an hour, 45 minutes, one hour – whatever you can manage – write for that time, then have a break.*

Before my son became ill with cancer and died, I was content. My confidence and self-esteem were built on the personal success (and joy) of raising two children to adulthood and the professional success of my teaching career. Generally, I was both professionally and personally

respected by my peers and also within the wider community in which I lived. I had built up a network of long-term friends on whom I thought I could rely for social and emotional wellbeing when the children were no longer dependent upon me. However, as discussed in Chapter 5, the death of a child strips the veneer of respect and camaraderie from some of these relationships. Thus, self-esteem becomes an emotional weapon of self-destruction if one is not wary. It must be slowly re-cultivated in order to stabilise emotion. *How do you want to handle this? Okay, they said/did/didn't do this; it was hurtful and unexpected. Take a moment to process and to feel. Then decide on what, if any, action to take.*

If self-esteem is influenced by outside forces, self-image is a compendium of personal circumstances usually over which you have little, if any, control. An opportunity of birth, nothing more, determined the factors in my life that enabled me to enact white female privilege. I was born into a white-skinned, middle-class family. Comprehensive health care, education, travel and other life opportunities were afforded to me that may not have been available to others born into different circumstances. The image that I held of myself did not change throughout my journey. *What do you have that will enable you to succeed? You were privileged at birth, and you have worked hard to get to where you are in life. Grief will not change that aspect of your past. You now need to work hard again. Focus.*

Identities

Identities "mark the individual as a unique person" (Brygola, 2011, p. 64). Theorising a definitive definition of the notion of identity challenges academics globally. Various conceptualisations of identity have been produced in scholarly literature (Alexander et al., 2014; Archer, 2008; Barnacle & Mewburn, 2010; McAlpine, 2012). Oyserman et al. (2012) hypothesised identity as "the traits and characteristics, social relations, roles and social group memberships that define who one is" (p. 69). The authors posited that identities can fix on past, present and future orientations to "provide a meaning-making lens" for Self (p. 69).

This is the definition that is utilised as a basis upon which I build my own theory of identity.

Husband and wife scholars, Eric and Joan Erikson (1997), posited nine character-forming crisis stages that occur for humans during the life course. Each of these sequential stages was categorised by syntonic and dystonic quotients – that is, a positive statement to do with growth and hope versus a negative statement around challenge and confrontation. According to Erik Erikson, the two opposing statements (syntonic and dystonic) represented the challenges that individuals face at particular stages in life. Joan Erikson (1997) conceptualised each of her husband's original eight stages, which were formulated in 1982, to add a daunting ninth stage of very old age that she herself encountered when she turned 80 years of age. This stage presented her reflections and were proposed as a metaphor that she referred to as "the Woven Cycle of Life" (Gusky, 2012, n.p.). These are depicted in Figure 3.2.

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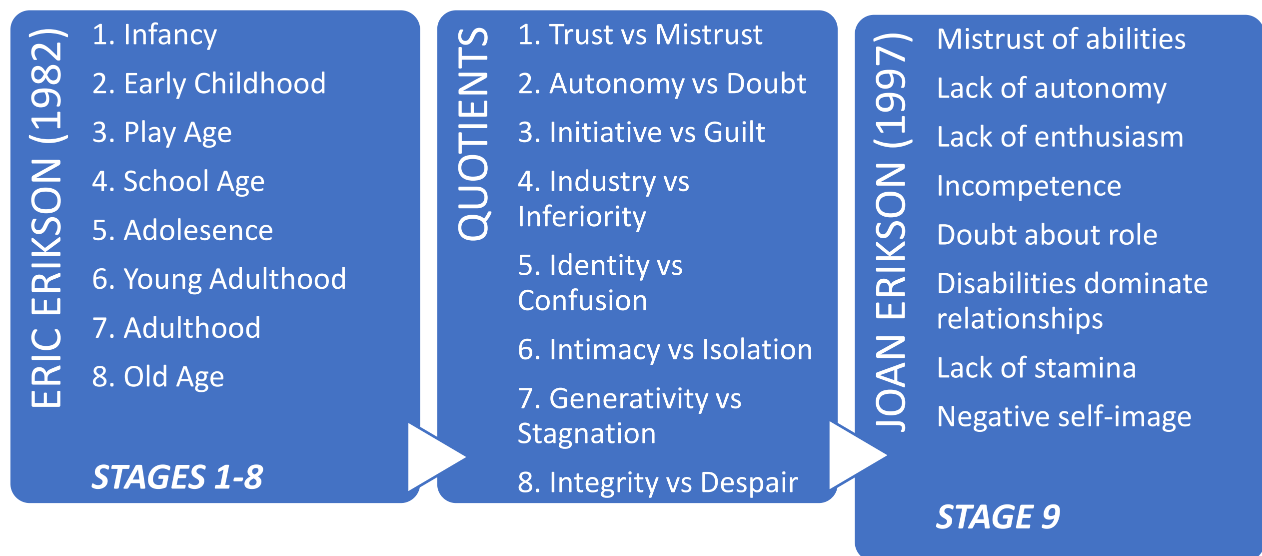
Erik and Joan Erikson's lifespan stages



Note. Adapted from Erikson & Erikson (1997, pp. 105-114).

Both Eriksons stressed the significance of the role of the social, intellectual and physical environment when discussing the concepts of human development and identity. Joan Erikson (1997) theorised that "individual and society are intricately woven, dynamically interrelated in continual change" (p. 114).

I have extrapolated the latter stage (Stage 7) of Generativity vs Stagnation (pp. 56-57) to encompass my theory of identity. This is the precursor to Stage 8, which Joan Erikson described as the "designation of uselessness" (p. 112). I was at Stage 7 prior to Rory's cancer diagnosis. I was in my mid-fifties, my children were on the cusp of adulthood and I was contemplating retirement from teaching. I began to evaluate the timing of such a momentous life change. *I had a lot to look forward to, and I had plans for my future.* This stage is significant in that it can usher in feelings of renewed purposefulness, or, alternatively, feelings of inadequacy/worthlessness. In other words, I was looking to future identity formations, guided by Self, once I was no longer a paid professional.

It is my contention that individuals are composed of multiple identities that are, metaphorically, the shoes that we don, as directed by Self, when the occasion demands. Through its focus on decisiveness and assertiveness, Self provides individual agency. An array of shoes from the past, the present and the future are stored in the recesses of our minds and are all accessible when we are directed by Self to do so.

When Rory became ill and died, I had to throw consciously some of my current and imagined identities away. "Identity is multifaceted and continuously shaped through our experiences" (Pretorious & Macaulay, 2021, n.p.). I was never again to wear the much-loved and close-fitting identity of a mother of two living teenagers. These were the shoes that I had worn for a long time and they had moulded to my feet perfectly. Similarly, as Rory is my only son, the identity of mother of an adult male was discarded. Rory had often spoken to me of his future personal ambitions: partnership, children. The longed-for shoes of grandmother of my son's children were also consigned to nothingness. As the environment of my motherhood dramatically changed, so too did my identities.

Self chooses (through reflexivity and self-regulation) which shoes are to be worn in that moment in time. Some shoes are old and treasured, such as that of a loving mother. Some are uncomfortably new and have to be moulded to the feet over time and wearing, such as that of a mother grieving her dead child. Some shoes are yet to be tried on for size and wearability, such as those of a first-time doctoral student.

I have defined identities as the following:

The private and public manifestations of a conscious and reflexive self.

Conclusion

Self is a reflexive and constantly dynamic regulator and evaluator of emotional processes. It asks questions of the psyche to determine action. Identity is the public and private expressions of the questioning Self. The existence of multiple identities reinforces time and place.

Needs theories

Need-based theories are an essential component of this thesis as they explain the motivation behind an individual's behaviour. When applied to my situation, Self interrogates circumstances to establish responsive behaviours that fit my needs at a certain time and place.

McClusky

Howard McClusky has been lauded for his contribution to advancing the scholarship of educational gerontology. Knowledge development around the topic of older learners has been invaluable for understanding the needs of older adults (Hiemstra, 1981). McClusky's "Margin Theory" (1974, p. 329) hypothesised a formula for older people that enabled them to respond to life's stressors by balancing life's tensions, which he referred to as "load", against "power", which were the resources upon which people may call to attain skill – for example, financial assistance. Scholars have utilised this theory in a variety of academic work. These include Biney (2021), who explored the implications of Margin Theory as it pertained to the life transitions of adults in higher education; Lv and Chen (2012), who adapted Margin Theory to study older adults' learning experiences in Hangzhou, China; Mulligan (2018), who interrogated the social stressors on older males; and Salyer-Funk (2012), who applied the theory with regard to the stressors encountered by older females with tenure in higher education institutions. I have extrapolated Margin Theory as relevant to my position in that I equate "load" with my chronic grief and identity loss; and "power" with my doctoral opportunity and the presence of my daughter. The division of power into load provides the margin of agency and autonomy that I could practise over my situation. By assessing my emotional load at the beginning of my grief work journey and identifying my strengths, I was able to ascertain the "margin" as a response to the stressors placed upon me. This margin of autonomy grew as my grief work developed in tandem with my doctorateness.

This is demonstrated pictorially in Figure 3.3.

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Margin theory as applied to my circumstances

LOAD chronic grief, identity loss POWER doctoral opportunity, love of family

Note. Adapted from Hiemstra (2013)

McClusky (1974) stated that older people have five imperative needs that should be met "… in order to satisfy the basic requirements of the aging" (p. 331). A need was qualified as being "a requirement for survival, growth, health, social acceptance, etc" (p. 331). He posited that humans required the fulfilment of these five needs in order to live a purposeful life as they aged. These needs were: coping, expressive and contributive needs, influence and transcendence.

1. Coping needs involved the successful praxis of everyday life skills such as proficient literary acquisition and good health and finances.

Expressive needs were manifested in a satisfying creative life through intrinsically pleasurable activities such as hobbies and leisure activities. In my case, these needs could also be extrapolated to include the expressive/demonstrative need to show love for significant others.

Contributive needs were fulfilled through positive community engagement and the resultant value that this brings. In my case, these needs could also be extrapolated to include the contributive need to engage with parenting praxis to the best of my ability.

Influence was achieved through the resultant agency and respect afforded by constructive relationships with others. McClusky (1974) noted that, "although older persons may be less powerful, they are not powerless …" (p. 336).

Transcendence required the older person mentally to rise above their declining physical circumstances to focus on selflessness.

I have synthesised these needs (McClusky, 1974, pp. 332-338) and represented them pictorially in Figure 3.4.

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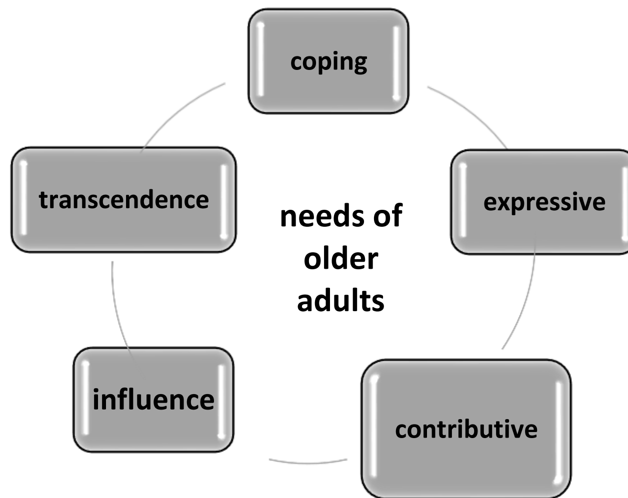
McClusky's (1974) Needs of older adults



In my bereaved circumstances, after the initial shock, I was particularly drawn to the fourth need for "influence". As an older person (in my fifties), I had established a credible professional life and a satisfying personal life. After the death of my son, my identities of successful career woman (educator) and loving, competent mother were swept away in a tsunami of shock and numb apathy. I felt a certain powerlessness in my relationships with others, particularly as I had not managed to 'save' my son. This overshadowed my relationships with significant others such as my daughter. From an influential position within the family where my children turned to me for continuity of life, health and love, I became an impotent, broken-hearted victim of circumstance.

Hence, after an initial period of shock, my desperation to fulfil this fourth need over-rode the other needs. I acknowledge my unconscious privilege of not having to worry about coping needs as these were in no imminent danger of being taken away. I was well-educated, and my

health was relatively stable, as were my finances after four decades of paid employment. Similarly, the expressive, contributive and transcendence needs were of no consequence at that time. I had no interest in, or energy to devote to, leisure activities. I felt that my contributive needs were not important at that time as I was not leaving the house and had no energy for, or interest in interacting with the wider community. Transcendence was completely ignored in favour of survival. Eventually, I came to the realisation that, in order for me to endure the trauma of Rory's death, I needed to reinvest in the influence that I was able to exert over my own sense of welfare as well as my daughter's. I knew that life was never going to have the same stability and certainty as before; however, I recognised that I had to demonstrate proactively to both myself (as I entered older age) and my daughter (as she entered adulthood) that it can still be lived with dedicated purpose and positivity.

Maslow

In his seminal work published in 1943, Abraham Maslow posited the "hierarchies of pre-potency" (p. 370) – that is, the motivational needs of healthy human beings. He hypothesised that certain needs had to be met on a hierarchy of importance before other needs could be fulfilled. At the lowest level of the hierarchy were the necessities for basic survival such as air, water and food. Above this, on the second level was the need for security that manifested as autonomy, safety and shelter. Level Three was concerned with basic emotional needs such as love and belonging. Level Four needs had to do with self-esteem, success and recognition by others. Level Five encompassed self-actualisation in the form of self-development and the fulfilment of potential.

In 1970, Maslow added three more levels to his hierarchy. These included cognitive needs in the form of the quest for knowledge; aesthetic needs to do with searching for beauty and balance in the physical environment; and, finally, a level above self-actualisation was the addition of self-transcendence, which indicated that a person had attained spirituality and truth.

Maslow's original and extended hierarchy is illustrated in Figure 3.5.

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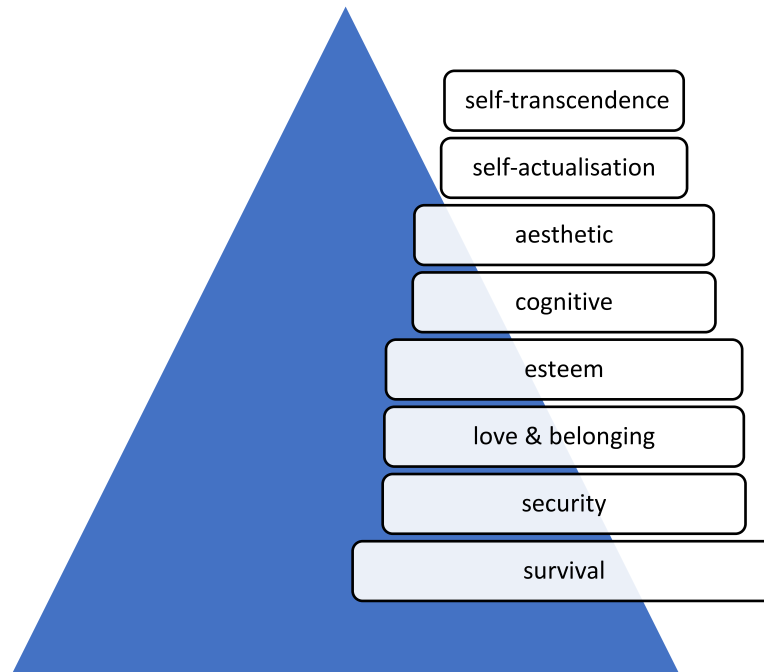
Maslow's extended Hierarchy of Needs (1943, 1970)



Critics of Maslow commented that the "excessive individualism of humanistic psychology and education is essentially elitist" (Pearson & Podeschi, 1997, p. 203). Lethbridge (1986, p. 90) remarked "*what* real individuals, living in *what* real societies, working at *what* real jobs, and earning *what* real income have any chance at all of becoming self-actualisers?" (italics in original). However, from the outset, Maslow (1962) claimed that "every person is, in part, 'his own project' and makes himself" (p. 181). This was a reference to the highly individualised nature of his theory. Apart from the obvious male-centric reference, I concur with this sentiment (with the proviso that this is achievable only when provided with the privilege and agency to do so). I posit that this ownership of and responsibility for Self (as an emotion regulator) are the basis for self-actualisation and eventual self-transcendence.

Conclusion

Recognition of needs is a fundamental premise of my thesis, as is the requirement for ownership of the fulfilment of those needs. I alone

was responsible for my reactive behaviour in this particular tragic and life altering circumstance. In taking responsibility for myself, I also acknowledged that, as a mother, I had an added responsibility to attend to the physical and emotional needs of my impressionable teenage daughter, who looked to me for emotional guidance in this time of uncertainty and overwhelming grief. Thus, after an initial period of allowing myself time to sit and to process an existence without the physical presence of my son, I reflected on what I wanted life to look like in the future for both myself and my daughter. These reflections led me to begin a doctorate and to see it through to fruition.

The reflexive Self

Grief destabilises Self. "Our sense of self is established through the stories that we tell about our lives, the stories that others tell about us and the stories that we enact in their presence" (Neimeyer et al., 2014, p. 489). A traumatic event, such as the premature death of my son, intensified the symptoms of grief and mercilessly ripped away previously held and taken for granted assumptions about life and death. I will age and die before my children. This is the natural order. Thus a reframing and a reconstitution of Self became an imperative. Reflexive thinking – "the ability to take oneself as the object of one's attention and thought" (Leary & Tangney, 2012, p. 6) – constitutes the heart of Selfhood.

Qualitative enquiry requires the researcher to engage in reflexivity and to attend to their own personal positioning when interpreting the actions of others. If autoethnography is "the study of one's own humanity" (Scott-Pollock, 2020, n.p.), the implications for reflexivity are complex and significant. Writers describe the struggle through the embodiment of their reflexive selves in order to interpret their conflict with the goal that the reader will find a point of engagement and connection. This co-constructed understanding is reliant on openness to the privilege of cultural commonalities.

Conclusion

Reflexivity is manifested in the identities that we assume as we answer the questions asked by Self. Reflexivity informs our understandings of our emotional and physical environments, and the ways in which we experience the positionings of ourselves within our cultural framework. It is a sensitive and interpretive process in that our senses are acutely alive to our surroundings, particularly after a bereavement, as we endeavour to practise sense-making in the new, foreign landscape of profound grief. Paradoxically, our senses are also dulled by our emotional overload; thus, the answers to the questions that the reflexive Self asks direct our behaviours.

Grief work and Self

"Trauerarbeit", the German word for grief, is a feminine noun (collinsdictionary.com). Historically, the most recognised published researchers on the topic of grief have predominantly been male (Bowen, 1990; Bowlby, 1969; Freud, 1917). Their masculine lexicon failed to acknowledge (or respect) the maternal aspect of grief, leaving bereaved women branded as pathologised victims of their own emotions (thefsi.com.au). Women have been stereotyped and consequently marginalised in their grief. The 'hysterical woman', the 'over-emotional woman', the 'unreliable woman' – all pay a distasteful homage to gendered grief.

Brennan and Letherby (2017) noted that grief is "conditioned by society but experienced first-hand by the self – an embodied self that both thinks and *feels*" (p. 161; emphasis in the original). Thus, Self is tasked with feeling the loss and with activating the approach to dealing with it. This is problematic because as a griever I suffered multiple losses. These included some of my past identities; the shared physical and emotional environments that included my son and myself, and the family unit; the companionship of my son; and the knowledge that, when I am gone, my son and my daughter will carry on their close relationship. Grief work is conducted by a demanding Self. It is arduous and intentional. At

its core, it is heart work that requires attention to be paid to the inner workings of our damaged psyche.

Based on a review of historical and contemporary scholarship, I have developed my own conceptualisation of grief work whereby I position myself as an older woman firmly at the epicentre of the undertaking. I place the following caveats around its enactment:

Grief work is <u>unconditional</u>. It does not change my relationship with my son. The latter remains as it ever was: the unreserved love of a mother for her child, no matter where he is or what form he takes.

Grief work is <u>demonstrable</u>. The emphasis is removed from the act of death; rather it focuses on the act of the griever living as a role model for significant others (in my case, my daughter).

Grief work is <u>relational</u>. It does not necessarily demand the formation of new relationships when the current relationships are sustaining.

Grief work is <u>developmental</u>. Ownership remains solely the province of the griever: to progress in a manner that she deems appropriate.

Grief work is <u>perpetual</u> and will continue until the death of the actor.

Grief work is multifaceted and <u>multidimensional</u>. It is a holistic and embodied experience. It reshapes the griever physically, mentally, spiritually and philosophically.

Grief work can be an <u>intentional</u> process that can lead to a positive transformation.

Grief work is <u>individual</u> in nature. It is subjective and personal.

Figure 3.6 illustrates these bullet points diagrammatically. The photo of my daughter signifies my impetus for the ongoing grief work that I endeavour to conduct.

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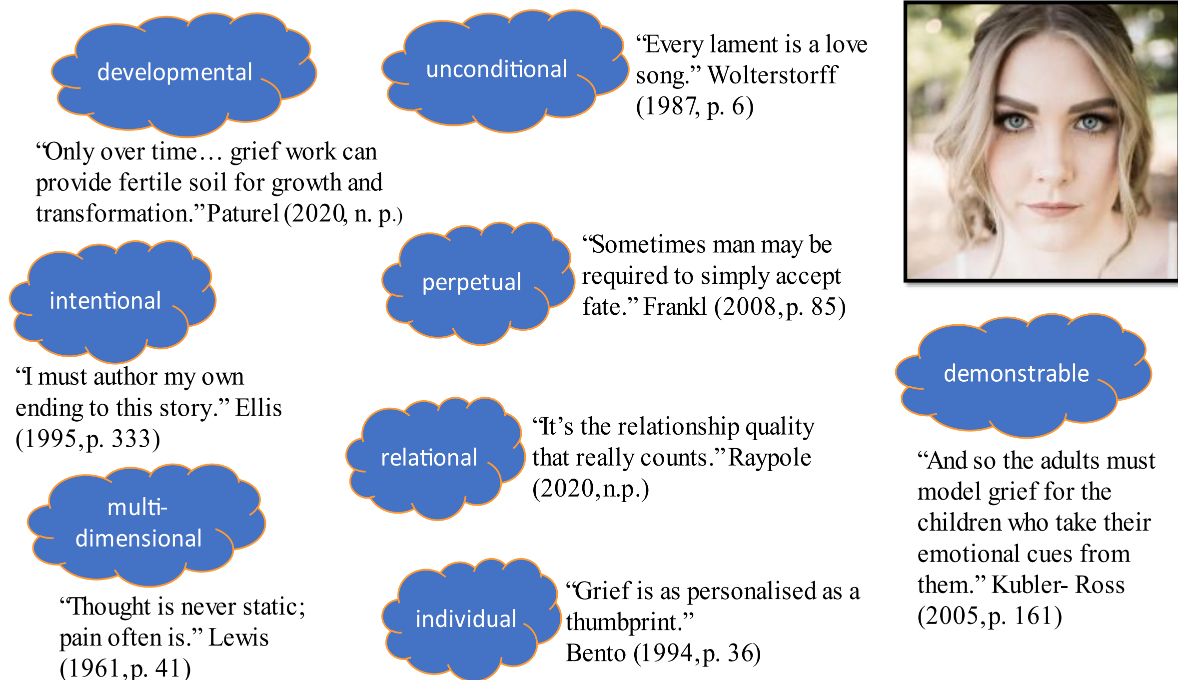
Grief work



Conclusion

Building on the '6Ps' framework developed in Section 2.3.1, Self asked several questions at various times related to the progression of my grief work. These are synthesised in Table 3.2.

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Questions asked by Self about grief work

ELEMENTS	QUESTIONS ASKED BY SELF
PREREQUISITES **(before beginning a doctorate)**	*You are consumed by Rory's death. Do you have any room in your head for more stress? It's not about how smart you are; are you tenacious enough to juggle grief and study?*
PURPOSE **(initial phase of the doctorate)**	*How strong is your purpose?* *Can you focus on your doctorate while you grieve your son?*
PROCESS **(throughout the doctorate)**	*Are you prepared to leave the house to interact with others?* *Should you leave this project for a later date?* *Do you have the strength to carry on?*
PRODUCT **(culmination of the doctorate)**	*Do you have enough mental capacity and willpower to produce a quality product?* *You are so tired all of the time.*
PEOPLE **(throughout the doctorate as well as post- doctorate)**	*Your supervisors believe in you; do you believe in yourself now?* *Will other academics pick up on your grief when you interact with them? What will you say? Will you tell them about Rory?*
PILLARS of **LIFELONG LEARNING** **(throughout the doctorate as well as post- doctorate)**	*Are you too grief stricken?* *Can you organise your 'new normal' to fit in this major task?* *What is your alternative?*

Doctorateness and Self

This thesis is located within the area of research that examines the embodied experiences of doctoral students and the attainment of doctorateness. This "academic becoming" (Miles et al., 2019, p. 602) is highly dependent upon the institutionalised constraints and individualised resilience of the candidate.

Research conducted into the basic personality requirements of successful doctoral candidates is an emerging area of interest. Denicolo and Park (2013) identified four personal attributes that they claimed are inherent in doctorateness: intellectualism, autonomy, tenacity and

adaptability. They posited that candidates should exhibit the following traits: "intellectual quality and confidence, independence of thinking, enthusiasm and commitment, [and the] ability to adapt to changing circumstance and opportunities" (p. 193).

Yazdani and Shokooh (2018) defined doctorateness as:

> A personal quality that, following a developmental and transformative apprenticeship, results in the formation of an independent scholar with a certain identity and level of competence and creation of original contribution, which extend knowledge through scholarship and receipt of the highest academic degree and culminates [in] stewardship of the discipline. (p. 42)

This is an important definition from the perspective of grief work where my aim was threefold: to develop as a scholar; to enact an emotional transformation; and to shift my major public identity from grieving mother to respected academic. Kamler and Thomson (2006) posited that doctoral researchers perform a "mutual construction of text and identity" (p. 66) as they become inducted into scholarship. From a grief work perspective, I take that to mean that doctoral candidates write themselves into their doctoral identities as their experiential journey progresses.

Trafford and Lesham (2008) posited that doctorateness was akin to a 12-element puzzle that is appreciated only by the sum of its parts, and that should produce a sequential, synergetic body of scholarship (p. 39). Wellington (2013) hypothesised that the most valuable element of doctorateness resides at the level of knowledge contribution and the impact that it may have on the academic field in which it is located (p. 1503).

Conclusion

Building on the '6Ps' framework developed in Section 2.3.1, Self asked several questions at various times related to the progression of my thesis. These are synthesised in Table 3.3 below.

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Questions asked by Self about doctorateness

ELEMENTS	QUESTIONS ASKED BY SELF
PREREQUISITES **(before beginning a doctorate)**	*Have you got the necessary educational background to get this done?*
PURPOSE **(initial phase of the doctorate)**	*How strong is your purpose?* *Will you have to drop out because you are not emotionally ready?*
PROCESS **(throughout the doctorate)**	*Are you prepared to interact with others outside your immediate supervisory team and to build a network of peers?*
PRODUCT **(culmination of the doctorate)**	*Can you put the "puzzle pieces" together?* *Are you sure that you have done justice to the scope of the research?*
PEOPLE **(throughout the doctorate as well as post- doctorate)**	*Have you represented all stakeholders sufficiently?* *Have you practised reciprocity?*
PILLARS of **LIFELONG LEARNING** **(throughout the doctorate as well as post- doctorate)**	*Are you too old?* *Will people think that you're crazy? How will you react if they comment?*

Parallels between grief work and doctorateness

Grief work and doctorateness constitute "strong emotional binaries" (Alexander, 2013, p. 547) in that they construct a negative/positive emotional dualism whereby I reflect on my orientation within certain shared experiences. From my perspective, the fulfilment of doctorateness, and the resultant document that emerged, were a form of academic alchemy whereby the researcher (myself) found the essential elements of knowledge to create a previously undetected creature of importance (the problem addressed in the thesis). Similarly, the grieving self emerged through the process as transformed from a shadowy/wraith-like creature to a person of substance and credibility. The process of grief work, while eternally ongoing, rewrote the narrative of my life in a purposeful manner.

Stroebe and Schut (1991) hypothesised a four-task model of grief work that aligned with my doctoral circumstances. It focuses on altered reality, emotional cognisance, environmental adjustment and the reframing of identities.

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Parallel between grief work and doctorateness

TASK	STREOBE & SCHUT'S GRIEF WORK MODEL (1991)	DOCTORATENESS MODEL
1.	Accept the reality and the altered world in which the deceased is no longer physically present.	Accept that the academic on-campus doctoral world was unlike any previous academic exposure that I had encountered.
2.	Feel the pain of loss and grief, but also take some respite from it.	Integrate fully into the intensity of doctoral study, but take some respite to balance work, study and other life events.
3.	Mentally reconfigure and adjust to the new environment.	Mentally reconfigure and adjust to the new environment.
4.	Establish new "roles, identities and relationships" (p. 215).	Establish new "roles, identities and relationships" (p. 215).

Part of the conceptual framework identified the systemic elements of grief work. It unmasked the clinical examination of grief (in my case, parental bereavement) and doctoral study. An insider perspective that focused on the subjectivity of the lived experience of a griever who is also a doctoral student was applied. These systemic elements involved the interplay or triangulation of the three notions of parental bereavement, doctoral processes and personal transformation as the former two concepts were synthesised into the latter. The grieving mother enacting grief work (identity) runs parallel to that of the doctoral student (intellect), both of which culminate in an individualised schema for transformation (individual). I have described this as 'A Triangulation of Change' as it highlights the three elements that evolve as my grief work progresses. This concept is depicted in Figure 3.7.

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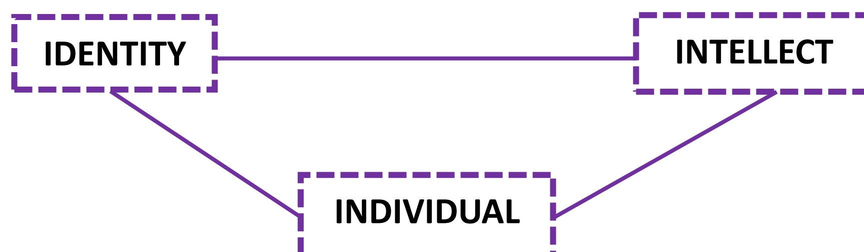
A triangulation of change



I have acknowledged ownership of my emotional state. Such recognition embodies the nexus of identity shift, intellectual growth and personal development. The will to change – no matter the catalyst – was an important facet of the production of my thesis. Parallel to this willingness to embark on strengthening this triangulation of approaches, an understanding of the influential forces that frame the mechanics of change is imperative. Such comprehension produces the acknowledgement of control (in so far as control may be achieved), and an initially tenuous insight into those elements in life that can and cannot be altered, and to what degree they may be manipulated along the doctoral journey.

Conclusion

Connections of relationality informed by Self-narrative were the pivotal aspects around which my conceptual framework was established. Self-narrative has been described as "an introspective recounting of a person's development" (Your Dictionary, n.p.). The four pillars that constitute Rory's death, my dog El, the performance of doctoral study, and the duality of grief work and doctorateness inform the linkages associated with the stories that I tell as I relate my emotional and academic progress. This was an active process and generated new

knowledge and understandings about Self and identities in the context of my lived experience.

These connections are depicted in Figure 3.8.

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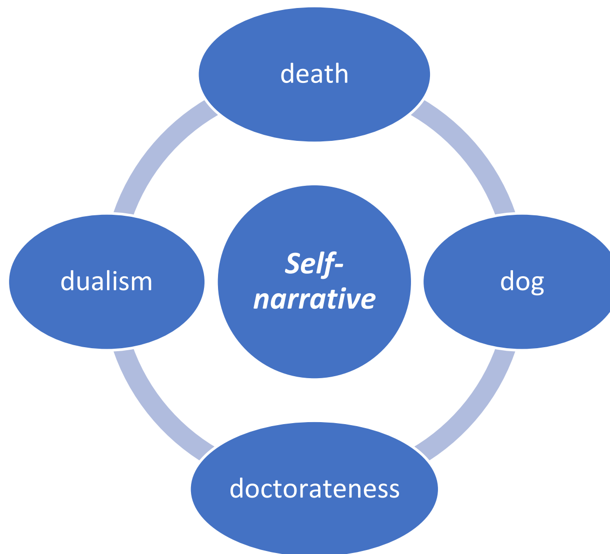
Connections of relationality



The conceptual framework

The development of a conceptual framework is fundamental to problem-solving and meaning-making. Potschin-Young et al. (2018) claimed that this "first, vital step … can help to define the scope and focus of the problems addressed and the assessments needed" (p. 428). The authors further stated that "it is clear that their pictorial simplicity masks a range of complex negotiations, the nature of which are fundamental to a successful outcome" (pp 248-249). I felt that the autoethnographic complexity of the interplay among the topics of grief work, doctorateness and personal transformation warranted the juxtaposition of a simplified diagram. As stated, however, behind the diagram lies a profound and intricate interplay of synchronistic elements to do with psychological needs, physical environment and relationality. Figure 3.9 illustrates the development of my journey from the duality of bereaved parent and doctoral student to my emotional and academic transformation.

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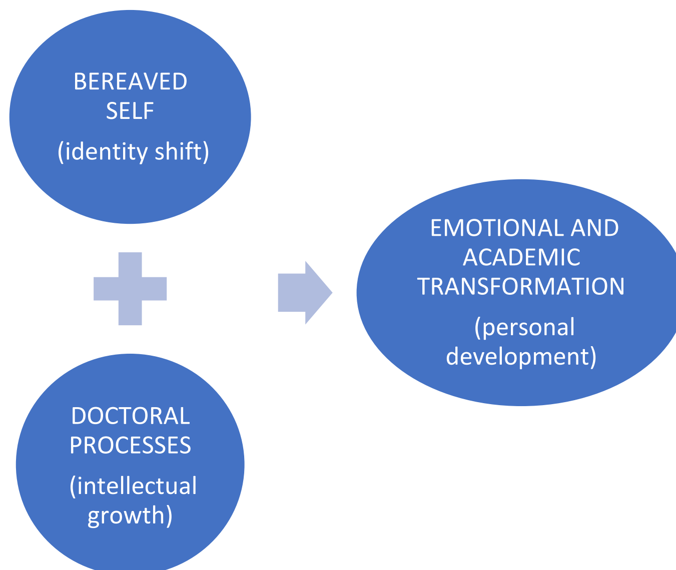
Grief work, doctorateness and personal transformation: A conceptual framework



As each of my research questions is addressed (Chapters 5, 6 and 7), I have concluded each chapter by filling in the relevant diagrammatic elements. This serves as an indicator of the progression of my grief story, thus indicating the significance of the duality of purposeful transformation as I attended to my bereaved Self and doctoral processes.

Comprehending the nuances behind a conceptual framework allows the reader a more fully balanced understanding of its production and application. There are certain caveats that I would like to place around the communication of my story and the construction of my conceptual framework:

1. My story reflects cultural individuality and privilege. Certain elements worked in my favour on the road to intellectual growth. I live in a town that hosts the main campus of a local university. I had completed both my Bachelor of Education and my Master of Education at the same venue. Thus, I had historical and environmental ease of access.

This is not a journey upon which others may seek to embark, or, indeed, that they may have the opportunity to enact. I fully recognise that others may not be positioned to take the same steps in the quest for relief from the endless trauma of bereavement. A PhD is a time consuming and emotionally draining endeavour on its own, let alone with the additional tensions created by chronic grief.

I was well supported by family, university staff and academic peers in my journey. It is true that I encountered stumbling blocks in the form of personal and relational issues (as discussed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7); however, at no time did I feel the sting of academic isolation.

Thanks to my network of loving family and friends, and the fact that I possessed stable finances, I was able to practise self-care along the way. If I were tired/overwhelmed, it was within my power to rest and/or to seek counsel. Not everyone has this freedom.

My supervisors respected me and were totally supportive of my academic goal to succeed. They met me regularly, they provided resources to broaden my mind and they believed in me. I never felt that they did not have my best interests in mind. Shared goals and collaborative enactment are twin necessities for success. I was not pathologised, and I felt 'heard' by my supervisors.

Thus a number of favourable and serendipitous elements provided the lubrication required for a successful outcome. These are diagrammatically represented in Figure 3.10.

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Elements of my successful doctoral journey

Chapter summary

When positioning the Self in academic writing, particularly when the author comes from a place of trauma, the production of authenticity is fraught with reflexive unease. This is not an easy story to tell. Matthews (2019) stated, "When my son died, my heart broke and my brain tried to stop working" (p. 1). Chadwick (2021) discussed the notion of "discomfort" (n.p.) when researching and addressed the anxiety around writing that crosses the border from our personal lives into the domain of our academic worlds. However, the story of transformation woven around the bereaved Self inextricably linked with doctoral study is not one to be secreted away. Chadwick emphasised that discomposure is "*actant* in research practices" (n.p.; emphasis in the original). Furthermore, it guides interpretation and is a fundamental element of the ownership of "reflexive and critical" (n.p.) research praxis. As such, it should be welcomed in that it constitutes a potentially significant source of knowledge production.

Collins and Stockton (2018) offered this description of a conceptual framework: "A conceptual framework is loosely defined and best functions as a map of how all of the literature works together in a particular study" (n.p.). The framework hypothesised in my thesis was composed with the

following signpost elements in mind: reflexive Self, identities, needs theories, grief work, doctorateness and parallels between the latter two elements. This signposting is represented pictorially in Figure 3.11.

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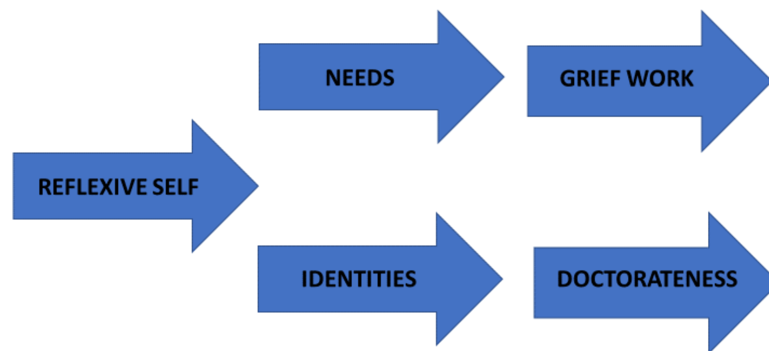
Signposts



The caveats listed in Section 3.8 were underscored by my philosophical assumptions around epistemology, ontology and axiology, which reflect the moral and spiritual values of righteousness, willingness and intentionality. I was psychologically and emotionally ready to undergo the journey. "A story is not merely a chronicle of events. A story is an account of events set against a landscape of moral values" (McCleod, as cited by Etherington, 2004, p. 193) This does not mean that I would not have dropped out given certain circumstances (e.g., unsupportive supervisors), but it was my wholehearted intention to see the project through to the end from its inception. I tell this story with an open heart and an acknowledgement that my journey is individual and that I was able to enact tenacity – the will to endure is paramount.

The following section presents the end of Chapter 3.

Epilogue

Endurance

One of my PhD supervisors died a few weeks ago. It wasn't unexpected – he had terminal cancer – but it was still a shock. He was a wonderful man and will be greatly missed in our community.

I am intimately acquainted with death by cancer. My son, Rory, died on the 22nd of December 2010 from an osteo sarcoma. He had just turned 19. I had begun a doctorate before he fell ill but then abandoned it to care for him. I am a primary school teacher and after he died the system allowed me two years off for bereavement leave.

Six months into my leave, I was sitting on the couch having morning tea with my dog, El. Well, to clarify, I was eating – she was watching me chew. Intensely watching me chew. She's a Labrador – they have a keen, if uncontrollable, interest in food. El and I had spoken about Rory and his cancer on many occasions.

One day, a couple of months after Rory had died, I found her lying in his room beside his empty bed. When I asked her what she was doing, she raised her head and her eyes said, "He's gone. I miss him. When is he coming back?" At that stage I couldn't verbalise the unimaginable – that he would never again run with her and throw the ball for her or let her illegally sleep on the bed with him. 'No Dogs on the Bed' was a rule made to be broken by my children and my dog.

It would seem that I was not the only one who discussed cancer with El. It was only then that I realised what a stalwart friend she had been to my son in the lonely, dark and desperate hours. A warm body when the universe offered nothing but the cold realisation of imminent death. A quiet understanding that accepted and absorbed tears. A trust that her consistent loving presence made a difference to him in his hours of need.

