Personal Loss, Memory and Family: an exploration of family photographs and objects after a bereavement

by

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Personal Loss, Memory and Family: an exploration of family photographs and objects after a bereavement is a project centered around photographic practice, using visual ethnography to explore family photographs and domestic objects after the death of an adult within the family.

The research explores five key theme findings, through the experiences of participants and includes their stories and reflections in remembering a deceased relative through objects and photographs. It includes an autoethnographic voice from me as participant and reflexivity as researcher, as well as the voices of authors within the field of death, dying, creativity, sociology, visual ethnography, identity, and estrangement.

The voices in the thesis are as follows:

Me, myself, I, my, Nikki, participant-researcher-friend, photographer: quotations and reflections from me

Participant/s: those who were involved in interviews, others, Sally, Kelly, Mary, Denise, Helen, Olivia, Tammy, Nancy, Beth, Fran, Eric

Authors/researchers: writings around relevant theories and other research projects

The practice, interviews and methods such as sound recording, documentary photographs, archival photographs and domestic items (candle holders, cuddly toys, fabric, sewing boxes), are used in exploring and identifying key commonalities between participant experiences, appreciating an inevitable overlap of themes and roles.

The photography element includes;

- Documentary and archival photographs included in the thesis
- Examples of work displayed at Medway Open Studios 2018/2019 and Fusion19 exhibitions included in the appendices
- A photobook of further documentary research photographs and archival photographs to support the wider narrative provided by the thesis and the full transcriptions

The Written element includes;

- Ethnographic and autoethnographic accounts and reflections in the thesis
- Autoethnographic reflections from me indented to denote my voice, including accounts from my reflective journal, as well as direct quotes from transcripts in italics

- Reflective writing and discussions on the uses of creativity
- Quotations from participants indented and in italics
- A USB for the illustration of anonymised transcripts of participants
- Examples from my visual diary from Instagram, other social media accounts, and photographs from my family archive
- Written accounts from participants included in the Medway Open Studios 2018/2019 and Fusion19 Exhibitions to support the narrative of the stories behind the photographs (included in the appendices)

The curated exhibitions at Medway Open Studios 2018/2019 and Fusion 2019 provided further unconventional spaces in which to have open conversations and reflections around death, grief and bereavement. Using both writing and photographs supports a third space in which to explore these sensitive themes.

Abstract

This research project explores photographs and domestic objects with 12 adult participants, including myself as participant-researcher, after the death of a member of the family. Using ethnographic and autoethnographic approaches, alongside methods such as recordings and documentary photographs, supported the exploration of this sensitive subject. Adults were interviewed at their homes in Kent, discussing memories and reflections on the deceased as well as themselves through self-selected photographs and objects. Core themes emerged including; women continuing to act as curator of the family image and archive after a death, a willingness by participants to discuss and reflect on the subject of death, often seen as a taboo. It highlighted that in family fractures and estrangement and then a death, participants retained items from the family member to which they had been estranged. A key finding of the research was the beneficial nature in holding space and using photographs and objects in which to remember the deceased, as tools to support reflections on self-identity after an emotionally challenging life event as a death, and through using creative methods such as writing and photography.

The research is explored and illustrated through text and photographs contained in the thesis and a wider selection of the documentary photographs in the accompanying photobook. A selection of documentary photographs were exhibited as part of Medway Open Studios 2018 and 2019, as well as Fusion19 at the Daphne Oram building Canterbury Christ Church University which can be seen in the appendices and facilitated ongoing conversations around the subject of death in non-traditional spaces.

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Preface

The research title; *Personal Loss, Memory and Family: an exploration of family photographs and objects after a bereavement* was prompted by the deaths of both my maternal grandparents; nan in 2014, grandad in 2016, and my dad in 2017, one month before I started my master's research. The thesis has a core of autoethnographic research around my experiences of deaths within my family.

After the deaths within my family, it was the female family members who led the organisation of my grandparent's home, arranging for things to be discarded, donated, shared and gifted within the family. As a photographer, I was keen on documenting life experiences and continued taking photos of my grandparents' home shortly after they had died to capture it just as they had left it. While being at my grandparents' home, a place I'd known since being a young child, I was struck at all the objects and photographs that held memories and stories within them, as well as recounting those memories while photographing, through the photo I then had another record and could revisit at any time. It was intriguing to me; in what family members would want to keep and what would have specific meanings for them. I was gifted several objects through my mum, however, when organising my grandparents' belongings, the only item I really wanted was a small yellow cup that they used to give me milk in as a child. The cup had been used as a disused tea bag pot so was a little stained, it didn't bother me, I wanted to keep that cup for the reason of the memory it held. I then became interested in how others documented, curated and organised family belongings after a death.

My parents divorced when I was four and subsequently the last time I saw my dad was when I was 21, we lost touch and then were estranged for 16 years, before meeting again for the final six weeks of his life. Being dad's only descendant, I had the role of organising his estate, which included organising his home, deciding what to keep, discard and donate. I found an old Weetabix box containing some official papers and the photograph of me in the red jacket at the beginning of this thesis. It shows me standing in front of a funfair ride at Dreamland in Margate, Kent. I had completely forgotten this day until I saw that photo again, the memories of that day flooding back, like Barthes' (1980) Punctum, allowing me to reconnect with a moment, revisit and rethink its meaning. I was about four, and it was a cold day, dad had lent me his jacket, we ate fish and chips on the beach, paddled in the sea and ate Rock, a lovely memory. It struck me that this photograph was cherished by dad since that moment, keeping it safe in this box of important papers, I was astounded at how I hadn't recalled that day until

seeing that photo, a loss of a memory, remembered through a found photograph. This moment had such an impact on me; it prompted a change in my research focus.

This thesis is born of my interest in seeing if there were common themes shared by others that reflected my own experiences after a death in the family. If there were any similarities to which objects and photographs were kept, who had organised them, what was remembered, how it reinforced understanding of the family unit, supported reflections, and in navigating grief and supporting ongoing connections to the deceased.

Acknowledgements

Undertaking this research would not have been possible without the support of my partner Roy and his ongoing love and patience. Hal, my Dog for the much-needed walking breaks when writing my thesis, and my family, for their love, and in support of me exploring and sharing family memories and photographs of our deceased loved ones so publicly. Nan Stella and Grandad Frank who gave me my first experiences of death and dying and for their overwhelming love for our family, and to my Dad Brian who I am thankful to for our reconnection, all of whom have been much of my focus over the last five years.

To all my participants for whom I hold a great deal of gratitude, for being involved in this research and sharing such personal memories with me, I thank you all. Thank you to my supervisors at Canterbury Christ Church University Dr Karen Shepherdson and Professor Shane Blackman, for their ongoing advice, support and critical friendship.

Hal

Introduction

Using a variety of disciplines and methods supported open conversations of the thesis title *Personal Loss, Memory and Family: an exploration of family photographs and objects after a bereavement* from the position of an adult, after the death of another adult in the family. This interdisciplinary thesis uses autoethnographic and ethnographic methods, as well as practical methods such as voice recordings, documentary photographs, photographic exhibitions, archival photographs and domestic objects.

The research has been part of a journey exploring my family after the short succession of deaths within it, my nan, grandad, and dad, as explored further in the preface. The project gave space in which to explore my personal experiences after a family bereavement, using photographs and objects, navigating my grief, and learning about the experiences of eleven research participants, who recognised that they might not have previously afforded themselves time to do this. It has highlighted the emotional challenges that I faced after the deaths of my family members, and equally the emotional journey throughout the research into death, dying, and family memories with others, all held sensitively with integrity through the established methods. The research contributes to the wider research field of death, dying, and grief illustrating and enhancing the wider narratives around death and grief literacy which are often considered taboo subjects. Death, dying and grief are inescapable parts of the human condition and will all inevitably be touched by it in our lives. My personal experience and those of the research participants, in sharing and giving space to contemplate and reflect, hopes to assist others as a way of understanding, exploring, and navigating their own grief.

The methodology chapter details the processes used throughout the research and its importance, and the literature chapter explores the wider theoretical context of the research themes. There is then an exploration of commonalities of experiences between participants through chapters reflecting on these key themes.