I digress. I was sitting on the couch having morning tea when suddenly El said to me, "You are driving yourself crazy thinking about Rory's death. You need a purpose. Go back to your study."

I was outraged that she should think for one moment that my grief could and/or should lessen. "I can't; I'm not whole. I am broken and raw and can't hold a thought for longer than two minutes, and I cry all the time."

"You can. You must go on. Otherwise, what's it all for? Rory always said you needed a project to keep you going. Live your life. I will be here for you in the physical world and Rory will remain a significant presence in your thoughts."

So I rang my former supervisor, Glen Postle. He suggested a topic and I began – slowly, haltingly. It's taken me seven years to submit my thesis. And I've learned a lot in the process.

I've learned that it is possible to function physically and mentally in a physical world that does not include my beloved son and where I am burdened by the weight of my unrelenting grief.

I've learned that, by focusing on something else, grief can be overcome momentarily in small increments that gradually build to larger slices of time. My grief is subdued for periods of time.

I've learned that, essentially, I am alone in my grief. I need to deal with it in a manner that feels right for me. Ignore the naysayers; they have no idea what you're going through. My son once said about his cancer journey and his impending death, "I've realised that there's always people in life who think they know what's going on better than you do. Some people are always gonna hate. And I say let 'em hate. 'Cause they don't know what I do."

Even though I am alone in my particular grief, I've learned that my story is not unique. There are others who grieve and suffer the heartbreak of the loss of a child and deal with it in their own way. One way is no better than another. We choose our own path to grieve, and we enact our own grief.

I've learned the patience that comes from striving for a long-term goal. For me, time does not heal but it does provide trade-offs if I am open to them. If I can do this (study), then I can do that (live with my grief). Simply put – if I can write this one word, sentence, paragraph, I can (just for the moment) put aside my grief and focus on this small project. Gradually, these moments become longer as I make my way through my "project". Grief is not forgotten – never that – but it is put aside momentarily.

Throughout the whole process, my dog has been my champion. She has listened to paragraphs that made no sense at all and helped me to find some structure. She has endured my frustrations and my triumphs and snored through the countless hours that it took to write my chapters [Figure 3.12].

Her quiet presence helped me to endure the solitary, isolated hours, just as she did for Rory. "Endure. I am here."

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Doctoral El

RESEARCH DESIGN

Would you recognise how much I love you when you stare out at sea?
Would you let me wash away the pain as you swim with me in the ocean?

Overview of the chapter

Chapter 1 provided the introduction to the thesis. Chapter 2, the Literature Review, situated the research within the contextual framework of the thesis. Chapter 3 explained the conceptual framework around which the thesis was built.

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify and highlight the interconnectedness of the key elements of my study's research design. When considering the components of my methodological approach, I reflected on the significance of the contextuality of each of the research questions. When compiling appropriate research questions, Adams (2021) suggested that the author addresses the key question of "What's going on?" (n.p.). Therefore, my three research questions (as presented below) encompassed the plot line of the impetus for this thesis – the struggle. Firstly, I became a bereaved parent and was traumatised by the death of my 19 year old son from cancer. Secondly, I intentionally embarked on an ambitious journey to 'do' a doctorate to supplement and support my grief work. Thirdly, as a result of this project, I achieved personal change and transformation both emotionally and intellectually.

Research Question 1: How has the mobilisation of my grief work affected my experience of my bereaved Self?

Research Question 2: How has the mobilisation of my grief work affected my experience of doctoral processes?

Research Question 3: How has the mobilisation of my grieving Self and my doctorateness facilitated my personal transformation?

These questions led to a process of deep personal reflexivity focused on the basic components of my philosophical framework when considering the posited dualism of doctorateness and grief work. Based on Patel (2015, n.p.), who cited Guba (1990), I have created a table that depicts the questions that I asked myself about the paradigm linkages upon which my research design was built. This thought process is depicted in Table 4.1.

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Research design linkages

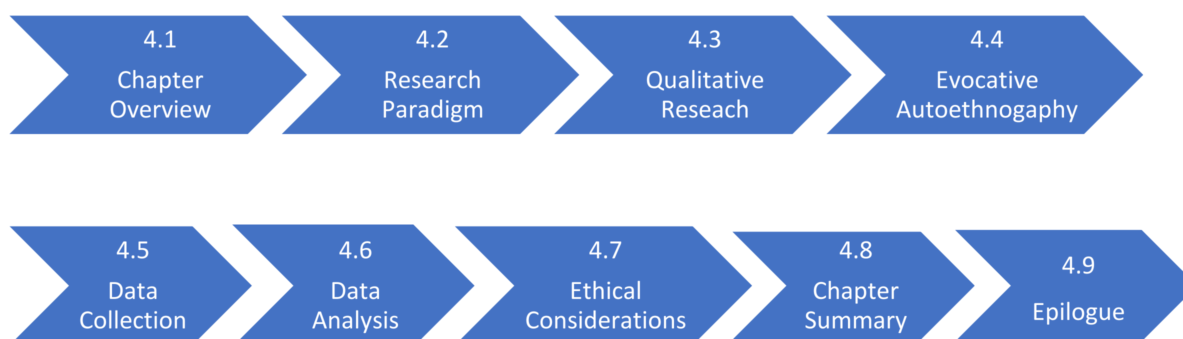
Concepts	Questions
Axiology "values" (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 127)	What are the values and the ethical codes by which I live my life after the death of my child? Are these different from when he was alive? (grief work)
Epistemology "study & acquisition of knowledge" (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 127)	How much do I actually know? (doctorateness, grief work) How do I interpret knowledge as it applies to my lived experience both past and present? (doctorateness, grief work) What do I do with my knowledge now and in the future? (doctorateness, grief work)
Ontology "reality & being" (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 127)	What is my newly formed reality? Have my bereavement and my doctoral studies altered the meaning of my existence? (doctorateness, grief work)
Methodology "process & procedures of research" (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 127)	How can I share my knowledge and experiences in a way that is meaningful for others and for myself? (doctorateness, grief work) What is best practice when it comes to acquiring the knowledge to communicate findings? (doctorateness)
Tools "devices used in the collection of research data" (O'Leary, 2010, p. 89)	What are the data that I can utilise that effectively reflect the experience that I am attempting to convey? (doctorateness, grief work)

Concepts	Questions
Analysis "systematic process of interrogation and interpretation" (O'Leary, 2010, p. 230)	How will I examine my data in a nonbiased, holistic manner? (doctorateness)
Ethics/politics "moral obligations" (O'Leary, 2010, p. 41)	What are the ethical and political considerations to be accounted for? (doctorateness, grief work)

In accordance with Table 4.1, this chapter progresses below as depicted in Figure 4.1.

Figure Error! No text of specified style in document.**.24**

Flowchart of the progression of Chapter 4



The Interpretivist Research Paradigm

Introduction

This section provides insight into the philosophical underpinnings of the interpretivist paradigm upon which my research was based. When selecting a research paradigm, the scholar must make several important decisions that reflect her moral and ethical assumptions. These have to do with expectations of the role of research in her life experience and, in particular, with the embedded belief systems (honed from life experience) that have created the blueprint of the values by which she lives her life (axiology); the lived experiences that reflect her current reality (ontology); and the knowledge creation around the critical event that became the catalyst for the investigation (epistemology). "The paradigm selected guides the researcher in philosophical assumptions about the

research and in the selection of tools, instruments, participants, and methods used in the study" (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 127). From that perspective, the interpretivist approach assumes a close relationship between the researcher and the researched. Subjectivity is foregrounded; therefore, interpretivists view contextualisation as paramount, with reality as an environmentally shaped phenomenon (Levers, 2013).

My thesis employed an interpretivist research paradigm targeting the reflexive Self. This paradigm is based on the proposition that reality is relational as well as socially and culturally created. It is not a static concept, and as such it is ever-changing (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006, n.p.). Interpretivists endeavour to comprehend and appreciate the lived experiences and multiple truths that are commonly grounded within the contexts of people's lives. "We create truth through our human interactions so humans are always impacting [on] the phenomenon they are studying" (Scott-Pollock, 2020). Even though the researcher maintains a reflexive lens, she is bounded by her own interpretations of truth, "there is no fixed and unchanging Truth" (Etherington, 2004, p. 27). Previously, my lived experience of truth relied on a traditional pattern of life stages that included two living children. As my reality shifted, so did the reflections and expectations of Self.

Braun and Clarke (2013) challenged the researcher to reflect on several points when considering employing the interpretivist paradigm: "What is crucial is that you provide reasons for why the story you have told about the data is important" (p. 268). These reasons are based on the researcher's philosophical assumptions, beliefs and values, as well as on consequences for all stakeholders, including participants, the topic being explored, societal concerns and scholarship.

Axiological assumptions

Axiology, the role and place of values in the research process, is an important aspect of who I am as an ethical person and therefore as an ethical researcher. "The researcher's proactive values are central to the task, purpose and methods of research" (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129). The

notion of values was hypothesised by Wan et al. (2007) as personality elements that provide the foundation for decision-making about the significance of, and the reaction to, life experiences. They posited that a person's value system is hierarchical in nature, in that some values have a higher priority than others. Culturally important values are key indicators of self-concept and can be heavily influenced by widely adhered-to group norms that are shared through common representations of "cultural knowledge" (p. 3). The pairing of values and cultural norms was an important facet of my research as I reflected on my identification as a doctoral student and as a bereaved mother.

Evocative autoethnographers are practitioners of complete and total transparency in the representation of their values and in the effects of those values on their research as they interpret them. It is a given that, in relating a reflexive story, authors are aware of the value-laden environment in which their story takes place. They invite the readers into their world of cultural belief with the shared understanding that "facts can never be isolated from values" (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 130).

Epistemological assumptions

Epistemology, the study and acquisition of knowledge and truth (Somekh & Lewin, 2011), is "a way of understanding and explaining how I know what I know" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). Thus, epistemological reflection aids meaning-making. In line with the interpretivist paradigm, the concept of multiple truths is foregrounded. What is counted as knowledge is also interpreted by the individual. For example, Mingé (2013) described six "epistemological lessons" (p. 428) that she learned through observation and reflection from the familial participants in her research. Based on her interpretation of her lived experience, she posited that knowledge is:

dynamic and vigorous in its complexity ("messy" [p. 428])

contextual and individual (constructed from "a particular point of view within a particular context" [p. 428])

sensory (utilising the senses as discursive modes)

localised ("rooted in local contexts and actions" [p. 428])

actionable ("we do create change each and every day" [p. 428])

experiential ("expand our knowledges from our personal stories to creating and making knowledges" [p. 429]).

The communal nature of epistemology that can be enacted through an interrogation of networks of situated and interdependent relationships was further discussed by Mingé (2013).

When referring to the interpretivist paradigm underpinning some approaches to autoethnography, Denzin (2013) wrote of an "evocative epistemology" (p. 132) that supersedes "the already-seen and already-heard" (p. 132). In my case, I aimed to subvert the supposed knowledge of bereavement that is recorded in the objectivity of impersonal empirical scholarship. This is a "mystory" (p. 128) that is new knowledge built from my memories. It is epistemologically challenging in nature and telling because of its emphasis on the personal lived experience. It is knowledge from the heart told through the lens of grief.

Ontological assumptions

Ontology is the study of the nature of being and reality/existence (Somekh & Lewin, 2011). Qualitative autoethnographic knowledge is not presupposed by prediction; rather it is recorded as it occurred in the reality of the particular individual and her or his context. Participants are regarded as distinctive entities who all have their own stories to tell and their own truths. In this way, notions regarding the nature of reality and existence are interrogated at a deeper level. Interpretivists adopt a relativist ontology – reality is identified as a contextualised notion. Thus, it is highly subjective and constructed by the individual. Self must still ask questions, but the answers differ in relation to my connection with the meaning(s) behind being, reality and existence.

As an interpretivist, my philosophical view presumes that "universal truth" is a myth, that the reality of truth is a negotiated phenomenon and that every person experiences her or his own form of reality. The existence of multiple truths is a foundational assumption of this philosophy. "The purpose of science from a relativist ontology is to understand the subjective experience of reality and multiple truths" (Levers, 2013, p. 2).

Interpretivists adopt the ideology of a social construction of reality that is dynamic and heavily discourse dependent (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Ponterotto, 2005). My research position highlights this subjectivity and embraces the fact that realities are ever-changing. My truth, prior to my son's death, was a physical family of four. This then shifted to a physical family of three and, as my truth shifted, so did my reality and vice versa. With this disruption of reality came a reframing and renegotiation of social and personal discourse that then ushered in a series of new realities that included bereavement (and the resultant grief) and doctoral study. This multifaceted world of lived experience has been told from the first-person perspective and highlights the notion that humans are "reflexive beings" (Somekh & Lewin, 2011, p. 7).

Conclusion

I have adopted an interpretivist paradigm that reflects my philosophical stance. I have embraced the axiological position of the transparency of values, and stress that the environment in which I position my writing is value laden. This "mystory" (Denzin, 2013, p. 128) is a subjective text built on my way of knowing, being and thinking. O'Leary (2010) stated that "good research should be seen as the thinking person's game" (p. 7). The dynamic social construction of changing realities (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Gall et al., 2005) is foregrounded. Meaning-making is derived through the interpretation of memories and emotions that I saw as my fundamental truths at that time. Table 4.2 synthesises the philosophical underpinnings of the study's interpretivist

paradigm as defined and adopted by me during the course of my research.

Table Error! No text of specified style in document.**.12**

Philosophical underpinnings of the study's interpretivist paradigm

Autoethnographic inquiry	Focuses on interpreting the unique and the subjective. "Mystory" (Denzin, 2013, p. 128) is foregrounded as a social discourse.
Axiological assumptions	Transparency of interpreted values is central to the position of the researcher.
Epistemological assumptions	Knowledge is relative, complex, and locally conceptualised and interpreted.
Ontological assumptions	Reality is a dynamic construct. The interpretation of multiple realities is accepted.

The qualitative research orientation

Introduction

The methodology adopted by the researcher is dependent on my philosophical assumptions. Axiological, epistemological and ontological assumptions mould the shape of the research process. Traditionally, the accepted model of social science research into cancer was one of prescription and restrictive practice (Arnold, 2011) that favoured broadly ranging empirical methods. I reject this form of inquiry as an impersonal, formulaic output of findings that can be over-generalised and result in misleading interpretations of data.

Reflexive qualitative research is an organic process whereby contextualised data focused on a particular cultural phenomenon are sourced, organised, coded, themed, interpreted, concluded (O'Leary, 2010) and, in my case, finally, voiced. Qualitative evocative autoethnographic research emphasises relational tenets where the author's vulnerability is revealed to the reader. Anderson and Glass-Coffin (2013) posited that "these features are the new language of qualitative

research" (p. 80). Qualitative application is further suited to autoethnographic research as it invites the researcher and the reader to reflect on the complexity of daily life, the lived experience of the author and the individualisation of one person's interpretation of an event (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 269). It does not reduce an issue to generalised number crunching. Rather, it focuses on meaning-making embedded within the story behind the statistics. "Qualitative researchers, therefore, embrace the contingencies of knowledge and the unique experiences of the individuals" (Jones et al., 2013, p. 27). Embracing the uniqueness of the lived experience of the individual disavows the impersonality of the "large-scale" (Jones et al., 2013, p. 27), sweeping inquiries so often favoured by quantitative research projects.

Qualitative researchers utilise the vast array of research data provided to them. In this way, they can be seen as "bricoleurs" (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 134) who implement a variety of strategies that arise during the research process. Ponterotto (2005) described qualitative research as having the following characteristics:

highly contextualised

uses common lexicon that often integrates the participant's own vocabulary

portrays "a psychological event, experience or phenomenon" (p. 128).

Subjectivity

Subjectivity, as opposed to objectivity, is a hallmark of qualitative research. Subjectivity seeks contextual meaning focusing on individualised findings. Etherington (2004) maintained that "academic research has traditionally been seen as an impersonal activity … and that subjectivity was a contaminant" (p. 25). Objectivity seeks empirical data in order to generalise outcomes. Berkal (2015) stated that, by contrast, qualitative research is "not a cold functional tool in a kit. It's a human pursuit with all of the idiosyncrasies and irrationalities of the real world" (n.p.). I contend that subjectivity exposes our 'humanness'. Cook (2015)

expanded on this notion and hypothesised that these are the traits that distinguish us "from the inanimate, unthinking objects of the world" (n.p.). Subjectivity highlights richness and intricacy when illuminating the interwoven layers of a phenomenon. The dichotomy of subjective and objective research is synthesised in Table 4.3.

Table Error! No text of specified style in document.**.13**

Subjectivity versus objectivity in research design

SUBJECTIVITY	OBJECTIVITY
"Objectivity is never a given." O'Leary (2010, p. 31)	"Impersonal" (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 128)
Researchers ask "How?" and "Why?" (McGill Qualitative Health Research Group [MQHRG], 2018, n.p.)	Researchers ask "What?" and "When?" (Adapted from McGill Qualitative Health Research Group [MQHRG], 2018, n.p.)
Recognises contextual uniqueness. Disavows stereotypes. (Adapted from Denzin & Lincoln, 2005)	"Remove all contextual factors to observe and know the phenomen[on] as it exists independent of the human mind." (Levers, 2013, p. 3) "Insensitivity to issues of race, class and gender can also lead to dichotomization" (O'Leary, 2010, p. 31)
Acknowledges that knowledge is value laden. (Levers, 2013, p. 3)	"Removal of human bias leads to the discovery of knowledge." (Levers, 2013, p. 3)
"Observations are influenced by the observer and the observer is influenced by the observed." (Levers, 2013, p. 3)	"What is being observed is not changed by the observer, nor is the observer being influenced by the observed." (Levers, 2013, p. 3)
"Unaffected and universal knowledge of an external reality is not possible beyond individual reflections and interpretations." (Levers, 2013, p. 3)	"impartial observation" (Levers, 2013, p. 3) "careful control of empirical variables" (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 128)
Knowledge is "always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 21)	Knowledge is "universally applicable" (Levers, 2013, p. 3) Focus on generalisation of outcomes (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 128)
Refutes the notion of one "dominant voice" (O'Leary, 2010, p. 31)	The goal of science is to discover the essences that reveal the natural, universal laws of Truth (Levers, 2013, p. 3)

The goal is "to develop understanding, increase sensitization to ethical and moral issues, and personal and political emancipation" (Levers, 2013, p. 3)	"the purpose of knowledge from this epistemological standpoint is often used to explain, predict, and control" (Levers, 2013, p. 3)

Conclusion

In order to enact qualitative research competently, certain criteria should be applied and adhered to. Mack et al. (2005, p. 1) developed a six-point checklist. Table 4.4 displays this checklist and distils my application of each criterion.

Table Error! No text of specified style in document.**.14**

Application of qualitative research criteria to the study

CRITERION	APPLICATION
The investigation should pose a question.	I have articulated the three research questions intially in Chapter 1 and then at intervals throughout the thesis.
The investigation should utilise a systematic and established set of procedures to answer the inquiry.	I have followed the protocols of autoethnographic research.
Data should be gathered during the investigation.	Data were based on information collected and interpreted both before and during the investigation.
Data should yield outcomes that were not predetermined.	I have acknowledged my values and preconceptions.
The investigation should produce findings that are relevant and can be applied beyond the boundaries of the study.	Benefits of individual stories about the long-term effects of cancer and parental bereavement are manifold. Institutions that offer bereavement leave to their workers would profit from this insider knowledge around which to shape their support. Political awareness of the human ramifications of childhood cancer death could shape tax incentives for research. Empirisists who report on statistics would benefit from hearing the stories behind the statistics. The bereavement community benefits from having stories of the impact of childhood death that show purposeful lived experience.
The research should seek to articulate answers to the research question from the perspectives of the social group whom it targets.	The research is offered as a form of grief work.

Autoethnography as method

Introduction

Autoethnography is nested within the genre of life writing. It necessarily includes the author's "personal experience", offers "lessons

about living" and "insight into a person's decision-making", and at times articulates "stories that haven't been told yet" (Adams, 2021, n.p.). The crafting of the text seeks to evoke a reader/writer relationship built on the vulnerable first-person voice of the writer and the cognitive curiosity of the reader. Deconstructed, the term literally means the following: "auto" as in self-revelation, "ethno" as in interrogating a cultural experience and "graphy" as in conceptual analysis or "storycraft" (Schroeder, 2017, p. 321). "Thus[,] as a method, autoethnography is both process and product" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 273), in that the researcher has embodied lived experience of her/his/their autoethnographical account and has then manufactured a product (written, performed) from it.

Shared social themes viewed through the lens and voice of the individual are a feature of autoethnographic methodology. Roth (2009) referred to the self and the general population as being "co-constituted in their relation, having emerged from a singular plural *with*" (n.p.; emphasis in original). Readers are invited into the world of the writer as a certain cultural incident is explored from the writer's individual perspective. Through this lens, the writer hopes to share her or his story in a manner that enables the reader to find some common ground with the writer's experience.

Autoethnographic exchanges provide meaningful linkages to social change. The writer is afforded an opportunity to challenge widely held and steadfastly regarded cultural stereotypes and traditional behavioural tropes. Indeed, autoethnography "has the potential to resonate with those in similar circumstances who may then be moved to reflect critically on their experiences and perhaps act differently or, at least, puzzle over similar questions" (Trahar, 2017, p. 280).

Adams and Manning (2015) identified autoethnographic research design as possessing the following six characteristics:

Illustrates and evaluates the researcher's personal experience

Recognises the significance of the researcher's relationships with others

Is intensely reflexive

Makes meaning of life experiences

Is authentic and methodologically sound

Can be an agent for social change. (pp. 351-360)

As was noted above, autoethnography focuses primarily on social change. It serves to provide a more personal slant on nuanced lived experience as a valid research tool. Jones et al. (2013) hypothesised five purposes of autoethnographic enquiry. These had to do with disruption of the grand narrative, authentication of insider knowledge, serving to enhance life, providing a voice for the unheard or marginalised and ensuring accessibility to scholarship (p. 32).

Evocative autoethnography

It has been asserted that the two overarching categories of autoethnography are analytic and evocative (Ngunjiri et al., 2010). This is not a binary classification; rather the two categories are positioned on a continuum and can be interwoven by the researcher, dependent upon the purpose of the research. Analytic autoethnography tends towards the ethnographic 'auto' and 'ethno' research investigation, whereas evocative autoethnography is skewed towards more autobiographical models and prioritises the 'auto' and the 'graphy' (Ngunjiri et al., 2010). Analytic autoethnography focuses on casting the research outwards to explore groups where the researcher is not a member. Thus, insider knowledge is not a priority. By contrast, evocative autoethnography casts the researcher Self inwardly and is heavily dependent on insider knowledge as a data source.

Four modes of autoethnography have been adopted by academics (Chang, 2013). The "imaginative-creative" (p. 118) mode blends "poetry and performative dialogue" (p. 118) throughout the autoethnographic text. The "confessional-emotive" (p. 118) mode looks to elicit an emotional reaction deliberately from the reader by "focusing on personal

life and relationship issues" (p. 119). The "descriptive-realist" (p. 119) mode is detail explicit and highlights the accuracy of a life event. The "analytical-interpretive" (p. 119) mode is more traditional in that it seeks to analyse and interpret published sources. Chang (2013) went on to say that many authors choose to blend these modes when relating their autoethnographic research.

My thesis is a "confessional-evocative" (Chang, 2013, p. 119) autoethnographic enquiry in that it is a rendering of my reflexive Self (auto), it is located within the cultural groups of bereaved mothers, teachers and doctoral students (ethno), and it follows a set research pattern, including data collection and analysis (graphy). Further, it is told from an insider perspective, and it is a story that is related completely through my eyes and from my viewpoint based on my lived experience. I have also blended in the "analytical-interpretive" (Chang, 2013, p. 119) mode, in that I interpreted published resources based on doctorateness and grief.

The intertwining of theory and story was discussed by Holman-Jones (2021), who hypothesised that "theory and story share a reciprocal, mutually informing, and iterative relationship" (n.p.). She posited key linkages when blending the personal and the theoretical. These included the idea that theory serves as the foundation for a nuanced story, and that theory and story share a balanced, equitable relationship – one is no more important than the other. Thus, theory plays a contemplative role that is then actioned by story.

The storyteller

As befits the practice of autoethnographic methodology, the focus of this thesis remained solely on my story (Adams & Manning, 2015), and was not directed at any other individual involved in its production. Researcher subjectivity was foregrounded, and the notion of reflexivity lies at the heart of this type of methodology (reflexivity is considered in more detail in Section 4.4.5). "As social scientists, when we write we turn life into language" (Bochner, 2012, p. 160). Further to this sentiment,

when we write we can also turn traumatic death into loving memorialisation. Storying loss and love "enhances my sense of his ongoing presence and allows me to honor him" (Lengelle, 2021, p. 168). Intentional, deliberative storytelling fashions literary gifts for both the teller and the reader/listener. Through crafting storied memories and other personal data, the teller can traverse an array of psychological landscapes.

Storytelling can be a journey into self-knowledge. Lengelle (2021) stated that "death unveils things you already know and didn't want to look at before" (p. 140). Telling my story from a distance of time offered me the chance for a more in-depth self-examination. The opportunity for reflexivity allowed me the bittersweet grace of remembrance and the affordance to look more deeply into painful thoughts and feelings that I had pushed aside in the past but am now ready to face in the present. *I will go on. This is my gift to myself.*

Storytelling can be a journey into continuing the bond with my son. By writing about the impact of his death, I have reiterated to myself and to others that he was here, that he did matter and that unending grief is born of unconditional love. "A continued bond is an echo of the past and a connection in the present" (Lengelle, 2021, p. 168). *We laughed, we cried. Love endures. This is my gift to myself.*

Storytelling can be a journey into communication of previously unspoken and unshared subjects such as the secondary loss of friendships. This taboo topic is a painful and bewildering experience that is silenced by the griever's sense that she or he may have done something to deserve such treatment. Telling the story of the reaction of others to Rory's death provided me with an opportunity to revisit old wounds and to be a "comforting witness of my own experience" (Lengelle, 2021, p. 171). *I will forge new relationships. This is my gift to myself.*

The reader/listener can benefit from the openness of the teller who shapes her story in such a way that the emotional terrain is accessible, relatable and relevant. Storytelling can be a journey of companionship

and mutual understanding, “The moral genius of storytelling is that each, teller and listener, enters the space for the other” (Frank, 1995, as cited by Etherington, 2004, p. 179). Both bereaved and non-bereaved listeners step into my world and glean an insight into motherhood in its most raw state. In the reading, a bereaved mother may seek justification and articulation of her own emotional turmoil. *I understand your pain even though your journey may be different. Please take some comfort in knowing that you do not travel this barren land alone. This is my gift to you.*

The non-bereaved may seek comprehension and atonement, resulting in the will to reassess their own philosophical assumptions, or perhaps to address their fears about death. *You must love your children wholeheartedly in perpetuity. This has happened to me. I am still standing. This is my gift to you.*

Storytelling can be a journey of interpretative imagination or memory. The teller writes her momentary truth whereupon the reader/listener applies her or his lived experiences and her or his truth interpretations: “Reading leaves the orbit of the text to the reader: it is not confined by the author’s thinking” (Arnold, 2011, p. 69). *Make of my story what you will. This is my gift to you.*

The unique features of writing in the first-person narrative were discussed by Bochner (2012, p. 158). They involved the following reflexive criteria:

Written in first person, highlighting Self as research data

Foregrounding individuality over generalisation

Intensely personal

Full interrogation of relationships

Written as a reflexive story

Using descriptions of critical incidents for contextual authenticity.

Critical incidents

When used in the context of this research, critical incidents were those highly personalised events that had taken up permanent residence inside my memory. They hovered in the mists of my consciousness, ever ready to regain form and shape. All sense of time was forgotten when they were recalled to write themselves into my current thought. They became part of my life's narrative, a truth that is a stepping stone to self-understanding, self-learning and reflexivity.

Serrat (2017) mapped a cycle of reflexive thought when examining a critical incident. He suggested an examination of:
the event ("description"),

emotional reaction ("feelings"),

advantages/disadvantages ("evaluation"),

sense-making ("analysis"),

alternative behavioural choices ("conclusion"), and

future reactions to similar incidents ("action plan") (p. 1080).

For the purposes of this thesis, an incident (or event) was deemed critical (or highly significant) if it had a bearing on the overall trajectory of my story, and if it imparted knowledge and evocation to the reader. The working definition of a critical incident for the purposes of this thesis was as follows: *An incident was deemed critical if it concerned one or more others and was a major specific, factual, historical event that impacted directly upon my wellbeing and that influenced the manner in which I lived my life.* Critical incidents were utilised as analytical strategies in the study. Building on Serrat's (2017, p. 1080) analysis, I considered a number of key elements when reflexively examining and relating the major critical incidents warranting inclusion in this thesis. These included: participants other than myself; the actual event as told by my truth; the period of time when it happened in my grief journey; the environment in which the event played out; the reason that it was fixed in my memory;

and how I felt about it. These elements are represented pictorially in Figure 4.2.

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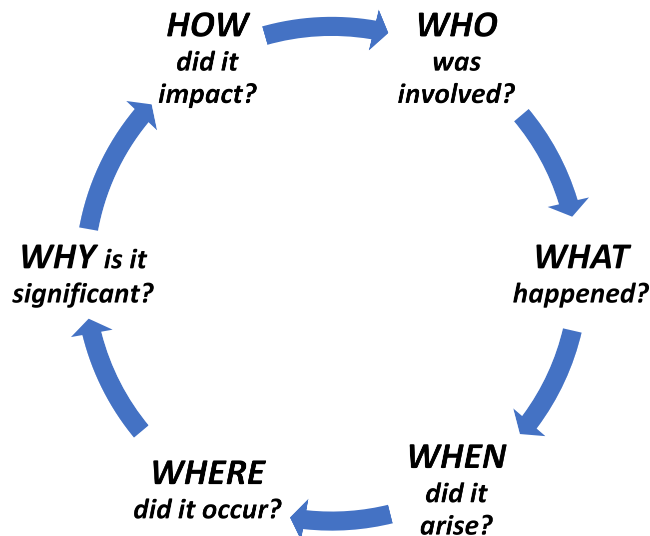
Reflexive key elements to be considered when describing a critical incident



When using critical incidents as a major data source, the researcher should be cognisant of the goal of the research and whether it is best served through the telling of significant events or another type of data resource. Building on the scholarship of Spencer-Oatey (2013), I have compiled a list of the advantages and disadvantages of embedding critical incidents as storytelling (in no particular order of significance).

Advantages

The incidents can be historical or contemporary. Thus they are not time limited.

Relating the incidents connects theory with practice – they are real-world, lived experiences of the author researched in a valid and authentic manner.

Information about seminal experiences that have not previously been uncovered or extrapolated upon is revealed.

Significant or revelatory life events are easier to recall accurately as they can be seared into the memory. They are also easier to confirm with trusted others who may have witnessed or partaken in the event.

Critical incidents may be a springboard for other contextually important data that had been psychologically blocked by the participant.

They provide a tool for reflexive practice, and examination of an incident's impact on lived experience can constitute an agentic practice in that it may provide a voice for change in a person's life.

Autoethnographically, relating critical incidents forms the basis of a storyteller's narrative.

The personal revelation of critical incidents in the life of the storyteller promotes insight and understanding that may assist others who are struggling with similar contexts.

Relating critical incidents is an historical and well-accepted phenomenon: "People have been making observations on other people for centuries" (Flanagan, 1954, n.p.).

Disadvantages

In order to maintain scholarly authenticity and rigour, as well as interest for the reader, incidents should be crafted in such a way as to be completely "full and precise" (Flanagan, 1954, n.p.) but also relatable and evocative/meaningful.

The critical incidents contained within this thesis relied upon my subjective memory. What was related as my truth may not have been the exact recollection of involved others. Each incident bore witness to my interpretation of the event.

I have addressed the disadvantages above through rigorous data collection and analysis. I have consulted the relevant personal journals that I kept assiduously when I returned to work and when I began

doctoral studies. I have also had multiple conversations with those parties who were privy to my physical and emotional environments at the time.

My particular definition of a critical incident is contextual in nature and involves the intentional utilisation of a high degree of reflexivity in thought and agency in practice. *An incident is regarded as being critical when the event significantly influences an individual's agency either positively or negatively.* This is determined reflexively in the context of the individual's lived experience. The incidents recounted within this thesis are relevant to each of the research questions and provide emotional and environmental context. Table 4.5 demonstrates the synthesis of the three major critical incidents presented and their relation to data collection and analysis. Thus the notion of reflexivity is paramount.

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Three major critical incidents presented and their relation to data collection and analysis

PARENTAL BEREAVEMENT Research Question 1: *How has the mobilisation of my grief work affected my experience of my bereaved Self?* Critical incident: return to work: grief work, emotional labour, dark labour
DOCTORAL PROCESSES Research Question 2: *How has the mobilisation of my grief work affected my experience of doctoral processes?* Critical incident: beginning the doctorate: new and positive experiences to do with a vibrant university, competent supervisors, generous fieldwork participants, ongoing peer support, new and interesting scholarly endeavours in the form of presentations and publications
PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION Research Question 3: *How has the mobilisation of my grieving Self and my doctorateness facilitated my personal transformation?* Critical incident: cancer talk: grief work, doctorateness, identity-trajectories

Reflexivity

Reflexivity in autoethnographic research is a contested notion and has variously been described as:

the "constant awareness, assessment, and reassessment by the researcher of the researcher's own contribution / influence / shaping of inter-subjective research and the consequent research findings" (Patnaik, 2013, p. 100);

the "impassioned process whereby autoethnographers use and play with our implicature [utterances] to render meaningful accounts" (Berry, 2013, p. 213);

the "self-conscious introspection guided by a desire to better understand both self and others" (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013, as cited by Matthews, 2019, p. 2);

linking "ideas about the self and personal experiences to the wider culture and to others within that culture" (Dashper, 2016, p. 215);

when "researchers systematically and rigorously reveal their methodology and themselves as the instrument of data generation" (Ruby, 1980, as cited by Tomaselli et al., 2013, p. 582).

In an effort to allay the confusion around the definitions associated with the term "reflexivity", I have created Table 4.6 that deconstructs elements of the notion that applied to this thesis. This is noteworthy because reflexivity is a significant foundation upon which the thesis was built. It is the action that is taken by the storyteller before, during and after the focus story. As such, clarifications around the process and the contextual meaning of the term are necessary to enact the paradigm choice and research design. These clarifications are provided in Table 4.6.

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Reflexivity: Clarifications

<table>
<tr><th colspan="3">REFELEXIVITY</th></tr>
<tr><td>Who does it?</td><td colspan="2">The storyteller/writer
The story listener/reader
The insider
The outsider
The other</td></tr>
<tr><td>What is it?</td><td>Methodologically:
• contextualised
• interpretative
• data-driven</td><td>Emotionally:
• troublesome
• challenging
• transformative</td></tr>
<tr><td>When is it utilised?</td><td colspan="2">Explanation of thought for Self and others
Manifestation of thought for Self and others</td></tr>
<tr><td>Where is it utilised?</td><td colspan="2">In a story/vignette
In research</td></tr>
<tr><td>Why is it utilised?</td><td colspan="2">To enhance the story
To aid understanding
To act as a springboard for change</td></tr>
<tr><td>How does it function in autoethnographic writing?</td><td colspan="2">Enables agentic change for the teller and the reader/listener
Invites the audience into the world of the teller</td></tr>
</table>

Storytellers who engage in autoethnographic studies work from insider knowledge. They utilise their own lived experience as a basis from which to build a narrative filled with nuanced understanding and rich descriptive language that create "a cultural experience in order to facilitate understanding [of] those experiences" (Holman-Jones et al., 2012, p. 33). This deeply personal retelling serves a dual purpose. Not only is the storyteller's will to voice the narrative reflected in the prose, but also revealed is the articulation of "aspects of cultural life [that] traditional research methods leave out or could not access" (Holman-Jones et al., 2012, p. 34).

The act of reflexivity functions as an emotional clarifying process for the soul. Past hurts can be examined and rationalised when the mind and

heart are ready to accept the bewildering impact of wounds sustained. Past pleasures and random acts of kindness from others can also be revisited and appreciated. Thus reflexivity creates a degree of temporal distance with regard to the inherent emotional dimension of insider knowledge.

Insider knowledge

One of the philosophical missions of autoethnography is the interrogation of the ontological goal of what it is to 'be'. Insider knowledge showcases the minutiae involved in responding to this existential conundrum. I locate my insider knowledge of the trauma of grief within the process of my reflexivity around this ongoing experience. My insider knowledge is explicit and shared with the reader for comparative purposes and contextual clarification. As such, the process aids the reader (through connection with the author) and myself (through strengthening the articulation of meaning-making and analysis).

Insider knowledge is more than living through an incident. It is the ability to research episodes and to mine the experience(s) to produce meaningful data that can then be passed on to others as a learning tool. Clutterbuck (2020) posited that "simply being there, or being of there, was insufficient to the determination of not only what happened, but how, why and more importantly the consequences of those happenings" (p. 99). I was uniquely positioned as a griever with an intentional quest to make meaning of my positive and negative environments. I was able not only to interrogate my lived experiences and to examine the historical effects and outcomes of situations, but also to decide on my present and future reactions.

Vignettes

Traditional vignettes utilised in qualitative research have been described as short stories about hypothetical characters used in a particular circumstance to elicit a response from a research participant (Finch, 1987; Hazel, 1995; Hill, 1997). However, when applied to autoethnography, where the participant is in fact the researcher, Denzin

(2000) described the use of vignettes as opportunities for the author to "ask readers to relive the experience through a writer's or performer's eyes" (p. 905). When applied to a qualitative approach, Humphreys (2005) described autoethnographic vignettes as "a means of enhancing the representational richness and reflexivity of qualitative research" (p. 840).

In order to provide a reference point for this thesis around the differences between my use of vignettes and my use of critical incidents, I offer the following alternative definition of a vignette:

> *Vignettes are used as a socially contextualised, creative reflexive tool constructed between myself and my dog that invites the reader to enter the writer's emotional world at a particular point in time. Vignettes are representational strategies utilised to add depth and evocation to the narrative.*

In the context of my thesis, vignettes differed from critical incidents in that they were self-reflexive constructions that involved only myself and my dog.

Socially constructed refers to the fact that it is context specific. *Creative* refers in the case of the vignettes in this thesis- to myself and my dog. El became my non-judgemental, trusted other as I spoke to her and observed her actions. Anthropomorphism allowed a nonclinical reflection of what it is to grieve and of its effects on myself and others. *Reflexive* refers to the heart of this self-focused autoethnographic thesis written in the first person. *Writer's world* refers to the interpretation of the truth of the writer's lived experience. *At a particular point in time* refers to the fact that contexts and the associated interpretations of truth are dynamic entities and are changeable over time and distance as lived experience broadens. "We, and what we do are, after all, always works in progress" (Frost, 1991, as cited by Humphreys, 2005, p. 854).

The ultimate aim of my use of vignettes was to produce an understanding between myself and the reader. Pitard (2016) warned that

"all knowledge begins with experience, but not every experience produces knowledge" (p. 2). Thus, I offer the interactions with my dog as a construction of new knowledge and new insight into my interpretation of my lived experience. "How we interpret the lived experience determines whether developed knowledge will result" (Pitard, 2016, p. 2). I do this in the hope that the vignettes provide a snapshot in time and, as such, provoke discussion and reflection, and generate a shared understanding of a bereaved mother living with her grief.

Critiques of autoethnography

Critics of autoethnography have labelled this form of research variously as "too aesthetic and literary", "too realist and linear", and composed by "confused second-rate writers" (Ellis, 2009, pp. 371-372). Clough (2000) referred to the "melodramatic focus" (p. 16) of autoethnography. The criticism and contested academic angst evoked by autoethnography continue over two decades later. Pickles (2017) discussed a "selfie culture" (n.p.) in academia, giving rise to a "mesearch" (n.p.) culture that foregrounds "academic narcissism and diary-writing for the over-educated" (n.p.). Building on this analysis, Walford (2021) branded autoethnography as "self-indulgent self-analysis", resembling the sharing of holiday 'selfies' with uninterested parties in that "only those who are very close will wish to see all the photographs, and even they will become bored" (p. 40). Walford (2021) warned that too much unstructured focus on the individual as a topic in scholarship may miss the bigger, more traditional meaning of ethnography, which is to convey the lived experiences of others, not of the author.