The core chapters are set out in five key themes areas; curating family photographs; exploring who curates the family archive and what they keep after a death, reflecting on death; after a death what is remembered of the deceased, what rituals are observed, including senses and sensing, and considerations of talking about death as a taboo. The third theme explores keeping and creativity; what photographs and objects were kept, the meanings associated with them, and how creativity has been or is intended to be explored in responses to a bereavement. Identity; explores through photographs and objects personality traits of the deceased as well as

using them as tools for self-reflection, and estrangement; exploring all the key themes in the context of estrangement through participant experiences.

The chapters explore the individual stories of participants through text and documentary photographs and reflection, full quotes are included from participants, as well as my reflections and quotes from my self-interview.

Photographs illustrating a breadth of participants stories, and a place for further discussion are in the photobook as a rich accompaniment to this thesis. Photographs were included for exhibition at Medway Open Studios 2018 and 2019, and the Fusion19 Daphne Oram Canterbury Christ Church University Exhibition noted further in the appendices. As highlighted in the preface, this thesis is supported by my experiences as someone who has been bereaved and as a photographer with my practice, based firmly in social commentary.

Chapter 3 explores the main theme of the roles of females within the family as keepers and curators of family memories, image, objects and photographs.

Chapter 4 explores themes of memories of the deceased through reflections on senses, symbolism and rituals explored through objects and photographs.

Chapter 5's theme concentrates on how participants used and kept photographs and objects after a family death, with a focus on the use of creative practices (such as photography) in supporting grief and potential benefits of such practices.

Chapter 6's theme explores reflections on self-identity and the identity of the deceased using objects and photographs.

Chapter 7 focusses on estrangement within families and how this may affect what family objects and photographs are kept, discarded and remembered.

Chapter 1: Literature

1.1 Introduction

This chapter explores existing literature around the curation of family photographs and objects within a domestic setting, the role of women, and how technology can be used to contribute to the family archive, as well as discussions around aesthetics and image. Theories on the use of photographs and objects in supporting reflection, the everyday, memory and stories, and the role of curator of photographs and objects within a family following a death are explored. After a death in the family, connections to the deceased and concepts of identity and self are included as well as rituals, symbols, the taboo of discussing death, and consideration of estrangement as a loss. It highlights the uses of visual ethnography and autoethnography in the field of death, family stories and memories, including examples of creative practices and responses.

1.2 Family photography and curator roles

Mass production of the camera enabled families to document their lives, with early family photographs documenting major life events such as weddings, new children, and family gatherings. The instigator and curator of family photographs is usually the mother, and the curation of family photography is important in understanding our connections to family, our identity, and sense of self and belonging (Kuhn, 1995; Zussman, 2006; Plowman and Stevenson, 2012; Behrens and Umemura, 2013; Janning and Scalise, 2015; Day, 2017). Behrens and Umemura's (2013) research suggested that future interest in photographs is dependent on a mother's connection to the child, suggesting that future curation and creation of family photographs are passed to those who have positive experiences of looking at photographs with mother. There remains scope for further research from the perspective of the father as the research sample was specifically mothers. Rituals of looking through photograph albums as *'repository of memories'* (Zussman, 2006:32) in a domestic setting with mother, can

promote discussions, raise questions and prompt memory, facilitating ongoing family stories and connection *'mums would show family photos to young children and babies in order to teach them who was in their family'* (Rose, 2010:30). Exploring photograph albums, reflecting on photographs, reinforce our position with the family, and with '*togetherness (a) range of things is done with family snaps to see that togetherness is not just pictured by the family photo image; it is also enacted by family members as various things are done with the snaps'* (Rose, 2010:41). Kuhn (1995) and Zussman (2006) used photos that were either curated or photos instigated by their mothers, from their family albums in discussing the influence that the photographs had on shaping their concepts of self, identity and position within their family. When looking at photographs in a reflective way as an adult or as part of family activities as a child, photographs can have an element of absence *'while recording what has been seen, always and by its nature refers to what isn't seen'* (Berger, 1967:20). Absence within a photograph can give space for reflection in piecing together family stories and our place within it. In analysing a photograph as a child in a coronation dress (made by her mother) in reference to wider society's experience of the queen's coronation during that time, Kuhn (1995) surmised that her mother may have wanted to connect the family to something greater or wanted to portray the family in more positive light. Mothers, as curators of the family image and archive, decided how the family was perceived and the reference points it had for all family members. Women's influence and taking the lead on family image, and curation in organising what was seen as important, may have been influenced:

> *in the feminist movement, the processes involved in consciousness-raising were seen as a way for individual women initially to understand the effects of patriarchal structures on them and subsequently to reconceptualize their individual responses to those structures so as to effect structural change as well as change in their individual lives*
>
> (Davis, 1998:224)

The collection, documentation and curation of photographs gave each generation an insight into family life at a particular moment in time. It's growth as a social construct with women leading change in their individual lives, was supported by a *'visible and situated materiality of display technologies (which) affords curatorial control and the demonstrability of a family's domestic order'* (Durrant *et al.*, 2009:1021). Women may use photographs and objects to relate the family to the external world, as reflections of themselves as explored further;

> *the familial look, (then), is not the look of a subject looking at an object, but a mutual look of a subject looking at an object who is a subject looking (back) at an object.*

> *Familial subjectivity is constructed relationally, and in these relations, I am always both self and other(ed).*
>
> (Hirsch, 1997:9)

In rethinking family image and archive, women can open up new possibilities in exploring, changing and rewriting a family archive, as reflecting on Mann's (1992) *'Immediate Family'* was explored '*perhaps it's my past I am photographing, suggesting that she has no memories of her childhood, maybe using her camera and her children to create a past and a childhood she never had'* (Hirsch, 1997:162).

Kuhn (1995)*;* Rose (2010)*;* Janning and Scalise (2015)*,* suggest women continue to choose photographs and objects to keep in the curation of their family memories, and are *'the guardian and gate keeper of our familial language'* (Hirsch, 1997:214) reinforced by the following *'it was his mother who told him about their family past, legends, and memories that made up their shared family identity'* (Gloyn *et al.*, 2018:165). Traditional roles of mothers as curators of the family image remains as a social construct and '*Women's pressure to present photos in a certain way is an attempt to control the meaning around the photos when they are shared in private and public realms'* (Janning and Scalise, 2015:1723). Hegarty's (2016) research explores why a traditional role of women as keepers of the family image continues. In discussions with a group of Irish stay at home fathers using photovoice to explore language and literacy within the family, it challenged the men who expressed gender stereotypes saying that they didn't feel comfortable having these reflections that were perceived as a female role. Hegarty's (2016) research did highlight that fathers spoke more when prompted by a photograph they took (or one they were familiar with) through the research, therefore suggested fathers as takers of photographs but perhaps still not instigators and curators. The reasons for a continuation of women as curators of the family archive may be due to;

> *mothers through cultural norms and familial ideologies position daughter as future mother that foster the presentation of the family as harmonious and free from conflict that accept the photographic images.*
>
> (Hirsch, 1997:214)

As considered in this section in women leading the curation of the family photographs, stories and other ephemera, Davis' (1998) suggestion of the feminist movement enabling an analysis of patriarchal structures and women's place within them, the opportunities for change can be

explored through curation and the act of curating. The importance of curation and the practice of reflection through curating is also highlighted:

> *Curating creates a foundation for criticality as it frames and groups individual works around issues of content, form or other concerns. The possibility of a critical dialogue is therefore amplified through active curatorial practice. Curating and criticality are linked and synergistically contribute to an elevated discussion about meaning, purpose, form and content.*
>
> (Rosenberg, 2009:86)

Curating family photographs and stories can be considered important not just for sharing stories from mother to child in the present, but as a repository for future generations to add to a wider family narrative. Exploring family photographs is a useful starting point in providing an understanding of who in the family takes the lead in their curation. It also illustrates how the collection of family photographs is important for reflection and understanding place within family, connections, stories and the role of women.

1.3 Family Photographs: technology and aesthetics of everyday

In wanting to show the family in a positive light, there are considerations of photographic image aesthetics, in how it is curated and what is depicted in it, as illustrated in the example of Kuhn's (1995) photo of the coronation dress. Authors have explored photograph aesthetics and notions of them being public or private, giving insights into the future use of technology in the production and curation of family photographs (Pritz, 2011; Plowman and Stevenson, 2012; Wang et al, 2014; Lewis Ellison, 2016). A study of Norwegian young people and their camera phone photos, found there was a shift in young people becoming more involved in photographing the family, *'parents are no longer the sole editors of the family's visual memories'* (Pritz, 2011:191), building on from Kuhn's (1995) view that photographs may remain curated by mothers, but may physically be taken by fathers and others within the family, highlighting a growth in camera phone technology supporting all family members in contributing to the family story. The Norwegian research group is a useful example of an

ethnographic project exploring the changes in family image curation, and it opens up opportunities for further research into different groups and cultures. Plowman and Stevenson (2012) also used mobile phone cameras to explore the everyday lives of children at various points throughout the day, with mothers taking photographs and providing a short description of what the children were doing. On some occasion's photos were not provided but just a description, reasons for this were largely due to the event being perceived at the time, not very interesting to photograph. The use of camera phones allows for everyday aspects of family life to be photographed and shared in abundance, in contrast to traditional film photography. Pritz, (2011) and Plowman and Stevenson's (2012) research provides insight into everyday family interactions through photography, of the mundane, which they may not have had access to previously, this in contrast to early family photography being used mainly for special occasions such as weddings and birthdays. The notion of the mundane conjures images of the ordinary, everyday, ad hoc, usually unstaged, and relaxed photographs, and having photographs of the mundane was important; *'while family photos never show domestic labour, for my interviewees they were an important part of it'* (Rose, 2010:32) reiterating *'what it shows invokes what is not shown'* (Berger, 1967:20). Wang, Alasuttari, Aro, (2014) suggested that with the growth of sharing of family photography on social media sites, specifically on Flickr, there has been a shift not only from the private to public nature of family photographs but also from the mundane, ad hoc nature to one that is more aesthetically and photographically technically pleasing, portraying an idealistic picture of family life. Wang, Alasuttari, Aro, (2014) analysed photographs of children's birthdays on the online platform Flickr, the nature of the site is one of amateur/professional photographer and similar to Facebook the online appreciation of photographs is encouraged with likes. Photographs on Flickr were more about the aesthetics of the photograph taken by the mother as opposed to specifically about the subject matter (i.e. her children and their birthday), supporting notions of the *'familial look'* (Hirsch, 1997:9) and Kuhn's (1995) mother presenting the family in a positive light. Flickr is, however, one online platform and specifically to share amateur/pro photography, and is a platform not necessarily used by current generations as much as platforms such as snapchat.

Sharing photographs online on social media or between the family in the curation of family archives can be referred to as the *'photograph travelling'* (Pink, 2007:133). The photograph (and objects) being transient and part of a wider archive around what constitutes family, and the changing nature of the use of technology, was explored by Steichen, (1955) in 'The Family of Man', Phu, Brown and Dewan, (2017) 'Family Camera Network' and Gloyn *et al.* (2018).

‘The Family of Man’ and ‘Family Camera Network’ both encouraged the submission of family photographs from around the world to be included in its databases and archive, allowing research into the further understanding of family. Gloyn *et al.* (2018) explored historical family archives in relation to objects, as far back as Roman times providing a contrast to Wang, Alasuttari, Aro's (2014) exploration of the development of technology, illustrating an interest throughout history of what objects travelled and were seen as important to a particular family. Lewis-Ellison (2016) suggests that there is still a long way in understanding digital and online recording of family objects and can be supported by making more digital artefacts and stories at home with the family and having open conversations across families (and schools) about how these are made.

Technology and aesthetics illustrate the changing nature of family photography, its curation, movement, and the way it is taken and stored ultimately raises questions on how it is accessed by, passed on and curated by future generations of the family.

1.4 Identity and self, connections, memory

Curating and organising photos and objects following the death of an adult family member can stimulate memory, support reflections on identity and ongoing connections. These themes were illustrated by Barthes (1980) in analysing a photograph of his late mother, taken of her aged 5 and her elder brother in the winter garden (a conservatory) in the family home, punctum supported him in identifying his mother in the photo and reflecting on her authentic self. The use of the photograph as a visual trigger point, stimulated his memory in recognising and connecting to a gesture of hers at that age, helping him to identify her through *‘looking for the truth of the face I have loved’* (Barthes, 1980:67). In exploring his connections with the winter garden photograph of his mother, Barthes (1980) may also have been working through this process in remembering his mother in different ways perhaps not just at the end, looking for her identity at a time when she wasn’t his mother. The process of using the photograph supported reconciling connections to his mother in finding her authentic self, giving space to reflect and move forward in his life; he wasn’t simply exploring his mother’s identity but in contrast, was in *‘mourning and anticipation of his own death’* (Hirsch, 1997:5). As Rose

(2010) suggested, looking at photographs with our mothers when children, supports our identity and acknowledgement of others within our family, in contrast undertaking such a task after a bereavement as we see with Barthes (1980), can be useful in understanding our identity, view and place in the world without the deceased.

In exploring a sense of self and identity within *'performances and theatrical frames'* (Goffman, 1959:124), Goffman (1974) likened our lives to existing in a theatre performance suggesting an adaptation of self or performance when interacting in various social situations. Social performance suggests that;

> *when the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society'* (and concludes that) *'the self, then as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented*
>
> (Goffman, 1959:45)

i.e. the self can be affected by each interaction or situation we are presented with or choose to participate in.

Wang, Alasuttari, Aro's (2014) research is an example of a frame and performance in which mothers used the platform Flickr adhering to an ethos, of the group around aesthetics, and were adapting their performance in interacting with the group, showing what they wanted others to see, and therefore altering their identity and self within that platform through the use of photographs. It is worthy of note here on the intended and actual meanings in photographs, in presenting photographs with the intention of a specific aesthetic or meaning, photographs have *'distinguishable levels of meaning; informational, symbolic and third meaning'* (Barthes,1977:52-53) with the third meaning likened to the *'familial'* (Hirsch, 1997:9) in that both can be subjective with their meanings being unique to the viewer.

After a death within a family three adjustments take place relating to self and identity;

> *External adjustments -how the death affects one's everyday functioning in the world, internal adjustments -how it affects one's sense of self and spiritual adjustments-how the death affects one's beliefs, values and assumptions about the world.*
>
> (Worden, 2003:32)

Goffman's (1974) frames, and Worden's (2003) adjustments, complement one another in providing a framework to support understandings of sense of self and connections to the

deceased, using *'strategies of identity preservation, to refer to the activities by which both the dying and the survivors keep certain identities intact and alive for the future',* undertaken in three ways *'solidifying identities, accumulating artefacts and distributing artefacts'* (Unruh, 1983:342). Choosing and using photographs and objects gives a framework in which to prompt reflections on self, identity and our relation to the deceased. Photographs also support reflections as it *'is revealing what is absent from the photograph as about what is present in it'* (Berger, 1967:20), giving additional space beyond photographs prompting interpretation, meaning and memory. Memories, meaning and connections individuals place on photographs is not *'unilinear at all, memory works radially, that is to say with an enormous number of associations all leading to the same event'* (Berger, 1967:59) also illustrated in *'memory text'* in that *'time rarely comes across as continuous or sequential'* (Kuhn, 2010:299).

Objects and photographs can prompt reflections on identity and self as well as connecting to the deceased, within a structure that can be used at any time to stimulate memory, but as with familial and third meaning, there may also be subjectivity when analysing photographs, and therefore our memories, how we read and connect to the objects and photographs therefore may change over time.

1.5 Death, grief, creative practices in using photographs and objects

Death as a disruptive and significant life event can highlight a need for space in which to reflect on experiences that are emotionally challenging and gain control, supported through interactions with photographs, objects, and creative practices;

> *disruption that dislodges a photograph from the space of the family may be due to death, migration, trauma, abandonment, destruction, or simply indifference – someone no longer thinks the photographs important enough to hold on to anymore.*
>
> (Phu, Brown and Dewan, 2017:149)

Individuals and the family may go through a range of emotions in their processing and reflecting on grief as *'it is a systemwide event and yet it is also a personal event for each individual in the family'* (Wedemeyer, 1986:338). Kubler-Ross (1969) in her research with dying patients, noted 5 Stages; denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance,

that individuals go through in dying or grieving, however *'there is a tendency for the novice to take the stages too literally'* (Worden, 2003:25) suggesting that individuals may experience the stages at different times, i.e. not necessarily in order as suggested, or may experience a variety of stages at once, similar to the theory of memory working *'unilinear and radially'* (Berger, 1967:59). After a disruptive event such as death can raise many feelings, and a need for *'adjustments internal, external and spiritual'* (Worden, 2003:32) having anchors or frames in which to understand grief and loss can support navigation through it. Understanding these variety of feelings and how these are characterised after a death could be considered as; *'mourning is commonly the reaction to the loss of a beloved person'* and *'melancholia is mentally characterized by a profoundly painful depression'* (Freud, 2005:203-204). Through loss and grief, having avenues of support in professional counselling and peer support groups, including those who may or may not have had similar life experiences, could benefit individuals in navigating and understanding grief (Parkes, 1998).