I have reflected on the meaning and application of these sentiments and I am confident that the insider insights provided by my lived experience are worth sharing and that interested others will find my story valuable. I feel that my narrative will connect with others who live their lives with grief and bereavement (not only the loss of a child). This applies not only to the socially and emotionally marginalised communities of bereaved mothers in which I found myself, but also to the academic

community in which I have strived for membership. I further contend that higher education institutions are made up of individuals who all have a story to tell about their education journeys, not necessarily the journey to a doctorate. This connection that most students have to academic struggle, no matter the causality, is very real.

Walford's (2021) criticisms were noteworthy and revolved around his multiple claims that: autoethnography is an abrogation of scholarly responsibility; autoethnography lacks analytical specificity and ethical validity; personal suffering should not be placed above social suffering; and "academics are not interesting enough to be the subject of social inquiry" (p. 40). It is up to the researcher/storyteller to ensure that these challenges are addressed and overcome sufficiently to provide the reader with a balanced, circumspect and relatable piece of scholarly writing.

My reply to these claims reflects the notion that all knowledge, and the imparting of same, is value laden. Such knowledge is revealed (both consciously and unconsciously) through the experiential lens of the researcher, whether the paradigm is qualitative or quantitative. All researchers come to their research experience with philosophical assumptions, the foundations of which are laid in a researcher's cultural grounding, gender, age and use of language. It is the researcher's recognition of such biases that constitutes the ethical and relational worth of the writing. Rigorous methodological practice, and my application of this, are discussed in Section 4.4.9.

Research rigour

When conducting autoethnographic research, the application of rigour is a contested notion (Johnson, 2022; Loh, 2013; Morrow, 2005; Sparkes, 2022). However, Le Roux (2017) posited that, "without rigour, research is meaningless" (p. 195). The author highlighted the importance of research tools that reflect the stated philosophical assumptions of the researcher and that reinforce the aim of the study. When considering an evaluation of rigour for an evocative autoethnography study, Le Roux

(2017) proposed five criteria that included subjectivity, self-reflexivity, resonance, credibility and contribution (p. 204).

My application of these criteria is demonstrated in Table 4.7.

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Application of Le Roux's (2017) criteria

CRITERION	LE ROUX (2017, p. 204)	MY APPLICATION
Subjectivity	"The researcher is self-consciously involved in the construction of the narrative which constitutes the research."	I frequently reiterate that this is my story, based on my own lived experience as I saw it through my eyes only.
Self-reflexivity	"There is evidence of the researcher's intense awareness of her role and relationship to the research which is situated within a historical and cultural context."	I acknowledged historical factors that led to my privileged position while simultaneously being cast as an outlier within that culture.
Resonance	"… the audience is able to enter into, engage with, experience or connect with the writer's story on an intellectual and emotional level."	I have utilised the practice of anthropomorphism and humour to relate real-world incidents.
Credibility	"The research process and reporting should be permeated by honesty."	I have represented my truth as I have experienced it. Credibility has been maintained in the way that I drew from multiple data sources in order to construct the narrative.

CRITERION	LE ROUX (2017, p. 204)	MY APPLICATION
Contribution	"Autoethnography teaches, informs and inspires."	This thesis contributes to theoretical, methodological, policy and practice knowledge (please refer to Chapter 8).

Le Roux (2017) asserted that adherence to ethical practices is inherent in each of these criteria, and that at no time can "informed judgement" (p. 204) based on lived experience and intense reflexivity be overvalued. This philosophy and the five criteria constitute the ethical framework of my thesis writing. Le Roux stressed the significance of the beliefs that the author adheres to, and the cognisant choices implemented when decision making. When writing about grief and motherhood bereavement, I belief that these criteria allow a deeper level of thought and application of research rigour. *For my researcher identity.*

Conclusion

When evaluating the credence and validity of an evocative autoethnographic piece of writing, Dashper (2016) cited five criteria. These were "evocation", "narrative flow and structure", "believability", "ethical narratives" and "contribution" (pp. 222-223). I have synthesised these criteria in Figure 4.3.

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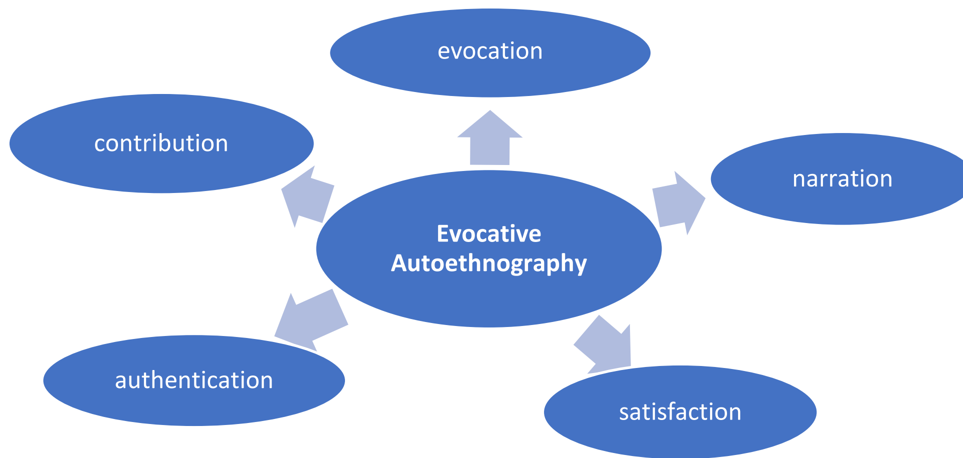
Criteria for an effective and credible piece of evocative autoethnography



"Evocation" (Dashper, 2016, p. 222): How evocative is the writing? Can the reader connect with the topic and the emotional content?

Narration: "narrative flow and structure" (Dashper, 2016, p. 222): Does the writing flow naturally? Is it too cumbersome?

Satisfaction: "believability" (Dashper, 2016, p. 222): Is the reader satisfied that the experience/topic conveyed is believable and topic-worthy?

Authentication: "ethical narratives" (Dashper, 2016, p. 223): Has the writer considered the ethical stance of herself and others included in the story?

"Contribution" (Dashper, 2016, p. 223): Does the piece of writing enhance scholarship in the topic area?

I have addressed the notions listed above in the following adaptations:

"Evocation" (Dashper, 2016, p. 222): This is expressed in the addition of my constructed conversations with El (vignettes) and the judicious

application of short, italicised thoughts littered throughout the thesis. I have also included photos of significant others in order to make the narrative personal and relatable.

Narration: “narrative flow and structure” (Dashper, 2016, p. 222): The narrative follows a set structure with the critical incident described as the prologue and the vignette offered as the epilogue. Each of the research question chapters follow the same format.

Satisfaction: “believability” (Dashper, 2016, p. 222): The umbrella subject of cancer is topical as it is widespread throughout the community. The subject of the death of a child from cancer follows as a natural outcome of the consequences. Further, I have told my story in the subjective, yet balanced, first person.

Authentication: “ethical narratives” (Dashper, 2016, p. 223): I have told my story in an ethical and rigorous manner as evidenced by a valid data collection and a meticulous data analysis.

“Contribution” (Dashper, 2016, p. 223): Understanding the ramifications of parental bereavement adds to scholarship in multiple ways. These are further discussed in Chapter 8.

Through the additional adherence to Dashper’s criteria (2016), I feel that I have established a genuine piece of quality writing that can be utilised beyond the initial reading of the text. The use of these criteria not only makes my writing more solid and more rigorous, it ensures a practical application of the content. *For my relationship with the reader.*

Data collection

Introduction

In the tradition of autoethnographic data collection, I utilised my personal experiences as my primary data source (Chang, 2013). This thesis contains a combined bricolage of rich information obtained from both the academic and the private worlds that I traversed during the

thesis journey. Primary data sets were situated within my research questions as I positioned my bereaved Self within the doctoral journey. Data sources were screened for relevance and impact. Information was discarded if I deemed the source unworthy of the thesis (not factual enough, too emotive, disrespectful) or too personal.

I began my data collection by reviewing my fieldnotes. These were embedded in "natural settings" (Adams, 2021, n.p.), and comprised personal historical and contemporary written, oral and visual texts. Written texts were in the form of doctoral documents, journals, notes from presentations, formal publications, readings, social media, PhD Thesis #1 and PhD Thesis #2, and vignettes. Oral texts were in the form of snippets of memories or "headnotes" (Wall, 2008, p. 45) from past academic, professional and/or personal conversations, as well as recorded songs/poems that Rory wrote and performed. Visual texts comprised photographs, videos and illustrations, as well as other forms of artwork. After establishing the emotional connection that I had to the items that I had collected, I examined their applicability to my research. In effect, I adhered to the adage of "mining oneself as data" (Arnold, 2011, p. 72).

Sources for Research Question 1: *How has the mobilisation of my grief work affected my experience of my bereaved Self?* Sources included:

past and present private journals;

artefacts such as photographs;

appropriate readings of journal articles, books and social media sites to do with the current research topic;

presentations grounded in my experience of cancer as Rory's carer;

selected memories involving specific critical incidents;

correspondence to do with PhD Thesis #1 and PhD Thesis #2;

constructed narratives in the form of reflexive vignettes interrogated through my relationship with my beloved dog.

Sources for Research Question 2: *How has the mobilisation of my doctorateness affected my experience of doctoral processes?* Sources included:

historical documentation of emails and other doctoral processes (e.g., administrative documents, reflective journal);

selected artefacts such as photographs of the participants in my first PhD study as well as photographs of my first PhD graduation;

selected memories;

presentations and publications grounded in my first doctoral topic;

appropriate readings such as journal articles, books and social media sites to do with the current research topic;

correspondence to do with PhD Thesis #1 and PhD Thesis #2;

constructed narratives in the form of reflexive vignettes interrogated through my relationship with my beloved dog.

Each of these data collections culminated in the realisation of ***Research Question 3:*** *How has the mobilisation of my grieving Self and my doctorateness facilitated my personal transformation?* Which are as described in this study's conceptual framework.

These data sources are synthesised in Table 4.8.

Table Error! No text of specified style in document.**.18**

Data sources

DATA SOURCES	
PERSONAL (RESEACH QUESTIONS 1, 3)	**DOCTORAL/ACADEMIC (RESEACH QUESTIONS 2, 3)**
"Headnotes" (Wall, 2008, p. 45)	Publications
Correspondence to do with PhD Thesis #1 and PhD Thesis #2	Correspondence to do with PhD Thesis #1 and PhD Thesis #2
Artefacts	Presentations
Private readings	Doctoral documentation
Reflective journal	Reflective journal
Social media	Social media

Doctoral documentation

Documents of past correspondence such as academic and personal emails and text messages from significant academic others (such as supervisors, peers, book contributors) helped to ground the progression of my story. They told my tale using a different voice and perspective and were empirical examples of the progression of time and experience.

Artefacts

Photographs and possessions from the past provide an embodied visualisation of lived experience that helps to narrate that past. They can provide both joy and sadness. They can serve as a rescue net as one freefalls through grief, losing control of the past and the present. Photographs of my son, in particular, provide tangible, chronicled evidence of a young life that was lived to the fullest. Baird (2020) noted that "objects have intrinsic value as triggers of memory and nostalgia, and therefore help us [to] document our lives" (p. 107).

Headnotes

Perhaps the most controversial of all data, "headnotes" (Wall, 2008, p. 45) are deeply reflexive memories of the field(s) in which the research occurs. They are thoughts about various past unwritten critical incidents, and they "provide the sense of the whole" (Wall, 2008, p. 45). When

mentally reviewing headnotes, the researcher asks herself questions related to the action in the scenes, her feelings about what occurred, a comparison of past and current reactions to the same event, and the relationship of these feelings to extant scholarly literature (Dashper, 2016, p. 221). In this thesis, headnotes constituted remembered oral texts and, as such, were conversational in nature.

Emotional candour is paramount in order to establish the relevance of that particular incident and why it is worth pursuing academically. Headnotes are controversial for some researchers and readers because they cannot be proven; they are remembrances. In defence of this type of data, Giorgio (2013) commented that "as autoethnographers, we use memory for much of our data; through memory we ground our analysis" (p. 406). Headnotes included remembered critical conversations and events that occurred between me and others. Examples included my interaction with a school auditor (please refer to Section 5.3), and my interaction with my dentist (Section 8.1). Etherington (2004) commented that "my personal experience [acts] as a legitimate source of knowledge" (p. 19). Wall (2008) noted that the respected anthropologist Margaret Mead favoured the use of headnotes, citing the importance of long-term lived experience in research. Thus my historical engagement in the field of grief, and the lengthy interactions with others around this phenomenon, enabled me to observe and record aspects of lived understandings to which others were not privy.

Journals

Academic and private journals can constitute informative sources of evocative data that underscore the passage of identity construction over time. Highly personal and self-reflective, journals are a rich resource that track the triumphs and challenges of lived experience over time. When reading over the past, I was able to place those old academic and personal resentments/disappointments in another context and to hold them up to the calming lens of the present. I was also able to relive past triumphs and to feel a sense of accomplishment and motivation, as well

as excitement for those that I have not yet experienced. Chang (2013) noted, "I remind myself that doing autoethnography is more than recalling stories … and digging into my past. It is about holding collected (or written) fragments of life against the present life and making sense of their significance within the bigger context of my life" (p. 115).

Presentations

During my first doctoral journey, I presented my research at a number of different forums. These included symposia that my university hosted for early career researchers; conferences held by outside organisations; and presentations made to a postgraduate and early career researcher group to which I belong within my university. I was also asked to speak at public community forums such as the local writers' association about the process of publishing a book from my thesis. Upon the completion of my first PhD, I travelled to the participants' rural and metropolitan headquarters and delivered my research findings to the men's groups. From this, I was requested to give a presentation to interested others at a dinner meeting that was held in a private room at a local hotel.

Some of these resources are listed below.

Miscellaneous

Mulligan D. L. (2019, October 14). *TOMNET and Men's Sheds: Meeting the contributive needs of older men?* Paper presented at a Soroptimist International dinner meeting, Toowoomba, Qld, Australia.

Mulligan, D. L. (2021, February 27). *Lessons learned on a journey to publication.* Paper presented at a meeting of the Toowoomba Writers' Association, Toowoomba, Qld, Australia.

Thirteen stakeholder meetings with TOMNET/Men's Shed groups to discuss my research findings after being awarded my first doctorate.

Involvement in the USQ PGECR Research Symposia

Mulligan, D. L. (2018, July 27). *The dive: Why begin a PhD?* Paper presented at the 22nd University of Southern Queensland

Postgraduate and Early Career Researcher (PGECR) group research symposium, Springfield, Qld, Australia.

Mulligan, D. L. (2018, November 23). *The ethics of reciprocity*. Paper presented at the 23rd University of Southern Queensland Postgraduate and Early Career Researcher (PGECR) group research symposium, Toowoomba, Qld, Australia.

Mulligan, D. L. (2019, June 28). *Reflecting on the delightful discovery of finding your writing tribe*. Paper presented at the 24th University of Southern Queensland Postgraduate and Early Career Researcher (PGECR) group research symposium, Toowoomba, Qld, Australia.

Mulligan, D. L. (2019, November 15). *Activist research: Real-world reciprocity*. Paper presented at the 25th University of Southern Queensland Postgraduate and Early Career Researcher (PGECR) group research symposium, Toowoomba, Qld, Australia.

Mulligan, D. L. (2020, November 27). *Dr Death: Emotional collaborations and the power of belief*. Paper presented at the 26th University of Southern Queensland Postgraduate and Early Career Researcher (PGECR) group research symposium, online.

Mulligan, D. L. (2021, June 18). *Lessons learnt on a journey to publication.* Paper presented at the 27th University of Southern Queensland Postgraduate and Early Career Researcher (PGECR) group research symposium, online.

Mulligan, D. L. (2022, November 18). *The impact of supervisory praxis on the student's research experience.* Paper presented at the 29th University of Southern Queensland Postgraduate and Early Career Researcher (PGECR) group research symposium, online.

Moderator or Chair of at least one session at the last five symposia.

USQ Postgraduate Early Career Researcher Group (PGECR)

Chairperson: ongoing

Solo presentations:

**Why???*

**Meme life: A silent journey through a PhD as told by social media*

**How to write an effective abstract*

**The agony and the ecstasy of turning your PhD into a book Pt 1*

**The agony and the ecstasy of turning your PhD into a book Pt 2*

**Researcher identity: Where can I buy it?*

**A different type of art*

Jensen-Clayton, C. M., Cutcliffe, K., Mulligan, D. L., & Danaher, P. A. (2021, July 15). *The doctorate as a formative developmental process.* Panel presented at a meeting of the University of Southern Queensland Postgraduate and Early Career Researcher group, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Qld, Australia.

Conferences

Mulligan, D. L. (2019, April 3). *Entering the man cave.* Paper presented at the Qualitative Research Conference, Brisbane, Qld, Australia.

Mulligan, D. L., & Weier, M. (2019, April 3). *The shed's not the same without you.* Paper presented at the Qualitative Research Conference, Brisbane, Qld, Australia.

Mulligan, D. L., & Hegarty, A. (2019, October 24). *TOMNET.* Paper presented at the Toowoomba Community Development Conference, Toowoomba, Qld, Australia.

Mulligan, D. L. (2020, June 23). *The effectiveness and sustainability of Men's Sheds.* Paper presented at Men's Health Connected, online. https://www.amhf.org.au/

Publications

After I had completed my first PhD thesis (Mulligan, 2018), I was fortunate to be offered a chance to co-edit and to contribute chapters to a number of research books with my supervisor Patrick Danaher (Anteliz et al., 2022; Mulligan & Danaher, 2020; Mulligan & Danaher, 2021; Mulligan et al., 2023). I have also authored a research book based on some of the chapters from my first PhD thesis (Mulligan, 2020). This provided me with the courage to contemplate solo editing a book about older people (over 55 years of age) who choose to complete a doctorate.

Readings

The notion of sacred texts is most often connected with religious doctrines. It is my contention that this terminology can be equally applied to those writings that any reader (religious and nonreligious) prizes above all other texts. In my quest for consolation after the death of my son, I sought solace from numerous written volumes referencing death, bereavement and grief, none of which was suitable for my particular values and/or circumstances. Finally, I came upon one book that resonated with my emotional state. Wolterstorff's (1987) *Lament for a son* rescued me in that it affirmed my grief and spoke to me as no other text had before or has since. It acted as a consciousness-making resource in that it was the first text that I had read that stressed the ownership of grief and the agency of the griever. I was later to draw comparisons between the parallel ownership and responsibilities that I had for my grief and my doctorateness. Thus, it is appreciated as a continuing source of inspiration and wisdom.

Social media

Social media can be a valuable resource for support, information and humour. It has the ability to normalise previously foreign feelings such as imposter syndrome (doctoral studies) and emotional desperation (grief). Interaction with others who are experiencing similar issues provides comfort and reassurance that validate the emotional rollercoaster that can be a by-product of a long-term project such as the ones upon which I embarked (willingly and unwillingly).

Sites were chosen for their relationality and my emotional connection with the content. Some were constant sources of doctoral knowledge such as the OWLs group (as noted below). The bereavement sites were visited less regularly as my grief journey progressed and as my personal trajectory became more established.

The sites that I visited regularly included:

Facebook

- Grieving Mothers (facebook.com/groups/Grievingmothers)
- Living after Child Loss (facebook.com/groups/392231727955571/?hoisted_section_header_type=recently_seen&multi_permalinks=1238682636643805)
- Older Wiser Learners (OWLs) (facebook.com/groups/708019069302386) Reviewer 2 Must Be Stopped! (facebook.com/groups/reviewer2/)
- Women in Academia Support Network Group (facebook.com/groups/905644729576673/?hoisted_section_header_type=recently_seen&multi_permalinks=2234758733331926)

Twitter

- Grief Speaks (twitter.com/griefspeaks?lang=en)
- @PhDForum (twitter.com/PhDForum?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor)
- @PhDStudent (twitter.com/phdstudents?lang=en)

Instagram

- Love PhD Memes (instagram.com/lovephdmemes/?hl=en)
- PHD Comics (instagram.com/phd_comics/?hl=en)

Blogs

- Patter (patthomson.net/)
- The Thesis Whisperer (thesiswhisperer.com/)

Vlog

- Tara Brabazon (youtube.com/user/TaraBrabazon/videos)

Youtube

- TED (ted.com/talks)

PhD Thesis #1 and PhD Thesis #2

Prior knowledge of the research process was provided in the form of my first PhD thesis entitled: *"Time to find a new freedom": TOMNET and Men's Sheds – meeting older men's contributive needs in regions within South East and South West Queensland, Australia?* (Mulligan, 2018). This thesis formed the basis of my knowledge about the structure of traditional thesis writing; the importance of quality peer and supervisory support when undertaking a major project such as a doctorate; and the joy, the purpose and the sense of confidence that come with successfully completing a complex piece of writing.

This, PhD Thesis #2 is methodologically very different from my first, and has led me down an alternative path of discovery, and more specifically catharsis. I have appreciated employing an autoethnographic approach to telling part of my personal grief journey. I welcomed the

interwoven nuances of theory and practice to promote social justice for voicing my experience on behalf of others who may have suffered the same fate.

Conclusion

Data collection consisted of written, oral and visual field notes. Written texts in the form of doctoral documents, journals, publications, readings, social media and my first thesis were interrogated. Oral texts (headnotes) such as snippets of remembered conversations were analysed. Pleasant memories of my initial conversation with Glen Postle as he offered me the lifeline of resuming my study – "Don't worry about a topic; I've got something you might be interested in" – and memories of the conversation between Patrick Danaher and myself as we walked to the university campus carpark together one afternoon – "I would be honoured if you would consider me as a supervisor" – were examples of headnotes. "They don't want you back, you know" was another (less pleasant) type of remembered conversation from my teaching partner upon my return to work. Visual texts such as artefacts and presentations from the past were examined for relevance to the research. Vignettes in the form of conversations with my dog were offered as collaborative, reflexive constructions of thought and point in time reality that depicted pivotal scenes of my emotional reaction to those scenarios.

These data sources were intended to contribute to increasing social understandings of the reality of living and working with grief through the lens of the researcher while conducting a doctoral study. These sources are synthesised into Figure 4.4 below.

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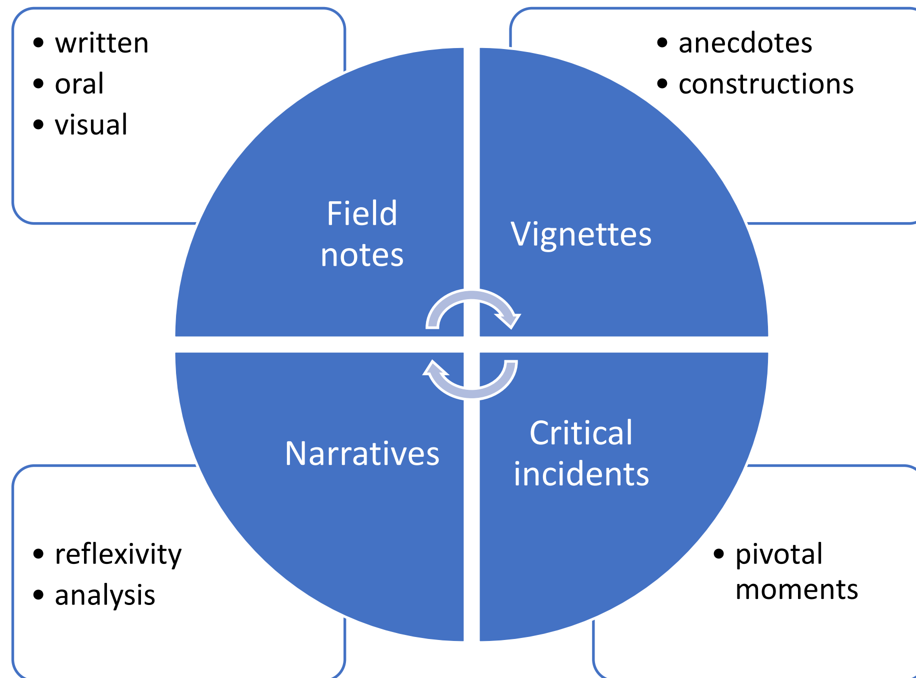
Data collection



Data analysis

Figure 4.5 depicts those sources that composed my identity reflections of Self at the beginning of my first doctorate six months after my son had died: ground zero. This diagram synthesises my interpretation of multiple [r]evolving identities that are created through the reflexive lens of the stable "signatures" of Self (Morf & Mischel, 2012, p. 35). These "signatures" refer to the manner in which an individual's emotions and behaviour diverge according to contextual clues. Each dynamic identity retains its own truth (until proven otherwise), and constantly changes shape, position and importance depending upon context and the transitory health of Self. The latter is constantly monitored through the stable Self in the form of self-talk around issues of self-awareness, self-belief, self-care, self-concept, self-control, self-discipline, self-esteem and self-image.

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Ground Zero

loneliness
panic attacks
bewilderment
stress
overload
lightness
anxiety
fear
pain
shock
responsibility
lethargy
over eating
ACADEMIC
DEVELOPMENT
invisibility
silenced
under eating
restlessness
emptiness
exasperation
role model
self-doubt
isolation
disappointment
GRIEF
WORK
flash backs
exhaustion
IDENTITY
SHIFT
brain fog
mental chaos
vulnerability
anguish
numbness
powerlessness
nightmares
inferiority
resentment
EMOTIONAL
TRANSFORMATION
anger
alienation
fragility
loss
heaviness
paralysed
yearning
sadness
sadness
BROKEN
DAMAGED
DIMINISHED
CONFUSED
LESS

Analysis of the data focused on meaning-making around life after bereavement, not only for me as a grieving parent, but also for others in the bereavement community who are searching for strategic insight in order to move on from ground zero. Chang (2013) addressed this notion "meaning-making also requires determining how data are connected to the realities of other people with similar experiences and to existing research" (p. 116).

To this end, with the outline suggested by Chang (2013), I embraced the notion of an organic analysis that drilled down through the various data sources to uncover the heart of the research. "Facts are important to an autoethnographic storyteller – they can and must be verified" (Bochner, 2012, p. 161). Evocative autoethnography foregrounds emotion. It is an intuitive phenomenon that legitimises the emotions that others may have cruelly and wantonly disparaged. It celebrates the highs and the lows of an individual's emotional state and acknowledges that these emotions serve as a valid acknowledgement of lived experience. Mining the emotions is a raw process that emphasises reflexivity and patience. Subjectivity is all; there is no room here for clinical appraisal.

Phase One of my data analysis consisted of reviewing sources to establish emotions born of tone. For example, when I read through the emails sent by the university that pertained to my doctorate(s), I perused the contents to ascertain how I felt about them – not necessarily what was imparted. This led me to reflect on my theses as overall experiences, ignoring specific counterpoints. Additionally, when I read through journals, I sought emotion and I sought to remember how I felt at this time. The process, I believe, was a mystical practice that surfaced through my memory and that prompted truth. I did not examine these emotions; rather I noted them and then allowed them the opportunity to clarify themselves.

Thus, rather than focus on individual data sources, I examined each one as it pertained to the whole of the message behind my current thesis: that is, bereavement, doctorateness and ultimately personal transformation. My application of this point is illustrated in Figure 4.6.

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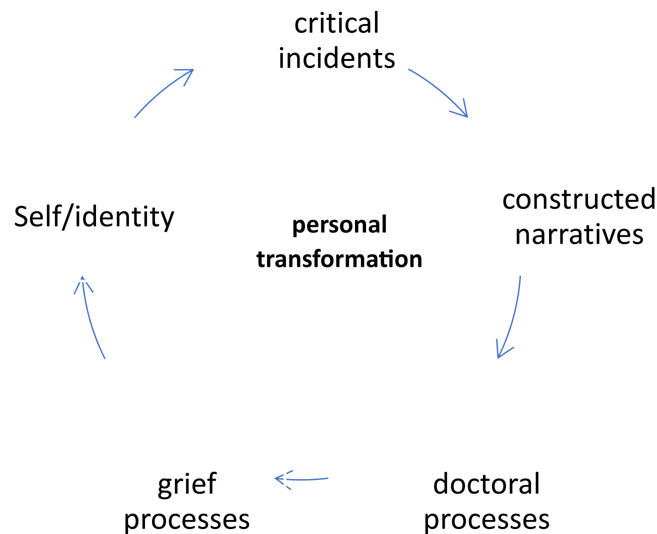
Holistic examination of data



Phase Two of my data analysis required a more practical approach. Data were revisited and reread on a regular basis. As I worked my way through my information sources, I was constantly re-examining the contents for currency and applicability. I reconsidered how I felt about certain information – for example, my return to work – to ensure that my approach to the overriding message of personal transformation was consistent and truthful. Evocative autoethnographies such as the one that I have undertaken are essentially emotion-driven recounts.

From this iterative process, initial emotional points of awareness were noted and gradually expanded upon through the processes of review and reflexivity. Thus, while endeavouring to represent authenticity, I focused on language that would speak to the relational aspect of my story as I interacted with each of the data sources. In so doing, I was able to classify these points of interest into Challenges and Blessings. This classification was not thought of as a dichotomous entity, but rather as a

gentle appraisal of emotional transparency. These points of awareness added to the clarity of my thinking. My application of this point is illustrated in Table 4.9.

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Data sources and points of awareness

DATA SOURCES	POINTS OF AWARENESS			
	CHALLENGES		**BLESSINGS**	
Doctoral documentation	university processes such as confirmation of candidature	addressing feedback, refining knowledge	clarity of thought and achievement	mutual trust between myself and my supervisors
Artefacts	emotions in the 'before' compared with life in the 'after' (Rory's clothes)	reminders of Rory's life with cancer (videos)	physical proof of love from my children (photographs)	remembrances of privilege (gifts from and to my children)
Headnotes	liminality and the enactment of dark labour	unwelcome conversations with others	love and appreciation for my dog	meaning-making through memories
Journals	Aloneness	understanding (Rory's cancer journal)	personal and scholarly growth and development	gratitude
Presentations	imposter syndrome	trepidation of public speaking	camaraderie of knowledge sharing	networking – increasing feeling of confidence
Publications	skill uncertainty	connecting with contributors and publishers	feeling 'academic' scholarly reciprocity	honing academic skills such as editing other people's work
Readings	considering the perspectives of others	sacred texts that teach about Self	insights from other academics	forging my own personal and doctoral path

DATA SOURCES	POINTS OF AWARENESS			
	CHALLENGES		BLESSINGS	
Social media	being privy to the overwhelming stories of others	finding meaning in other people's experiences	shared stories, peer support	humour
PhD Thesis #1 and PhD Thesis #2	learning new computer skills	balancing family/doctorate/grief	respect for the processes of grief and doctorateness	sense of completion and pride

As I approached Phase Three of my data analysis, it occurred to me that grief and doctorateness were parallel emotional rollercoasters (as presented in Section 3.7) that could have very easily spun out of order into chaos. I did not want to revisit the disturbingly frenzied early era of my bereavement before I contacted Glen when I felt that I had no emotional power. In order to develop my data analysis, and in concert with my findings (as represented in Table 4.9), I then arranged these points of awareness into two emergent themes. These are represented in Table 4.10.

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Emergent themes

Things that I could learn to control		**Things I that could not control**	
The present	*My daughter deserves more; I deserve more*	The past	*Live with it; it can't be changed*
My reactions to the negativity of others	*I had a plan – I did not want it derailed*	The reactions of others	*Disconcertingly and bewilderingly unpredictable*
My reactions to my grief	*Grief is righteous and eternal – manage it*	Structural doctoral processes	*Comfortingly predictable*
Knowledge acquisition	*I have always wanted to do a doctorate*		
New relationships	*I will be accepted for the person who I am now*		
Social change	*I have something to say about bereaved motherhood*		

Phase Four of the process linked the themes from my data analysis to my conceptual framework (as presented in Section 3.8). This final, iterative process focused on the notions of parental bereavement, doctoral processes and personal transformation as they pertained to grief work and to the development of Self and identities as part of personal transformation. This is represented in Figure 4.7.

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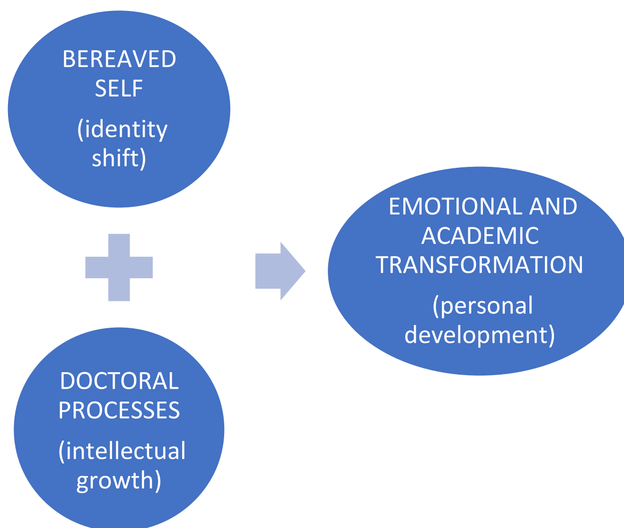
Conceptual framework



Accordingly, my data analysis consisted of four deliberate phases. These are diagrammatically represented in Figure 4.8.

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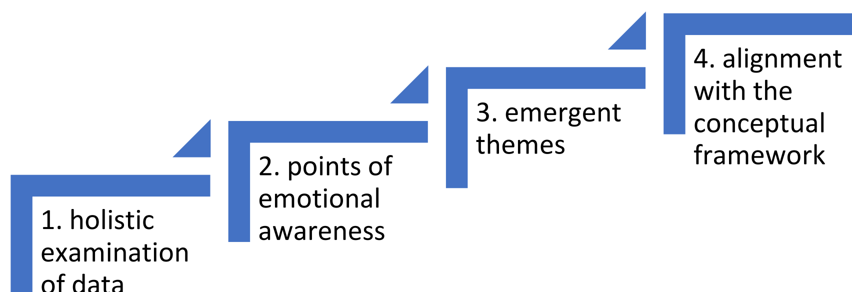
Phases of data analysis



Ethical and political considerations

Historically, researchers have been expected to consider "dutiful ethics" (Etherington, 2007, p. 601) when planning their research. Fairness (informed consent, findings), independence (withdrawal options) and privacy (the use of pseudonyms) were paramount. Etherington (2007) raised the question as to whether these guidelines are adequate criteria when considering the contextual nature of the research environment. She posited that the interplay of relationships based on gender, age, culture and power should also be accounted for by the reflexive researcher. Etherington (2007) further advocated the notion of a metamorphosis from the traditional objective to the more subjective research practice that favours transparency as the connection between reflexivity and ethical research.

Autoethnographers should consider their ethical stance before, during and after embarking on their writing journey. Roth (2009) maintained that, as researchers, we are ethically obliged to apply ourselves to all moral consequences before we present our written ideas to the general population, "our very presence in this world thereby makes us responsible for what we do and how we do it" (n.p.).

As our stories inescapably and necessarily involve other living beings, the "authorial power" (Tullis, 2013, p. 258) that autoethnographers maintain over the others mentioned in their writing should not be abused. The idea of the power and the inherent potency of the writer's words and the influence that they may have over the reader should not be overlooked, particularly when describing the actions of significant others. In my case, I refer consistently to my son (Rory) and one of my supervisors (Glen Postle), neither of whom are alive to provide direct participatory consent. In the case of Glen Postle, I have written permission from his widow to reference him in the thesis. Additionally, the reputations of the people whose actions (both positive and negative) are referred to in the telling of my story, should not be utilised as fodder or embellishment in the narrative.

Tullis (2013) created a checklist for autoethnographers from which I have adapted a number of points that applied to my research situation. These considerations included:

- minimise personal and reputational damage to self and others
- ensure that any publicly available writing is respectful of the persons (both dead and alive) contained therein
- acknowledge that autoethnographic texts are relational, and that audience response will be varied both in the present and in the future
- practise "ethical mindfulness" (Douglas & Carless, 2013, p. 99), which I interpreted as being reflective about, and aware of, the consequences of my research for myself and for others.

I wish no harm to others in the writing of this thesis. What was done, behaviours both hostile and supportive, cannot be undone. Where photographs of people are presented, I have sought permission for their use. It was my eyes that were behind the lens that captured the images. As adults, we are all responsible for our behaviours – either intentional or unintentional. I am confident that those readers who have a similar lived experience will recognise the universal essence of who is represented both pictorially and in prose, and the roles that they play in their own grief laden world.

When including a deceased person in one's story, the notion of informed consent becomes of utmost importance. This representation of inherent power imbalance is an imperative consideration for the author. As I wrote my narrative, I took care to keep my memories of their attitudes (as I interpreted them) uppermost in my mind. I was constantly challenging myself to examine my motives for their inclusion. I continually asked myself, "What would Glen/Rory think of this?", "How would he react to this piece of the story?", and, finally, "Am I shedding a loving light on my relationship with El and treating her memory with respect?". Such reputational ethical judgements governed my decision-making as I sought

to honour those significant others who were denied a living voice in my story.

Chapter summary

In summary, an interpretivist paradigm delves deeply into understanding the data to conceptualise and personalise a phenomenon. Qualitative research does not detect trends or generalised patterns in the population. Rather, the author's story is constructed as a shared experience that links the audience into a significant emotionality that promotes knowledge and understanding. Autoethnographic researchers have an ethical responsibility to focus on the experience of the individual. In combination, these different elements of the research design provided a rigorous and robust approach to answering the study's three research questions.

In this chapter, I have explained my application of an interpretivist paradigm foregrounding subjectivity and highlighting the significance of contextualisation and reality as shaped by the physical and emotional environments. I have further described my utilisation of a qualitative approach to research, emphasising the collection and the analysis of data that are relative to the tenets advocated by Mack et al. (2005). Evocative autethnographic writing suggests a meaningful reader/writer connection through real-world, culturally bound experiences. Matthews (2019) stated that autoethnography "stimulates discussion … encourages exchange, … and remains fluid and flexible rather than fixed" (p. 2). A variety of data sources, analysed in a vigorous and robust manner, adds credibility to the research underpinning paramount ethical considerations. These structural elements are portrayed diagrammatically in Figure 4.9.

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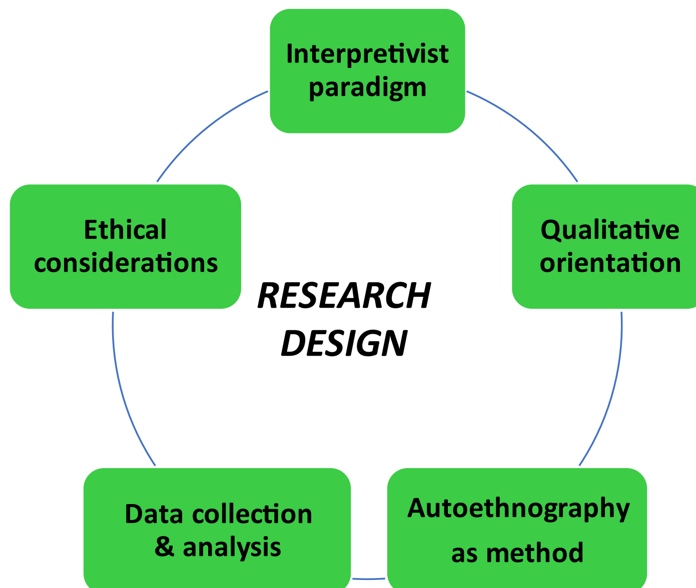
Structural elements of the research design



Chapter 5 interrogates my response to the first of the three research questions: *How has the mobilisation of my grief work affected my experience of my bereaved Self?*

The following section (4.9) presents the end of Chapter 4: the Epilogue.

Epilogue

Happiness

So here it is – as I journey through this maze of confusion and bewilderment, there are definitely times when I feel happy. This is a very serious statement for me because I refuse to let go of my grief. So how does this positioning of the opposed notions of happiness and grief make a home in my psyche? El and I have had this conversation on many occasions. Am I, as a bereaved mother, allowed to feel happy?

So many books have been written about happiness. For me, happiness has been pared down to making the most of what I have at this moment

in time. Sometimes this works, sometimes it doesn't – and there it is – the grief factor.

Flashbacks can be bloody. When I am strong, I am able to acknowledge them and get on with whatever I am doing. When I am not so strong, they bring me to my knees and I rage – sometimes silently, sometimes not. And, when my fury burns itself out, I take time out to recover. Rage is exhausting.