In navigation of grief and death, as well as maintaining ongoing connections to the deceased, adult loss could be explored through the use of creative practices, photographs and objects. Deger (2016:128) used *'thick photography (which)-sets things people and places in a relationship'* when working with Aboriginal Australians using images that were digitally manipulated reimagining family portraits using cultural symbols, the collaged images included both living and deceased relatives illustrating a connection to all family members. Similarly Wedemeyer (1986:339) after a bereavement worked with families using *'creative sculptures, using pictures from magazines, cotton, yarn, or other textural materials…others do paintings'* in representing connections, Unruh (1983:340) explored *'activities that encourage continued emotional attachment'* to the deceased through the keeping of artefacts. The research findings using creative practices were broadly similar in that creative acts and organising photographs and objects, gave focus for memories, connections to the family and the deceased and in navigating grief, with Unruh's (1983) research concluding that having artefacts of the deceased and interacting with them, supported memories and enabled individuals to have some control over the impact of the death on their lives;

> *this interactional process, in which survivors preserve the identities of the deceased, begins to shed light not on how survivors "work through" and dispense with lingering images of those who precede them in death, but how memories of the deceased thrive through social action…for these are the strategic actions of people trying to exercise some personal control over the impact of death on their personal histories.*
>
> (Unruh, 1983:349)

Hegarty (2016) and Samuel (2017) both found individuals more conversational when speaking about a photograph they took (or one they were familiar with) which could be used in updating research into the memories and impact on individuals following a death with objects and photographs. There is opportunity for further research in how adults interact with and organise family objects and photographs following the loss of a parent, within different cultural contexts, and the wider family, and in exploring potential similarities in the uses of creative practices, photographs and objects, from those who have researched into the loss of a child.

Processes that individuals go through when navigating child loss has been explored through the use of photography and objects (Riches and Dawson, 1998; Michelson *et al.*, 2013; Blood and Cacciatore, 2014; Harris and Edmonds, 2015). Riches and Dawson's (1998:133) *'memory hooks'* emphasized importance of photographs of the deceased within the home for self-reflection and to facilitate conversations about and to the deceased, highlighting how objects and photographs can help ongoing family connections and memories every day. The use of photography similarly illustrated that some families felt it important to have photographs of the deceased in order to *'pause the action'* (Michelson *et al.*, 2013:525) allowing a space to reflect on at any particular moment. Blood and Cacciatore's (2014) research findings suggested that encouraging connection and reflection on photographs of the deceased, helped wellbeing by building family stories and enhancing connections. Harris and Edmonds' (2015) re-photographed their deceased child's image to include them in the future presence of the family, similar to the research of thick photography by Deger (2016). Exploring parents in relation to child deaths as illustrated, was an imagining of life that could have been, in contrast to an adult death in having lived and shared family stories, photographs and objects. There is, therefore, an opportunity for future research opportunity in exploring family photographs and objects in creative ways for those who have specifically experienced adult loss. The benefits and strength in using creative methods, photographs and objects, after a death in family, supports individuals in having some control over the '*impact of death on their personal histories'* (Unruh, 1983:349) helping to *'see something in a different light'* (Gauntlett, 2007:20) as well as supporting conversations about the deceased (Hegarty, 2016; Samuel, 2017), and ultimately in wellbeing avoiding burnout and compassion fatigue (Kearney *et al.*, 2009).

Curating family archives, from a female perspective, following a death, Hocker (2010) explored connections to her own family photographs and objects after the deaths of many members of her family in a short period of time, questioning (as she does not have children in which to pass them to) what the purpose of keeping them is for, she notes, *'I realise that my*

feeling rests on gender assumptions that the women of the family 'should' have cared for all these pieces of reflected memory, I feel the accumulated weight all those female ancestors must have felt' (Hocker, 2010:865). The process that she went through, perhaps daunting at the time, allowed her to work through a process of understanding, remembering stories and affirming her identity within the family. It challenged her initial gender views on who should have been responsible for the organisation of the family artefacts, but ultimately as the title of her article suggests, as a woman, the curation of family photographs and objects was all down to her after deaths within her family. In re-curating her family album, artist Novak (2005) used similar creative processes, through photography, to reimagine her family memories perhaps resonant of changing the connections to family and '*impact of death on their personal histories'* (Unruh, 1983:349).

There is, therefore, an opportunity for further research into who leads the curation of objects and photographs, and the thought processes about what items are kept, discarded or reimagined following adult death. Hocker's (2010) research also illustrates, in the curation of family photographs and objects in life, perhaps with the use of technology, it is useful to have these in some kind of meaningful and accessible archive for future generations, as Novak's (2005) work suggested that just as curating in life, the photographs and objects could be re-worked to make something more meaningful to the individual, in navigating this emotionally challenging time.

1.6 Symbols, rituals and senses

Objects and photographs can be used as everyday symbols, in rituals and stimulation of senses in remembrance of deceased relatives. Ebenstein's (2018) research on art and death explored, through photographs, a community in Mexico and their use of saints of death where children and the wider family are encouraged to make their own symbols of the saints, to display in homes and communities. Ebenstein (2018) suggested that some cultures are being removed from death for many reasons, for example through not living with livestock (therefore not seeing the process of death for food) and our elderly relatives are living longer, we aren't taking about death in everyday life, it causing uncertainty and feelings of being overwhelmed when it

happens. Day's (2017) research into ancestor worship for unbelievers, in experiences of rituals of the non-religious, explored the social experiences that individuals had following a death that included; visiting graves, the telling of stories, feeling connected to places known only by the deceased, and the remembering of milestones. Day's (2017) research illustrated traditional gender roles of women being curators of objects, photographs and family memories and were those who undertook the social rituals in remembering a loved one, maintaining connections to the deceased. Rituals such as attending a funeral, can support individuals in;

> *a healthy resolution of grief' 'making a fact of the loss, the service can give people opportunity to express thoughts and feelings about the deceased, and be a reflection of the person, and it supports drawing on a social support network*
>
> (Worden, 2003:78-79)

Highlighting similarities in the use of symbols, rituals, and sharing ongoing social experiences across communities could be beneficial;

> *By comparing rituals, customs, and grieving processes related to death in diverse societies, people may become better equipped to put their own beliefs about death in perspective. This wider view could possibly eliminate some of the fear associated with the experience of death among people worldwide.*
>
> (Hilliker, 2006:246)

Photographs acting as memory or time markers could be used in rituals of reflection after a death (Berger, 1967; Riches and Dawson, 1998; Pink, 2007; Kearney *et al.*, 2009). Something physical in prompting memories and connections to the deceased, have been considered useful; *'photographs can provide an important prop both as an object of personal internal conversation with the deceased and as a vehicle for conversations between surviving relatives and others about the deceased'* (Riches and Dawson, 1998:124), and taking control of personal histories (Unruh, 1983).

In contrast to physical objects, connections to the deceased may occur in non-tangible ways, smelling a particular scent relating to the deceased, or experiencing a presence of the deceased in their everyday lives (Day, 2017). Experiences of the deceased being present without presence could be explored through *'spiritual adjustment'* that death *'can challenge one's fundamental life values and physiological beliefs…that are influenced by our families, peers, education and religion as well as life experiences'* (Worden, 2003:34). Connections with the deceased may come to the living through senses, and is dependent on many factors such as the relationship with the deceased (Fenwick and Fenwick, 2008);

> *in dreams…the experience was richer -there was more likely to be sensation of physical contact, hugs and cuddles for example. Experiences during the day tended to be less specific and more ambiguous and to involve strong feelings rather than physical contact. The response to the contact varied, although it was nearly always positive.*
>
> (Fenwick and Fenwick, 2008:94)

In the areas of rituals, symbols, senses and other coincidences, Day's (2017) research highlighted that in the field of ancestor worship and remembering in respect to objects, and photography, in particular, is an under-researched area. Crang (2003:494) suggested there is opportunity for further development of using methods within the field of visual ethnography *'methods often derided for being somehow soft, and 'touchy-feely' have in fact been rather limited in touching and feeling'* and concluded by suggesting a *'push further into the felt, touched and embodied constitution of knowledge'* (Crang, 2003:501). The use of photovoice and photo-elicitation could support further discussions around photographs in rituals and senses (Harper, 2012).