This is why I accept happiness into my life and look for occasions to laugh. I have taught myself to laugh again. Haltingly at first, but it gets easier if you practise.

I cannot spend my life in a state of perpetual grief. I owe it to my family and to myself to be able to find joy in living, however momentary that joy may be. Just as I own my grief, I am responsible for my own happiness.

It's not easy. It takes work to find the happy in life after the trauma.

I do not overstep my quest for joy. But I am open to the moments.

Nature – Sunshine after rain, rain after a dry spell. Wind whistling through the branches, a soft breeze caressing and playfully ruffling my dog's fur.

Other people – My daughter's happy laughter as we share a joke. My friends and I chatting. Random acts of kindness – receiving and giving.

Intellectual satisfaction – Guided by my supervisors who are travelling along the PhD highway with me.

Food – Hot soup on a cold day, an ice-cold milkshake on a hot day. Chocolate on any day.

El – Watching my delinquent dog steal a mandarin straight from the tree. She knows she's not supposed to do this [Figure 4.10]. Listening to her snores as I write my thesis gives me comfort and a settled contentment.

Memories – Some are painful and are to be borne as well as I can, but some are happy and make my heart sing. Those are to be embraced and shared if I feel like it, hugged to myself and my dog if I don't.

Figure Error! No text of specified style in document.**.33**
Illicit El

GRIEF WORK

Would you realise I miss you when it rains? Would you know I'm screaming out to you when thunder echoes loud? Would you cry as the fog reminds you of how I won't see you for a while?

Prologue

She is wise, my old dog. I know she loved Rory. I know that, when the world was dark and the rest of the family were sleeping and he lay in his bed awake, in pain, traumatised and desperately scared, he was never alone. Her warm, golden presence lay beside him, comforting him, offering a furry, loving rock to cling to while he was drowning in a sea of unimaginable terror throughout the long, interminable night. This is the gift of companion animals: the unconditional love that they have for their humans and their intuitive, empathic connection with us. Early on in the 'after', there were times when I would find her in his room lying on the floor beside his empty bed. Then she would look at me with beseeching eyes that implored, "When is he coming back?" and I would have to tell her, "Never".

Overview of the chapter

Chapter 1 presented an introduction to the thesis. It explained the background to my research and the dual nature of the structure of the writing employed throughout. Chapter 2 offered a contextual foundation and reviewed some of the major theories around grief work and doctorateness. Chapter 3 articulated my conceptual framework and described the underpinning theoretical constructs. It interrogated the key elements of Self and identities as I have applied them to my research. Chapter 4 examined the research design in terms of method and data analysis.

Chapter 5 addresses the first of the three research questions:

1. How has the mobilisation of my grief work affected my experience of my bereaved Self?

Figure 5.1 depicts a flowchart of the progression of Chapter 5.

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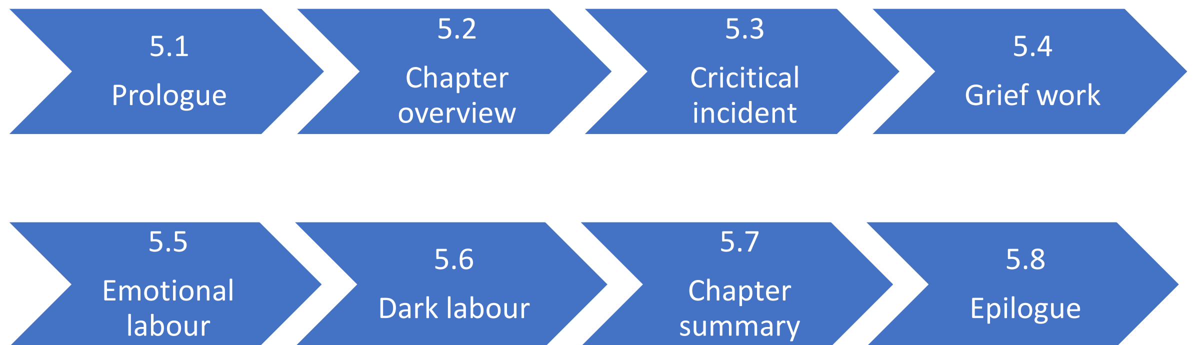
Flowchart of the progression of Chapter 5



Critical incident

An event or incident can be considered as critical when "people feel a lack of control, have a shock reaction to the event, and are left feeling very vulnerable" (EAP, n.p.). As described in the following paragraphs, my return to work left me feeling impotent, even more traumatised and emotionally raw. The reactions of some of my colleagues left me with a profound sense of bewilderment and of hurt – two emotions that I carry with me many years later, and the sources of which are vividly and indelibly etched into my memory. As is the practice of autoethnography, this incident is drawn to the surface of my consciousness and analysed for its research relevance and emotional impact (Ellis et al., 2011). It is now given the acknowledgement that I have historically denied it in order to carry on with my life's journey in a positive way. After having dealt with its immediacy, Self had consigned it to the recesses of my mind as unwanted and psychologically damaging baggage.

The critical incident upon which this chapter is based involved encounters that occurred when I returned to my workplace (a primary/elementary school) after my bereavement leave. When Rory was diagnosed with cancer, I had maintained an employment regime of part-

time work, consisting of 40 days (2 days a week during the Australian school term) for two terms. The rest of my time was spent seeing to the needs of my teenage daughter and spending time with Rory in hospital for operations (that included a leg amputation) and chemotherapy.

My career goal had always been to remain in paid employment until I was 60 years old. After Rory died, when I was 56 years old, I returned to my job as a primary (elementary) teacher at a large mixed gender metropolitan state school (whose population at that time was 900 students with approximately 100 permanent staff). I had worked at the same location for 20 years and was generally well-respected by colleagues, parents and children. During my time there, I had completed a Master of Education degree specialising in children's literacy, more specifically boys and literacy (Mulligan, 1998). As a result of my teaching profile and the curriculum programs that I had implemented in the space of six years, the school had become recognised for its individualised educative excellence for both boys and girls. One of my projects, 'Real Men Read', attracted local, state and national media attention with various national, state and local radio interviews, newspaper articles (Cole, 2000) and television features (Mulligan, 2000a). *Classroom* magazine (Mulligan, 2000b) published an article that I wrote about the operation of the program. I was also invited to provide a submission to "Boys: Getting it Right", the Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary (2002) inquiry into boys' education (pp. 165-166). Further, I was featured as the cover story for the local lifestyle magazine, *Revive* (Bell, 2005).

However, after the death of my son in 2010, and my subsequent return to the classroom in 2012, it was immediately apparent and quite distinctly articulated by the administration that they did not want me back in the school. As it transpired, nor did some of my colleagues. I had been branded by the most influential power brokers in the school as a damaged and pathetic creature.

During my time away, a new principal/headteacher had taken over the running of the school. I had never met this man and I went to his

office to introduce myself before returning to classroom teaching. My reception was taciturn and cold. He physically and verbally indicated his scorn for my situation. When I asked if I might be considered for a part-time teaching position (four days as opposed to five), he very loudly (and somewhat aggressively) leaned towards me and started to yell. "I'm the boss of this school. I control what teachers do here. If you think I'm going to do you any special favours just because your son died, you're wrong. I don't have any four-day positions available. I've already done the staffing. You'll have to go to another school." I was shocked. *I can't believe this happened. Did I deserve this treatment? I can't believe this happened.* I went home and subsequently reported his behaviour to an administrator at our regional office. This was an action that I had never taken against a principal in my previous 37 years of teaching. Fortunately, I was met with a sympathetic ear as I was known to the staff in regional office from my previous media endeavours. Also, this man had a reputation for his lack of interpersonal skills with staff. His attitude towards me in the future was far more considered. I went back teaching four days a week.

Similarly, when I was inducted back into the school by another member of the administration, I was asked for a logon number that had been introduced into the school system three years prior, while Rory was undergoing chemotherapy. At the time, I was working two days a week for half a year (the remainder of the time was spent in hospital with my son). When I said that I couldn't remember it, she looked at me with disgust. I began to cry and she responded, "Well, if you can't remember anything, you can't come back." Fortunately, at the last minute, it came to me. I logged onto the system and we commenced a rather fraught five hours of induction, the details of which I have no memory. Prior to my return to school, I had been on good terms with this woman. Clearly, her behaviour towards me was a directive from the principal. *My loss had been reduced to an administrative inconvenience.*

I returned to work in the new year and was subsequently given a Year 4 class (9 year olds), four days a week. At the end of the first day, my colleague in the adjacent room came into my classroom to inform me baldly (and truthfully) that the administration didn't want me to return to the school. "They don't want you back, you know." Apparently, I was given the room beside her so that she could monitor my teaching and report back to the administration any untoward behaviour on my part when interacting with the class. "Effectively, they want me to spy on you." I respected this person greatly and was immensely relieved when she said that she wasn't going to partake in the administration's duplicity. "Be careful, though: they want to get rid of you. They think you can't do it." I had never been partnered with this person before, and we soon found that we were very similar in our educational approaches. We subsequently worked together quite successfully for the next two years to the benefit of both our classes. I was then moved to Year 3 (8 year olds) where I again maintained effective teaching partnerships.

The same year that I recommenced teaching, our school was audited. This involved a group of investigators from the head office in the capital city entering our school, reviewing our data, interviewing teachers and visiting classrooms unannounced. One of the auditors came to my room. He began our conversation (in front of the class) with a remark that referred to my bereavement. Obviously, the administration had briefed him on my situation. "You're the woman whose son died." He proceeded to ask me questions about the school environment that I could not answer as I had been on bereavement leave for almost two years prior. *My 9 year olds were more gracious in their treatment of me than this adult male wearing a mantle of smug authority.*

I do not know why I was treated so harshly by the administration. I had been privy to a glimpse of this attitude several years prior at the same school under another leadership regime. I happened to be working in the staffroom unbeknown to the then principal and deputy principal who were in transit from their rooms to the playground. I overheard them

referring to the return of another teacher who had been absent for a period of time because of personal mental health issues owing to infertility. "I don't know why she'd want to come back here. Surely they could send her somewhere else. What will we do with her?" The fact that this woman had taught at the school for many years and was a respected and hardworking member of staff did not seem to enter into the equation. When they saw me, they ceased their conversation and walked silently away. I did not say anything to anyone but, when my situation mirrored hers, this incident rose to the surface of my memory. This teacher has subsequently informed me that she had been treated more respectfully than I had been.

As mentioned previously, I had taught at the same school for 20 years. I had built up friendships that I had believed transcended our professional lives and enhanced our personal lives greatly. I was a member of what I perceived as a solid friendship group and thought that I had established lifelong, positive relationships. Upon my return to work, some of my colleagues in that friendship group refused to speak to me. One in particular, whose son was the same age as mine and with whom I had shared a very fulfilling social and professional life for the five years prior to Rory's death (our sons were also good friends), walked away from me or left a room when I entered. I ceased being invited to social occasions and was left out of their company completely. I can only suppose that I represented all that the others did not want to acknowledge – that is, the fact that in this impermanent life there is indiscriminate death and that it favours all ages of those whom we love most dearly. *If my vibrant, larger-than-life son could so inexplicably die, so could theirs. They were afraid.* Occasionally, in the manner of life, years later, I have randomly encountered my former friends with whom I had previously thought that I had forged an unbreakable bond. Initially, inexplicably they had greeted me with wide smiles and open arms ready to embrace the years, the mistreatment, away. However, as they walked towards me, I instinctively recoiled and stood at a distance. I offered

simple greetings and returned to my business. *I do not ignore people, but I am not to be treated as a random conduit for forgiveness and understanding. In my current capacity, there is neither.*

The response to Rory's loss throughout the school staff was mostly one of distant detachment. I was disappointed with this characterisation, particularly by those staff members with a similar longevity at the school to mine. Some had taught my son; both my children attended the same primary (elementary) school. Rory would often come to social gatherings in the afternoon when he had graduated to the nearby high school and serenade us with his guitar as we drank coffee and chatted. Perhaps this history between the school staff and my son contributed to the silent distance of other staff members. Perhaps they were grieving his loss and could not express how they felt. Perhaps this was a manifestation of respectful cowardice on their part and they hid behind an empty empathy. *Perhaps … The silence of deeper resonance was deafening.*

When I reflect on the attitude overtly manifested in the behaviour of the administration and my colleagues, I come to the realisation that, in their eyes, I was deemed as "other" (Jensen, 2011, p. 64). I had deviated from the social norm. *My child is dead; I am rendered 'less'.* I had been devalued in the eyes of those who held the most power and marginalised by those who had once been my equal. *I have been cast out.* "… identity is fundamentally gained in the gaze of the powerful" (Jensen, 2011, p. 64). Thus, my identity as a competent teacher, an effective and popular mentor, and a respected colleague was rendered suspect and demeaned by those who should have known better. My treatment by the school leadership and by some colleagues was reductionistic, unethical and oppressive. Dazey (2021) referred to "respectability politics" (p. 580) when interrogating the marginalisation of some social groups such as those exhibiting ethnic differences. She claimed that those who perpetrated this form of prejudice highlighted the "entrenched categories of social worthiness" (p. 581). I would extrapolate upon this notion and suggest that, through their deliberate attempt to dominate and subjugate

my professional and personal positionality within the school environment, these actors knowingly committed to the destabilisation of my return to paid employment for their own unspecified purposes.

Only the perpetrators of this act could reason a justification. I do not seek to understand their behaviour. In my situation, to be "other" (Jensen, 2011, p. 64) was to be an outlier, a pathologised misfit. At a time when I desperately sought to claim some professional normality and return to the safety of my teaching, I was denied one of the most fundamental human needs – to belong. *I will never be as I was in my workplace. I must rewrite a new narrative for the journey that will take me to the end of my career.*

Paradoxically, the newer teachers, those who had been transferred into the school in my absence, were open and friendly. They did not know me or my son, and so took me at face value. The relationships that I formed with them included no prior expectations of behaviour. They did not care if I were silent or did not partake fully in conversations. I found this lack of complicated emotion gratifying, and it was very easy to form a professional and, eventually, a social bond with them. I did not feel that they were watching me for signs of 'inappropriate' emotion. Their eyes did not follow my movements in the staffroom or the playground. They simply accepted me for who and what I was. *I was enough*. In fact, on one of my birthdays, I walked into my classroom one morning to find it strewn with streamers and balloons. A huge, wrapped box sat atop one of the desks. In due course, after unwrapping the many smaller boxes contained therein, a small, expensive gift was revealed. Apparently, they had stayed behind the previous afternoon to decorate. It was a lovely and deeply treasured gesture. I am happy to say that I have had the opportunity to repay their gesture in the years that followed. I have found that birthdays are particularly hard to navigate when one is mired in grief. *Another milestone to be endured. Never again will he sing to me. Never again will we share birthday cake.* "His death is things to do not done – never to be done" (Wolterstorff, 1987, p. 30).

In conversation with an ex-colleague, I was reminded of another occasion at my workplace when we happened to be walking to our classrooms together after a break. A couple of nightjars had made a home in a tree outside my classroom and apparently I was speaking to my colleague about a school-related matter when I interrupted the conversation to share the sighting of the birds with my son – *Look Rory, aren't they wonderful?* I have no memory of this occasion but I have since been told that it was a regular occurrence that momentarily broke conversation but which then proceeded as normal. My new colleagues unhesitatingly accepted this behaviour and my unbroken relationship with my son as natural on my part. *He is with me always.*

Grief work

Of all of the complexity and destabilisation of bereavement and the emotion work that needs to be accomplished in order to acknowledge and walk with grief in my life, the word *never* is the hardest to come to terms with. That body will never again be in my physical presence to hold on to, to laugh with, to cry with, to age with. *If I am not careful, the finality of never can be my undoing.* "Reality passes its verdict. Dead is dead. The person is gone" (Alapack, 2010, p. 48). This sentiment underlies my grief work. Acceptance of Rory's absence was never a goal – physically, he was dead and gone, and nothing that I could do could change that reality. Acceptance of *never* was a more heartbreaking and interminable task. This designation was the springboard that required forethought and intentionality in my grief work, particularly when I went back to school and was faced with overt animosity.

The undertaking of "grief work" (Rosenblatt, 1996, p. 23) has developed as a contemporary process that refocuses the griever on continuing her own life in the present and the future while continuing a relationship with the deceased that does not involve separation of all emotional connection. This concept was discussed more fully in Chapter 2 (Section 2.3).

The enactment of grief work can be theorised as a wicked problem (Mulligan & Danaher, 2020, p. 25). The latter is an abstract notion characterised by its nonlinear complexity. Wicked problems are not easily solved and require personalised application. The multiplicity of solutions that are reframed and revisited continuously are evasive and capricious, and they require a constancy of thought, adaptability and tenacity. As a bereaved parent, I know that my grief work will, in all possibility, be unsuitable for others who find themselves thrust into a similarly unwelcome circumstance. I further acknowledge that, for me, full 'recovery' from my grief is not sought nor desirable. It is to be absorbed into my life as a journey where I may stumble with the emotional weight that I carry but, hopefully, I will always get back up on my feet again to take the next step. This constitutes the essence of my grief work. In all of the unknowns on this earthly plane, the grief work journey is the ultimate unknown. It is by no means a linear process in that what I have instituted one day for my mental and physical health may be an unacceptable and inappropriate dead end the next. For example, one day the oppression of grief could be lifted by a walk in the outdoors with my dog. The next day I might find the outdoors too daunting, and I may just need to sit in a chair and stare into nothingness, my dog a silent sentinel.

The death of a child creates ongoing ontological and axiological crises. Both my perceived reason for being and my long-held life values have been challenged tremendously. My safe, reliable and long worn identities of mother-of-a-son and respected teacher have dissolved – burned in a fiery furnace to be turned into ash along with my son. My reality has shifted to such an extent that I am, at times, unrecognisable to my Self. Familiar questions may be posed but identities are fuzzy, distant and unfamiliar variables. The shoes that I had previously worn with no thought are now discarded as strange and unwearable. Precedent is nonexistent – just like the physical absence of my son. Self still acts as questioner but must evaluate answers even more intensely and cautiously than before. "Self-evaluation is crucial to mental and social wellbeing. It

influences aspirations, personal goals and interactions with others" (Mann et al., 2004, p. 357).

Thus I was left to navigate an aggressive administration, and a contemptuous and non-inclusive former friendship group. *Why won't they speak to me?* Of course, not everyone on the staff was antagonistic. Most were initially wary but, as I did not deviate from my professionalism, I was soon accepted back into the common fold. "Formal organisations have explicit and implicit norms which define appropriate behaviours for people performing various roles" (Bento, 1994, p. 35). These 'norms' regulate a person's actions and interactions with all stakeholders. In my case, these stakeholders were composed most immediately of parents, professional colleagues and children. My presence posed a threat to the orderliness and happiness of the teaching environment. "Sadness and grief should be checked [in] at the door" (Bento, 1994, p. 89). These "grieving rules" (Doka, 1999, p. 37) consisted of unspoken values that society has enforced as acceptable and honourable when the griever partakes in social and professional situations.

In retrospect, my return to work reflected both the intended and the unintended disempowerment of bereaved persons. Worth (2013) commented that "power is exercised through ideologies or values that prevent people (with lower power) from recognising their true interests" (p. 18). My emotions were subjugated by those who deemed it in their best interests to give precedence to their own personal and professional needs. Amidst the chaos in my mind, it was difficult for me to acknowledge the circumstances, let alone to act fully on my own behalf in terms of self-interest and a considered response. In my otherness, I became a cautious respondent to their actions.

While I was present in my workplace and fulfilling my teaching duties, I recognise now that my grief was disenfranchised – it was publicly (and, at times, privately) unacknowledged (Doka, 2008). There was no space provided for shared memories or shared mourning in my workday. My façade was composed and my interactions with others were carefully

self-orchestrated so as not to reveal sadness or emotional weakness. Even though my feelings of grief were internalised, I carried the overtly and publicly designated stigmatised label of 'bereaved mother' wherever I walked within the school environment. It would seem that others were acutely aware – and perhaps afraid –of the notion of "fear of stigma-by-association" (Chaudoir et al., 2013, p. 3), and those who had known both me and my son dared not broach the taboo topic of childhood death. Additionally, not only was I stigmatised by others, but also I personally possessed "enacted stigma" (Chaudoir et al., 2013, p. 2) in that I felt unable to express any emotion freely lest I be further stereotyped and marginalised. *I can do this: not long to go now until I can go home.*

The mechanism for effective grief work in my circumstance necessitated an accommodation of the reactions of Self to the influences of others. The emotional terrain that I navigated during my return to school in my workplace was rocky and unstable. It was full of tripping hazards and if I did not continually concentrate I would certainly fall and hurt myself badly. I was forced to abide by the "grieving rules" (Doka, 1999, p. 37) that dictated stoicism and hidden trauma. When I returned home, to my sanctuary, I was able to enact my grief naturally but with the caveat that the following day the shoes of my professional identity would once again be a tight and difficult fit that rubbed and blistered.

The manifestations of my public and private grief work were a result of iterative successful and unsuccessful cooperation between Self and outside influences. While at my workplace and at home in the aftermath of the day, Self was constantly asking the questions: *So he/she/they has/have said/done this. How will you react in your best interest? How much are you prepared to endure to meet your goal? What will you do tomorrow if it happens again?* The cogs ground on as I negotiated my reality and enacted revisions of my grief work.

The mechanics of my grief work as depicted in Figure 5.2 present a metaphor of the mind.

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The mechanics of grief work

The figure represents the inner workings of my psyche and the interplay between Self and my identities. I acknowledged that I was a tiny cog in an enormous educational machine. As one of the many *disposable* teachers, the mechanics of my survival consisted of the sustained interplay of the twin cogs of internal *Self* and external *others,* forces that led to my manifestations (enactments) of grief work. The manifestations of this grief work were represented in the many shoes (identities) that I chose to wear during the day as I went about my professional duties. Multiple identities were employed such as calm professional, competent staff member, caring teacher and trusted colleague, but *never bereaved mother*. Each of these identities was directed by Self, who chose which shoes were situationally appropriate and when to slip into them.

I consciously made an effort to endure the damaging and hurtful behaviours of some of my colleagues towards me, as well as to celebrate the thoughtful and compassionate actions of others. I was disciplined in my responses to, and dealings with, those others. Constant lubrication by a problem-solving Self prevented the gears from grinding to a halt. I could not afford to allow this machine to run down. I had a long-term goal to finish my career at a time of my choosing. I was not going to be

diverted. I also had to model to my impressionable and vulnerable teenage daughter that life could go on. *Not all is lost.*

Prior to Rory's illness and death, I lived a comfortable and secure life. I wanted for nothing as long as my children were safe and cared for. I did not chase promotion, although it had been offered on occasion over the years. I was content in my motherhood and my professional status. My career priority was to retire at 60 years of age. My personal priority was to raise my two children to an adulthood that was filled with promise and adventure. My trajectory was established, and I was well on the way to meeting my goals. Then my son died. I became a disembodied entity, spinning crazily out of the careful orbit that I had set for myself. Control was rendered a dim memory. I entered the "borderland" (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 25), a treacherous and nebulous terrain where I walked an emotional tightrope and where certitude was discarded in favour of ambiguity and indecision. *Never again will I experience emotional stability. I will live and journey with uncertainty.* "How does one live in the middle space, the crevice of two worlds?" (Reale, 2020, p. 9). This liminal space of "betwixt and between" (Garsten, 1999, p. 602) exemplified my situation when I returned to work. I remained professionally, as ever, a dedicated teacher; however, the ground had shifted in my workplace. Whatever I had achieved previously was eclipsed by current events over which I had no control. A steep and treacherous incline had appeared around a bend, unseen through the complacency of my everyday life. Suddenly, horrifyingly, the narrative of my journey had shifted, and I had somehow become an unwelcome and shadowy, albeit determined, *pathetic,* even *pitiable,* character in the plot structure of my professional and personal story.

Concealing emotional truth from others is a hard task master. It is labour intensive and requires a tight control over conformity to emotional regulation so that others do not perceive one's innermost thoughts. From this perspective, Section 5.5 examines the concept of emotional labour as it applied to my situation.

Emotional labour

Emotional labour can be defined as, "the hiding or changing of true feelings in an effort to display a more acceptable emotional front" (Jarzabkowski, 2001, p. 133). In the case of paid employment, emotional labour may further be defined as "… the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display [that is] sold for a wage …" (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7). In her research into the hidden emotions of flight attendants, Hochschild (1983) referred to emotional labour as a workplace construct where (in this case) the participants were required to hide their true feelings under a façade of friendliness and compliance with the customers' needs on the flight.

Kendrick (2018) referred to "organizational feeling rules" (n.p.) as the regulations imposed by workplace administrators that they deemed suitable or unsuitable. This enactment by employees of "deep or superficial acting" (Kendrick, 2018, n.p.) ultimately prejudices the actor's state of mental health and can lead to emotional toxicity and long-term physical and mental exhaustion. Indeed, I knew that I had to leave my place of employment when I was one week away from my 60th birthday. One morning, I woke up straining to speak. I could not talk without coughing and, by midday, my voice was completely gone. My body had determined that I could not go on. I was physically and emotionally burnt out. Maslach et al. (2001) referred to the phenomenon of being burnt out as "a psychological syndrome in response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job" (p. 399). *I had nothing left to give.*

As a paid employee, my feelings were rendered negligible by my employers and by some of my colleagues. I was forced to hide any emotion that was deemed unacceptable. I was discouraged from speaking about my son. *Don't upset anyone.* However, it needs to be acknowledged that I was not a passive, apathetic receiver of this imbalance of power. I knew what was happening to me and, in some ways, I initiated this behaviour. This compliance was an important facet of my behaviour during these return-to-work years. Engaging in this performative "deep

acting” required me to “manipulate [my] internal thoughts and feelings” (Näring et al., 2012, p. 63).

Emotional labour can be defined simplistically as “the management of emotions as part of the work role” (Gabriel et al., 2015, p. 2), and emotion work or emotional management may be referred to as unpaid emotional labour whereby the regulation of the emotions of Self and others is warranted in social situations. I would like to suggest a further reconceptualisation of this notional thread of emotional effort. Section 5.6 interrogates the experiential and conceptual notions of emotional labour by applying them directly to my situation. With this individualistic function in mind, I have reframed emotional labour and created a new term that I have hypothesised as *dark labour.* This conception is idiosyncratic and was developed by me because I felt that previously referenced annotations of emotional labour were insufficient to account for the more personal, distinctive rigours of the emotional dimension of my grief work.

Dark labour

Building on the scholarship around emotional labour and emotion work, and as noted above, I have defined dark labour as *purposeful, nonlinear, unpaid and self-regulated emotion work utilised by the griever in professional, social and private environments after a traumatic event.* Table 5.1 presents a synthesised categorisation of the definitional differences between emotional labour, emotion work and *dark labour*.

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Definitions of emotional labour, emotion work and dark labour

EMOTIONAL LABOUR	EMOTION WORK	DARK LABOUR
"the management of emotions as part of the work role" (Gabriel et al., 2015, p. 2)	Unpaid emotional labour whereby the regulation of the emotions of Self and others is warranted in social situations. Adapted from Exley & Letherby (2001)	Purposeful, nonlinear, unpaid and self-regulated emotion work utilised by the griever in professional, social and private environments after a traumatic event. Adapted from Gabriel et al. (2015)
Enacted in the workplace	Enacted in social situations	Enacted in both private and public spaces

The term *dark labour* was employed in this analysis owing to a number of its orientating features:

Darkness is invisible, which is how my grief felt to others when I returned to my workplace. *Where is my emotional safe harbour?*

In its invisibility, darkness is all consuming and all enveloping. There were times that I became emotionally disorientated as I navigated the professional terrain of my workplace. In my darkest moments, I lost sight of my physical body (and the shoes that I wore), my spirit, *my courage*. I lost direction and I stumbled frequently and had to find something to which to cling in order to keep upright. *My daughter, my dog. Both need me.*

My grief girl is darkness personified (please refer to Section 1.11). *I need me.*

Darkness precedes light. I was working towards the retirement light at the end of the dark tunnel. *One day soon …*

The darkness can be a comfort. It can be a silent, empty place to rest momentarily while gathering the resolution to go on. *Be at peace for these solitary moments. Focus.*

The binary of dark and light is a pair of emotion-laden terms that can be utilised both metaphorically and realistically. *Step from the painful void of the dark past and the alien world of the present into the light of a different, altered future. Awaken from the unsettled dark hours into the newness of the light of another day.*

The enactment of my *dark labour* with the help of my golden dog represents a metaphorical merging of her behaviour and my emotions. *Meaning-making.*

Labour denotes hard work for an intentional end. *I will enact an effortful process that will lead me to the end point of my first step on my lifelong journey of grief.*

Dark labour challenges psychological safety. The latter refers to "the belief that one can speak up without risk of punishment or humiliation" (Edmondson & Mortenensen, as cited in Wilson & Danaher, 2022). There is a compulsory carefulness in the enactment of responding to incidents that challenge mental stability. The labourer begins from a place of emotional volatility. Even though this instability lessens as the years progress, triggers such as birthdays and anniversaries herald an onslaught of sleeplessness, brain fog, nightmares and panic attacks, all of which must be factored in to maintain a professional demeanour. *Control your emotions whatever the circumstance.*

Dark labour is saturated with 'respectable identity politics'. I have combined the terms of "respectability politics" (Dazey, 2021) and "identity politics" (Oliver, 2018, n.p.) to emphasise the dark labour involved in grief work. In the context of this thesis, I use this term to describe a philosophy that speaks to the culturally imposed image that others have of ourselves (adapted from Oliver, 2018, n.p.). This has no connection with the political machinations of, or attitudes towards, government or with motivations ascribed to particular minorities. Rather, it is manifested in my workplace diplomatic negotiation with those who are perceived by others, or who are perceived by themselves, as holding

the power in their relationship with me. These parties attempt to influence my emotional state in a way that renders it inferior to the group and/or fear laden, thus belittling the positive identities that Self tirelessly and doggedly promotes. *Their manoeuvrings and power games are a constant battle of their will against mine.*

Dark labour is gendered. I consciously took great care of other people's feelings, lest they became upset over Rory's death. Yoo et al. (2010) claimed, "Motivated by not wanting to make others feel vulnerable, managing emotions … meant restraining and controlling one's true feelings" (p. 208). Factored within my interactions with colleagues was the self-inflicted policing of my emotions. I did this so as not to place others in a position where they may have felt uncomfortable. Perhaps this was enacted as a result of social conditioning. Sprankles (2017) argued that women are consciously and subconsciously taught to be "polite, pretty, proper, delicate, modest and selfless" (n.p.). It is the last element of the martyrdom of selflessness that I have trouble overcoming. It seems that I am not alone in this quandary. "Women in most societies tend to be the caregivers of others" (Yoo et al., 2010, p. 208). Each of the elements posited by Sprankles (2017) is slowly but surely being relegated to the pile of imposed, socially oppressive and outmoded stereotypes of women by the younger generations who are demanding the right not to be judged by old fashioned social tropes. As a woman born into the Baby Boomer era, I am yet to embrace the day-to-day portrayal of this. My historical conditioning precedes the easy adaptation of some of the fundamentals of modern feminism. I still find myself attempting to make others feel better when it is I who has suffered the trauma of bereavement and actually it is I who should be comforted. *It's okay. I'm fine. Yes, at least I've still got my daughter…*

Dark labour is enacted for the comfort of others and is also a source of self-protection. Not only was I caretaking the emotions of my colleagues, but I was also simultaneously maintaining my own. There were certain actions that I did not feel that I wanted to share with my

workplace colleagues*. Don't feel sorry for me. If I start crying, I won't stop. I'll embarrass myself.* I was also mindful of the fact that I was in a place of employment to which I had chosen to return, and I had a job to do. Being a custodian of my own emotions meant that I had space for the emotions of others, particularly those of my students, who, at eight/nine years of age, looked to the adults in their lives as positive role models. I had a moral sense of obligation to constrain my own emotions in order to deal with their struggles as they navigated their social world, both inside and outside the classroom. My professional presence was observed at all times. *This was the part of the job that I knew and loved.*

Dark labour simultaneously grants permission for the griever to respond to the humour in certain situations while acknowledging the harmful effects of toxic positivity. In their research into humour and grief, Wilson et al. (2022) recounted that "most participants also indicated that they periodically used humor to manage, escape [from] or otherwise, live with their grief" (p. 13). Thus, in their study, humour became a form of self-imposed therapy where the griever chose when to participate in episodes of emotional levity. "Toxic positivity" (Bastian & Humphrey, 2021; Williams, 2021; Villines, 2021) refers to the notion of prioritising positivity/happiness in even the most traumatic experiences. For me, this push from uncomfortable others for the pursuit of happiness at the cost of appropriate and righteous sadness is an anathema. Six months after Rory died, I was told by a 'well-meaning' person to "smile more; if you don't, people will think you're a 'sadsack' and won't want to be around you". To me, this desperation for us to 'smile more' or to 'put a positive spin' on our life experience ignores the basic human need to live a genuine life that includes emotional pain and sorrow. *To be truly 'well', a griever must accede to a range of dichotomous emotions.*

Dark labour comes from a pre-existence of trauma. Whereas emotional labour notionally occurs in the workplace, *dark labour* is born of trauma and is enacted all of the time. There was no respite after work hours. My carefully constructed emotional façade during the working

hours continued long after I returned home. My concentration was such that respite from the effort of self-regulation and the management of others lingered well into my relaxation hours and my interactions with my family/friends. Then, like a spider, my web of intense self-management had to be rebuilt each morning prior to the beginning of the workday. This is diagrammatically represented in Figure 5.3.

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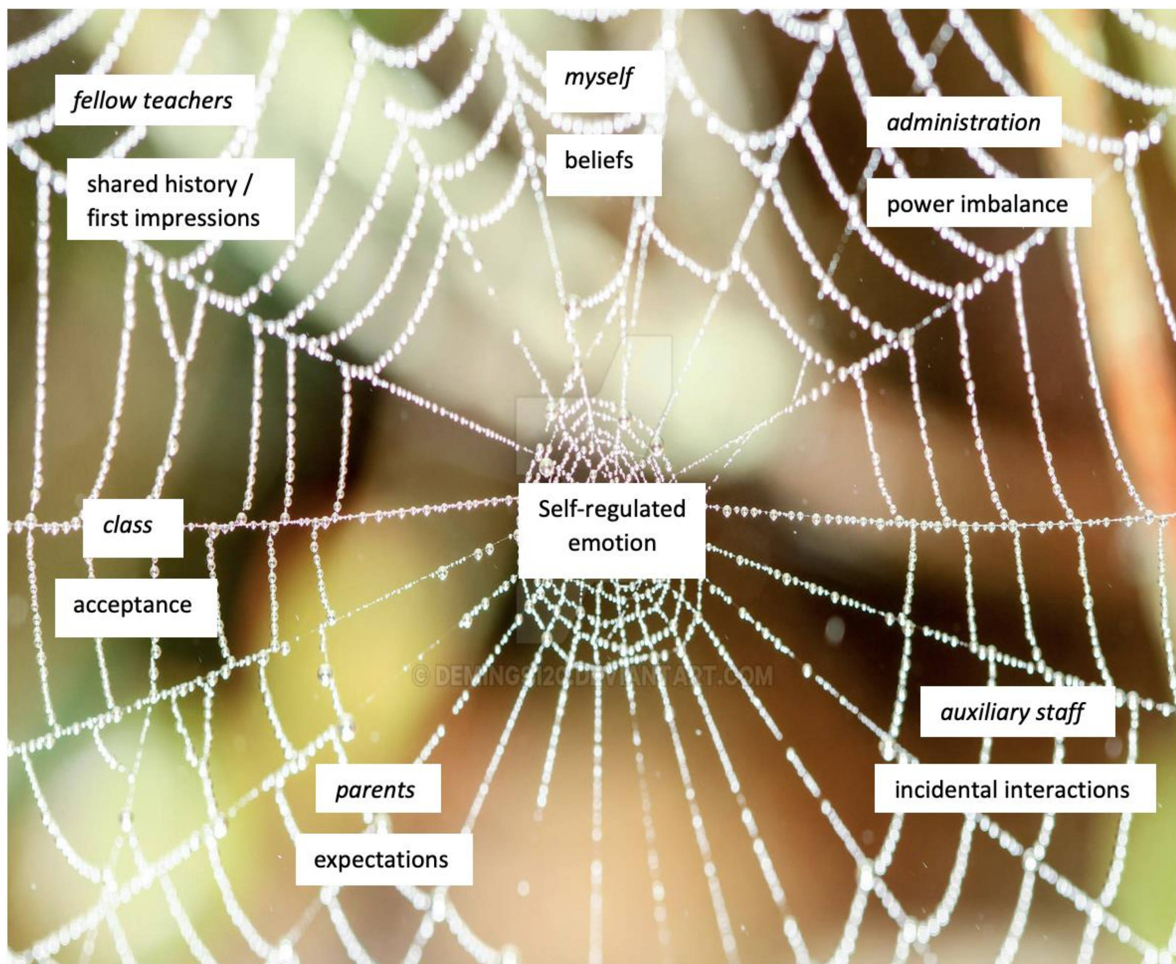
My spider web of emotional self-regulation when enacting dark labour



Fellow teachers

Dark labour involves managing unforeseen circumstances when conducting commonplace daily professional rituals. Circumstances such as a shared history with some parties and the need to manage first impressions with others is a messy contrivance. One afternoon after

school, I wandered into a colleague's room. We had both been on staff at the school for over a decade, so I knew her quite well and she knew Rory. She had some old curtains hanging that were signed by past students who had been taught in that room. These curtains were there when she took over that space. We were talking about curriculum matters as we usually did, when I happened to glance over her shoulder. Along with various other students, Rory had signed his name and had drawn on the curtain. I hadn't seen it before, even though I had wandered in and out of that room all year. I stopped speaking and stared. I'm not sure how long I was 'away' (only a matter of moments, I think), but I came back to a very distressed colleague calling my name. This brought home to me the hypervigilance and fear that others who had known Rory experienced when they were around me. Instead of gently speaking to me and asking if I was all right, this person immediately became a distressed, self-imposed casualty of my grief. I reassured her that I was 'fine' and resumed our former conversation. This was a rare emotional misstep by me. *I didn't know it was there.* The next day, I was wordlessly handed the curtain.

Dark labour demands that you not be seen as a victim by those whom you had known and those whom you are yet to know. When meeting new staff members – that is, those who had arrived at the school in my absence – I was careful to smile and assume an untroubled manner. Of course, the school grapevine had comprehensively explained to them the reason for my time away. But, in line with the social rules, nothing is mentioned as the great silence prevails and so the game must be played until the topic of death is raised and, even then, it is treated from an emotional distance.

Class

Dark labour requires an added layer of vigilance when dealing with the innocent. Building a relationship of mutual acceptance and respect with a class of middle school students necessitates cautious honesty. My

classes knew that my son had died but had obviously been instructed by the adults in their lives not to speak of it. This is an unnatural situation for the inquiring mind of the primary aged child. Such a situation creates a barrier between the teacher and the class. It inhibits the free flow of communication and knowledge. I am not a believer that children should be cosseted and protected from the notion of death. When not examined appropriately and with sensitivity for the age and experiences of the audience, grief becomes a communal secret to be hidden away. Thus, when the opportunity arose, I spoke to my 8-year-olds of death and emotion: *"My grandfather died last month and I went to his funeral"; "Our dog died last year. I cried"; "Mum said we're not supposed to say anything to you about your son."* We spoke about the appropriateness of feelings such as sadness and anger when we are grieving. We then discussed the fact that, even though we are feeling one way, we can still function quite effectively and productively on a daily basis. We also interrogated the inappropriateness of using our emotions as weapons against others such as our family and friends. We talked about 'old people' and pets and Rory. We digested the fact that every living thing dies at some point. Then, in the way of children, after they felt that we had gone far enough with this topic, we moved on to the unrelated matter of our favourite food. The unhurried discussion of death and the effect that it can have on us demonstrated a teachable moment on a subject that could have been consigned to secrecy and silence but that actually became an episode of shared understanding and meaningful conversation. And, as the class hurried out to recess, one of them stopped and said, "I'm sorry your son died, Mrs Mulligan." *An 8-year-old demonstrating the compassion that adults shy away from.*

Parents

Dark labour endures judgement. In my situation, managing the expectation of watchful parents with preconceived ideas that have been fed to them from unknown sources requires a deliberate dance of respect

and mutuality. Upon my return, when I took over my first class, the parents of my students were nervous about my professional ability. I was deemed an unknown and potentially *unstable* entity, even though I'd taught at the school for years. That the parents were nervous was highlighted by their constant before school and after school presence. However, as the school year progressed, they became more comfortable and at ease with my teaching, and their expectation that I would be a bad influence on their child abated. *Eventually, we became a united team with one goal: the education and wellbeing of their children.*

Auxiliary staff

Dark labour requires developing a resistance to the apathy of others about your situation. Brief, incidental interactions with all staff members abound during the life of a school day and must not be inflated in meaning. The main auxiliary staff with whom I dealt consisted of teacher aides and office staff. My relationship with these women was friendly, respectful and professional. One morning, not long after I had returned to school, I walked into the main office and was greeted by one of the office ladies, who asked how I was. When I replied that I was feeling a little sad that morning, she replied, "What have you got to be sad about?" I looked at her and answered, "Remember, my son died?" I walked away. *I am constantly bewildered by others.*

On another occasion, I happened to be in the staff common room when one of the teacher aides sat beside me and began to relate the worry that she was feeling as her elderly father suffered through chemotherapy. She detailed a list of his symptoms. While I was sympathetic, I had to remove myself from the torment of reliving the horrors of cancer treatment as soon as possible. *I can't hear this.*

Administration

Dark labour enforces emotional compliance. It entails a balancing act of personal fortitude with the power of the administrative staff. Thus, an underlying personal assessment of what is acceptable treatment and

what is not is warranted. I had a goal. I wanted to end my career in my own time. In order to accomplish this, I chose to forgo my true feelings and to comply with the emotional boundaries set by the administration of the school. This is carried out by most workers, especially service providers such as air stewards, nurses, teachers, paramedics, and so forth. However, the enactment of *dark labour* occurs when the individual comes from a place of trauma and has been actively discouraged from re-entering the workforce by her immediate superiors thus being forced out of revealing true feelings at any time in the workplace. In my case, the administration overtly utilised the power imbalance to bully and to influence others to enact coercive control.

Myself

Dark labour foregrounds tenacity and forces an individual to believe in themselves. I had to decide what I wanted to do with my life, and to work progressively to attain that goal. It compelled me to hone my expectations of myself and of others. I could no longer live and react automatically, and not think too deeply about my ontological and axiological philosophical stance. I was forced to make a holistic plan that involved the physical, mental and spiritual elements of a questioning Self. I made choices about endurance – what I was prepared to accept from powerful others to get to where I wanted and *needed* to go in life. This came at an enormous emotional cost. When others did not believe in me and ignored my past competences within the organisation, I was obliged to begin again from ground zero. In another context, the insensitivity of others would have resulted in Self asking the question, "Is this worth it?", and perhaps my answer may have been a resounding "NO!" This was not an option for me. When Self questioned the value of tenacity, I chose to stay with my retirement plan – not just for me but also for my daughter (who knew nothing of the torment that I was going through), who believed (and expected) that I would keep going.

Part of my intentional enactment of emotional regulation in the workplace (and in other spaces) was to teach myself to laugh again. Booth-Butterfield et al. (2014) hypothesised that "predispositional humor production is associated with greater coping efficiency, [and] reduced incidence of negative physical and emotional symptoms, and, overall, aids individuals in functioning during grief" (p. 436). A number of factors came into play that I thought necessitated this psychological re-orientation from acute griever.

Firstly, one of the key factors that led me to prioritise humour was my relationship with my son and my daughter. Rory loved to laugh and often this was infectious for those around him, including for my daughter and me. He found ridiculousness in most situations, even when he was ill. I noted that this drew people to him in that they recognised that the cancer was an illness, not part of his personality: something dreadful that had happened to him but he would not let it take over his agile mind. *He was still there.* This smoothed the path for his friends, who were constant visitors to the hospital and our house during his treatment. *They weren't afraid of him.* Not long after his amputation, his account of the technical bodily positioning of catheters had a room full of his friends reeling with laughter.

My daughter was 16 years old when her brother died. Our house, once filled with boisterous teenagers, became a silent tomb. She had her last year of high school (Year 12) to complete. I would drop her off at school and then come home and sit with my dog. Then, in the afternoon, I would get in the car and go and pick her up from school. One day a month I served in the tuckshop (canteen) at her school – something for which I could not volunteer when I was in paid employment at my school. There were days when she came to me during class hours and we would wander the school together for a little while. Sometimes we would sit on the bench outside the music room where the principal had erected a memorial plaque in Rory's honour. These occasions allowed my daughter to take a break from the pressure of the classroom.

At that time, my mental health was such that, during break times, when the students came to buy food, I would imagine Rory and a group of his friends striding up the slope that led to the open tuckshop counter. This of course was a ridiculous scenario as Rory had completed his schooling three years prior. *Grief does not respect time.* My daughter needed more from me than that shadowy, disconnected wraith. She was used to laughter and light and a mother on whom she could depend emotionally.

Secondly, when I interacted in both professional and social situations, I think that it is fair to say that people were afraid of engaging in a conversation with me. *Too difficult/too disconcerted to address my grief.* It became apparent that I needed to develop strategies that would alleviate situations that others perceived as awkward and/or uncomfortable. Humour was an avenue for positive interaction and to break down the barriers that my bereaved state had erected in others. Thus, in break times in the staffroom, I deliberately reminded myself to laugh at other people's jokes, and I also recounted amusing anecdotes from my classroom. Not long after I began this campaign of humour, one of my colleagues remarked that she had missed my laugh. *The effort is costly.*

Thirdly, I needed to break the cycle of the acute emotions that swirled constantly around in my head. I have likened my grief to a toddler who won't be tamed – a wild thing that feeds on distress and chaos. But, as with all toddlers, among the behavioural madness and unpredictability, humour lurks on the fringes of despair. And so my observations of El were born. Who could not find humour in the antics and the impulsive gay abandon of a beloved family pet? *Conversations with my dog.*

Thankfully and humbly, I was professionally positioned well in terms of sources of humour as children are a never-ending well of mirth, joyfulness and spontaneity. They possess the ability to laugh unashamedly at themselves and at others, as well as the ability to be completely impulsive and to give themselves over to the moment. Before

school each morning, I would play some music video clips from YouTube through my smart board for the children to listen to/dance to. One day, in one particular English lesson, we found ourselves talking about our favourite songs. I played a few of the children's choices and we danced along. Then someone asked me what my favourite song was. I decided to play them a song called "Rockin' All Over the World" by the iconic 1970s group Status Quo (youtube.com/watch?v=Yw_sJifUYgM). In the clip, the two long-haired lead singers shared a microphone and their heads were quite close together as they sang. Disappointingly for me, the class sat in their chairs and watched the clip in silence. There was a vacuum of reticence when the song finished. I could tell that they were trying to think of a suitable comment to make about a song that they knew that I really enjoyed but clearly had no value for them. After a protracted moment, one of my students broke the emptiness by saying "Boy, I bet they get a lot of head lice." *I am forever grateful for the uncomplicated (and at times pragmatic) nature of 9-year-olds.*

Dark labour represents construction of a web of emotional highs and lows – the connections of which could be broken at a moment's notice. In order to endure and rebuild, I had to be open to moments of both joy and suffering. Sometimes each would occur in consecutive moments. Within this never-ending uncertainty, I had to recognise when to walk away, when to stay to defend myself and when to laugh.

Chapter summary

Through careful engagement with the web of dark labour (as represented in Figure 5.4), I was able to complete my professional life as set down in my projected goals and the values with which my grief work was aligned.

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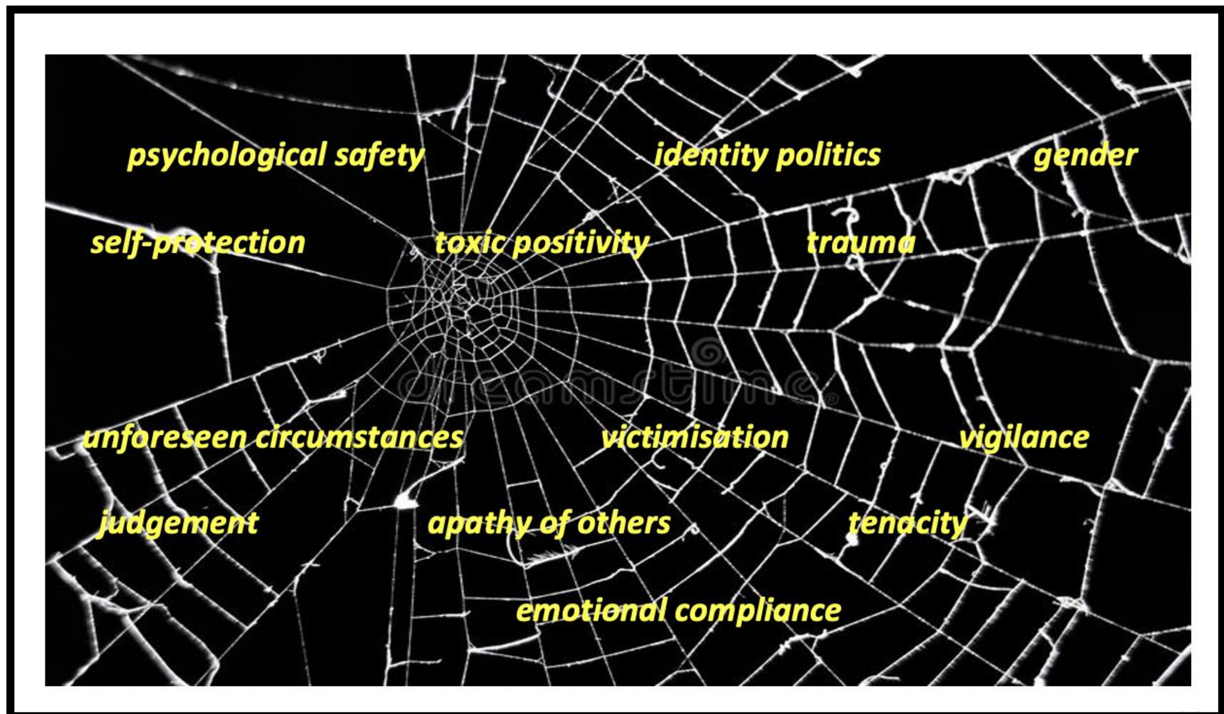
The web of dark labour



David (2017) opined that "emotions are data, they are not directives" (n.p.). Guided by regulated talk from Self, I was able to examine my emotions and to provide an avenue for identity work that was not self-destructive. This demanded an agility of mind that constantly scanned for emotional pitfalls. Through this vigilance, Self acknowledged the emotions and asked questions such as "What do I need to be aware of when responding to this emotion?"; "What is the solution to this situation that aligns with my axiological beliefs?"; and "What is the solution to this situation that aligns with my ontological beliefs?". I was endlessly fearful of:

the level of power that the leadership team may choose to wield (my professional identity);

the level of support that I would receive from other staff in my school (my collegial identity);

the level of trust from my class and the parent body (my teaching identity);

the perceptions of the auxiliary staff (my occupational identity);

the level of belief that I could have in myself to endure (my grieving identity).

"You own everything that happened to you. Tell your stories. If people wanted you to write warmly about them, they should have behaved better" (Lamott, 2012).

I was constantly reminding myself that emotional regulation is hard, tiring work. Further, it was my responsibility to perform effectively in order to meet the goals that I had set for myself. *Ownership – of emotions, of grief, of Self. I am formed by the answers to the multiple questions asked by Self and of Self.*

Stroebe and Schut (1999) referenced Cook and Oltjenbrun's Model of Incremental Grief (p. 210) that described the compounding factors that further complicate the grieving process. This "dissynchrony of grief" (p. 210) was highlighted within this chapter. The representation that I have made of several losses – *professional, social, personal* – on return to work underscored the ripple effect of my particular type of bereavement where "one loss often triggers another loss, resulting in the magnification of grief with each added loss" (p. 210). *Unforeseen, unexpected, crisis-filled losses.*

Autoethnography interrogates the unfamiliar. "We're talking about loss … things we're not prepared for, things that interrupt our life and we try to represent it in ways that will bring people closer to the experience" (Bochner, 2016). This chapter addressed the manner in which I achieved 'identity shift'. I have presented a window into the emotional challenges and blessings that I faced as a griever newly returned to the workplace. The storyline represents the initial step on my grief work journey that included the dark labour I had intentionally instigated in order to shift my

sole identity as grieving mother to include multiple identities, not the least was as a professional and a friend (to others and to myself). It was a difficult space to revisit, but the telling of it has merit in that it acts as a backdrop for the reader to the narrative that is revealed in Chapter 6, which focuses on intellectual growth. Figure 5.5 focuses on the journey so far – bereaved Self and identity shift.

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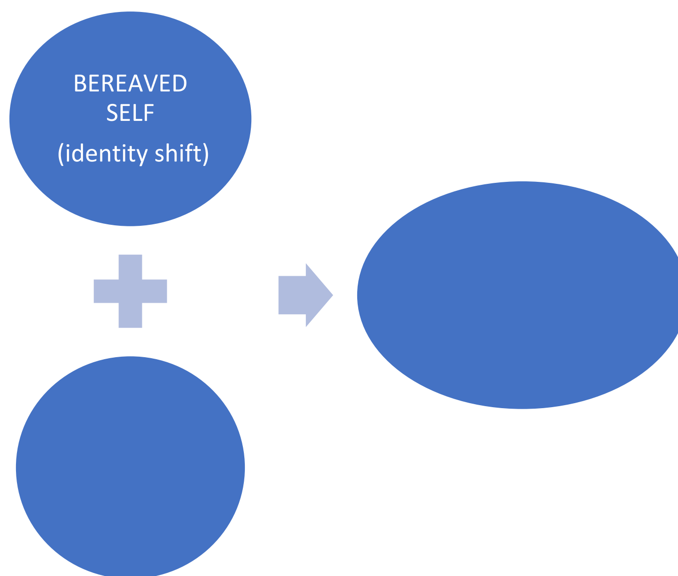
Bereaved self (identity shift)



The following section (5.8) presents the end of Chapter 5: the Epilogue.

Epilogue

Control

"Throw the ball! Throw the ball! I promise I'll bring it back." El and I are outside in the yard. We have just hung the washing out. The job is done and she wants to play. I am happy to throw her the ball but she sometimes misses the memo that she has to actually bring it back once she's retrieved it. I stand there and cajole her into bringing it to me. It's a game to her. Labradors love to play.

I have lost my playfulness. My son died; I can no longer spontaneously do stuff. I need to plan, to control my life. Ridiculous, really. I lost all control when Rory was diagnosed with cancer. And now, for me, control is just an illusion. A cosmic joke at my expense. It's a belief that people who have not lost a child can cling to. I know better than to think that I can order the universe to fit my needs or desires.

Before Rory died, I had everything under control. My life was planned. I would continue in paid employment until such time as I reached the age of 60 – or maybe beyond if I were still enjoying it. My children were protected and living fulfilling lives. I made it so.

Failure – as a mother, as a guardian, as a nurturer. I can no longer give sage advice to young mothers. "Well," I can no longer say blithely, "I let my children do/see/eat/play this or that, and they survived." One of them didn't. My head knows it's not my fault. Cancer is a random beast that indiscriminately crosses boundaries. Old, young, active, inactive, rich, poor. A walk through a children's cancer ward will dispel any notions of the particularness of cancer.

"Why me?" This was a question that Rory never asked the doctors, the universe, his family, his God. He would just look at me and sigh, "Mum, it is what it is." He was a better person than I. He never put any pressure on me to be/do better than I could during his illness. The cancer controlled his body but not his mind or his heart. I learned a lot about stoicism and courage from him during that time. I hope that I am half the person my son was.

In his footsteps, I will walk tall and deal with the hurtful boundary crossers who think that they know how I should think, feel, live as a bereaved parent. Let them fear both my presence and his absence. I am here, in this impermanent place. He is physically absent. I will live with this fact, and assign those who think to injure me because of it, as nothing.

But for now, for today, in this moment, I will throw that ball to my dog and not care if it isn't returned. I will play the game while I still can with her. It takes her longer to chase it down now and her arthritic legs make it harder for her to bound back to me and pretend she's going to return it. I know she hurts but she still wants to play. On the days I am not up to it, she waits ever patiently, eyes willing me to join her outside for a game [Figure 5.6]. She has not given up on life.

Figure Error! No text of specified style in document.**.39**
Patient El

DOCTORATENESS

Would you remember our struggles as you climb the tallest mountain?
Would you remember our triumph over them as you got to the top?

Prologue

WhoamInow? WhatwillIdonow? Isthereaplaceformenow? Whatismynewnormal? ShouldIgoon? HowcanIkeepgoing? El doesn't ask herself these endless questions. She's a dog. She accepts loss as part of life. She knows that she is an important member of our human/canine family. She has faith that those around her will attend to her needs just as she will attend to ours. This does not mean that she is unaffected by Rory's death. She has calm acceptance. She maintains her unconditional love for those around her. And that is enough. Is my life to be forever overshadowed by Rory's death? Well, yes, it is really. Even on 'good' days, my grief seeps out of my pores and radiates into the air I breathe. I can taste it. It pulses in and around my body like a menacing spectre. A hazy, uncanny thing that smugly and rightfully knows that its place in my life is assured. So I will carry it with me as I pursue my dreams from the 'before' and create a place for myself in the 'after'.

Overview of the chapter

Chapter 1 presented an introduction to the thesis. It explained the background to my research and the dual nature of the structure of the writing employed throughout. Chapter 2 offered a contextual foundation and reviewed the literature exploring some of the major theories around grief work and doctorateness. Chapter 3 articulated my conceptual framework and described the underpinning theoretical constructs. It interrogated the key elements of Self and identities as I have applied them to my research. Grief work, bereavement, identity shift and a reflexive Self were the foundational constructs mobilised in this chapter. Chapter 4 examined the research design in terms of method and data

delivery. Chapter 5 addressed the first of the research questions: How has the mobilisation of my grief work affected my experience of my bereaved Self?

This chapter addresses the second research question:

How has the mobilisation of my grief work affected my experience of doctoral processes?

Figure 6.1 depicts a flowchart of the progression of Chapter 6.

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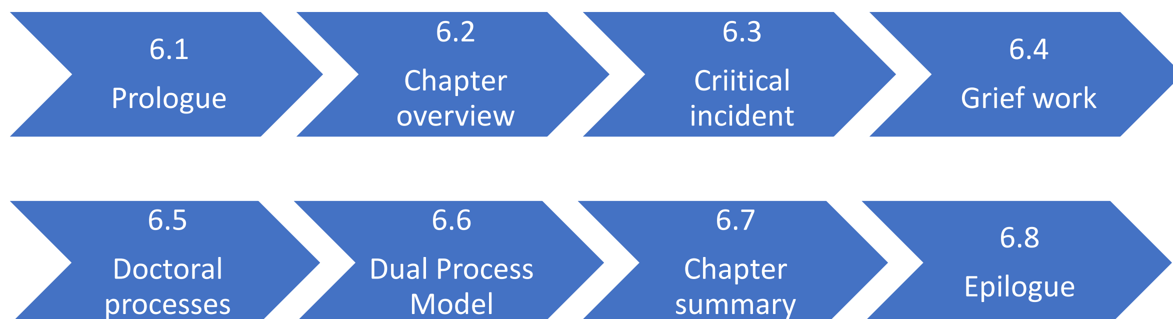
Flowchart of the progression of Chapter 6



Critical incident

It can be argued that not all critical incidents are seen through a lens of negativity and raw vulnerability such as those described in the previous chapter (Section 5.3). Some events may be empowering and influence the life course in a positive manner. Commencing my doctorate was a prime example of this phenomenon. The catalytic effect of my doctoral pursuit significantly shaped my grief work with unforeseen and beneficially constructive circumstances. Even though the doctoral journey for PhD Thesis #1 was protracted and included two unrelated incidents that gave me pause for thought, on the whole it was a fulfilling and deeply satisfying experience both academically and personally.

I began my doctoral journey six months after Rory died. I had started a doctorate previously but, of course, I ceased all study upon Rory's cancer diagnosis. I was 54 years old when I resumed my pursuit of the tenuous notion of 'doctorateness'.

When I decided to begin studying again, I immediately contacted my supervisor from before Rory's diagnosis, Professor Glen Postle. I had an academic history with this man as he had lectured me in my Bachelor of Education many years before. Glen was also my supervisor from my abandoned doctorate; thus I felt comfortable with him and secure in our relationship. *This was a man I could trust. We had a history. He had a point of reference. I wasn't always like this.* I had no idea about a research topic; I just knew that I had to do 'something' while I was on bereavement leave and to sustain my life beyond. I wasn't mentally ready to return to school as I would frequently break into uncontrollable sobs and I was partially nonverbal at the time. After the flurry of the funeral (which had an attendance of over 1,000 people) the trauma had taken root. I was left with the overwhelming solitude of grief, and any communication with people other than my immediate family was conducted via text message. I self-isolated for the majority of that time. This was as much for myself as it was to spare friends and extended family the discomfort of the wholly physical and mental nature of my grief. *I needed to be alone for a while.*

I rang Glen and we had a quiet conversation about supervision. He graciously accepted me as one of his students and told me about a research project that he thought that I might like to do. *This man embodied compassion and purpose.* It involved a detailed examination of a number of men's groups in and around my local area. The focus was on older men and the prevention of suicide ideation (Mulligan, 2018). This topic felt like a natural progression of my former research interests, which focused on boys and literacy. I could feel the tentative stirrings of intellectual curiosity. It was particularly pertinent to me at the time, as it was completely disassociated from teaching. *A lifeline was thrown to me by this man, and I grabbed it with trembling, thankful hands.* And so began a seven and a half year journey that was at times comforting, challenging, conflicting, fulfilling, frustrating and, overall, immensely rewarding and life altering.

Glen sent me to the university to discuss my re-entrance into the doctoral program with Professor Patrick Danaher. Our first meeting left me with a sense of reassurance and a feeling that I wasn't completely crazy to attempt this level of study in my state of mind. It was he who suggested that I join a very active postgraduate and early career researcher group (PGECR) that had been established within the university some years prior. This turned out to be a supportive and welcoming environment consisting of doctoral students and university lecturers all with the aim of sharing skills in the pursuit of scholarly knowledge. Even though I was silent throughout most of the initial meetings, I still felt like I belonged to something greater than myself, and the members were generous in their communication of information. *I felt accepted.*

One afternoon after a PGECR meeting, I found myself walking to the carpark with Patrick. It had transpired that Glen had introduced me to another member of staff who he thought would be acceptable as an associate supervisor. I did not instinctively bond with this woman. She came with excellent credentials and had supervised quite a few students to completion. She was competent and well-respected but, for me, there was 'something' missing. I was worried because I trusted Glen and we had filed the paperwork that named my supervisory team. Patrick listened intently as I rambled on, not really having a concrete explanation as to why I felt uncomfortable. *Patrick was, and continues to be, a skilful and empathic listener.* He reassured me that it was not uncommon for students to change supervisors. I replied that I didn't know whom I could replace her with. He then stated, with a modesty and a humility that I have come to recognise as symbolic of his popularity among his many students, *"I would be very honoured if you would consider me as your associate supervisor"*. I accepted immediately as I had observed this man with other university personnel – from professors to students to ancillary staff – and he treated all respectfully and equally. I knew that this was a golden opportunity and I was smart enough to recognise it as such. *I was grief stricken – not stupid! A lot of people cannot distinguish between the*

two. Thankfully, my supervisors were astute enough to do so. Glen was more than happy to accept Patrick into our team, and so my doctorate began in earnest.

I took my first leave of absence from doctoral studies after my confirmation of candidature. This is a process at my university whereby candidates prepare a 20-page mini-thesis that explains the structure of their proposed research. Candidates then present a 30-minute PowerPoint slide show that synthesises the contents of the written work. This is carried out in front of a panel of two or three university staff who are supposed to critique your proposal constructively upon completion of the presentation. Nominally, their purpose is to offer suggestions that enrich the study. I was very unhappy with the conduct of two of my panel members. They seemed to me actively to disparage my research and to belittle my attempts to answer their questions. I had attended other students' candidature confirmations and had not witnessed this type of negative behaviour from a panel at all.

In my fragile and vulnerable state, I was so shattered and badly affected by what I perceived as bullying during my confirmation of candidature that I decided to take a leave of absence from my study for six months while I determined my doctoral future. I had recommenced paid employment by that time, and I was also dealing with the emotional fallout from my poor treatment in that environment (please refer to Section 5.3). After discussions with Glen and Patrick that were highly respectful (on their part) and highly emotional (on my part), I decided to continue my journey with them.

Even though I felt that two of my confirmation of candidature panel members had been disappointing and destabilising, the event also generated two advantageous happenstances that were to be a turning point in my doctoral progression. These are described in the following paragraphs.

1. The third panel member was largely silent throughout, posing only one question that I answered to the best of my ability. As it

turned out, he was the chair of the university ethics committee at the time, and my approval to begin interviewing participants was granted within five days after the confirmation of candidature presentation. I was subsequently informed that this was unheard of and broke the norm of a protracted waiting time for ethics approval. *Gratifyingly, this person heard and appreciated my research.*

The day after my confirmation of candidature presentation, I attended a PGECR group meeting. A group of attendees greeted me before the meeting and enquired about my experience. I described what had occurred from my perspective. They were attentive, friendly and reassuringly *sympathetic*. This was a balm to my psyche. *I was not alone. I can get through this.* I then wrote the following poem as a self-reflexive act.

Confirmation of candidature couplets

Congratulations! Today is your day
You're off to great places, you're off and away! (Seuss, Dr.; 1990)

Finally! How hard can it be?
It's about time and IT'S ALL ABOUT ME! (Mulligan, Dr.; 2030)

I've sweated and practised and sweated some more
If all else fails, I've got cartoons galore

And a dvd with old men on motorbikes
I just hope it starts when it's s'posed to – Yikes

The panel walks in and they all take a seat
I feel like they are the diners and I'm the cooked meat

Oh well, here we go, it's now or never
Now is the moment to show them I'm clever

I deliver my speech and sit down with a sigh
Really, Deborah, sit up straight, this is no time to cry

"I notice on Page 10 you've used the word which…"
It's then that I develop an unforeseen twitch

"Errrrrrrr, ummmmmm," I mutter, stalling for time
How can they look at me like it's such a big crime?

No-one told me this would be the longest hour of the day

My desperate thoughts start rambling and my mind starts to stray

I look around the room and my supervisor is nodding
Willing me onwards as my words just keep plodding

"The end," says the chairman and graciously smiles
"The end," says my battered psyche like it's run 1000 miles

Thank heavens it's over, I'm home on my bed
I've taken some Panadol for my poor aching head

And then the next day my peers gather round for a report
I feel blessed and I'm grateful for all their support

This doctoral road is tricky, fraught with bends and dead ends
But it's made just that bit easier with my new found friends.

My second leave of absence from the doctorate occurred a couple of years later, when Glen revealed to me that he had terminal cancer and wouldn't be able to see my research project through to completion. I was devastated – for him and for me. *Not again!!! Please no!!!* Selfishly, I couldn't come to terms with the closeness of the destructive force of cancer appearing yet again in my life. Once again, I needed time to determine my future. Could I bear to watch him waste away as I had watched my beloved son? *Could I bear to watch the cancer ravage his body?* More practically, what did this mean for my research? Glen had indicated that he would stay with me as long as he could, but could I bear to add my *comparatively petty* doctoral problems to his struggle for survival? I, of all people, knew that he would need all the physical, mental and spiritual resources that he possessed in order to endure. *Hasn't he got enough to think about without the added burden of my doctoral progression?* But cancer is a capricious creature and Glen's sharp mind remained focused throughout and his physical visage remained as he had always appeared, albeit a thinner version of his former self. *Unlike my child who physically wasted away – a bald, amputee dependent on crutches and goodwill.*

During my time away from my study, I met with Patrick, and he generously assured me that we could go on as before with the supervisory roles reversed. He would replace Glen as my principal

supervisor, and Glen would become my associate supervisor. It was important to me that no-one else join our team. These men were my doctoral support crew, and I was unwilling to risk my mental stability with a third voice who would wish, quite rightly, to comment on my research. *Too many voices in my head; too much noise. I was hanging on by a thread.*

It was decided that Glen, Patrick and I would meet and confer as often as possible. Dates were earmarked in calendars for three, but only two of us would turn up. Drafts were emailed to two supervisors, but only one would respond. Patrick and I accepted this situation with an unspoken understanding that Glen would still be included in all of our interactions and correspondence, even though he seldom responded or participated. *The cancer journey is a full-time commitment. We understood this.*

Out of the ashes of this tragic and shocking circumstance, Patrick managed to be my academic constant and to prioritise me in his busy schedule. He modelled supervisory praxis at its most excellent. After all, he had originally signed on to be an associate, not a solo, supervisor. All the while, he must have been mourning the loss of a valued and much-admired, long-term friend and colleague. The consummate professional, Patrick walked alongside me and assisted me with my academic and emotional journey as well as silently travelling on his own academic and emotional journey. *What would I have done without him? I am thankful that I didn't find out.*

My doctorate did not really progress in any tangible manner until three years after I had returned to my place of employment. Prior to that, while I was on bereavement leave, and then as I readjusted to my role as part of a school community that clearly demonstrated antagonism, I went through the motions of candidacy. Wraith-like, I moved through my life not really focusing on specifics, my mind flooded with anger, bewilderment, confusion and psychic pain. I was hypervigilant and constantly seeking answers to the questions and the random survival prompts raised by Self. *Are you ready for the day? Get out of bed. Walk*

your dog. Eat something – anything. Clean your teeth. What will you wear? How are you feeling? How is your daughter feeling? YOU CAN DO THIS. YOU MUST DO THIS.

Grief work

In terms of the connection between my grief work and my doctorateness, simply put, I undertook a doctorate in order to help me to remember who I was. I had a past connection with Glen in the 'before', a couple of years prior to Rory's illness and subsequent death. If you're not careful, grief can steal your soul and your ability and *willingness* to live a full life. I looked upon this renewed act of scholarship as a lifeline – not to my past, but to my future. I knew that I should not stay sitting in that chair. It could become too comfortable. There is a certain succour in misery. It can become a singular identity that monopolises your state of being and poisons your relationships with loved ones. *Chronic grief is a wild thing and a voracious thief. It can steal your mind, your spirit and then attack your physical body.*

If you're not careful, Self may not have the courage or fortitude to ask the questions of life that are necessary to survive and to establish personal identities that are beneficial and life-affirming to you and your family. With this in mind, I embarked on a process of identity healing. This involved a transformation from the one stifling identity of pure griever to the multiple identities possessed by a healthy and active adult. This intentional act grew from a time that I knew that I had to endure before I could leave the shadowy land of chronic emotional reaction. I knew that I had to allow myself time to grieve fully and without reservation. After I had succumbed to that initial period, I had to take action to progress emotionally. "I will deal with the truth and find the courage to transform the loss into … something meaningful and endurable" (Alapack, 2010, p. 44). My first step on the transformational journey was to enrol in a doctorate.

Doctoral processes

I have come to the realisation, over time, that doctorateness is a destination, with multiple factors affecting the fluidity of the journey to achievement. As described in Section 2.4.8, Table 2.5, I have qualified 'doctorateness' as possessing the following elements:

Personal qualities of commitment, emotional intelligence and intellectual curiosity

Academic qualities of intentionality, competency, resilience, open-mindedness and willingness

'Doctorateness' as an ageless, cultureless and genderless phenomenon.

Green (2005) stated that "Doctoral pedagogy is as much about the production of *identity*, then, as it is the production of *knowledge*" (p. 154; emphasis in original). In my situation, initially identity (re)construction took precedence over knowledge. To begin with, Self was tentative – not really expecting viable answers to the survival questions being asked. *Are you ready for the day – or do you need to go back to bed? Can you eat today? Can you get dressed today? Can you leave the house today? What will you do if you can't?* As the answers to the questions posed by Self became more confident and positive, my identity as a doctoral student developed. I became more established in this other academic community that I had tenuously entered, and I was able to allow knowledge praxis to seep through. For the first few years of my study, my ontological and axiological processes were dominant. I struggled to find the path with solid ground. Self consistently posed questions to do with 'being' and values, but I was awash with emotional turmoil. *How is your reality imposing on your research? Can you combine the two? What attributes do you possess to see this through? What are your values and how much do you want to fight to live them?* Gradually, with time, effort and support, my doctoral confidence and purpose asserted themselves, and I was able to give myself over to the joy of research.

Thus began a stronger, more confident Self who had previously posed questions hesitantly, unsure of the response. As I embraced my doctorateness, multiple, more self-possessed identities answered the perennial question: *Are you ready for the day?*

Can you get out of bed?

- ***Yes,*** *I am feeling okay. I have some writing to do.* (doctoral identity)

Can you go to work?

- ***Yes,*** *I'm feeling fairly confident.* (professional identity)

Can you cope with the grief?

- ***Yes,*** *I'm feeling stronger.* (grieving identity)

Are you modelling healthy life skills for your daughter?

- ***Yes,*** *I'm demonstrating achievement of goal setting.* (mother identity)

Are you looking after yourself?

- ***Yes,*** *I'm walking/chatting with El.* (pet owner identity)

The word ***Yes*** became a righteous symbol of my emotional progression as I traversed the multiple, long, winding and interconnected roads of unknown scholarship endeavours, murky professional experiences, exhausting grieving practices, conscientious enactments of motherhood and, lastly, responsible pet ownership. I fully believe that, without the impetus of my burgeoning doctoral identity, the other identities would still be stumbling around, trying to find direction.

For me, the simplicity of doctorateness was playfully and quite accurately reflected in a random conversation that I had with one of my new colleagues at work:

Her: What are you doing this weekend?

Me: Writing.

Her: I think it's cute that you think that's fun.

Each of the following subsections constitutes one of several welcome multiple paths that I traversed on my way to the destination of doctorateness.

University

University campuses play an important role in the mental health of all who work there, including students. They can operate as salutogenic environments (Dooris et al., 2016) where consideration of the mental health of all stakeholders is paramount.

Physically, my university campus was pleasing to the eye and relatively easy to navigate. The horticultural environs were well tended with tree lined pathways that meandered through the university grounds from one building to another. Benches were spaced throughout for those who needed green space in which to sit and contemplate. The gardens reflected the changing seasons and there was always a vista that was pleasurable to look at. Adjacent to the university campus was a Japanese garden maintained by the University and the local council. Many university personnel and students could be found there at lunch time taking in the ambience of water features, wildlife and dedicated picnic areas. This garden provided a place for a nearby escape from the university confines.

At the time of my study (pre-COVID), the campus was a bustling place. I always felt that I was part of something important when I met my supervisor(s) for coffee in the refectory, which was a hub for many members of the university community. As I got to know more people, I felt embraced and welcomed. I often stopped to have a quick conversation with other academics who were genuinely interested in my research. This was such a contrast to my return to work experience where

people didn’t really know what to do with me. My presence at work was awkward and colleagues were uncertain, whereas on the university campus I was valued for my dedication to education.

Supervisors

Supervisory practices are constantly being (re)examined by students, supervisors and other academic researchers (Pyhältö et al., 2015; Ryan & Mulligan, 2022; Schneijderberg, 2021; Trowler, 2021). Mowbray and Halse (2010) interviewed a sample of PhD students and found that their expectations did not match their reality. The student participants entered the program expecting an immediate academic and personal bond with their supervisors. Unfortunately, their lived experiences were the opposite.

> Managing supervision was a challenge experienced by many students.…Many experienced their supervisors as unsupportive and disengaged. Supervisors were often too busy to meet or seemed to be continually absent on study, conference, research or other leave. Some supervisors disappeared entirely by relocating to another university. (pp. 658- 659)

Observations about supervisory styles were recorded by Chamberlain (2016), who noted ten categories that she had detected while conducting her ongoing role as university lecturer. They included the following:

“the clone” (the student duplicates the philosophies of the supervisor)

“cheap labour” (the student is powerless)

“ghost supervisor” (the supervisor seldom interacts with the student)

“chum” (the student provides personal lifestyle support to the supervisor; however, the supervisor rarely reciprocates with academic support for the student)

"collateral damage" (the supervisor is globally influential and the student takes over the jobs that the supervisor doesn't have time for – to the detriment of their own research)

"combatant" (the supervisor constantly denigrates and belittles the student)

"creepy crawlers" (harmful supervisory interactions with obsessive overtones)

"captivate and con" (sexual relationship develops between supervisor and student)

"counsellor" (supervisor half-heartedly attempts to counsel the student about personal problems)

"colleague in training" (professional and respectful relationship between supervisor and student). (n.p.)

I consider myself to be inordinately fortunate with my supervisory team as I was privileged to be the recipient of the final category of Chamberlain's (2016) observations. My relationship with Glen and Patrick was based on mutual respect, as was the association between the two of them. Thankfully, I felt an immediate bond with both. I knew from the outset that they both wanted the best outcome for my academic career and for my personal status. Before Glen became ill, we met regularly as a collaborative team and at no time did I feel neglected, imposed upon or unsettled in their presence. After Glen was diagnosed, I know that he followed my doctoral and personal progress keenly, even though he was sick and I rarely saw him. During his illness and subsequent death, I was able to move forwards with my studies thanks to a seamless transition initiated by Patrick from two supervisors to one. The respect and honour that both Patrick and I continue to have for Glen are reflected in a large photo of Glen in his academic regalia that I proudly carried in my graduation processional (please see Figure 1.3).

The fact that I was highly traumatised and stressed before I entered the doctorate meant that I had no expectations of the emotional and academic requirements of study at this level. I have spoken with Patrick about the risk that he took when he offered to be my supervisor. In my emotional state, with my tenuous grasp on reality, there was no guarantee that I would finish my research, even with the best will in the world. In retrospect, initially I invested in the power of studying to help me with my grief work but, as the doctorate progressed, I found myself more invested in the relationship that I had with my sole supervisor. Patrick, on the other hand, was of the opinion that it was I who took a risk on his praxis. The fact that he was initially unfamiliar with my research topic was made clear from the beginning. After all, it was Glen's suggested topic and Patrick's focus (at that time) was education, not gerontology. In my opinion, this strengthened our research relationship. Patrick, the consummate intellectual, was incredibly interested in my progress and my findings. I believe that this gave our sessions together an additional wonder as we traversed the topic together.

> The difficulty of managing the PhD supervisory relationship is a well-known one. The intensity with which this relationship can be played out reveals that much more is involved than a simple transference of knowledge from one individual to another. On the contrary, each individual is revealed to have complex investments in this relationship. (Owler, 1999, p. 132)

Whereas the dominant discourse around supervisory practice and doctoral completion is generally negative (Chamberlain, 2016; Mowbray & Halse, 2010), my supervisors subverted this trope. Glen and Patrick believed in me. The power of belief is not one to be dismissed or disparaged in any circumstance, let alone the one in which I found myself. Sathyanarayana Rao et al. (2009) stated that "one of the biggest misconceptions people often harbor is that belief is a static, intellectual concept" (p. 239). Further, "If you believe you are fragile, the

biochemistry of your body unquestionably obeys and manifests it" (Sathyanarayana Rao et al., 2009, p. 240). When individuals suffer from lack of belief in themselves (as I was feeling after Rory's death) or from lack of belief from others (as I encountered upon my return to work), they feel powerless and diminished. This is reflected mentally and physically. Initially, my body language and performance were those of a vulnerable individual who was easily startled, hunched around the shoulders, spoke infrequently and was in constant physical pain owing to stress. As my doctorate progressed, my physical stature became more upright and my mental and physical acuity asserted itself. "When we consciously allow newer perceptions to enter the brain by seeking new experiences, learning new skills and changed perspectives, our body can respond in newer ways …" (Sathyanarayana Rao et al., 2009, p. 241).

When applied to a supervisory context, the notion of belief is based on the twin concepts of "being and becoming" (Davies & Danaher, 2017, p. 230). Through embarking on my doctoral studies, I was making a conscious decision to become 'more' than I was at that time. I set out intentionally to reframe my reality. Gradually, and at times haltingly, through my doctoral studies, with the help and guidance of my supervisors, I achieved this.

Part of the journey to doctorateness is making space for listening to the wisdom of those who gladly and proficiently share their skills. The lessons learned from Patrick and Glen were incredibly valuable in terms of the production of knowledge.