1.7 Death as Taboo: speaking of the dead

Death can be considered as taboo to talk about particularly as a highly emotionally challenging subject, also perhaps for the reasons suggested previously around social situations of not having livestock, therefore not being close to the process of death for food, and in not living with elderly family members, *'Death is the last great taboo; and the consequence of death, grief, is profoundly misunderstood…it is so frightening, even alien, for many of us that we cannot find the words to voice it'* (Samuel, 2017:XII). Across recent history there have been ebbs and flows on how we connect to and speak about death and dying, from the 60's there have been conversations that *'we should develop societies for dealing with the questions of death and dying, to encourage dialogue on this topic and help people to live less fearfully until they die'* (Kubler-Ross, 1969:268). In vocabulary we are still now tentative with using the word death and using phrases such as *'passed over, lost, or gone to a better place'* (Samuel, 2017, p. XII) or *'even contemporary social movements (e.g., Hospice) use terminology such as "end of life care" as opposed to "care of the dying," contributing to our death denying cultural identity'* (Hilliker, 2006, p. 254).

Ebenstein (2018) highlighted the use of creating symbols around death, to support conversations about death and dying within everyday interactions as well as other creative practices, such as writing through fictional and fact-based accounts or stories of dying, with non-ambiguous vocabulary (Lewis C.S, 1963; May, 2009; Barnes, 2011; Toolis, 2017) (notably all men).

Within the UK there would appear to be a movement towards greater interest and discussions around the topics of genealogy, memories, dying and death due to the growth of organisations such as Dying Matters, Good Grief Trust, Death Café's, and the increase of popularity in topic related programs such as 'My wonderful life', 'Long Lost Family', Cariad Lloyds 'Griefcast', Ricky Gervais 'After Life' Grayson Perry 'Rites of Passage' and as suggested with reference to BBC's 'Who do you think you are?' *'we are all inherited material'* (Lawler, 2008:31).

As Walter (1996:7) suggested *'Survivors typically want to talk about the deceased and to talk with others who knew him or her'* and as suggested throughout this chapter that photographs and objects have and can be used to support and prompt discussions and support future research. Death as Taboo or being too controversial a topic as Blackman's (2007) Hidden Ethnography, should not be a barrier to further research in potentially as '*Physical death is a shared experience for humans around the globe, in every society. Since death affects all of human society, it is worthy of examination'* (Hilliker, 2006:245).

There is space here for further research into why there appears to be a greater interest in organisations specifically around death and dying, programs around genealogy, memories, dying and death, and in opening up conversations around death and the deceased through the curation of objects and photographs.

1.8 Estrangement as loss

The loss of relationships due to estrangement within the family could bring similar emotionally challenging and disruptive moments and as if someone had died, having similar emotions; *'grief is the emotional reaction to a loss, in this case, to death'* (Samuel, 2017:XVII). Estrangement within families was the focus of two studies, in understanding the social

implications of estrangement from the point of view of parents (Agllias, 2013) and adult children (Scharp and Thomas, 2016). The research highlighted that the emotions that came with estrangement felt similar to when someone had died and that any *'unresolved estrangement could contribute to a number of negative long-term consequences'* (Agllias, 2013:310). There was a notion of perceived social stigma attached to family estrangement in reference to experiences of the mother, where;

> *attachment related triggers, such as family photographs and videos were particularly painful for some……as (they) tended to highlight the absence of the estranged children and their families*
>
> (Agllias, 2013:312)

outcomes being particularly painful is reminiscent of;

> *absence also inflects the viewing of photographs, with photos looked at more when the people pictured were far away….as well as togetherness, photos are taken to remind us of our spatial absence.*
>
> (Rose, 2010: 46:47)

When we are away from family, their absence is compounded through consistent looking of photographs, and with Agllias's (2013) research in experiencing an estrangement and having photographs being painful, this could be delicate to revisit or speak about. Death as a disruptive and significant life event within experiences of estrangement, individuals may also not have photographs or objects from the person to which they are estranged. Estrangement can equally have many negative consequences, and following a death, feelings may or may not change;

> *The point is not that actions or qualities viewed as negative when the deceased was alive are positively redefined. Rather, the negative provides additional evidence for an identity which -good or bad-is part of the survivor's memory. Thoughts about negative qualities may spark reminiscences which keep the survivor and deceased emotionally connected*
>
> (Unruh, 1983:346)

In periods of estrangement there maybe reconciliation as explored by Koggel, (2017) in her feelings of reconciliation with her mother who was dying, and comparing them to the feelings she had when a close friend died and concluded *'I was not at ease in these ways with my mother'* (Koggel, 2017:194), and then discussed that her connection to her mother at the time of dying, the roles that changed to what they were previously, needed to change; *'Travelling to her "world" meant that loving her necessitated being able to love and care for her failing and dying body'* (Koggel, 2017:196). In situations of estrangement, individuals still experienced senses that may come to the living of connecting with the dying;

> *there are also examples of relationships in which the two people hadn't seemed particularly close or had been estranged, and the contact seemed to suggest that the dying person was trying to affect a reconciliation.*
>
> (Fenwick and Fenwick, 2008:94)

As explored, negative consequences can come through unresolved estrangement (Agllias, 2013) so whether there is reconciliation, or not, as well as being able to access support systems, *'researchers and clinicians should learn more about estrangement experiences and the coping mechanisms that might help estranged adult children live healthier lives'* (Scharp and Thomas, 2016:698). There is also scope for further research into the experiences who are firstly estranged, then experience a death and how photographs, objects and memories could support the navigation of grief, connection and identity supporting wellbeing, after this second great impact on their history (Unruh, 1983).

1.9 Visual ethnography, the everyday, auto/ethnography, reflexivity and reflection

The following section explores literature around how visual ethnography, autoethnography, reflexivity and reflection in the everyday, can be used and its importance on exploring a vast array of topics and in particular on the subject of death, loss, and domestic archives.

Visual ethnography can be an important tool to support reflection and that *'using photography is about self-discovery as well as our community'* (Harper, 2012:7) similarly to when mothers looked at family photographs with their children, to visually explore their social connections to other family members (Rose, 2010). It is a reminder that *'sociologists should study documentary photographers, to remind themselves that it (sociology) begins with the observations of social life'* (Harper, 2012:37) and as also illustrated through a Hobo Project travelling with railroad workers in America (including the taking of photographs), to be fully immersed in research. In immersing oneself in ethnographic research, it is *'naive to deny the self an active and situated place in the field'* (Coffey, 1999:37), requiring reflexivity to explore interactions of self within a field. In her community garden project, Pink (2007) used

reflexivity throughout the project, when a participant started to take photos of her in the community garden, she illustrated that we are;

> *people who actively use photography to explore, construct and understand other people's experiences and worlds…we can learn much by attending to how other people use photography to insert us into their categories, project and agendas*
>
> (Pink, 2007:82)

Photographs provided a rounded view and greater understanding of that particular research project, highlighting the cycle of reflexivity, and throughout;

> *have to contemplate the differences between their own and academic ways of ordering reality and the orders by which local people construct their worlds and histories visually.*
>
> (Pink, 2007:129)

In ethnographic study *'doing life story research is also personal, interactional, emotional…that can have implications for the self of the researcher, as well as the researched'* (Plummer, 2001:213), and similarly *'a field, a people and a self are crafted through personal engagements and interactions among and between researcher and researched'* (Coffey, 1999:23). The subject area may relate to the society the researcher is within, inevitably being something of interest and personal, and as Blackman (2007) suggested, that potentially emotive ethnographic research (such as death) need not be shied away from.