Find your authorial voice. *Read widely, write often.*

Own your doctorate and be your own agent for intellectual accomplishment. *Grow through the experience.*

Consider feedback – even if you disagree. *Hone your argument.*

Cast your mind wide in the realm of scholarship: be interested in even the seemingly trivial. *Seek out intellectual nuggets.*

Maintain a sense of community: not just within your doctoral boundaries but with the wider community as well because that is the essence of higher education: to strive for (in my case) social change. *Make a difference.*

Exercise patience and an unpretentiousness in your dealings with others both inside the academic community and outside. *Practise equality.*

Respect the topics of others. *All learning is valuable.*

Value the struggle. *It makes you stronger and the endpoint is more rewarding.*

Fieldwork

My fieldwork was immensely stimulating. It comprised visiting 10 male-only, remote, rural, regional and metropolitan Men's Sheds (menshed.org.au) and three male-only TOMNET (The Older Men's Network) (tomnet.org.au) groups (Mulligan, 2018). My fieldwork habit was that, at a prearranged time negotiated with the executive of each organisation, I would arrive at morning tea time with several boxes of chocolates, the contents of which I scattered over the tabletops. I became known as 'the chocolate lady'. The men appreciated my thoughtfulness, and I visited each venue frequently to conduct interviews, to keep the participants updated and finally to give them the book that I wrote from my first doctoral thesis (Mulligan, 2020a). At each location, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the executive committee and anyone else who wished to contribute. I took a leave of absence from my teaching in order to complete the majority of visitations and interviews. Grief and the treatment that I received when I returned to work had robbed me of self-confidence and, as such, walking into unknown, male-only domains was fraught with unease. *What am I doing?* However, without exception, everywhere that I went I was greeted with respect and a willingness on the part of the men to participate fully in the research (Mulligan, 2020b).

One of my first fieldwork procedural priorities was to book a meeting with the 11-member executive committee of TOMNET. At an assigned date and time, I was ushered into their boardroom. I was feeling quite fragile that day as it was my birthday, and the absence of my son weighed heavily on my spirit. *I miss him.* Of course, none of my participants was privy to my backstory. After a lengthy discussion about the aims and objectives of the project, we began to discuss how and when I could access the members. Out of this convoluted discussion, I happened to mention that it was my birthday. Spontaneously and as one, they all sang me the 'Happy Birthday' song. It was a lovely moment. *I am forever thankful for their act of random kindness on an emotionally tumultuous day.* I have no doubt that my path to TOMNET was eased considerably by Glen's historical association with this group. This act of bonhomie was to exemplify all of my fieldwork interactions with the participants in my study. I was the recipient of many light-hearted offers of marriage (that I had to decline respectfully), and I was privy to male banter that, in my presence, was courteous, unbiased and joyful. My biggest inconvenience occurred when conducting the Likert scale surveys in a room full of males on their tea break. They were conscientiously doing their best, but most ignored my efforts to explain the process. On one occasion, in a large Men's Shed group, having completed the form to their satisfaction, they started to speak loudly across the table to one another about the projects in which they were engaged and to throw pens playfully at one another. I was never in any danger of being hit by these projectiles. Also, on other occasions, one or two of the men were hearing challenged and so enlisted others to explain loudly (and sometimes inaccurately) exactly what it was that I needed them to do.

WHAT did she say?

SHE SAID YOU HAVE TO TICK THIS COLUMN! (I didn't)

THIS column?

NO, THAT ONE!

THIS one????

YES!!!!!!

Lessons learned from the participants in my doctoral study were based on reciprocal interactions with volunteers:

Don't assume a bias that in reality is nonexistent (I had initially thought that the men would dismiss me or try to play gendered power games). *Be open-minded.*

Respect their participation: they don't have to give up their time. Buy the chocolates; have patience when they don't listen, they are doing the best that they can with goodwill. *Be grateful.*

Every voice/opinion matters and can strengthen your thesis argument. *Be aware.*

Have a sense of humour and don't take offence when none is meant. *Be flexible.*

Maintain the relationship (if possible) when the journey is over. *Mutuality is key.*

Demonstrate to the participants how their insights were utilised. In my case, I put together an information booklet for them that I took to each participating group and talked about my findings with them. I also conducted a number of information sessions for various community groups within my local area. *Be of service.*

Peers

I am indeed most fortunate to have shared my journey with academic peers who appreciate and value the doctoral journey as much as I do. The impact of a positive network cannot be overstated, particularly in the area of academia. When referring to university

campuses, Dooris et al. (2016) stated, “While services play an important role, there is also evidence that social networks influence a range of psychosocial factors important to well-being” (p. 239). The authors broadly categorised these factors into belongingness, supportive community and healthy behaviours.

A sense of belonging enhances life choices, fosters networking and solidifies relationships within chosen communities. Belongingness and inclusion are keys to relationship connection – an element that I craved desperately after my son died. Maslow (1943) categorised the social needs of love and belonging as the third requirement (placed after physiological and safety needs) for behavioural motivation in his hierarchy of needs (please refer to Section 3.3.2 and Figure 3.5). Connectedness is linked with feelings of acceptance by others (being part of a group) and positive self-esteem (being valued by group members). Stillman and Baumeister (2009) hypothesised that, “Threats to belongingness decrease the belief that life is meaningful” (p. 250). *Where do I fit now? Should I even try?* Performing healthy behaviours are, at times, a challenge to doctoral students. In the pressure cooker of family life, paid employment and doctoral study, it is easy to devalue positive physical and mental health pursuits such as exercising and socialising.

The value of networking with my peers (cindyseeme.wordpress.com, 2020) was highlighted to me at the very beginning of my doctoral journey. There are important lessons to be learned from the parallel struggles of others who strive for the same goal. Being part of the supportive academic community at my university heightened my research skills. It was my participation in face-to-face groups like PGECR and online groups such as Older Wiser Learners (OWLs) (facebook.com/groups/708019069302386) that I learned how other academics went about the minutiae of research: planning, fieldwork, writing and generally coping in academia. Lessons learned from fellow travellers revolved around the notion of resilience and the acknowledgement of the academic journeys of others:

Not all supervisors are to be trusted with your research or your personal life. *Recognise whom to trust.*

A good coffee session with open-ended conversation can refresh and (re)motivate. *Appreciate your peers.*

Everyone has issues in life, but it is possible to complete a doctorate in spite of them. *We all struggle with something.*

Older women are not to be taken for granted or put on the shelf. “Don’t write us off” (Shriver, 2022). *Age/gender is not a barrier.*

The joy of celebrating the hard-won achievement of others. *Community spirit is uplifting.*

The infinite possibilities and intricacies of a myriad of research topics. *Everyone has different interests/passions.*

Imposter syndrome is universal. *It can apply to a range of scholars, no matter how academically experienced the person.*

Through my participation in symposia and conferences, I learned the value of articulating my research in a manner that was comprehensible and relatable to others. I also learned the value of feedback, and how to interpret the opinions of others and to apply (or ignore) the suggestions of other scholars.

Beyond

Life beyond the completion of my doctorate had been a rewarding one. I am humbled by the generosity of others and the writing/presenting opportunities that they have shared with me. I am also thankful that I am able to help others as a mentor in their academic journeys. I think back to when I began my own first doctorate and marvel at the transformation of an older woman who was mired in chronic grief to an (even) older woman who is now able (mostly) to manage emotional trauma and to participate productively in scholarship.

My association with Patrick and Glen has led me to new scholarly endeavours, undreamed of in my past life. At the time of writing this thesis, Patrick and I have edited three books (Mulligan & Danaher, 2020; Mulligan & Danaher, 2021; Mulligan, Ryan & Danaher, 2023) and one handbook together (Anteliz, Mulligan & Danaher, 2022). Additionally, I have solo-authored a book based on the research from Thesis #1 (Mulligan, 2020). Through Patrick's ongoing mentorship, I have built upon my initially meagre cache of academic skills. *I still have so much to learn.*

My association with the participants in my first thesis has led me to engage in a wider world than the one of which I inhabited before I began my doctorate for PhD Thesis #1. Those participants believed in my scholarly capabilities and never doubted that I would complete my research. They were proud to be involved, and, in return, I was thankful for their open-heartedness and candour. I carry with me a comment made to me by one of the older male participants whom I admired greatly for his community-mindedness and his commitment to furthering the cause of older men's mental health: "You can think"*. These are three words that are so complex in their simplicity.*

My association with my scholarly peers has afforded me the opportunity to form new friendships, unencumbered by past complexities. They have no immediate knowledge of my life with Rory, and yet they respect my memories of him, and they acknowledge my lived experience of grief. They listen empathetically if I speak of my son, and there is no judgement on their part. *He is accepted as part of me.* I am similarly invested in their doctoral progress, and as such I am able to add value to their academic lives.

Not only was I invested in doctoral studies, but so was my daughter. I hadn't realised it at the time but, in retrospect, she was monitoring my progress in a way that signalled her own hope for the future. She was proud of my achievement, and I was similarly pleased that she recognised the value of the twin struggles for mastery over my doctoral studies and over my grief. When I initially had thoughts of not

attending my graduation ceremony, she exclaimed loudly, “Mum, you’ve got to go. You can’t rob me of this opportunity to be proud of you!” *The hard work was worth it.*

The following section describes a grief theory that is relevant to my situation over the last decade. It explains the emotional journey of striving for independence from my grief while on a journey to doctorateness.

The Dual Process Model

There is a school of thought that promotes the idea that exploring different theories about grief can be beneficial for grievers (Williams, 2014). From my perspective, now that I have the mental capacity to process and analyse how I wish to live my grief, understanding the various hypotheses around its enactments helps me to make sense of what is happening to me. The traditional task-oriented models of grief seemed unattainable, too linear, and too rigid and inhumane to my way of thinking. The Dual Process Model (DPM) demonstrates the complexity and the ‘humanness’ of grief. It allows Self to ask the primary questions and for identities to vacillate depending upon my emotional state at that time. The DPM reinforced for me that, at some time during the day, when Self checks in and asks the question *Are you okay?,* it’s all right to say “Yes” one minute (for example, when I’m focusing on my doctorate), and then to say “No” (when I swap from my doctoral identity back to that of grieving mother). The DPM acknowledges that this can happen multiple times during the day (and night) and confirms that it’s an acceptable emotional position.

The DPM of Coping with Bereavement was introduced by Stroebe and Schut in a paper that they presented at a meeting of the International Work Group on Death, Dying and Bereavement (Williams, 2014). The idea was formalised in an article written for the journal *Death Studies* (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). It was revisited by the authors just over a decade later (Stroebe & Schut, 2010). “It is a model, then, of *coping with* loss, not a generic model aimed at explaining the broad range of

phenomena and manifestations associated with bereavement" (Stroebe & Schut, 2010, p. 274; emphasis in original). This schema provided a more realistic representation of the grieving process as applied to my situation of reflexivity from a distance of over a decade. The issue of coping, or effectively overcoming a difficult situation, is a major source of tension for the bereaved. I had accepted the reality of Rory's death, but how was I to deal with it? *I held his hand as he took his last breath.* I was cognisant of two main realities:

a) Rory was dead; nothing could be done to alter this bald fact. *He is gone.*
b) I had another child to nurture through this catastrophic event. *She is here.*

After a period of self-isolation and deep, intense mourning for six months, my responsibility to my living child took precedence over my grief enactment. I could not afford to isolate, I needed to stop wearing black (at my daughter's insistence) and I needed to live purposefully to demonstrate to her that she *and I* still had a life full of promise. It was time to model for her how to cope with life without her brother. In order to do so, my life needed to be reframed. Identities needed to be resurrected and/or created. "Rethinking and replanning one's life in the face of bereavement … can also be an essential component of grieving" (Stroebe & Schut, 2010, p. 277).

The DPM consists of four components. These are "loss-orientation", "restoration-orientation" and "oscillation", with each act performed experientially in "everyday life" (Stroebe & Schut, 2010, p. 277). When portraying the element of "loss-orientation", the bereaved allows grieving to be acknowledged and the act of grief work to begin. Immersion in the embodied pain and experiencing its impact on mind, body and soul are important and necessary for an effective grieving process. The authors described this as the "heart of grieving" (Stroebe & Schut, 2010, p. 277). *I took nearly two years out of paid employment to give myself over to*

mourning my son wholeheartedly and without reservation. It was a desperate time, but it was much needed.

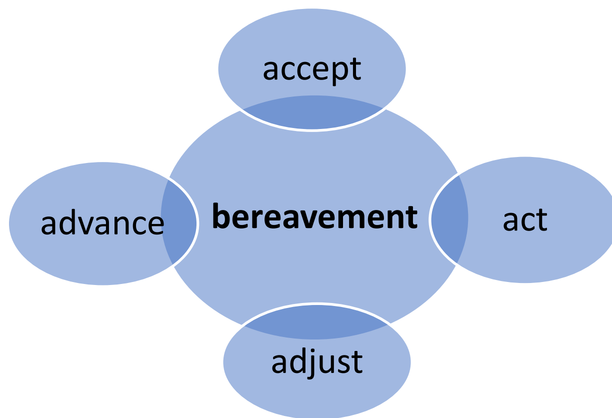
"Restoration-orientation" (Stroebe & Schut, 2010, p. 277) begins when the griever reflexively plans a life without the deceased. This reorientation is also considered to be a vital constituent of bereavement. Loss-orientation specifically addresses the elements of "grief work; the intrusion of grief; letting go – continuing – relocating bonds/tie; and denial/avoidance of restoration changes" (Stroebe & Schut, 2010, p. 276). Restoration-orientation involves "attending to life changes; doing new things; distraction from grief; denial/avoidance of grief; and new roles/identities/relationships" (Stroebe & Schut, 2010, p. 276). *I began a doctorate. And, in so doing, I began a new life chapter. This was begun not to forget my son, never that, but to model for both my living child and myself that life goes on and can be productive and purposeful. Grief can be managed and must not consume.*

The emotional shifting from one category to another multiple times a day is referred to as "oscillation" (Stroebe & Schut, 2010, p. 276). This is the key element that sets this DPM theory apart from its predecessors. Acknowledgement of psychological chaos recognises that for the most part grievers cannot and *should not if they can't/don't want to* follow a neat, linear enactment of their emotions, moving fluidly from one phase to the next. "Oscillation" (Stroebe & Schut, 2010, p. 276) represents the chaotic and unpredictable *frenzied* traversing between the loss and restoration orientations that occurs in the daily life of a griever. The authors maintained that this is the element that signifies a more practical hypothesis of bereavement praxis. *Unpredictability, insanity, serenity – these are the hallmarks of long-term grief – like the inevitable summer storms in my home town that appear on the horizon, which are full of thunder, lightning and tempestuous wind, only to subside and then to return again. This constitutes the mirroring of the emotions of mourning. Moment to moment, day to day, year to year, I oscillate between wild yearning for my son and calm acceptance of his death.*

In their comparison of the structural components of the revised models proposed by Bowlby in 1980 and Worden in 1991, the authors articulated a blending of these historical models as well as an additional facet of their own hypothesis (Stroebe & Schut, 2010, p. 278). They proposed a four-part bereavement structure that I have depicted in Figure 6.2.

Figure Error! No text of specified style in document.**.41**

My depiction of the structural components of the dual process model



The authors proposed:

An acceptance of the reality of multiple losses. *In losing my son, I lost our future together. In losing my son, I lost friendships. In losing my son, I lost an imagined, hoped-for life narrative in which he was one of the main participants.*

An actioning of the pain caused by the losses by taking time to experience it but also by taking "time out" (p. 277) from it. *Researching and writing my thesis provided me with a respite from the constancy of mourning my son.*

An adjustment to life without the loved one, including overcoming the altered emotional and physical environments. *This constitutes the endless struggle of the bereaved parent, no matter the distance of time.*

An advancement of emotions that allows the griever to form new identities and new relationships. *I am emotionally stronger. In my*

doctorateness, I have added another comfortable identity (the shoes of an academic) and established new comforting and meaningful relationships.

Parkes (1998) referred to the practice of "time out" when he stated, "As time passes people may also need permission to take a break from grieving" (p. 858). The aspect of "permission" is worth acknowledging. This formed the nexus of my doctoral aspiration. While I wasn't seeking "permission" (as such) to take a rest from the emotionality of bereavement, I experienced an underlying feeling of unease and anxiety where I initially thought that I should be constantly thinking about Rory's death and actively pining for him. *Somehow not thinking of him was a betrayal.* Parkes (1998) referred to this psychology as a feeling of "duty to the dead" (p. 859). Of course, this is unsustainable and is detrimental to the bereaved and to those who care for her. As my doctorate progressed, these feelings of emotional uncertainty dissipated, and I came to terms with how I wanted to enact my coping strategies in the best interests of myself and my family.

My doctoral studies allowed me to learn how to take respite incrementally from my grief for a more decisive occupation of my mind. I immersed myself in the acts of research and of thesis writing. Gradually, as I warmed to the academic processes, I felt able to concentrate with a greater capacity for longer periods of time. My doctorate provided a much-needed escape route from the unutterably exhausting and relentless psychic and physical pain of grieving for my child. Indeed, Stroebe and Schut (2010) stressed that "changes are to be expected across the *duration of bereavement*" (p. 283; emphasis in original). They asserted that over time there will be a lessening of the influence of the loss-orientation components, and that more attention will be paid to restoration-orientation activities. They further posited that the importance of any future loss-orientation type tasks will weaken.

The underlying assumption of this incrementally diminishing influence of immense sorrow is exemplified in the following piece that I wrote in my journal two years (December 2012) after Rory's death.

Of course, I will never again be the 'old me' – the 'before' me. How could I? The tapestry of my being will forever contain the golden threads of my son's love, woven through with black threads of death and crimson threads of unspeakable horror and heartbreak. But it is becoming a looser weave. My doctoral studies gift me with pin hole glimpses of a bright future. Rays of golden sunshine sometimes break through the dense, cloudy barrier of grief. The cool, blue breeze of hope and possibility wafts in, calling me to a new life that is just beginning to glimmer with an alternative possibility. My place in the 'after'.

Chapter summary

Grief is a wild complexity. It begins with a trauma that overwhelms the senses, but through careful crafting and patience it becomes mostly tamed and you can learn to adapt your life around its uncertainty. Writing is a mystical phenomenon. It begins as an unformed nub of an idea, but through careful crafting and patience it becomes fully formed and a thing to be proud of. Doctorateness provided me with an agency over my grief that I may have otherwise lacked. Mowbray and Halse (2010) concluded that "it is through the development and application of the intellectual virtues that individuals flourish in their daily life and work and contribute to the wider human good" (p. 662).

Aside from the benefits of institutional and intellectual belonging, the acquisition of intellectual virtues or intellectualism has had a dual effect on both my ability to enact doctorateness and my ability to enact my style of grief work. When referring to the concept of a lifelong learner (Section 2.4.1) – which is what I consider myself to be – Baehr (2013) described intellectual virtues as "thick concepts. They have both normative and a richly descriptive dimension" (p. 250). While scholarship in the area of intellectual virtues is plentiful (Baehr, 2011, 2013;

Candiotto, 2017; Heersmink, 2018; Mowbray & Halse, 2010; Roberts & Wood, 2007), I associate my experience and learning most explicitly with the writings from the Intellectual Virtues Academy (2021). The Academy lists nine "master virtues" (n.p.):

"curiosity (a disposition to wonder, ponder and ask why),

intellectual humility (own one's limitations and mistakes),

intellectual autonomy (think and reason for oneself),

attentiveness (mindful and engaged),

intellectual carefulness (strives for accuracy),

intellectual thoroughness (probes for deeper meaning and understanding),

open-mindedness (ability to think outside the box),

intellectual courage (persist in thinking or communicating)

intellectual tenacity (embrace challenge and struggle)" (n.p.).

Doctorateness and grief work require each of these virtues in abundance. I particularly resonate with the virtue of intellectual tenacity. *It is one thing to begin, but quite another to complete.* I have compiled Table 6.1 that lists the parallel traits of intellectual virtues when applied to the doctoral journey and to grief work. This shows the interconnection of both concepts, and demonstrates the manner in which both could be enacted simultaneously.

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Intellectual virtues applied to doctorateness and grief work

INTELLECTUAL TRAIT	DOCTORATENESS	GRIEF WORK
Attentiveness	A preparedness to dig deeply into the minutiae of the research and to acknowledge its nuances – e.g., when transcribing interviews, locate key themes and find supporting evidence for the opinions of multiple participants.	A preparedness to dig deeply into the minutiae of grief and its manifestations – e.g., acknowledge your triggers.
Autonomy	An aptitude to think independently – e.g., move beyond the need for supervisors' direction.	An aptitude to think independently and to know what your needs are as opposed to the manner in which others enact their grief work – e.g., assess what you need to do to carry on in a healthy manner that is appropriate for your character/personality.
Carefulness	A compliance to the governing rules and regulations of the doctoral processes – e.g., seek ethics approval.	A compliance with the governing rules of emotional regulation imposed by the grief work that you are enacting – e.g., adhere to your variation of emotion work in the form of dark labour.
Courage	A willingness to "subject ourselves to a potential loss or harm" (Baehr, 2013, n.p.) when conducting doctoral research – e.g., recognise when to discard an approach/methodology that proves unsustainable, no matter how committed you are to it.	A willingness to "subject ourselves to a potential loss or harm" (Baehr, 2013, n.p.) when conducting grief work – e.g., have the courage of your convictions when others may judge your behaviour.
Curiosity	A capacity to question and to seek understanding – e.g., ask questions that involve the 'who' and the 'why' of a research project: Who benefits from this research? Why are the data telling me this?	A capacity to question and to seek understanding of Self – e.g., ask questions that involve the 'what' and the 'why' of grief work: What benefit will I derive from this action? Why should I react this way in particular?

INTELLECTUAL TRAIT	DOCTORATENESS	GRIEF WORK
Humility	"An awareness of and a willingness to 'own' one's intellectual limits" (Intellectual Virtues Academy, 2021, n.p.) and to own one's doctoral research project – e.g., take control of the implementation of your project design and implementation.	An awareness of and a willingness to 'own' one's grief – e.g., take control of the manner in which you wish to enact your grief, and recognise your emotional limits (adapted from Intellectual Virtues Academy, 2021, n.p.).
Open-mindedness	A disposition to consider a range of different viewpoints around a topic – e.g., be aware of personal bias when interacting with data.	A disposition to consider a range of different viewpoints around the causality of grief – e.g., decide whether you need to consider different ways to enact grief work.
Tenacity	An ability to respond to the challenges of a long-term research project and all that it entails – e.g., take time out if you need to do so, but always return to the project.	An ability to respond to the challenges of a long-term grief work project and all that it entails – e.g., decide what you will react to as other people interact with you.
Thoroughness	A commitment to deep research and best practice that accounts for multiple perspectives – e.g., when analysing data, be aware of all aspects of what the data are telling you.	A commitment to deep research and best practice that accounts for multiple perspectives – e.g., research how others have enacted grief work; assess the successes and failures of others and apply them to your situation.

My Prologue began with a distillation of my grief work. As the topic of Research Question 2 highlights doctorateness, it is now timely to reflect on this notion specifically.

I feel that I have reached the destination of 'doctorateness'. I owe a debt of gratitude to those places and people I encountered along the way. I live a rich and fulfilling intellectual life that spills over into my personal life. The act of 'doing a doctorate' has opened my mind and body to challenges that have been constructive and instructive. I have reached the first stage of my 'after' and look forward to future adventures, always carrying my son in my heart.

This chapter addressed the manner in which I achieved 'doctorateness'. The storyline was built on the complexities I experienced when returning to work (as highlighted in Chapter 5). I presented a contrasting narrative that foregrounded surmountable academic challenges but were well supported by various stakeholders who believed in my ability to overcome, thus ensuring intellectual growth occurred. Figure 6.3 depicts the progression of the journey so far with the addition of intellectual growth.

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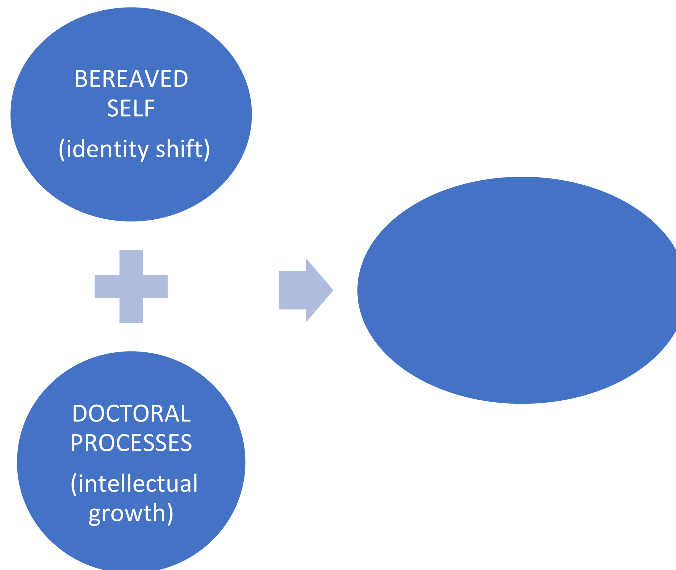
Doctoral processes and intellectual growth



Chapter 7 outlines my journey to achieve personal transformation building on information disclosed in Chapters 5 and 6. The following section (6.8) presents the end of Chapter 6: the Epilogue.

Epilogue

Reflection

Today I have woken in a philosophical mood. I have the flu so I can't go on to the university campus lest I spread my germs. Grief still makes me susceptible – or perhaps that is just the ageing process – or a combination of the two. So I am trapped and reflective. El senses my mood and stares out at the garden and beyond [Figure 6.4]. These are the moments when we sit together and gaze into the universe.

We contemplate our place in the world as we know it and wonder at the atrocities that occur around us. They're hard to escape with a constancy of media updates. Cruelty to animals, brutality to our fellow humans, destruction of the planet. Too much, too much. And yet, as we sit together, El and I, we are united in love and undemanding companionship. We are momentarily calm amidst the chaos.

I open my mind to the day and listen to the birds. How did I get to this place of tranquillity? I don't know. It's a gift. My grief girl knows this can go either way. She's alert, busy plotting and doing who knows what inside my head, my heart and my soul – ever vigilant for an opportunity to bring me to my knees emotionally. I ignore her. I mull over intangibles.

Happiness. That's a big one. I once heard that happiness is wanting what you have right now. Or words to that effect. It was the "right now" that has struck a chord. Right now, I have many blessings, save the ONE. Have I truly been 'happy' since Rory died? Fleeting snippets – yes – absolutely. Perhaps they are becoming more frequent with distance. But it seems to be balanced with the shockingly inadequate 'sad'.

Random acts of kindness. Have I been the recipient of them over the years since Rory's death? Most certainly. There are some good people out there. Both friends and strangers. People have nurtured me, and I am grateful.

Connection. After Rory's death, I used to meet an ex-colleague randomly in the local supermarket. We used to teach together. He would see me and spontaneously burst into tears – hauntingly and, for some chaotic reason, always near the bananas. We didn't speak. What more was there to say? We didn't touch. What more was there to feel? And yet, I felt oddly comforted. We would take a moment to look at each other and then move on. The shared moment, the shared empathy, the shared grief.

Simplicity. Among the many layers and multiple complexities of grief, there is a space in my mind that acknowledges the righteousness of enacting raw emotion – much like the impromptu meetings with my past colleague in the produce section of the supermarket.

Gratitude. Mostly. After the recognition of loss, what is left? A wander among nature in early morning or late afternoon. Waving to friends and strangers if I take myself for a walk into the street. The companionship of

a good friend. The faithfulness of my old dog. The comforting arms of those you most trust with your memories. The free flow of tears that wash away any pretensions of guarded emotions.

Commitment. I have learned to be single-minded. It's now a survival skill for me, just as it is for El with her insatiable desire for food and her limitless love for us. My brain only functions on 10% capacity – maybe 20% on a good day. So my synapses snap away and work overtime. No wonder I'm tired. The rest of my being is taken up with Rory. Memories of him, love for him and conscious (and unconscious) tributes to him.

Constant inner dialogue with Self. Yes, I'm okay with this life. Yes, sometimes it's overpowering, but sometimes it's a great comfort. And sometimes, if I speak to myself out loud, it can be embarrassing for others. I have learned not to care.

Purpose. Initially, my doctorate gave me something else to think about – incrementally – while I sat at home. It gave me an intent when interaction outside with people both known and unknown was fraught with tears and silences and too many words. Answering the phone was full of tension for me. Was I physically capable of speaking at that moment?

Time and tide. As I reflect on all the years without my first born, I can say that distance has made life more manageable. I have finally washed up on the shore of "Mostly, I can cope". There are times when I stray too close to the water's edge and those waves creep up and sweep me back out to sea and I have carefully to tread water and allow the tide to carry me back in its own time. But I always come back, and that's important. To me, to my family, to others who love me and to Rory's memory.

I am dwelling too much on reflection. Overthinking can be harmful. Time to pat my dog and chat about the annoyance of germs and a runny nose (for me) and the pure pleasure of food (for her).

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Reflective El

PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

Would you giggle as the cool wind and I give you goosebumps? Would you remember our journey as you retrace your footprints in the snow?

Prologue

There is a walking track that has been chiselled out of the side of the mountain upon which my hometown is located. It's a difficult walk. The terrain is steep and unstable, and can be treacherous, especially in the sapping heat of summer or after year-round rainfalls. Walkers have to descend a precarious single file, bitumen path to reach the bottom of the track and then climb a winding, rock strewn, dirt path to ascend.

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Step 1

The track is a lonely and challenging place for an already depleted solo walker. The solitude can be overwhelming, even though the stark beauty of the greyness is compelling. Your first steps are hesitant. You crane your neck, endeavouring to find the summit, but it is nowhere to be seen. Just the empty trail that winds ever upward.

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Step 2

Unexpected tripping hazards in the form of exposed rocks and tree roots can slow your progress and become painful injuries to carry. Staying put or descending are momentary seductive thoughts. But you know that to choose either would negate all of the effort-filled work you have accomplished to get this far. And besides, your heart knows that these are really not options at all…

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Step 3

The track itself is a barren, narrow landscape, but you take solace in the footprints ahead, knowing that others have struggled and lumbered up this path before you and have successfully reached the peak.

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Step 4

Occasionally, you see the broken corpses of once mighty trees cut down, now scattered, forgotten remnants. Their scars are real and raw and blood red. They lie littered in pieces with previous sacrifices, discarded by those who thought them useless or an impediment to the landscape.

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Step 5

The ascent is steep and, if you are incautious, you will tumble down with nothing but the hard, inflexible surfaces of tree trunks or the unforgiving razor-sharp brambles to break your fall. The temptation to walk close to the edge just to test yourself slides into mind. But you do not listen to the siren call and resume the middle ground. Upward, one foot in front of the other. Your sight fixed on the steps that will ultimately take you to the prize at the summit. Progress is all.

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Step 6

The view of other people's journeys is a confusion of branches that reach across your vision and can block access to the clear sightedness of purpose. You shrug. You wish them well as they go about their daily lives. You have your own journey to undertake at your own pace.

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Step 7

Occasionally, the sun will break through the gloom, and the landscape becomes richly colourful and more intensely alive and beautiful than before – the promise of hope just within your reach. You accept this as a fleetingly transient gift, instinctively knowing that there will be more of these occasions as you wind your way higher.

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Step 8

Along the way, there may be signposts. Read them carefully as they may be important to your wellbeing, and to the healthy maintenance of the track and its environs. Take the time to think about the words and their meaning. Someone has left this for you to contemplate as you journey.

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Step 9

And, if you are lucky, you may share your goal with supportive friends. Perhaps they have known you for years, and were just waiting for you to invite them in. Perhaps they were always with you, but you just didn't 'see' them before.

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Step 10

Even though at times they may walk ahead, you are confident in the knowledge that they will wait for you and walk with you to take those final steps to the summit. A joint celebration shared with those who care.

Previously, I have likened my transformational process to the steps undertaken on an arduous journey (please refer to Section 1.5). I would like to offer the prologue to this chapter as a sense-making exemplar of my conceptualisation of this metaphor. Figures 7.1 to 7.10 are photographs that I took while on a walk with three friends. I have likened our ascent of the track to the progress of my grief journey. Figures 7.1 and 7.2 depict the barren and emotionally treacherous landscape of grief that lies ahead when you are at the bottom of the track and just starting out. *And so it begins …* Figure 7.3 provides hope in the visual sightings of the footsteps of others who have trodden this track before, and who have overcome their grief struggles to continue the climb and to live rewarding lives. *I am not the only one who has lost a child.* Figure 7.4 depicts my experience as outlined in Section 5.3. The dismembered trees represent other grievers in similar workplace situations who were mistreated, emotionally decimated and deemed less than they once were. *I will not be*

cast aside and treated like dead wood. Figure 7.5 represents the temptation of giving in to the constancy of the emotional pressure and succumbing to the devaluation thrust upon me by others. *Rise above – enact your plan.* Figure 7.6 symbolises the stories that other grievers relate to you about their grief journeys. Some are heartbreakingly similar; some are heartbreakingly different. You listen with empathy, but you cannot deviate from your own path. They are not your responsibility at the moment, until you ascend and then you may offer tangible help. *Do not be disheartened by the narratives of others. Those are not your story.* Figure 7.7 also signifies hope in the form of intermittent golden rays of light that break through the darkness of grief. This was described in the previous chapter in the exemplar of my journal writing (please refer to Section 6.6). *Light is all.* Figure 7.8 reminds the griever to be alert for signposts or subtle signals that may be of help along the way. These may be in the form of accepting wisdom from others, such as doctoral supervisors or peers; or perhaps in the form of accepting help from others, such as an invitation from a friend to go for a walk. Mental, physical and spiritual elements combine to help to make the journey less lonely. *Be alert for those who do not judge and will help you on your way.* Figures 7.9 and 7.10 are an homage to friendship. Of the three women with whom I walked on that day: one had taught Rory when he was eight years old, and we have shared a respectful, professional acquaintance for over 25 years; one I have known within the school community for about 20 years, but I never really had a lot to do with her professionally or socially until Rory died; and finally, one whom I met when I returned to school (she was a new staff member) who treated me with kindness and respected the connectedness that I have with my son. These unexpected friendships were sown in my workplace, both in the 'before' and in the 'after'. They continue to nourish me as I enact my grief work. *Compassionate and non-judgemental others are a gift.*

Overview of the chapter

Chapter 1 presented an introduction to the thesis. It explained the background to my research and the dual nature of the structure of the writing employed throughout. Chapter 2 offered a contextual foundation and reviewed some of the major theories around grief work and doctorateness. Chapter 3 articulated my conceptual framework and described the underpinning theoretical constructs. It interrogated the key elements of Self and identities as I have applied them to my research. The focus on grief work, bereavement, identity shift and a reflexive Self were the foundational constructs mobilised in this chapter. Chapter 4 examined the research design in terms of method and data delivery. Chapter 5 addressed the first of the research questions: How has the mobilisation of my grief work affected my experience of my bereaved Self? Chapter 6 addressed the second research question: How has the mobilisation of my grief work affected my experience of doctoral processes?

This chapter addresses the third and final research question:

How has the mobilisation of my grieving Self and my doctorateness facilitated my personal transformation?

Figure 7.11 depicts a flowchart of the progression of Chapter 7.

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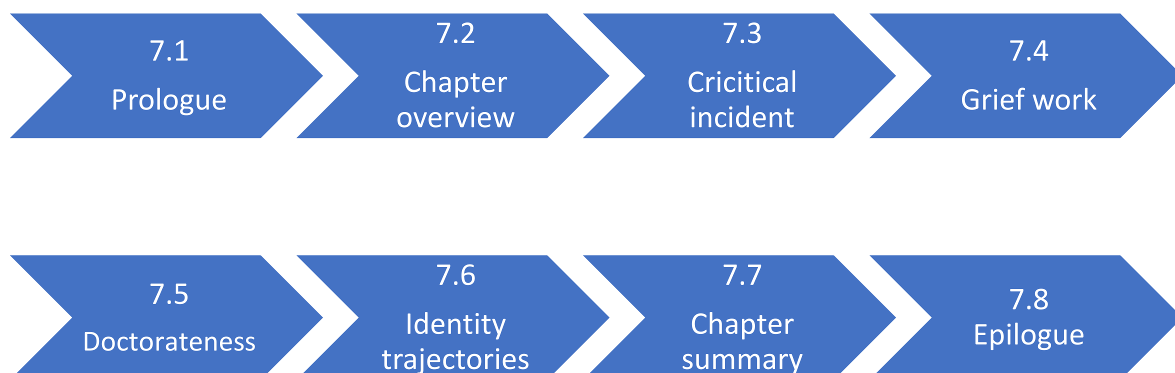
Flowchart of the progression of Chapter 7



Critical incident

Kenny (2001) related the story of a child in an audience watching a female performer on stage. In a moment of silence, the child could be heard saying loudly: "But Mummy – what's that lady *for*?" (2001, p. 237; emphasis in original). This child's comment exemplified the psyche of every mother who is mired in grief and longing. *What/Whom am I for now? What is my purpose in life now? Who benefits from my existence now?*

About four years after Rory died, I was asked to give a presentation on cancer at the local Community Centre. The mission of the Community Centre is to partner with local groups to provide support and advocacy for all members of the community. I duly put together my slide show and stood to the side of the audience while I was introduced by the Centre's director. During her opening speech, she reeled off a complete set of statistical data on types, symptoms and mortality of cancer. As I stood listening to her read from her prepared sheets of paper, I came to the realisation that, for many, this disease is just that, a set of impersonal numbers that are of no great significance to the majority of people. I glanced around the audience and felt that it was made up of distantly sympathetic individuals – those who were familiar with the concept of cancer (how could one not be in this day and age?), but who had generally not been directly privy to its most intimate consequences. However, they were interested and, to their great credit, they were willing to become more educated on the subject (or, at least, to sit through a talk).

When the director had finished sharing her background information, I thanked her and I began. I showed the audience progressive photos of my child from when he was a baby up until two weeks before he died. I talked them through his physical decline, his mental strength and the aftermath of his death. I indicated that Rory was not merely part of a statistical graph or a number on a page, but that he had lived and was loved in life as he continues to be in death. From the moment that I

showed the photo of baby Rory (please refer to Figure 7.12), the director – that competent, professional, reader of impersonal statistics – cried.

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Baby Rory

And she continued to do so throughout my talk (as did a number of others). I told them of Rory’s tangible legacies, some of which were a library of books and toys in a disadvantaged school that had I visited in Cambodia that I donated in his name; and dedication plaques in his honour on the door of the hospital room in which he died, and also a plaque outside the music room at his high school, neither of which I had expected or facilitated. Figure 7.13 presents photographic representations of these books and plaques.

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Books and plaques

I also related the intangibles. These were the immeasurable and incalculable legacies that he left behind in the care of his family, friends and acquaintances (among which was a demonstrated strength and determination to live a good life, unencumbered by those who thought that they could live his cancer life better than he). I told them stories about how unruly and frustrating his behaviour could be, and about his innate kindness, even as he was dying, to others – a capricious paradox, as all teenagers are wont to be. *In essence, I told them how normal he was.*

My aim was not to make the audience cry, although I must shamefully admit to a certain selfish gratification in the act. My aim was to *relate*, to *personalise*, to give voice to the victims of cancer, both the dead and the living. Upon the conclusion of the talk, I played a video that highlighted Rory's wisdom in his dying days. This had been recorded upon his return from a church camp that he was determined to attend (Mulligan, youtube.com/watch?v=EufT6l0PWyE, 2011).

I demonstrated that now Rory was not an unknown statistic for them; I had introduced them to my son, and had given them a glimpse of my life after he had died. In other words, I presented a representation of love, life, death and grief from the perspective of an insider. I explained to the audience that my particular journey as a bereaved mother from cancer is unique in that it is a process that applied to me only. *I did not wish to misrepresent or generalise.*

For me, this was an opportunity to take a major step on my journey to personal transformation because it included giving voice to both sadness and happiness. It constituted a shift from the mute impotence of overwhelming emotionality that had gripped me. Sharing my journey with unknown others provided an opportunity for personal growth, so necessary for transformational movement.

Grief work

The Aboriginal peoples of Australia engage in the spiritual practice of deep listening or dadirri (Korff, 2021). Simply put, it is an exercise

based on respectful listening to others in order to build a strong community that values the acquisition and dissemination of information. In order to facilitate my grief work alongside my doctoral work, I had to perform my own version of dadirri that comprised a concentrated, mediative, spiritual listening to Self when she posed the question *What now?*. I felt that I needed a plan that was based on both my history and my future. Thus my form of dadirri required deep reflexivity and an interrogation of how I wanted to internalise past events emotionally; how I wanted my life to look like from then on from the lens of the present; and what I was prepared to do to make that happen for my future.