Visual methods in ethnographic research has *'importance for legacy of memory, oral history and heartfelt beliefs'* (Spencer, 2011:109) and in using these in the field of family research, is moving focus into an exploration of the domestic;

> *an increasing amount of fieldwork is being carried out inside the domestic interior…it creates new practical and ethical dilemmas, things that may not normally be the object of public scrutiny. At the same time, it offers great opportunities to create data archives that reveal the detail of everyday experience and practice and encourage people to use their homes as a material and sensory prompt through which to talk about their self-identities and experiences.*
>
> (Pink, 2007:28)

There is a movement of a '*quickly emerging a sub-discipline of visual sociology'* as a *'third sociology; what really occurs in human society, at the level between structures and actions'* (Sztompka, 2008:2). Pritz (2011) and Plowman and Stevenson (2012) as explored earlier in the chapter on their research of the everyday the mundane, using camera phones as a recording device for children's activities at home throughout the day capturing the domestic, the

mundane, the everyday within a visual frame falls *'between structures and actions'* (Sztompka, 2008:2).

Photographs and objects that remain following a family members death were suggested as the mundane, and every day as explained further;

> *Survivors are left with a plethora of images, thoughts, and memories. Some exceptional feats or characteristics of the deceased may live on in the minds of survivors, but much of what remains is ordinary and mundane.*
>
> (Unruh, 1983:345)

Following a death we are left with the ordinary, the everyday in navigating the plethora of photographs, objects, thoughts and memories, in the *'third sociology'* (Sztompka, 2008:2), could be facilitated by using multi-methods of research to support understanding of this vast and complex area;

> *Attempts to understand the complexities of every-day life begin with comprehensive modelling of how time, space, and power interact to provide the infrastructure for lived experience in the everyday, together with methods that will enable researchers to encompass the (dis)order that makes up experiences recognizable as distinct events. Methodologically, quantitative and qualitative studies alike tend to seek precise characterizations of everyday life by pinpointing more and more details that have heretofore been ignored.*
>
> (Kalekin-Fishman, 2013:724)

In having photographs, objects and symbols within the home can act as time, memory and sensory prompts for those who remain, after a death, facilitating further opportunity for exploration around the use of objects and photographs in the everyday (Riches and Dawson, 1998; Pink, 2007; Ebenstein, 2018). The importance of using photographs and objects as *'documents of life'* (Plummer, 2001:17), in life stories (self or others) was explored further;

> *more and more, we need this critical photographs work to be included with life stories. We need a sense along with Barthes, that photographs do not simply call up the past or provide routes into memory; they are themselves their own invested images that can be used to invent their stories*
>
> (Plummer, 2001:66)

As explored earlier in the chapter in not being able to exclude the self as part of the research (Coffey, 1999), researcher involvement and impact on the field can be reflected upon, and being close to or having personal experience in a field, can benefit from the inclusion of the voice of the self through autoethnography. In the richness of exploring the everyday *'between*

structures and actions' (Sztompka, 2008:2) there is importance to *'press on with the auto-ethnographic project in order to destabilize and redraw the boundaries between a professional's work and their life, creating space for dialogue with previously silenced others'* (Denshire, 2014:845). As Denshire (2014) explored here, there is benefit in opening the self into research as there may be pertinent topics that may not have had a voice previously *'autoethnography is a mode of self-reflective or introspective writing that connects personal autobiography and experience with broader social, cultural meanings and contexts'*(Drabble and Leader, 2019:6). In support, using the self as well as the researched *'autoethnographies bridge the gap between the remembered past, the fleeting now, and the ephemeral hereafter'* (Herrmann, 2014:337) with the use of autoethnography supporting reflections to topics such as the everyday, exploring self in relation to others and contexts to wider society.

1.10 Conclusion reflection

Photographs, objects, and creative practices, and their use navigating and reflecting on the impact of a death, through connections to the deceased, self and memory have been illustrated in the literature presented. There is an opportunity of further multi-method research into how photographs and objects are used after the death of an adult in the everyday, and who leads on this curation in what is kept, discarded or reimagined. Further exploration into estrangement as a loss, death after an estrangement, in opening up these conversations, could support the navigation of these complex, emotive and often taboo topics.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore personal and participants family photographs and objects following the death of a family member. Participants were sourced from existing networks, either through face to face meetings or via 'shout outs' on social media platforms such as Facebook. Deemed appropriate due to the sensitive context, this auto/ethnographic research was conducted using qualitative methods through voice recordings, and visual research methods through documentary photographs in one to one interview, archival photographs and domestic objects, and analysed with using a combination of the principles of grounded theory and thematic analysis. The subject of death is often considered taboo and using a variety of approaches supported a space in which participants and personal felt comfortable in sharing related experiences.

2.2 Conducting Research: practicalities, recruitment and interviews

Sample group: 11 Participants were interviewed (10 female / 1 male) plus 1 self-interview
Sample Location: Kent various locations

Age ranges: 30 years to 81 Years
30-39 years = 1 participant
40-49 years = 3 participants
50-59 years = 4 participants

60-69 years = 2 participants
80 years plus =1 participant

The sample group consisted of 11 participants over the age of 24 years who had experienced a death within their family over 12 months before interview. The decision to concentrate the sample to those specifications for the research project, was more in line with my timeline in which I had experienced deaths within my family (as an adult), so was a natural basis for comparison, it was also conducted mindful of the stages of grief as noted by Kubler-Ross (1969). Participants were recruited from existing networks, either through serendipitous conversations about the research focus or 'shout outs' on social media platforms.

Participants aged from 30-81 Years old, 10 women (in addition to me), and 1-man from a variety of geographical locations across Kent from Medway to Thanet, with the greatest cluster of 9 Participants, living in the area of Medway, as expected given the connections to existing networks. The majority of participants are friends who knew about my research interests and were keen to be involved with one participant whom I met following attendance at a Death Café; all participants were recruited initially through face to face conversations.

Following the initial recruitment, each participant was sent a participant information sheet and consent form (appendix 1), which detailed the background to the research, the requirements of participation; the four key points being:

- Have had the death of an adult within your family at a time of being an adult yourself (and over 12 months ago)
- Have artefacts/objects belonging to the deceased
- Have family photographs (digital and hard copy) that you are willing to talk about and will be used in the final research outcomes
- Be comfortable and willing to talk about these potentially sensitive subjects

The participant information sheet provided a second stage in which to check suitability for involvement in the research. There were a greater number of potential participants expressing interest in the research; however, some reduction in these numbers was anticipated, and reasons

given were; other time commitments, feelings that they did not fit the brief, or simply it wasn't the right time for them to be involved.

Given the various locations around Kent, it was comfortable with travel to undertake two, one-hour interviews in any one day, with one interview taking place after a mild snowfall, and train travel was needed. The interviews took place at participants homes, to ensure they felt as comfortable as they could discussing things of a sensitive nature in a supportive and familiar space, this also negated the need to transport objects and photographs for the interview and having them readily available. I also wanted to ensure that the photos taken during interviews were also in keeping with the domestic nature of the research. The interviews took place in three months, from December 2018 to February 2019 at convenient times and dates to both participants and me, there was no set pattern to the timings of the interviews and was down to participant personal commitments. Interviews took place after work, during the day in the week, and on occasions with other family members or friends within the home.

I wrote key prompts for myself on the general practicalities of the research prior to the interviews (appendix 2), and immediately after and during the transcription process, completed a written journal of reflections, and on occasion a photo journal, on what initially struck me about the interview and anything that I may need to implement for the next. Two participants requested an additional short explanation of the research and their context within it following receipt of the initial briefing, and before we met for the interview.

The one-hour interviews at participants homes were recorded via I-phone, with photographs taken at salient points. The composition of the photographs I took, happened organically, I only had one key consideration of wanting to keep the anonymity of the participants, hence where participants were often keen to show, or present to me particular items, (as illustrations 13,14,15) or pointing to specific salient sections of photographs, only their hands are depicted. In other instances where the item was worn, such as earrings, again only a close up of the participant was used to retain anonymity. Re-photographing participant and my personal photos and objects enriched the mutli-method collection of data.

Conversations centered around memories and reflections told through objects, physical domestic items, as well as paper documents and photographs emphasizing that participants were the curator of their own hour, in which they could discuss as little or as much as they wanted about their deceased family member.

In each interview recording, I started the conversation by welcoming the participant to introduce themselves and brought the conversation to a close at the end of the recording to give structure in this open conversation, in most cases the objects and photographs presented after this gave participants a prompt in which to continue the conversation. Throughout the interview, if it became apparent through silence or visible emotion that time was needed for a moment of off-recording reflection, I would stop the recording.