Grief can send you into physical and mental exile as your emotions spiral chaotically downwards to rock bottom, too heartsick to care, and too weary to reach out for a lifeline. Ground zero (please refer to Chapter 4, Figure 4.5) beckoned as an inevitable emotional permanence. This depiction of the triad of my three interconnected goals of intellectual growth, identity shift and personal development, surrounded by a manic web of interconnected, unregulated feelings and negativity, presents my state of mind at the beginning of my journey. The interconnection and interdependence of these goals are represented in the Venn diagram below (Figure 7.14). This is an important facet of my grief work in that my aim was to achieve all three simultaneously and not to favour one goal over another. Holistically, all three emotional needs required fulfilment in order for my grief work to be successful.

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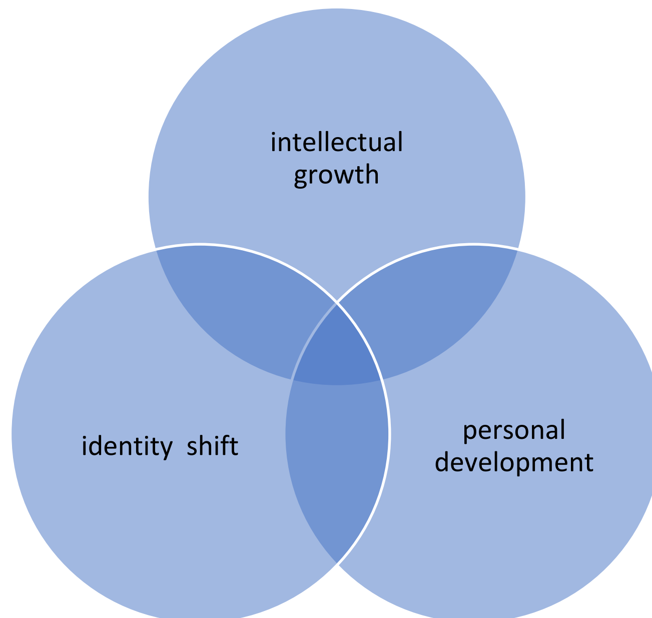
Three interconnected goals of grief work



For these goals to be realised, the grieving identity and the academic identity both have to undergo positive transformation in the form of change and progression as directed by Self. This evolution of emotions is individual-dependent and applies to my unique needs in the area of personal development. "As the researcher self is the primary instrument of inquiry, my self informs my research" (Netolicky, 2015, p. 265). For there to be transformation and significant growth in grief, Self must diligently research body, mind and soul and be cognisant of their individual and combined needs. For example, when Self asks the ubiquitous question: *What do you want from today?*, my grieving identity readily replies: *I'm so sad, I want to stay in bed and to pull the covers over my head.* My doctoral identity replies: *I have things to do – research and write.* My motherhood identity replies: *I must get out of bed, exercise, be a role model for life after death.* My professional identity replies: *Peace to do my job.*

Throughout my grief journey, I relied on my dog, El, to be my reflexive confidante. As such, she fulfilled my most immediate need, to survive and understand this new world, this 'after'.

Anthropomorphism

Journaling conversations and interactions with my dog, my "fictive kin" (Trigg et al., 2016, p. 27), recorded a complex period of my life. It was a time when I could not readily speak of the 'otherness' of chronic grief to anyone. I could not formally write about it as I simply could not find adequate words to express my emotions. To say that I was in pain, or that I was bewildered by the treatment of others and of life in general, would be gross understatements. Basically, I was surviving as well as I could, and I did not have room in my head for complicated "How are you feeling?" conversations. Therapy was tried and discarded as ineffective for me, although I did take away a metaphorical nugget from one of the sessions that I attended. The therapist compared the act of grieving to the turbulence of the ocean. I have extrapolated upon the original remark. *You are caught in a rip[tide]. You can fight against it, tire yourself out and perhaps drown in the raging waters of the murky sea; or you can go with it, see where it carries you and eventually make your way back to calming waters and solid ground.* This formed the basis of my conversations with my dog. *Don't fight the grief. Examine it. See where it takes you.*

Thus my dog became my therapist (as they so often do). She became my calm waters from which I could swim to shore. She walked alongside me through the liminality (Larson, 2014) of my grief. My walks around the yard/street with her slowed the pace of my hypervigilant mind. I became open to the balance of nature and to the contemplation of my situation. The yard/street became the landscape of my mind; my dog became the guide. I meandered my way to open (silent) discussion, and sometimes, if clarity of thought befriended me, to problem resolution. Time spent with my dog and observing her antics provided a reflexive harbour. I relied on these "liminal, creative and critical spaces" (Manathunga et al., 2022, p. 2) to gain a sense of perspective and rationality through the internal dialogue that I had set up around her.

The benefit of walking to problem solve has historically been recorded as a predominantly masculine domain with such intellectual greats as Tchaikovsky, Einstein and Jobs partaking in its influence as a creative outlet (Haas, 2019, n.p.). However, contemporary research on the mental and physical health benefits for all genders of walking with your dog is recorded in popular culture (Andrews, 2014; Better Health, n.d.) and in academic literature (Campbell et al., 2016; Christian et al., 2016). Mostly, these articles focus on the social benefits of dog walking – that is, the community of people with whom the walker interacts. For me, dog walking was more complex than this. In my traumatised state, mostly I did not want to interact with other people. In fact, in the beginning I actively avoided talking to anyone outside my immediate circle of family/friends. My internal dialogue and Self-observed interactions with El acted as conduits for emotional clarification. Once I had engaged in this interpretative process, I was presented with another step forward on my journey to personal transformation.

Doctorateness

As part of my daily "restoration-orientation" (Stroebe & Schut, 2010, p. 277) practice, I allowed myself to experience the joy of writing for my doctorate. "There's strong scientific evidence that we all get most pleasure from what are called 'flow states' – moments when we simply lose ourselves doing something we love and are carried along in the moment" (Hari, 2018, p. 97). Doctoral praxis allowed my mind a constructive respite from the destructive emotionality of grief. Gradually, haltingly at first, my flow states increased in duration and intellectual quality. As my doctorate progressed, my time in front of the computer with my beloved dog beside me became a spiritual, meditative space where we were cocooned by purpose. *The multiple manifestations of deeply seated grief had no place there.*

Imposter syndrome is given a particular cadence when applied to my grief journey. From my uncertain beginning and the dissonance that I experienced during my confirmation of candidature for PhD Thesis #1, I

grew intellectually and personally through the PhD journey. As the journey unfolded, both elements of intellect and emotion became enmeshed in a period of transformation. At the beginning of my first thesis, I felt that I had nothing to offer the academic world as I was emotionally devoid of self-confidence and self-worth. *How could I harness my limited skills to live up to my supervisors' expectations?* At the end of my first doctorate and in the time period beyond, I feel that I have transcended the self-deprecation of the past and forged the transformation that I so badly needed and endeavoured to execute. With Self-will and the skilled guidance of my supervisors, I managed to produce a doctorate that yielded minimal changes from the examiners' perspectives.

Furthermore, Figure 7.15 represents an extract from an email that was sent to me some years later by one of the examiners of my first thesis. I admire this person greatly and was particularly excited to receive this validation of my scholarship. He made reference to my sole-authored book (Mulligan, 2020) that was based on the findings of my first doctoral thesis that he had examined.

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Email from one of my first doctoral thesis examiners

Thursday, 1 July 2021 10:51 AM

To: Deborah.Mulligan@usq.edu.au

Subject: Contributive needs diagram request

Hi Deb

I recently bought your Palgrave book and really enjoyed the read. I think it is an important book.

I particularly liked the elegance of the nub of your argument on pages 36-37 and your contributive needs diagram on Page 37

I would like to include a copy the diagram, with appropriate acknowledgement to you and your book, in the final 'drawing together' chapter of my book to be published via Common Ground in the US later this year.

Could you please let me know whether that would be possible, or not.

Not only have I produced a sole-authored book, but also I have had the great fortune to collaborate with Patrick Danaher and other eminent scholars to co-edit three books (Mulligan & Danaher, 2020, 2021; Mulligan et al., 2023) and one handbook (Anteliz et al., 2022). Figure 7.16 depicts a very gratifying and validating message that I received from one of the contributors to our co-edited handbook. I worked with her to develop her ideas and to edit her chapter through to completion.

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Message from a handbook contributor

I love your comments and I'm having such fun writing again. You really pushed me to be brave and put me back into my story.

I have also worked with some people whom I met in the USQ Postgraduate and Early Career Researcher (PGECR) group and supported them through their postdoctoral experiences. Figure 7.17 is a message from one of my mentees whom I encouraged to publish from her thesis.

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Message from a mentee

Thank you for all your encouragement!! I got a contract for a book!!!!

Transformation during the enactment of doctoral research has been acknowledged in scholarly literature. "Through personal engagement in the research process the student researcher is understood to be remodelled in terms of their identity, thinking and agency" (Vahed et al., 2018, p. 315). In my case, of course, this 'spill over' from these academically constructed elements had profound effects upon my personal growth. As my researcher identity developed, so did my thinking around my thesis and the importance of my past as a way forward into my future. My sense of researcher agency became synonymous with my confidence to enact personal agency. This enabled me to try shoes on comfortably that reflected my burgeoning new identities as researcher, student, academic peer, *achiever*. These identities were constructed relationally and discursively as I stepped my way through the doctoral journey in the company of a community of like-minded and supportive others.

Paradoxically, Hazell and Berry (2022) discussed the issue of the increase in poor mental health of doctoral students. "Sadly, 42% of PhD

students reported that they believed having a mental health problem during your PhD is the norm” (n.p.). Further, over one third of students seriously considered terminating their doctorates owing to poor mental health, thus highlighting the emotional vulnerability of doctoral students. The authors acknowledged the many factors that interact to produce these statistics such as unrelated causations of poor mental health and the misplaced widespread acceptance of poor mental health as an outcome of doctoral study.

Given that the “average age on entry to a PhD in Australia is 34 years old” (The Thesis Whisperer, 2019, n.p.), it is no wonder that students are prey to mental health issues. Zilca (2016) discussed a survey conducted by the *Harvard Business Review* into the so-called “quarter-life crisis” (n.p.). This phenomenon spans from the late 20s to the mid 30s, and consists of a period of professional and personal emotional turmoil. It is typified by feelings of entrapment and isolation (in careers and relationships), and a lack of emotional maturity (that is developed later in life) to deal with these feelings.

As I reflect on the work of Hazell and Berry (2022) and recent others (González-Betancor & Dorta-González, 2020; Jackman et al., 2021; Levecquea et al., 2017; Waight & Giordano, 2018), I wonder at my positioning within the emotional vulnerability of my doctoral experience. My experience was that I began as a highly traumatised individual, but, through emotional diligence and academic support from significant others, I was able to complete my doctorate and to grow from the experience. My trajectory of achievement was bolstered by a number of factors, as discussed in the paragraph below.

At the beginning of my study, I was in my mid-fifties and as such I possessed a wealth of lived experience as psychological self-support. After four decades, I had completed my chosen profession to my satisfaction and was not looking to build a new career; thus I was under no financial or time pressure. Primary school teaching had provided me with a range of skills suited to study in higher education. These include

organisational and academic management ability (e.g., lesson preparation); the foundations of strategic planning (e.g., catering for the diverse learning styles within my class of 30 students); refined interpersonal skills (e.g., communicating effectively with parents, students and staff); and the capability to work to a deadline (e.g., as per curriculum requirements). None of these elements assured doctoral completion, but they certainly were influential in my trajectory decision-making capabilities throughout the doctorate and beyond.

Identity-trajectories

In order for me to alter my emotional status, it was necessary for me to make the mental shift from the sole identity of a bereaved mother to the more meaningful and fulfilling multi-identities that encompass my bereavement, but that also include doctorateness, role model, friend, and so forth. "Nothing changes unless something changes" (Curtis, 2022). One of the identity theories that resonated with me the most was McAlpine's (2012) theory of identity-trajectories.

I am particularly taken with the terminology of "trajectories" (McAlpine, 2012). I like the idea of moving forward from a stationary, *stagnant* position. McAlpine et al. (2014) explained their choice of the word as an integration of "a developmental perspective in which learning from experience is a natural feature of life with work experience intertwining with personal desires and relationships" (p. 954). From my perspective, the notion of a trajectory signals a pathway that a person may either accept or reject. For me, acceptance is all. *Accept the grief – it's not going anywhere – it now resides in your body. BUT accept that it is not all-encompassing – there is also room for accomplishment, growth and peace.*

McAlpine (2012) argued the importance of a conceptualisation of the notion of identity that values "individual agency, nesting the academic within the personal and incorporating students' pasts as well as imagined futures" (p. 38). This "nesting" incorporates both successes and challenges for the student and, as such, positions "doctoral intentions,

motivations, and decision-making" (p. 40). McAlpine's theory honoured the "resourcefulness and independence of the individual at the heart of the doctoral endeavour" (p. 38). I was attracted to this aspect of the theory because chronic, long-term grievers such as myself can be stereotypically considered as cultural outliers who lack the inner strength to 'get over it and move on'. *"You should have sought 'closure' by now."*

I am drawn to the ideas of personal agency and resourcefulness that locate "academic work within the fullness of people's lives" (McAlpine et al., 2014, p. 954). As I have stated so often in this thesis, the trajectory that I chose was pertinent to my circumstance, and I deliberately accepted the way forward that was revealed to me via the triumvirate of reflexivity, an openness to new experiences and a sense of personal agency. I instigated my identity change; the journey was not imposed upon me by others. This "self-selection", as opposed to "social selection" (Thoits, 2006, p. 312), provided me with a renewed feeling of control, an emotion that was swept away when Rory was initially diagnosed with cancer. Thoits (2006) described the determinants of personal agency as "possessing confidence, positive self-worth, a sense of control over one's life, and an optimistic outlook" (p. 312).

Even allowing for these attributes, my way forward emotionally was not an automatic phenomenon. I consciously enacted a plan, and I am reflexively cognisant that it could have changed at any moment. It was fraught with hazardous unknowns, and I was incredibly physically, spiritually and emotionally vulnerable throughout the journey. Thoits (2006) clarified that "the exercise of agency and the consequences of agency are distinct phenomena, not to be equated, despite a probable positive correlation between them" (p. 312). Rory's illness and subsequent death were uncontrollable events – that is, they occurred "independently of personal action or responsibility" (Thoit, 2006, p. 312) and, as such, they had no historical precedence for me. Thus I had no reference for Self as an exemplar of a way forward. *I was on my own.* Exercising agency does not ensure a positive outcome. *It requires hard*

work in the field of dark labour. My resolve could have broken down any number of times throughout the journey. *No one can feel your grief but you. Own it. Do something about it if you don't want to be stuck in this emotional chaos.*

When referring to the mental health of doctoral students, Mowbray and Halse (2010) hypothesised that the successful management of everyday life both inside and outside the university was critical to the growth of personal resourcefulness. They defined personal resourcefulness as "the reflexive, perceptual, emotional and contextual capacity that students develop during the PhD and that they used to discern and guide their actions" (p. 657). This pairing of daily lived experience of a bereaved mother and the constructive nature of doctoral work seemed to me to be how I wished to enact my emotions. One identity does not have to be at the expense of another. Further, McAlpine's (2012) theory of 'trajectories' lends itself to the exploration of multiple avenues through which to build new identities, such as 'researcher', 'author' and 'academic peer'; and to reinforce and reconstruct old identities that suffered because of the menacing insidiousness of grief, such as 'friend', 'mentor' and 'role model'.

A summary of the key concepts underlying McAlpine's (2012) theory is represented pictorially in Figure 7.18.

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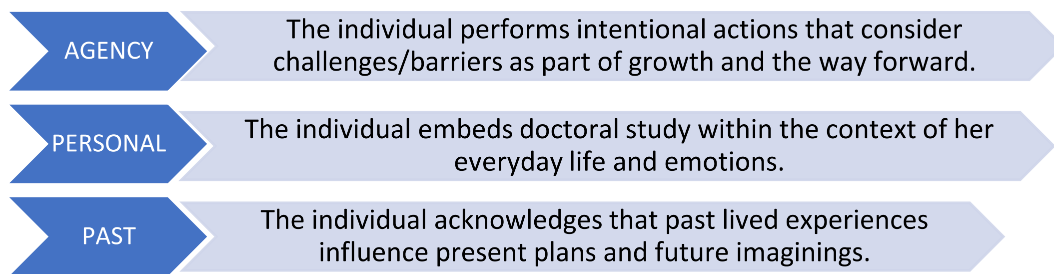
McAlpine's (2012) identity trajectories



Note: Adapted from McAlpine (2012)

Initially, McAlpine (2012) stated that personal and academic notions are linked by way of "opportunity structures" and "horizons for action" (p. 39). The former relate to those professional development structures that may already be in place, or that may be envisioned for the future. The latter refer to those "options for action" (p. 39) that may be personally worthwhile in the present and in the future. Doctoral-academic processes involve connectedness through networking (utilising resourceful relationships), intellectualism (scholarly contributions) and institutional affordances (to do with the organisation).

After conducting a year-long study of approximately 60 doctoral students and post-PhD researchers located in Canada and the United Kingdom, McAlpine et al. (2014) built on previous work and posited 11 interconnected components of the identity-trajectories theory. These are discussed below and are contextualised for adaptations and linkages to my particular circumstance.

1. "Passage of time' (p. 957): this incorporates a longitudinal approach that interrogates the impact of lived experience of the past on the present and on the future. Through focusing on this passing of time, variations in an individual's life are foregrounded. My doctorate took seven and a half years to complete. During that time, I experienced a return to work (please refer to Section 5.3), and a long-term academic project

(please refer to Section 6.3), all while dealing with the emotional, physical and spiritual aftermath of the death of my son.

"Agency" (p. 958): Through the implementation of constant agentic practices and dealing with periods of restrictions imposed by others, individuals are able to implement decision-making strategies that will impact on their study and their personal life. The critical incidents discussed in Sections 5.3, 6.3 and 7.3 reflect examples of the constancy of agency that I enacted as I progressed through my grief work journey and reacted to my interactions with others.

"The personal: life tasks, goals and relationships" (p. 958): The authors explained that their study demonstrated the importance of including events within individuals' personal lives as a partial influencing factor as to the progress of their academic lives. As demonstrated in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, my personal life played a significant role in the development of my doctorateness. Personal and academic tasks and goals were interwoven within the fabric of my identity trajectory. I had begun my doctoral journey in a Doctorate of Education. Through the tutelage of my supervisory team, I then submitted an application to progress my research to a Doctorate of Philosophy. This act exemplified my growing researcher self-efficacy and demonstrated my burgeoning sense of agency in achieving the dream of completing a PhD.

"Bridging the personal and the academic" (p. 959): This linkage acknowledges the significance of wider contextual knowledge as students realistically merge their individual aspirations within their adaptations to the shifting environments of study and work. This constitutes the very essence of my personal, professional and academic parallel journeys of grief work, career aspirations and doctorateness. My personal objective of overcoming emotional chaos, my professional objective of retiring from

primary (elementary) school teaching at the age of 60, and my academic objective of completing a doctorate were considerably hampered and enhanced by forces that were completely unexpected (please refer to Sections 5.6 and 6.5). These shifting environments required a high degree of emotion management on my part.

"Opportunity structures" (p. 959): This component characterises the knowledge that an individual may have in view of career prospects and subsequent choices. In my situation, I have related it to the progression of my doctoral study (please refer to Section 6.5). I have referred to my university as being a salutogenic environment (Dooris et al., 2016) where I was treated with respect and welcomed as an academic. There is no doubt that the positive energy of pleasant physical surroundings, and the academic and emotional support provided to me by my supervisors and my peers, enabled me to progress on my journey to doctorateness in a timely (for me) manner.

"Horizons for action" (p. 960): These opportunities refer to those that arise from past lived experience, personal goal setting, the influence of significant others and the number of successful connections between personal and academic identities. If not for my daughter, I would not have pushed myself to transcend my grief. I was truly blessed with my academic relationships, particularly with my supervisors, and the prospects that were opened to me because of them. If not for Glen Postle, I would have stalled at the start of my grief work. If not for Patrick Danaher, I would not have been granted the courage and the opportunity to publish.

"Re-locations" (p. 961): The authors referred to the influence on decision-making capabilities of opposing objectives that included expected or unexpected changes in circumstances. My return to work was a prime example of this. The change from staying at

home to going back to work was expected and, from my perspective, highly anticipated as returning to a supportive, comfortable environment. What was unexpected was the attitude of the leadership team and others, which seemed to be predicated on my actually not returning to work, and on attempting to make sure that this occurred (please refer to Section 5.3).

"Academic work" (p. 962): The authors observed that students became agentic individuals as they progressed through their studies and accepted new roles and responsibilities. This was my experience. As my confidence grew, I accepted positions that allowed me to co-chair the PGECR group at the university. I also facilitated learning opportunities for others in this group by inviting guest speakers and presenting my own research to the group. These experiences further enabled me to informally mentor a number of doctoral students.

"Networking" (p. 962): The authors referred to the various ways that networks were enlisted both to supply and to reciprocate much-needed support. I drew heavily on the PhD Owls – Older Wiser Learners Facebook page (facebook.com/groups/708019069302386). Within this group, I joined the OWLs Writing messenger group (Mulligan, 2023), which provided me with the pomodoro structure of chunking time. We wrote for 45 minutes and then chatted (or attended to other needs) for 15 minutes. Through this group, I was able to draw on the freely given wisdom and experience of others who were further advanced in their doctoral progress. As the group was an international endeavour, I also learned about different doctoral processes, both in Australia and around the world. OWLs Writing also introduced me to other doctoral students with whom I formed a relationship beyond completion, and whom I was then able to invite as contributors to the publications that I co-edited

upon completion of my doctorate (Anteliz et al., 2023, in press; Mulligan & Danaher, 2020, 2021; Mulligan et al., 2022, in press).

"Intellectual" (p. 963): This strand refers to the "publications, citations, papers and curriculum materials" that students have produced. I count myself fortunate to have been directly involved in 11 publications (to date) since my first doctorate was completed in 2018. With the support and encouragement of Patrick Danaher, I have established a publication profile of which I am inordinately proud and for which I am very thankful.

"Institutional" (p. 964): The authors referred to the "responsibilities tied to formal affiliation to a particular institution as well as the resources provided" (p. 964). Upon completion of my doctorate, I was awarded a position in the staff list at the University of Southern Queensland as an Honorary Postdoctoral Researcher (https://staffprofile.usq.edu.au/Profile/Deborah-Mulligan). I treasure this acknowledgement of my intellectual capabilities, and I am cognisant of the responsibility that this entails. As such, I have actively engaged in USQ conferences and symposia, as well as those types of opportunities outside the university, throughout and beyond my doctoral studies. Pre-COVID-19, I attended and facilitated a number of widely ranging presentations, the locations of which were situated both within the university campus and in the local and wider communities.

McAlpine's (2012) identity theory dovetailed with the work of Stillman and Baumeister (2009), who examined "uncertainty management" (p. 249). They hypothesised four key features of a meaningful life. These are listed below:

"Purpose" (effecting the future both personally and professionally)

"Efficacy" (a sense of agency)

"Value" (ethically sound impact in daily life)

“Positive self-worth” (internal sense of ‘goodness’ and substance). (p. 249)

In my case, the following nuanced and individual key elements were indicative of the application of my successful identity trajectory and my ensuing personal transformation.

Ownership: I accepted my grief and I found my voice. I created new relationships with people who enhanced my life. *I shed negative, destructive relationships as soon as I could.*

Intentionality: I knew what I wanted my life to ‘look’ like after this traumatic event. *I had a purpose and a plan.*

Intellectualism: I have demonstrated to myself and to academic others that I possessed the necessary intellectual curiosity and level of skill acquisition to complete a doctorate. *I value education.*

Reflexivity: I am capable of deep thought and emotional awareness. *Conversations with my dog.*

Societal privilege: Culturally, I was well placed to enact my grief work. I am a middle class, middle aged, white woman who is financially stable after a career that spanned four decades. *I had options.*

I have synthesised the hypotheses of McAlpine (2012), Stillman and Baumeister (2009) and myself in Table 7.1.

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Synthesising identity trajectories hypotheses

McAlpine (2012, p. 39)	Stillman and Baumeister (2009, p. 249)	Mulligan (2022)
"Opportunity structures"	"Purpose"	Ownership Intentionality
	"Efficacy"	Reflexivity
"Horizons for action"	"Value"	Intellectualism
	"Self-worth"	Societal privilege

Resilience

In order to contextualise better my journey of the enactment of identity trajectory, it is necessary to acknowledge the role of resilience. Research on the nature of resilience has occupied scholars for the better part of 50 years, and has conceptually evolved from the idea of "good developmental outcomes despite high risk; sustained competence under stress; and recovery from trauma" (Werner, 1995, as cited in Fleming & Ledogar, 2008, p. 8) to "the science that explains why people thrive despite being exposed to specific risk experiences" (Huisman et al., 2017, p. 574).

Historically, the concept of resilience has been of interest to academics in a range of disciplines. Much of this scholarship has included perceptions of meaning-making ability (Coutu, 2002); adaptability (Herrman et al., 2011); gender (Lightfoot et al., 2020); connectedness (Resnick, 2000); stressors (Rutter, 1985); and motivation (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2014). The idea of making meaning from an individual's lived experiences and of life in general as a panacea for life or as a comfort for the bereaved is, in my mind, a contested notion. I personally have no desire to attempt to find a meaning for Rory's horrific suffering and death. For me, there is no meaning behind this. My attitude aligns with that of Victor Frankl, who stated, "what matters therefore is … the specific meaning of a person's life at a given moment" (1959, p. 113). This

specificity was further examined when Frankl posited that individuals must live their lives by "*answering for*" their own life (p. 113; italics in the original). Thus, my trajectory of identities resides firmly as my responsibility. *There is no grand narrative.* I do not wish to make meaning out of my son's death, nor do I wish to contemplate the meaning behind his suffering. Rather, I wish to make my life as meaningful as I am able to do.

From my perspective, resilience is a journey that requires one step after another. At times, these steps may be small and tentative, the pace slow and unsure. At other times, they may be bold and assertive, with long strides taken towards a sighted goal. Certainly, resilience is a journey with a varied pace that is dependent on momentary emotionality and investment in self-truth. Ownership, intentionality, reflexivity, intellectualism and societal privilege would have amounted to nothing if, when put to the test (please refer to Sections 5.3, 6.3 and 7.3), I had failed to deliver comfort and security, and to change my situation beneficially. Ultimately, I am in agreement with Baird (2020), who posited that "you do not need to overthink resilience … 'You just get on with it.' After one day comes another, then another" (p. 123).

However, I theorise that there are certain elements of resilience to which one must be privy, and with which one must fully engage, in order to enable an individual to progress transformatively and to "just get on with it" (Baird, 2020, p. 123). These are akin to the intellectual virtues discussed in Section 6.7, and are similarly synthesised in Table 7.2.

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Synthesising resilience

Elements	Characteristics	Application
Autonomy	ownership, salutogenic environment	I recognised that I alone was responsible for my trajectory and the identities that I shed, as well as those that I refined and those that I adopted. I sought out health-giving environments in which to enact my trajectory.
Courage	skill acquisition, diligent self-management, revised lexicons	Both grief work and doctoral study require the courage to acquire new learnings in skill acquisition, self-management and a previously unknown vocabulary.
Curiosity	deep thought/higher level thinking	In order to enact my trajectory, I had to be of a curious mind and to pose the question, "*What if?*"
Honesty	mental health issues	Above all else, resilience requires honesty of thought. Ignoring the mental health issues arising from grief work and doctoral endeavour can cripple the soul and stall the trajectory.
Humility	self-belief, emotional intelligence	A parallel trajectory of grief work and doctoral study can mutate self-belief into a heightened and isolating sense of self-righteousness. In order to keep grounded, it is necessary to maintain a sense of "situational awareness" (Boss, 2015, n.p.). Tell your truth but be mindful that others have their truths that may not correspond with yours.
Passion	agency/voice, commitment	Resilience feeds on a commitment to agentic values whose wellspring is passion – for your future self and for the future of significant others.

Elements	Characteristics	Application
Prudence	cultural/societal influences	Acknowledgement of the privilege of choice that is afforded to very few members of the world's population is imperative. Allow this privilege to feed and nourish the trajectory as you grow. Do not exploit others for personal/ academic gain.
Tenacity	intentionality, aloneness, routine	Resilience requires tenacity and determination. The isolation of the quest can be damaging to the psyche.

Underlying each of these elements of resilience is the influential recognition that my beloved son is dead. This is a significant facet of the ensuing emotionality that accompanies my grief work trajectory. "In smooth flowing grief-work that goes to its end, my loss is conscious; I am both aware of what I lost and of its meaning and significance" (Alapack, 2010, p. 44). Emotional mis-steps will occur. These are to be treated as natural and an essential part of self-growth. My trajectory of new and reframed identity formations facilitated through personal development is outlined in Figure 7.19, which represents a simplified trajectory of self-growth and personal development.

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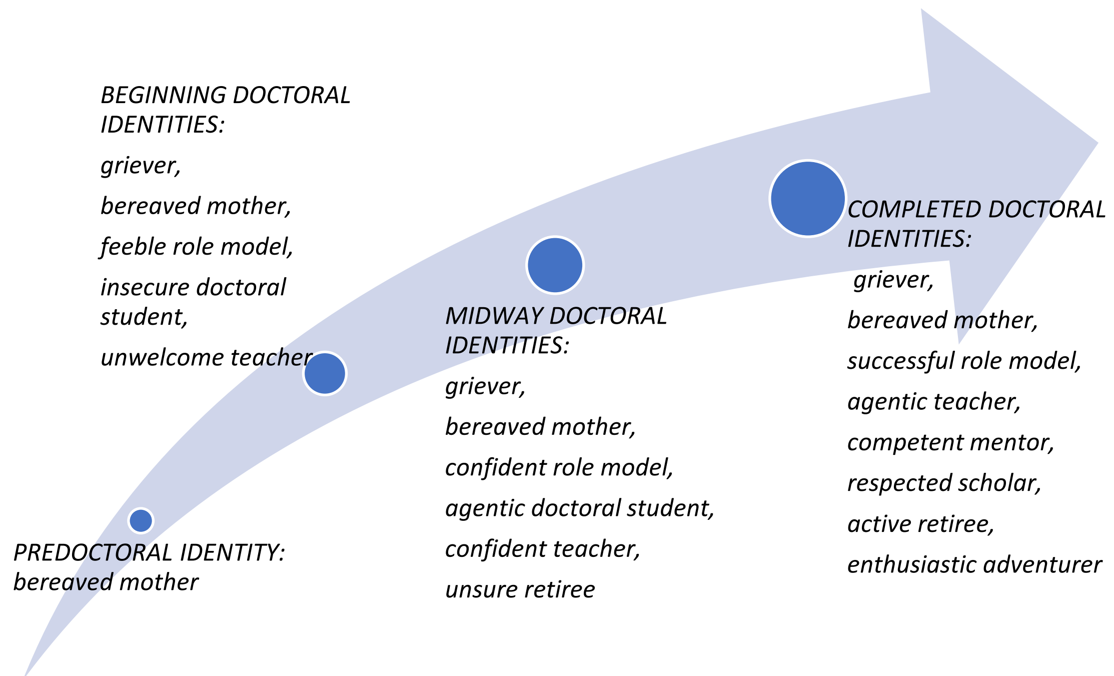
My trajectory of self-growth and personal development



My identities trajectory began at the baseline of the singular bereaved mother and all that that identity entailed. This comprised the narrowness of living a life of unrelenting grief, intense mourning and emotional turmoil, and of not being fully present for my daughter. Through reflexivity and self-evaluation, my world began to broaden. The first tenuous steps on the journey were taken. Agentic practices comprised the action behind my successful praxis. This does not mean that I did not have challenges (and still do), but I face them head on, supported by the confidence that I have gained from the progress that I have made and will continue to make. "My life and work are coming together in meaningful ways. The result is a sociology that connects life experience to the pursuit of knowledge" (Ellis, 1995, p. 335).

Chapter summary

Netolicky (2015) stated, "There are moments in our lives after which we are not the same; we have been transformed by our experiences, and sometimes by the way we make sense of these experiences" (p. 265). Transformative acts that emerge from a miasma of

chronic grief are difficult and hard won. This was exemplified by the following extract from my journal (LANGUAGE WARNING).

> *1st January 2018*
>
> *On the days when my body aches in sympathy with my heart and soul, I am disoriented and my mind is in chaos. The tears don't adhere to any social rules or niceties. I am every woman whose child has died. My body becomes an alien thing, my thought processes are incoherent, my Self is protectively hypervigilant, I am exhausted from TOO MUCH. I am conflicted when I see my son's peers living joyful and productive lives. If only… My senses are overloaded – when no one understands and I don't care to explain (again). I can't sleep for the haunting memories that turn into nightmares. I'm restless, exhausted. I want … I take refuge in the simple. Chats with my beloved dog, who assures me that this day too shall pass. We are in this for the long haul … F**k that grief girl and all the others who want to control and empiricise my emotions. I am not just a statistic and nor is my son. I am a bereaved mother.*

Although I am attentive to the fact that this is my story and that it remains unique to my situation in time and place, I believe that bereaved mothers share some similar experiences of their grief. This then constitutes the essence of my personal transformation as I see it. Underneath all of my other identities, I wear the shoes of a bereaved mother. My doctoral journey will end. My grief journey and the work that it entails will be unending. I acknowledge this. My first doctorate and all that it entailed provided me with a space away from grief and afforded me the opportunity to examine my life reflexively and openly, and to accept the changeables (a shift of my life's purpose, letting go of some relationships while building new ones) as well as the unchangeables (embedded pain and heightened emotionality). Just as Patrick urged me

to ‘own’ my doctorate, I now own my bereavement status and it is mine to do with as I will.

This chapter focused on the manner in which I achieved personal transformation and addressed my third research question: *How have my grieving Self and my doctorateness facilitated my academic and personal transformation?* The storyline built on the complexities that I experienced when returning to work as an intentional enactment of identity shift (as highlighted in Chapter 5), and the personal benefits to which I was privy when I simultaneously enacted my form of ‘doctorateness’ (as highlighted in Chapter 6). I presented two contrasting narratives that foregrounded my lived experience based on the twin notions of acceptance and of belonging. I have outlined my journey to achieve personal development, building on information disclosed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Figure 7.20 synthesises the journey.

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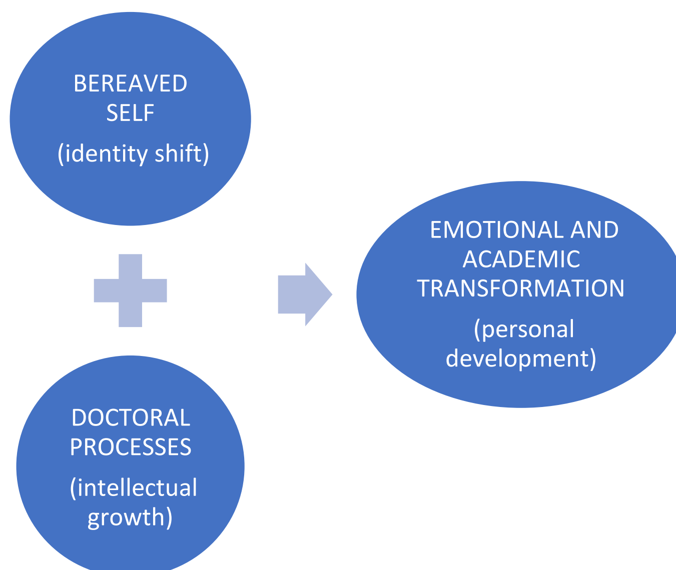
Emotional and academic transformation (identity shift, intellectual growth and personal development)



Personal development has evolved from my strategic trajectory of identity shift and intellectual growth, thus answering the third and final

research question: *How have my grieving Self and my doctorateness facilitated my academic and personal transformation?* The dual enactments of consciously addressing and melding the concurrent needs of my bereaved Self and doctoral processes facilitated emotional agentic movement from a singular identity to multiple identities.

The following section (7.8) presents the Epilogue. Chapter 8 contains the last chapter of the thesis.

Epilogue

In Your Own Time

She is old, my dog. Deaf. Arthritic. Our walks together look very different from the past. Even dissimilar to last year, or a month ago. I still try to call her to me, even though she can't hear. Old habits die hard. Our interactions are now punctuated with wild gesticulations and vocalising on my part, and nonchalance on hers.

I have always talked to her with my hands as well as my voice. It's just who I am. I like to gesture for emphasis. She knows exactly what I am saying to her.

But there are times when she refuses to acknowledge an instruction, no matter how many times I point and wave my arms around like a whirling dervish. She may stand in one place and stare at me, as if I am some strange creature who should be treated with uncertainty and distant curiosity. Or, more likely, bemusement.

Then, seemingly bored with the actions of a clearly deranged human, she tilts her head to one side, decides that for her the show is now over and then walks in the opposite direction to which I have been obviously indicating. Either that, or she lowers her nose and continues her important investigation into an enticing smell emanating from the ground/tree/bush.

Sometimes, she just sits. Clearly, she won't be rushed. She'll take her time [Figure 7.21].

The great social deception of grief is that it will move through one phase to the next in a linear, orderly fashion and be all over and done with within five years at the most (according to some doctors I have spoken to). But it seems to me that grief mirrors the actions of my old dog.

It, too, won't be rushed. There are days, as time passes, that grief abates. It is no longer the heavy presence that it was in the early days. Soft, melancholy tears replacing hard, full-bodied sobs. But then, all of a sudden, it is back with a vengeance and, no matter what you do, how wildly you gesticulate to move it along, it refuses to shift. Hard, ugly tears full of pent up grief and anger grip your body and your soul, and once again you are left staring at the abyss – the gaping absence, the 'never'.

When I am in a hurry and need my dog's cooperation, I resort to one of two practices. I go and find some food to waft under her nose to entice her, or, if this is not readily available, I get behind her and push. If she decides to move but then deviate from the path I've chosen, I push from behind and steer her from the side. To an onlooker, it is a charade of comedic proportions (my daughter kindly pointed this out to me as she stood watching us 'perform', unable to contain her laughter).

But grief is no laughing matter (even when it's hysterical and uncontained). It is stubborn and wilful and there are times when, no matter what you do, you need to surrender yourself to the anguish.

There is, of course, a third option that I occasionally opt for with my dog. That is, I give up trying to manage her and leave her to complete whatever mysterious doggy task she has given herself over to. And I wait – sometimes patiently, sometimes not – for her to acquiesce. She will take her own time.

If my grief buffets and pulls me and ignores my floundering attempts to find firm footing, I wait – sometimes patiently, sometimes not – for it to be over. I relinquish control. Grief can be more determined and stronger than I. There are days when I do not have the will to fight. I recognise that it will abate in its own time and that the emotional shift will occur eventually.

Ultimately, when it is spent, I rest if I can and then resume a calmer life. One that involves gently pushing and pulling my old girl or signalling crazily to her from a distance. All to the amusement of anyone who is watching, and, just possibly, to the even greater enjoyment of my dog.

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Sanguine El

CONCLUSION

If death was to take me tonight my love for you would be all around, you just have to look in the right places ….

I love you Mum

Prologue

I went to the dentist earlier in the year for a check-up. It was a Monday so my dentist, making small talk, asked me how my weekend was. I began to say "Fine" but then I caught myself. "Well, actually," I said haltingly with tears in my eyes, "my dog died." Immediately, both dentist and technician hovered over me and offered sincere and heartfelt condolences. "Oh, that's awful – poor you!"; "What was her name?"; "How old was she?"; "What did she die of?"; "I'm so sorry for your loss."; "Where will you bury her?" Their sympathy filled the room and comforted me.

My next check-up came in December – the 'festive' season. My appointment was close to Rory's anniversary on the 22nd. Again, my jovial and well-meaning dentist began his patient small talk. "Been to the carols? What are you doing for Christmas?", etc, etc. "Well, actually," I said haltingly with tears in my eyes, "my son died." Silence. "It's his anniversary close to Christmas so I don't go out much. Cancer." "Oh," he murmured. "It must be a bad month. Let's have a look at your teeth." And further into the cleaning process, as those stubborn December tears continually tracked their way down my face, my clearly uncomfortable dentist asked if I were okay and whether I wanted to stop. "No," I replied, "we just keep going." And so we did. And so I do.