Participants had brought to the table (literally in all instances as conversations took place around a coffee or dining table) a variety of photographs and objects either gifted to them by their family member or after their death when organizing the deceased belongings. Objects included jewellery, diaries, journals, published books, memoirs, written reflections, clothing, orders of service, kitchen utensils, symbolic objects such as candle holders and wooden figures, clocks, toys, objects made by the deceased, dishes, canes, tobacco tins, replica miniature cannon, and sewing boxes. Photos were presented either in hard copy, loose or in albums, in frames, or on laptops, the visual and aural also included short films and sound recordings.

The total time taken for interviews was just over 12 hours (including interviewing myself as part of the autoethnographic element to the research), there was additional time around this for emails, one to one conversations and telephone conversations for each participant. In line with the participant information sheet and ethics of the project, a follow-up email was sent to each participant one week after the scheduled interview to check in with them for a light touch chat and signposting to sources of support; all participants stated it was appreciated, however not required. Transcriptions were typed by me amounting to an average of three to four hours per transcript (therefore around 50 hours in total), before all participants receiving a copy of their typed transcription, I ensured that I had the correct spellings of names, places, and other items. Once this initial check was made and the transcription sent, participants could then still comment further on any adjustments to the script that they wanted to make, the transcript was then anonymized imported to and analysed using analytic software NVivo. Thematic analysis was undertaken through NVivo with broad emerging themes categorized in stage one; a second stage analysis was undertaken to refine the emergent themes further.

Following the initial interviews, I asked participants if they would like to have a follow-up meeting to discuss any further reflections on the interview, and ethically to see how they were after, in May 2019 I met with two participants, with a further two sending me written further reflections or photos digitally. The participants I met noted that in sharing memories at the

interview, had further reflections one on their own legacy of leaving photographs and objects to family, and one other expressing that the interview had encouraged them to start a creative project relating to their deceased family member. All participants commented the initial interview was beneficial to them and reiterated by four in the follow-up contact.

As part of the practice research element within this project, a sample of three photographs from the interviews and one from my archive were exhibited at Canterbury Christ Church University as part of the Fusion19 Exhibition August-September 2019 including the stories of participants corresponding stories. Fusion19 generated and prompted several discussions around a variety of topics relating to death, family, photographs and memory.

The choice of photos for the inclusion for the Fusion19 exhibition was supported by my earlier exhibition of 10 photographs in Medway Open Studios (MOSAF) July 2019, with visitors reflecting on their family memories as seen in appendix 3. Also, as part of my attendance on a course at The Photographers Gallery (TPG) in 2018, I shared curated archival photographs for peer critique, both practices at MOSAF and TPG supported my decisions in the final photographs for inclusion within this thesis. This thesis is also accompanied by a photobook, illustrating more of the documentary and archival photographs.

2.3 Importance of methodology

The use of methodology theory and mixed methods within this project were appropriate and its title sufficiently broad in providing a supportive and encouraging space in which to explore an emotionally heavy subject. A framework of autoethnographic and ethnographic research (study of self and social groups) is at the forefront of the project, the thesis title being born out of my own experiences inevitably has elements of self, and in understanding and constructing meaning in my life, can't separate it from the meaning-making from the lives of others (Merrill and West, 2009).

Reflexivity was an essential process throughout the project as participant-researcher, to consistently check researcher positionality, in understanding how closeness to the subject and participants could potentially affect the research. In being participant-researcher although

supported my understanding of the subject, I needed to be mindful in allowing critical reflection (Davis, 1998). Using peer critique at the initial stages of the research on my archival photographs and early development of the project, supported the refinement of the research focus.

As a photographer, I wanted the research to be conducted within visual research to support the richness of exploration of the topic, and to encourage discussion through photo-elicitation (Harper, 2010), hence the title 'exploration of objects and photographs', and in using photography to record the interviews, including photographing my own practice. Pink (2007) and Rose (2017) expressed the importance of learning of others and self through photographs in visual research to enable a specific time to be captured for further reflection, in particular within domestic settings as access to it is still a relatively unexplored area. My photography practice has, for many years, had an autoethnographic and social commentary element to it, my photographs encouraging further discussion. The use of qualitative methods such as interviews supported by objects and photographs in domestic settings was important, as participants appeared more comfortable, open and honest, and may have shared more within their known environment due to these reasons.

The analysis of text transcriptions was influenced by grounded theory and thematic analysis using a mix of methodical processes such as *'familiarisation, searching for themes, refining coding and reviewing themes'* (Braun and Clarke, 2013:202). Using elements from these processes enabled a bottom-up approach, being guided by participants stories and memories through emergent themes, within a rigorous framework, then refining themes further during a second analysis.

Using theoretical frameworks and methodology as discussed above, gives rigour, consistent approaches to analysis and conduct with integrity supporting cross exploration within a professional framework, the use of visuals provides a richness to the written elements of the research.

2.4 Methodology: reflection and key findings

This section reflects on and critiques the methods chosen for this research, highlighting key findings and suggestions for the future. My experiences of organising, documenting and revisiting objects and photographs relating to my deceased family members, spurred my interest in how others may approach this too. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the data was captured through practical methods such as interviews, and documentary, commentary or *'instances of truth'* (Emerling, 2012:82) photos, as well as having a basis for support through established and rigorous methodological processes.

In practical terms it was beneficial in having a group already interested in the research, with only one participant whom I met externally to my existing networks, it supported the timely recruitment and interview completion within the time scale available in the parameters of the master's study. A second stage of having a participant information sheet allowed a further check for participation, and participants could opt out of the project at any time. At the beginning of the recruitment in relation to reflexivity and my role as researcher, I wondered if the ease of recruitment through friends was that participants felt more comfortable speaking to a friend, or was it that being a woman (in a perceived traditional gender role of nurturing and supporting) had influenced their decision to be involved?

The total of 11 participants for this research project allowed for attentive one-to-one interviews and sufficient time for typing each transcription. The demographics of the sample was age clustered around 40-69 years and predominantly white women. There is an opportunity for future research to interview different age ranges, men, and interviewing in small groups, if the sample group was larger for example 30 more, this would be a substantial amount of time for one researcher, however moving onto a longer timescale within a part-time PhD for example, would support this. There is also an opportunity then to move into broader sample groups outside of immediate existing networks, interviewing more men, and across different cultures.

The use of interviews in participants homes reflected traditional methods within ethnographic research in obtaining stories and reflections. It supported participants ease of speaking about the subject, as well as enabling participants to bring other items that they may have wanted to share, but not included in their original sample. Through open participant-led organic nature of the interview and location, participants were able to discuss through a variety of objects and photographs, all through the use of methods similar to photo-elicitation (Harper, 2010).

Participants welcomed me into their home and very keen to present their photographs and objects, and from their initial selection of what they wanted to discuss, could then connect to other items within their home in continuing reflections. In just over half of the interviews, participants took me to the exact location in the house where their object or photograph was kept, which was different from where the interview took place. It allowed me to see actually where and how these objects and photographs were stored, presented and used in everyday life. There were instances in interviews where conversations did flow away from the initial sample of objects and photographs; however, this was to be expected given my friend relationship with participants. The place for interviews supported an environment in which to discuss the subject; however, for future studies, the interview format is open to be undertaken in different settings.

Throughout the interviews, I took photographs of what photos and objects were presented to capture, explore and comment on what was observed, to include within an exhibition, photobook, to also enhance the illustration and visualization from the thesis text, as well as re-photographing objects and hard copies of participant's photo's to enrich data collection, and supporting further reflections after the event, as suggested by Pink (2007).

With the inclusion of the camera in the interview, participants often showed their objects and photographs direct to camera, which gave space between myself and participant, I wondered if this way of presenting would have been enacted had I not have had the camera? The photographs did, however, support moments that may not have been observed in its entirety during the interview, for example through touch, this allowed for a more rounded analysis side by side with the written transcripts. Taking photographs during the interviews, was reminiscent of how I had navigated through my family memories, helping me understand how I had used objects and photographs in line with others, it, therefore, seemed second nature for me to work in this visual way. Taking photographs in the interviews did require a balance of researcher, interviewer, photographer, and note-taker, however, the framework of the interview being open and organic, supported an attentive and sensitive approach to dialogue between researcher and participant particularly needed in this subject matter. The importance of visual research is also explored in line with theory in the literature chapter.