Overview of the chapter

Chapter 8 constitutes the final chapter of this thesis entitled: *Thesis writing as grief work: An autoethnographic journey into identifying and positioning the bereaved Self in doctoral scholarship*.

Chapter 1 introduced the reader to the assumptions around the purpose of writing in this format and the relevance of the subject matter. Chapter 2 examined relevant grounding information to be found in the extant literature. Chapter 3 explained the conceptual framework upon which this thesis was built. Chapter 4 described the research design and the intricacies of my methodological philosophy. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 addressed each of the three research questions.

Figure 8.1 provides an overview of the sections within this chapter.

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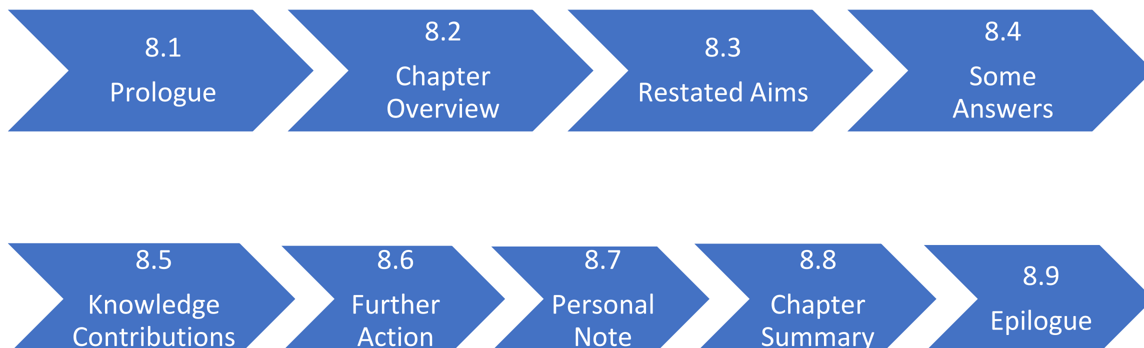
Flowchart of the progression of Chapter 8



The restated aims of the study

When referring to the usefulness of research, Bochner (2016) posed the following questions, "What can we do with it? Who decided that theory building is the primary thing that researchers need to be doing? How about making a difference in people's lives? Isn't that important?" (n.p.). He then responded to these questions with the statement that "research becomes useful when it helps people [to] cope with the conditions of their life" (n.p.). At this point in the thesis, it is worthwhile repeating the statistics mentioned in Section 1.6. In 2022, approximately

20% of diagnosed children will not survive their cancer. This percentage rises to 63% for rare cancers such as sarcoma (Cancer.Net, 2021). These stark statistics highlight the bereavement numbers associated with parents and siblings. Culturally, this 'condition' has been at best neglected, and at its worst pathologised. "It is not surprising, therefore, that bereaved people tend to feel misunderstood, isolated and inexperienced in dealing with their grief" (Pelacho-Rios & Bernabe-Valero, 2022, n.p.).

This thesis is offered to the reader as one person's bereavement story with the caveat that it is particular to my set of circumstances. The restated aims of the study are listed here:

A. assist the reader to find comfort from my eventual transformation from the singular identity of bereaved mother to the multiple identities that I now employ to live life in a purposeful manner, carrying my grief as I journey. *I did this – it's possible.*

B. build on the scholarship around the notion of what is it is to 'do a doctorate' and the various reasons that people may choose to seek this award. *Students who embark on a doctorate each have their own unique backstories.*

C. establish a meaningful and authentic conversation around motherhood and the ensuant social and emotional impacts of the death of a child. *We are not just a set of statistics.*

D. pave the way for doctoral others to consider this form of hybridised autoethnographic thesis. *This thesis constitutes a presentation of our expanding academic structures.*

E. contribute to an understanding of the multiplicity of enacting grief work and the impact that it has on grievers. *This is one of the many ways that a griever can survive.*

The comfort of the traditional eight-chapter thesis structure was reassuring to me as I worked my way through its requirements while building on the premise of 'presence'. As a researcher, I unashamedly incorporated subjectivity, vulnerability and emotionality within my

scholarship. This was reinforced through the words and terminology that I have used, and through the photographs of significant others that I have scattered throughout the thesis. “Even though grief is a universal phenomenon and a basic part of the human condition, there is a sense in which individuals are nevertheless alone in their grief” (Sköld & Brinkmann, 2021, n.p.). I have come to accept that aloneness in grief is generally a human social condition, but that aloneness in life does not have to be the norm.

My storyline of the aftermath of the death of my son places my circumstances and me at the centre of my narrative. I trust that the reader can relate to at least some of the experiences described therein. While answering the research questions (Chapters 5, 6 and 7), I have alluded to “faces of power” (Werth, 2013, p. 18). This term refers to the discernible use of power in the workplace and to the outcomes of exercising control over others. Chapter 5 presented the misuse of power by leadership and significant others upon my return to school. It demonstrated the energy that I had to expend in order to survive in that environment. Chapter 6 offered a juxtaposition of the use of power in my alternative university workplace. Those who were influential in my success wielded their power in a compassionate and professional manner that enabled me to flourish both personally and academically. Chapter 7 represented the power of a transformational journey. Underlying these three chapters, the power of the face of Self wove its resilience as it responded to each environmental challenge and triumph.

Richards (2008) stated that “when professionals write about patients’ experiences of illness … they cannot represent these experiences through their own professional lives” (p. 1). It is ever thus with parental bereavement. Generally, health professionals can record observations, but, as Freud learned after the death of his daughter (Grubrich-Simitis, 1993; Shapiro, 1996), grief work theory and practice comprise separate entities. Unless you have journeyed intimately with bereavement –

particularly that of a child – you cannot fully comprehend the struggle behind each step.

This research contains subplots interwoven around a major life story event. It is an amalgam of thoughts that constitute the foundations of my personal narrative as a bereaved parent. I have told my truth about a subject that is culturally uncomfortable. I hope that the telling resonates with those who have been silenced. Lamott (1994) theorised:

> If something inside you is real … it will probably be universal. Write straight into the emotional center of things. Write toward vulnerability. Risk being unliked. Tell the truth as you understand it. If you’re a writer you have a moral obligation to do this. (pp. 209-210)

My thesis adds to the literature around the nonlinear nature of grief, highlighting the fact that it is not merely a simplistic series of phases as we have been repeatedly indoctrinated into believing by those who should know better. Akin to the completion of a doctorate, the path is complex and delicate in the balance of its formulation of enactment. The interconnection of the relationship between Self and identity is of paramount importance. Self as both the asker and the answerer of significant questions defines how we present ourselves to the world and to ourselves. The value of the environment in terms of ambience and supportive others cannot be overstated as it affects our physical/mental/emotional/spiritual wellbeing.

This form of autoethnography places itself firmly in the ecology of academia. Ecologists investigate and question the functioning (and misfunctioning) of the interaction of organisms within their natural environment (National Geographic Society, 2022). I too have explored my quest for survival within my habitat. I have examined the interplay of Self, grief work and doctoral endeavour in terms of personal transformation. Through this ecological autoethnographic practice, I was able to employ a form of productive cognitive mobility in my capacity to

shift and develop my personal epistemological, ontological and axiological understandings over time. In relating my story and in interrogating some answers to the research questions posed, this ecology of knowledge has allowed me to adapt to life as a long-term griever, grow as an academic and cultivate a rich and meaningful personal life.

Some answers to the research questions

Writing about the topics of grief and doctorateness is akin to adding to the multitudinous list of wicked problems. Mulligan and Danaher (2020) listed a set of criteria around the nature of this concept. These criteria emphasised the multifaceted aspects of wicked problems in that they are individualised, interrelated, multi-solutional, complex, multi-participatory and ongoing. Most pertinent to this thesis, they also involve behavioural shifts by stakeholders. Further, "the interconnectedness of the problem often leads to a re-evaluation of the societal norms involved" (Mulligan & Danaher, 2020, p. 25). Each of these elements has been demonstrated throughout this thesis. In line with the unpredictable and complicated nature of wicked questions, I have elected to refer to 'some' of the answers to my research questions as I grow and learn from my grief. Answers to the three research questions required a nuanced and highly context-specific approach. They emphasised the complexity of the topics of grief work, doctorateness and personal transformation, and their applicability to my situation.

Research Question 1

1. How has the mobilisation of my grief work affected my experience of my bereaved Self?

This research question focused on my return to work and the treatment that I endured from some formerly trusted others. Their attitude reflected the fact that "many people think that emotions do not belong at work. They think emotions are distracting and depleting" (Shandell, 2022, n.p.). In addition to this attitude that labels emotions as distracting and depleting in the workplace, the loss of a child relegates

our experience as personally diminishing for the bereaved. We are damned as weak, lessened and valueless. This compounds the trauma of grief and attempts to deny the griever a way forward and the possibility of reclaiming their rightful space in that environment.

To this end, I created the concept of "dark labour" (please refer to Section 5.6) in the enactment of my grief work. Figure 8.2 presents the foundational elements involved in the performance of dark labour. These elements synthesise the fact that grief is silenced (in the loss), righteous (in its nature), educational (if the bereaved is open to it), stealthy (in the secondary losses) and pathologised (by those who should know better).

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Grief

Grief is:-

"There's a hole in the world now. In the place where he was, there's now just nothing."
Wolterstorff (1987) p. 33

silenced

"Sorrow must be sorrowed so that it can endure it's its own truth."
Alapack (2010) p. 53

righteous

"Loss invites us to stop and touch life in reverent ways."
Lengelle (2021) p. 5

educational

"...what is lost is more than the person."
Silverman & Klass (1996) p. 18

stealthy

"An odd by product of my loss is that I am an embarrassment to everyone I meet."
Lewis (1961) p. 10

pathologised

In order to facilitate my grief work, to enact dark labour, to (re)establish identities and to stay true to myself, I enlisted a tenacious and intensive Self (please refer to Section 3.2). Self asked the fundamental question with which every griever is confronted when considering their future life.

Can you do this?

The answers to the question constantly require a full review of body, mind and soul. Depending upon the context at that moment, more questions will be asked.

How can you do this? Should you do this? What will happen if you do this?

Thus identity reshapes and reforms, dependent on time, place and emotionality. This is a tiring and sensitive project that was reinforced by my beliefs around grief and the dark labour that I performed to work through and live with it, and to own it.

I will not be silenced. My grief work and the enactment of it are morally honest and righteous. I will learn and grow from this. I will recognise these secondary losses and attend to them, in my way, as necessary. I will not allow my grief to be used as a weapon against me because others are too afraid of it.

Part of my grief work and my identity reclamation was to undertake a doctorate. This led to finding some answers to Research Question 2.

Research Question 2

2. How has the mobilisation of my grief work affected my experience of doctoral processes?

My first doctoral studies were, on the whole, a joyous experience (please refer to Chapter 6). Participation in the PhD process acted as a balm to my shattered psyche. Through the expert guidance of my supervisors, both academic confidence and personal confidence that had lain dormant for quite some time owing to Rory's illness and death were re-awakened. The application of skills modelled (by my supervisors) and mastered in my quest for a doctorate ran parallel to those of my grief work. Through enacting the doctoral process, I found expertise in my chosen field; I interacted positively with new scholarly colleagues and fieldwork participants; I gradually accepted ownership of my thesis topic and my writing; and I practised healthy physical, mental and spiritual habits. These qualities are diagrammatically presented in Figure 8.3.

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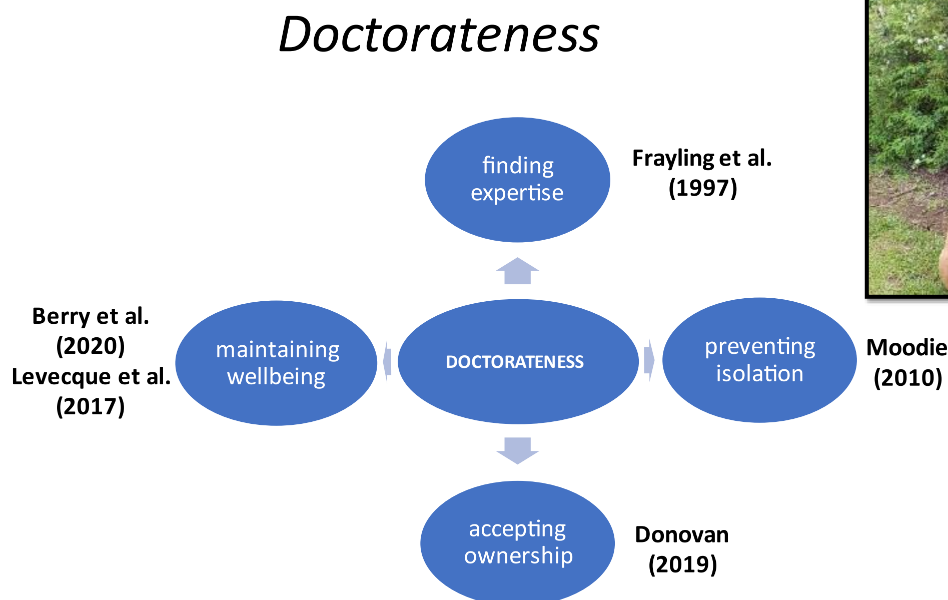
Doctorateness



Thus, the mobilisation of my grief work began to take shape and to gain momentum. As I acquired doctorateness, I found that my grief work took on new meaning and a purposeful trajectory. I began to find expertise and confidence in my approach to how I wanted to deal with the trauma of Rory's death; I made myself interact with previously unknown others in a constructive manner; I accepted ownership of my grief and resolved that its path was solely reliant on my behaviour and mindset – no one else's; I recognised the necessity to enact my grief work in a way that functioned best for me as an individual in my context.

Slowly, the trajectory of personal transformation emerged from the darkness.

Research Question 3

3. How have my grieving Self and my doctorateness facilitated my academic and personal transformation?

Although the grief work continues, within the network of emotions around the multifaceted nature of bereavement, nest regenerated feelings

of optimism and hope. Of course, I still struggle with my lived experience of loss and the practicalities of grief such as those outlined in black in Figure 8.4. These elements are ever present, embedded within my psyche. They represent the inescapable righteousness of journeying with the trauma of the death of my beloved son, and they surround my every thought and action. However, through the tenacity and diligence of Self, these detrimental thoughts and feelings now encompass but do not overpower (as was presented in Section 4.6, Figure 4.5). My emotional stability is still a messy contrivance, orchestrated by the questions asked by Self and the answers given, but negativity and hopelessness are lessened, and positivity (coloured as purple in Figure 8.4) now resides within. This enables me to tolerate the grief and to enact its consequences in my own way, with the knowledge that I can prevail. This is diagrammatically represented by the thicker black lines that connect positive feelings in Figure 8.4. Emotions that are associated with my grief work are connected by thinner black lines, thereby demonstrating the strength of my personal transformation. It is worth noting that, even though the grief lines are thinner, they are still very much in evidence and in place.

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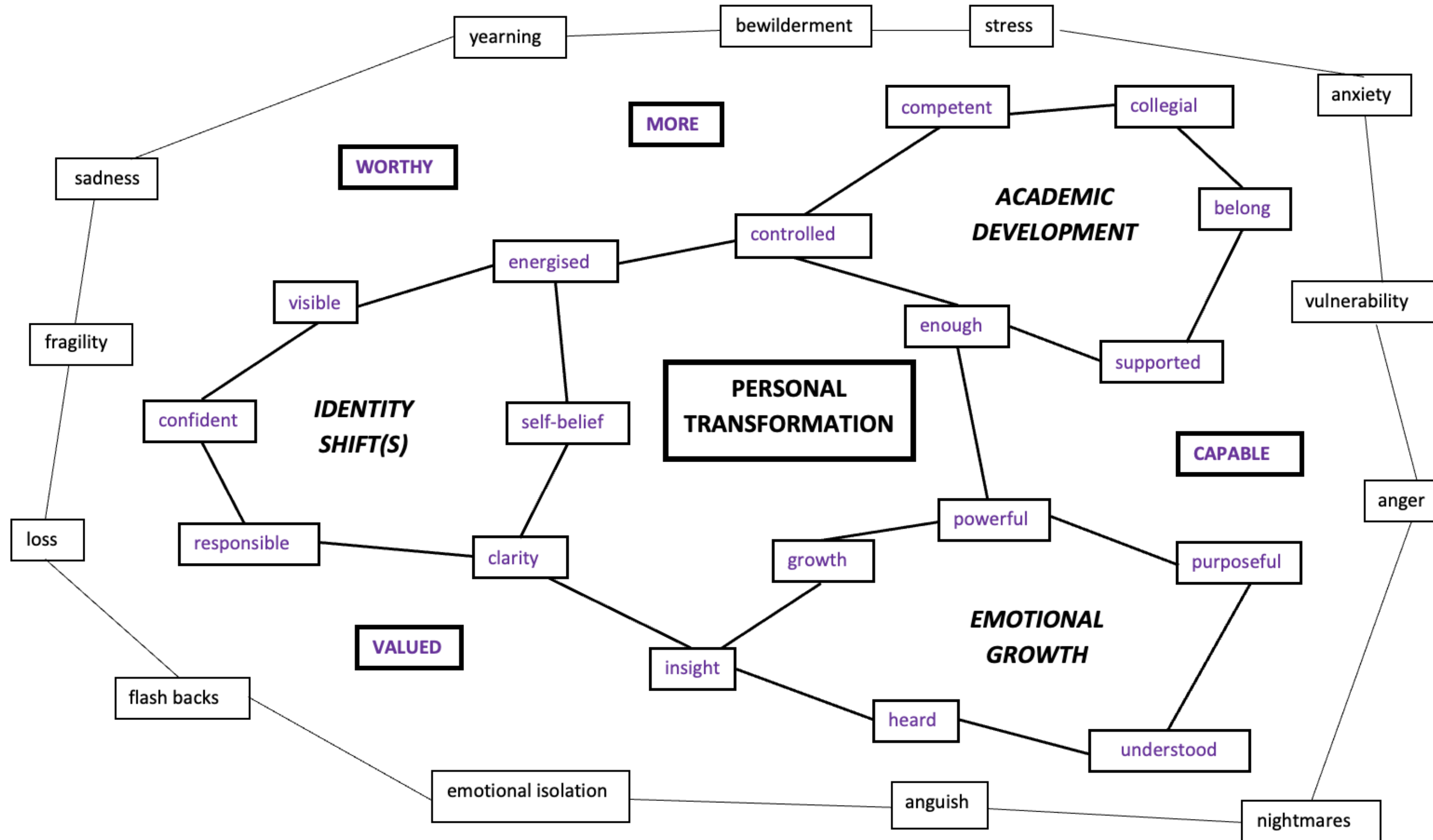
Personal transformation



It has taken an immense amount of time (several years) to come to terms with my grief, and the work associated with it is ongoing. However, through the diligence of Self questioning, I feel that the answers that I have sought provided me with a type of therapy that I could find acceptable. Pelacho-Rios and Bernabe-Valero (2022) referenced the term "Socratic dialogue" (n.p.). This is a concept that promotes the idea that "the answers patients are looking for are already within themselves" (n.p.). Generally, this type of treatment is conducted by a professional counsellor who poses questions relevant to the condition of their patient. I firmly believe that, in my case, Self acted as therapist and that identities were (re)formed by my responses to the questions posed by Self.

Lengelle (2021) interviewed Hubert Hermans, co-founder of the Dialogical Self Theory (DST). The heart of this theory revolves around lived experience and subjective research motivated by the researcher's physical, mental and emotional environment. "One of the core concepts from DST is that although people speak about themselves as a singular, congruent, unified whole, we are in fact diverse, multi-voiced, and seemingly inconsistent" (p. 6). This hypothesis aligns directly with my grief work in that it required a diversity of emotional responses (such as humour, patience, tenacity); multiple methods of articulation of my grief (such as 'conversing' with my dog, wearing black for an extended period of time, writing Thesis #2); and, inconsistency of emotional wellbeing (such as mental fatigue vs energy, timidity vs confidence) in order for me to adapt to the various environments which constitute the landscape of my lived experience as a bereaved mother.

Outside stimuli, in the form of my quest for doctorateness in PhD Thesis #1, aided the healing process. The significance of the primary influence of my supervisors and the positive experiences with others that I had when conducting and writing up my research shaped my academic and personal transformation. Wall (2008) referred to "motivators and enablers" (p. 39) when discussing her lived experience of international adoption. While I believe that Self was the primary motivator, the process

of achieving doctorateness cultivated an environment that steadily enabled me to grow as an academic and as a bereaved person. This transformation was difficult and treacherous, but I am now in a position to examine my grief and accept it – *welcome it?* – into my life.

The research questions of PhD Thesis #2 were fashioned in such a way as to explore the concept of "cognitive immobility" (Ezenwa, 2022, n.p.). This concept signifies the trauma of a person's inability to shift from a stressful mental space where they are trapped in efforts to relive the past. Ezenwa (2022) likened this experience to the feelings of a refugee who is forced to flee their homeland but who cannot let go of past connections: "My soul is there" (n.p.). This is akin to the loss of a child where mothers constantly revisit their lives before the child died and continually long for the time when the child was alive, healthy and *present*.

The study's multiple contributions to knowledge

The field of grief studies is vast. Similarly, scholarship targeting doctorateness is burgeoning. Integrating the two areas provides a potentially significant and unique source of knowledge production for grief workers, institutions such as universities and the community of grievers. The intersection of the personal and the cultural offers multiple unique contributions to knowledge in the area of social science. This thesis was written with the aim of extending sociological understanding with a practical, methodological, policy and theoretical generation and application of new knowledge.

Practical knowledge

At the micro level, practice knowledge about the death of a child provides insights into the social understandings of not only this demographic but also other marginalised cohorts within the community. At the meso level, it is vital that researchers add to an understanding of the hidden traumas as individuals attempt a positive and engaged commitment to community. At the macro level, this thesis adds new knowledge to this understudied group, providing a voice for the silenced

emotional and phenomenological experiences overshadowed by ongoing statistical data about childhood and youth deaths. Information based on the elements of grieving as they apply to this specific trauma is well overdue.

Although writings around cancer are emerging into the forefront of public consciousness, in general, most academic missives are decontextualised, thus signifying a generic, one size fits all approach to cancer therapy for patients and the bereaved. As a society, we have stopped thinking about the beating heart. We focus clinically on the mind at the expense of the soul. *Yet every beat of my heart reminds me that Rory is no longer physically here. What am I supposed to do with that?* I read the cancer statistics. I read the data on child/youth death. I donate to various cancer foundations. I am intellectually informed and engaged. But my heart – my heart is lost and alone and bewildered by circumstances beyond the control of any mere mortal such as me. This thesis has provided a practical perspective on living with grief and the labour that a bereaved mother must enact in order to survive. Dezelic and Ghanoum (2014) posited that, although individuals experience grief in their own unique manner, there are similarities in its manifestations. Thus, practical knowledge of a wide range of "models that offer a guide to the vast set of emotions, behaviors, cognitions and displays of them" (n.p.) offers the griever a basis upon which to compare her emotions and behaviours with others in similar circumstances. This is always with the stipulation that "there are several impacts that can cause grief to be more or less difficult, more or less chronic, and more or less complicated" (n.p.).

Every doctoral student wrestles, at some point in time, with the doctoral process. Whether the struggle is associated with supervision, with academic peers, with fieldwork or with personal tensions to do with home and/or employment, the doctoral journey is a fragile endeavour. Completing a doctorate is difficult – as it should be. This thesis has

presented an insight into my practical experience in the hope that others may be heartened and re-energised to move forward to completion.

Methodological knowledge

At the methodological level, PhD Thesis #2 exemplifies research as a process of systematic enquiry. The addition of this thesis to the field of death studies ensures that equal weighting is given to quantitative and qualitative enquiry methods. The methodological value of this study is evident in its application of evocative autoethnography as a developmental intervention in addition to a research method. I have contributed to methodological knowledge in three ways.

All research is a process of systematic inquiry. My first contribution to the field was demonstrated in the design and implementation of an organic and effective system of data analysis as initially presented in Figure 4.8 and repeated below in Figure 8.5.

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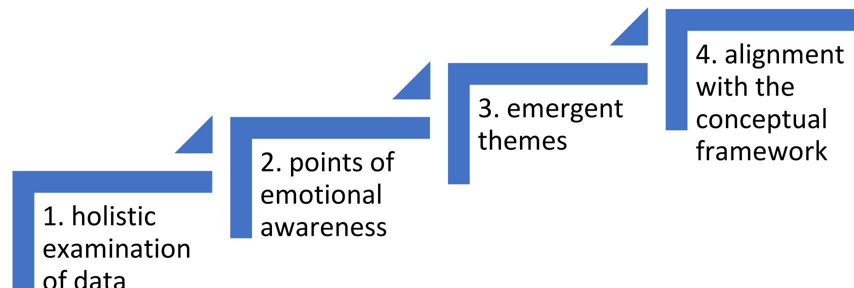
Phases of data analysis



This four-phase investigative scrutiny provided a rigorous and authentic approach to the autoethnographic research design that culminated in a synchronous and transparent alignment with the conceptual framework upon which my thesis is built. This type of analysis represents a technique that reinforces the value of so many individualised data sources – that is, the depiction of assorted relevant lenses from diverse sources.

Each of these contributions to the field reflected the fact that emotion-based thoughts are the hallmark of evocative autoethnography.

Emotion looms large in autoethnography because this type of research design focuses upon relationality and connection between writer and reader, while at the same time reflecting transparency and rigour. As autoethnography develops in scholarship as a valid methodology, my thesis adds weight and accountability to the process and presents a hybridised version of the production of a doctoral thesis.

Policy knowledge

It is crucial that public policy engages in the positioning of affirmative agency for grievers, particularly those who have endured ongoing trauma in the form of mental health issues. This, of course, is more important than ever as the spectre of the effects of COVID isolation is foregrounded socially and politically. "Sociological work helps laypeople, members of other disciplines, and policymakers understand 'them', those people who are less fortunate than 'we' are; in other words, our research helps to counter the ubiquitous tendency to blame victims for their misfortunes" (Thoits, 2006, p. 311; see also Lob, 2022; Zhai & Du, 2020).

A broad discussion of grief work as it relates to doctoral studies affords policy-makers an insight into the lives of the individuals who support and contribute to the existence of large-scale institutional organisations such as education departments and universities. This is significant in that "it makes the ideas and experience open to others and because, while tension might be contested, it provides an initial map of common ground" (Walker, 2008, p. xv). This "common ground" (p. xv) provides a starting point from which institutions may write policy about the treatment of bereaved employees and students.

Theoretical knowledge

In the academic world, childhood death/parental bereavement is considered to be a niche topic, surrounded by generalised statistics and social taboos. This may make it more palatable and less uncomfortable for those without lived experience; however, it also subtly signifies that further investigation would be subversive and unacceptable. "It is as if the

taboo that surrounds the issues of death and dying in organisations also keeps people from studying, writing and reading about it" (Bento, 1994, p. 36). It seems that the ugliness and rawness of this type of grief should be expressed only privately, in the 'comfort' of your own home – a home that may constantly provide the grieving parent with a plethora of reminders of a life lost too soon. Death is everyone's business, and bereavement should not be enacted as a shameful secret.

> These notions, together with the loss of a child[,] can contribute to pathological relationships that extend over several generations[,] and the existing knowledge that the degree of support perceived by the family is significantly related to better bereavement outcomes … makes it vitally important to provide these families with assistance. (Pelacho-Rios & Beranbe-Valero, 2022, n.p.)

Theoretical knowledge must be tempered by the practical. "Understanding what mothers experience following a child's death from cancer would help professionals [to] tailor interventions to parents' needs" (Kim et al., p. 390). The Facebook post presented in Figure 8.6 exemplifies the hope and love that my child displayed in his belief that I would help him to survive. He died 10 and a half months after this post. How do mothers reconcile their child's faith with reality?

Figure 8.6

Facebook post

February 15, 2010

Rory Mulligan Debbie Mulligan: HAPPY BIRTHDAY mumsy... Your the good news to my week, the non-boring bits in my cornetto, the fizz in my lemonade, the cool yellow colour in my cordial... the melody to my guitar, the smile on my face, the warm and fuzzies in my stomach, the comfort to my tears, and possibly the biggest part of my cure to cancer ;p

PhD Thesis #2 identifies four applications of theoretical knowledge. Firstly, I have presented an individualised roadmap of grief work. This is an important resource for a progressive understanding not only of bereavement scholarship but also of doctorateness in a time of

uncertainty and challenge. There exists a paucity of theoretical knowledge in this topic area. Dezelic and Ghanoum (2014) stated that:

> … the more knowledge, understanding, language, and tools clinicians have, the greater the benefit that can be provided for patients who have entered into the unchartered territory of grief. Having various models to draw from, offers the clinician a more comprehensive map and guide when walking with the patient into this new unknown world – life after loss. (n.p.)

Secondly, the topic of tenuous mental health has currency in its contemporary and long-term COVID implication to do with grief and loss during the ongoing pandemic (Helton et al., 2020; Zhai & Du, 2020). Thoits (2006) theorised that researchers in the mental health disciplines have "underestimated" (p. 311) the manner in which grievers shape their lives to be fulfilling and purposeful after their bereavement. She further claimed that researchers have "missed opportunities" (p. 311) that lead to an understanding of the nature and application of resilience and personal agency. Thoits' hypothesis was that researchers need to dig more deeply into the data around personal agency. In denying themselves access to this information, "they have skipped over important theoretical and empirical problems that might help them [to] understand how mental health is retained and enhanced by the vast majority of individuals, who, the data inevitably show, do not break down when stressors occur or accumulate" (p. 311).

Thirdly, I have devised an additional interpretation and application of the interactive notions of Self and identities when conducting grief work. I presented a unique relationship between the two where a dynamic and reflexive Self manages a mode of "Socratic dialogue" (Pelacho-Rios & Bernabe-Valero, 2022, n.p.) that determines the various formations of situated identities.

Finally, I featured a parallel between the processes required for grief work and those needed for doctorateness. I guided the reader to

acquire more of an understanding about the character of grief and of doctorateness, and of the work involved in each process. To this end, I coined the term “dark labour” (please refer to Section 5.6) to exemplify one facet of my grief work.

Recommendations for further action

In hospital settings, clinicians and investigators should consider individualised approaches to understanding and supporting the grief experiences of bereaved parents both before and after the death of a child. Counselling for the child and the child’s parents is not widely available in all hospitals. Factoring in the vast amounts of experience that practitioners have in the field of bereavement, they would be best placed to ensure individualised therapy for those whose children are terminally ill. Hospitals should ensure that their staff train regularly in order to keep up to date with current trends in the area of bereavement, as well as inviting parents with lived experience to share their stories. Additionally, hospitals/palliative care spaces should provide the resources necessary for effective counselling should the parents so choose. Køster (2022) referred to the “world-distancing” (n.p.) effect of chronic grief whereby the bereaved are emotionally “distanced from and unable to connect with other people” (n.p.). This has wider implications for continued mental health issues. Cancer sufferers are required to travel back and forth from the hospital multiple times for treatment (please refer to Figure 8.6). If organisationally supported in an ongoing manner and addressed directly after the event of the child’s death for an individualised length of time, these concerns may not be as impactful on family members.

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Repeated hospital visitations

Our communities are in need of compassionate and relatable research that covers a wide range of mental health topics. Bereavement counsellors, support workers, funeral directors, chaplains, and acute and primary health care workers, as well as the voluntary and charity sectors, are all at the forefront of knowledge.

Every doctoral student brings a personal history to their relationship with both their research topic and their supervisors. When this history is grief laden, tensions may naturally arise, such as those referenced by me around my Confirmation of Candidature and my (then) principal supervisor's cancer diagnosis (please refer to Section 6.3). Achieving my version of doctorateness (please refer to Section 6.5) was essential to my emotional wellbeing as I made my way through the parallel universes of my grief work and my study. Once I felt that I had accomplished my doctoral identity, I was able to take ownership of my thesis production. This enabled me to naturally progress to a relationship with my supervisor(s) that was more in line with a collaboration of equals, as opposed to the initial (necessary) phase of subordinate and teacher. I did not succeed in fulfilling my doctoral ambition on my own. I felt extremely fortunate to have been the recipient of the support I received when undertaking both of my doctoral efforts.

Universities have a responsibility to promote feelings of doctorateness within their student body. Shared and individual responsibilities of the supervisory team, the student and the other associated members of the faculty (such as the graduate research office) should be made explicit in university policy and should be clearly stated on university websites.

Supervisors should constantly revise their praxis when dealing with their students. This relationship is pivotal to the success or failure of the doctorate. Initially, each supervisor should provide the student with a set of criteria that lists what they are prepared to do for the student e.g. meeting frequencies, style of feedback. This checklist should take into account the supervisor's doctoral philosophy and assumptions as well as expectations of the student as the doctorate progresses. Time constraints may be a major issue for supervisors, and should be stated. Having this detailed can ameliorate any future conflicts as both parties would be able to refer to this document. Formalising the supervisor/ student relationship in this way allows all parties, including the relevant university administration, transparency and rigour in this most important aspect of doctoral work. The document may be amended when reviewed periodically by those affected.

Having reviewed the initial document supplied by the supervisor(s), it then behoves the student to assess the suitability of the supervisor for their purpose. At this stage of academic pursuit, students should be aware of their particular learning style and are in the best position to judge their supervisory needs.

Students must approach the doctorate, and their supervisors, with honesty. This is particularly important for those suffering from chronic grief. Supervisors may not be aware of the student's history if they are not informed. Thus they may impose expectations and responsibilities upon the student that are unreasonable and unattainable for that individual at that time. Open communication is a necessary facet of a

healthy and continuing doctoral relationship between student and supervisor.

In summary, recommendations for further actions include guidance around grief work and doctorateness. Firstly, practitioners and clinicians working in the field of grief should be granted access to the latest research in the field. Regular professional development should be provided by organisations, the content of which includes both theory (such as in-house discussion of relevant journal articles), and practice (such as invited guest speakers from a range of areas). Secondly, those involved in the production of doctoral studies, should establish easily accessed policies (university) and documentation (supervisors) that explicitly outline their expectations of students throughout the process. Students should also take responsibility for their relationships with the university and their supervisory team by selecting a supervisor that meets their academic needs and through open communication with all parties involved.

A personal note revisited

When a person loses their adult partner, they are widowed. When children lose their parents, they are orphaned. What of the parent who has lost a child? There is an ancient Sanskrit term for those of us who have lost children. "Vilomah" (Vasquez, 2021) translates as 'against the natural order'. This is an important piece of information as it provides a label/identity for those of us in need of one. Bereavement threatens identity and it may provide some comfort for the bereaved person, as well as an identifier for those others who interact with the bereaved.

While producing this thesis, people often asked me if the act of writing it were a cathartic experience. I am always nonplussed about how to answer. Simply – I resent wholeheartedly that I had to do it. However, it was a narrative that would not be ignored. After years of inarticulation, the story burst out of my consciousness, fully formed and desperate to be acknowledged in a meaningful way. I chose to write autoethnographically because, "The processes are too complex, the stakes are too high, to

examine from a distance. I offer my story as a voice for others immersed in their own negotiations, and perhaps in need of a story to cling [to]" (Berry, as cited by Paxton, 2018, p. 149).

I hope that the reader has enjoyed the Epilogues featuring my dog, El. The light-heartedness of her antics was a deliberate act on my part. "Humour is crucial. Humour is imperative both in grief work and in putting regret into perspective. It is pre-eminently healing to find humour in a situation that agonises us and imprisons us" (Alapack, 2010, p. 283). The death of a child can isolate and stultify mind, body and soul. The impermanence and injustice of life can overwhelm. One of the major lessons that I learned along my grief work journey was that finding humour in a situation can act as a signpost that signals recovery and hope for the soul. I chose to honour the memory of my son's absurd sense of humour and his ability to find a witticism in even the most distressing of circumstances. Truly he was a role model for dignity and possessed a gift for connection with others.

Finally, I write for myself and do not presume a grand narrative. This is my story to tell in the hope that it will resonate with others. Storytelling is "a fundamental part of being human … It is how we show who we are to the world" (Baird, 2020, p. 160). And so I reach out for myself and for my fellow travellers, in order to connect with other mothers who grieve loudly or silently, and who are constrained by this journey of otherness that has been forced upon us. I say to them, do not feel alone. "Loneliness hangs over our culture today like a thick smog" (Hari, 2018, p. 73). Fight your way out of the suffocation of grief. Reach out if you want to. Tell your story if you can. You matter. *Your pain matters.*

We have left the heart out of research around cancer and bereaved motherhood in general. Grief is nonsensical. Failure: the head knows that I am not to blame for Rory's death. The heart feels differently. My superman (please refer to Figure 8.7), who survived the pain and

suffering of his earlier years, was only to die inexplicably die at the hands of cancer before he really had a chance to live.

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Superman

Chapter summary

This chapter restated the aims of the thesis, which were to outline a transformative approach to grief work that included doctoral study; broaden scholarship around the lived experience of grief and doctorateness; describe bereaved motherhood from my particular set of circumstances; present an exemplar of a hybridised autoethnographic thesis; and provide an understanding of the multiple facets involved in

grief work. I then supplied a range of answers to the three research questions by framing them as wicked problems that require ongoing, multiple and contextualised solutions. I addressed the study's multiple contributions to practical, methodological, policy and theoretical knowledge. Recommendations for further action on the topics of grief work and doctorateness were made. A personal note was revisited where I rejected the idea of a 'one size fits all' approach to research involving bereavement studies and doctoral processes.

The following section (8.9) presents the end of Chapter 8: the Epilogue.

Epilogue

She is gone now, my old dog. I have written this second thesis without her. I have keenly missed her insights, and, when she couldn't be bothered, her snores. As a testament to a full life well lived, we mixed her ashes with some of Rory's and took her for a last walk around the yard. We scattered her under her beloved mandarin tree as well as at various points around the garden where she loved to stop.

She was a generous and forgiving soul, tolerating the resultant unintentional slights of a harried and disorganised *normal* family life. She was equally at home in the quiet solitude of her resting place on the verandah when the family was absent for the day, as she was in the full-on rambunctiousness of teenagers and their madcap energy as they raced through life. She added an undeniable richness and a certain stable routine to our lives, more keenly needed when Rory left us. We still seek her excited face at the door when we come home and unthinkingly look for her in her favourite places in the garden. She was pure joy and goodness personified, and we were fortunate indeed that she shared her life with us.

Farewell, my beauty

Farewell, my beauty. My faithful friend. Recipient of laughter and tears. Keeper of secrets and unspeakable horrors. Devoted companion to Rory, Katie and Debbie in the seemingly endless and desolate hours of darkness when dawn was so so far away. You were a warrior on our behalf. Your empathetic silence spoke more to us than mere words could ever say. The warmth of your body was a balm in a tumultuous sea of uncertainty and misery.

Cast off the shackles of an aged, treacherous body that disavowed the joyful running after a tennis ball (and never returning it); the illicit jumping up onto beds (you know you weren't allowed); and the thorough, intense demolition of marrow-filled bones. Your comforting snores and sighs were such a reassuring backdrop to days spent in front of a computer restructuring doctoral paragraphs that refused coherent formation.

The angels await you. Rory will feed you all the snacks that I denied you and that he and his sister sneaked you when they thought I wasn't looking (and even sometimes when they knew I was). Rory will run with you, and you will revel in his laughter, a sound that was seldom heard in the last 12 months of his life. This is your solemn duty. You carry with you all the love from those of us who treasured him here on this earthly plane. This was what you were born for. To receive love and to give it back an infinite number of times. You will carry this goodness, this devotion, with you as you ascend. No amount of scholarship, no amount of life experience teaches humans the compassion and wisdom that is innate in dogs. I will never find a friend more loyal or steadfast. You will be missed. Farewell, my beauty and thank you [Figure 8.8].

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Puppy El

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@PhDForum https://twitter.com/PhDForum?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor

@PhDStudent https://twitter.com/phdstudents?lang=en

Reviewer 2 Must Be Stopped! facebook.com/groups/reviewer2/

Tara Brabazon https://www.youtube.com/user/TaraBrabazon/videos

TED https://www.ted.com/talks

The Grief Toolbox https://twitter.com/TheGriefToolbox

The Older Men's Network (TOMNET) http://tomnet.org.au/

The Thesis Whisperer https://thesiswhisperer.com/

Thesislink Why is networking important as a researcher? https://thesislink.aut.ac.nz/?p=8297

Women in Academia Support Network Group https://www.facebook.com/groups/905644729576673/?hoisted_section_header_type=recently_seen&multi_permalinks=2234758733331926