As participant's presenting to the camera, interviews started with an introduction of themselves to the I-phone which was recording throughout the interview, the device was kept out of the immediate space in which conversations were taking place, to support a relaxed environment

further, as well as for practical reasons of having the device connected to a power supply. The 1-hour recording enabled consistency across each participant, having an open conversation with no set questions supported participants in sharing what they wished within the parameters of the research, some often speaking not only of a specific family member but touched on others. I didn't offer much comment throughout the interviews; however, did participate where necessary, affirming or using active listening to clarify what participants had said, and using non-verbal body language such as nodding.

All participants were comfortable with discussing their family memories, appreciated and commented on, the therapeutic nature of the process, with one participant saying that following the interview it was the 'best night sleep they had had in ages', illustrating the supportive nature of this process.

The core of the thesis being autoethnographic, i.e. my personal experiences and exploration of objects and photographs after a death, I wanted to hold space (Davis, 1998) for myself to be interviewed, just as I had done with my participants. Interviewing myself took the same format as the participant interviews, however as part of my practice I already had photographs of my family objects and family archive photographs, and knew what memories I intended to share, therefore didn't take photos throughout my interview. As researcher-participant it did allow me to have insight and empathy into the subject matter, however meant that I had experiences, ideas, and opinions on the subject, again highlighting the need for self-reflection and reflexivity, and acknowledgement of any potential bias.

Undertaking the interviews and completing a reflective journal, alongside transcribing the data, and reflecting my memories, means I have been embedded in and attentive to the research data. Being open and reflexive throughout the research supported me in identifying any needed changes required for further interviews and from one stage of the research to the next. Transcribing interviews myself, meant allocated hours needed to be included in the study for transcription, manageable with the smaller numbers; however, for future larger studies would consider outsourcing this task.

In addition to the practical use of photographs and objects, it quickly became apparent that it was the stories told through the physical objects and photographs that were equally important. On reflection, this became core in my decision to ensure that participant stories were included in this thesis, supported by the photographs both archival and from the context in which they

were shared at interview; enabling readers to feel and experience what participants did through their own words.

In line with ethics for the research, all participants received a follow-up email a week after the interview for reasons of wellbeing and signposting them to places of further support. All participants stated how pleased they were to be involved and how it was nice to have that time to reflect as they hadn't done so before. I was conscious that my memories of participants were in that moment of time at the interview, I, therefore, offered to meet again with all participants as explored earlier in the chapter. The following sums up how I felt at the time;

> *whereas the ethnographer moved on, temporally, spatially and developmentally, the people he or she studied are presented as if suspended in an unchanging and virtually timeless state*
>
> (Coffey, 1999:193)

Exploring the thesis title with participants through their photographs, objects, stories and memories, my reflections, and in-depth connection to the data enabled a timely first stage analysis of broad themes, then a second stage of refining as per the stages of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

The intention here is to indicate the key themes that arose from the interviews and subsequent analysis of transcripts and photographs, to provide an awareness of what will be presented, analysed and critiqued in the chapters that follow. It is worthy of note here within this ethnographic and autoethnographic research that themes are not intended to be universally applied to a wider population and that all experiences and examples included are *'unique to a single person'* (Davis, 1998:207).

Chapter 3: Curation of family photographs and objects

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter we look firstly at the traditional role of females within the family, touching on the feminist movement, and in the curation of family photographs and objects, including photo aesthetics in re-presenting the family image and story. There is consideration of the legacy of this role passing to daughters, including discussions on those without children, all of which will explore an understanding of who takes on the responsibility of presenting and curating the family image through photographs and organisation of objects.

We then look at the commitments of females in collating family memories through photographs and objects, supported by such texts from Hirsch (1997) and Rose (2010) who wrote about the family image, in relation to their experiences and reflections of their own family photographs and being the female curator of family possessions after a family death. With traditional female roles within the family, presenting women as key curators of family photographs throughout family life, and the role of the female curator being one of the dominant themes in my research findings, it seems prudent to include discussion on who takes on this role of curator of photographs and objects after a death.

Fractures in families due to divorce and estrangement is included, to introduce the themes, which are considered in more depth in the estrangement chapter. Divorce and estrangement feature as a theme in my research participants, as well as my personal experiences, it is useful to present this balance of view, of those who perhaps do not have family photographs and objects for these reasons. In reflection, there is a discussion on men as curators of family objects and photographs after a death, which leads onto the chapter reflection.

3.2 Traditional female roles in curating the family archive

In providing a view of what the traditional roles of women and the change through the feminist movement encompassed, Davis (1998) suggested it pathed the way for the empowerment of women in understanding and exploring ways of thinking within the patriarch, reinventing not only self but a way of changing many elements within their lives, including changing subtleties in social and family structures. In exploring this concept further;

> *the later women's liberation movements of the 1970s are perhaps better known for attempting to make visible and to challenge the structures, practices and values of male authority that defined and regulated both the public and private sphere'....'they were well aware that the laws in which they were challenging were only one part of the problem, the laws themselves were supportive of and supported by a wide range of more informal customs and conventions and values positioning men and women at opposite ends of the possible behaviours and personality traits.*
>
> (Jones, Bradbury and Le Boutillier, 2011:211)

It is important to note how the feminist movement can to act as a pointer to highlight the empowerment of women in reinventing not just themselves, but being at the core of the family, making and having their family image and possessions as reflections of themselves, in and outside of the family as seen in Wang, Alasuttari, Aro's (2014) research into family photo aesthetics on Flickr.

Curation of family photographs and the family image and its importance, has traditionally more likely to have been the role of the mother, as suggested by such writers as Gloyn *et al.* (2018); Hirsch (1997); Janning and Scalise (2015) Kuhn (1995); Rose (2010); Zussman (2006); Durrant *et al.* (2009). Up to, and throughout the feminist movement and as Jones, Bradbury and Le Boutillier (2011) note in the curation of family photographs, objects and image may still have traditionally been thought of as a female role or personality trait. The curation of the family image may have also been influenced by situation as women were predominantly within the home until such liberation in the 1970's as suggested by Jones, Bradbury and Le Boutillier (2011), with other family members becoming more involved in photographing the family as we have seen in the examples from Pritz's (2011) research into camera phone photo's with Norwegian young people.

In the literature chapter Zussman (2006) and Rose (2010) discussed the ritual that mothers go through with their children in looking through family photographs, illustrating and identifying

family members, building a sense of family connection and identity. In exploring mothers as keepers of *'familial language'* (Hirsch, 1997:214) through photographs and stories having space for reflection, Kuhn (1995) used personal examples in analysing family photographs in the example of herself in the coronation dress and similarly Hirsch's (1997) example of herself and her son Oliver. Janning and Scalise's (2015) research indicated that although younger fathers would take photographs of children, it would still be mothers who instigated the taking of photos and therefore curating the family image, this is also evident with Olivia and Sally's examples illustrated further on in the chapter.

From early in our lives, mothers, as Rose (2010) suggested, would sit with their children in identifying family members through photographs. A study of a group of Japanese children, noted that *'children of mothers with a secure attachment status were significantly more positive in their photo reactions'* (Behrens and Umemura, 2013:289), indicating mothers are dominant in keeping family photographs and objects laying a foundation in forging connections to the wider family unit, supporting children getting to know whom other people in their family are, curating what we see and equally what we don't see, and deciding on the method in which it is presented.

Nikki;

Evident in my personal experience mothers and other females within the family, leading the curation of photographs, both my grandparents were keen on taking photographs. However, it was nan who curated our family albums and wrote the names of people depicted and the event dates on the back of the printed photographs. Following the deaths of both my grandparents, it was my mum and I who sat together as part of our creative response, and collected any loose photographs found in a box in their home, and put them within a larger album for the family, here's mum going through the album, stopping at the section of photographs of my aunt, as illustrated by the snapshot I took:

(3) Nikki: with mum organising family photographs

> When curating photographs with my mum, we spoke of the memories that they evoked, piecing together unfamiliar information from the notes that nan had written on the back of the photograph. We put the photographs together in a logical order of chronology, and family groupings that felt right at the time. There were a number of photographs of people that we simply did not know and decided to put these at the end of this newly assembled album, in effect changing the narrative of the photographs into something else, throughout always discussing who they could potentially be, by who they resembled the most in our family. It became important for mum and me to have this discussion, stimulated by the curating process, giving meaning to the process as suggested by Rosenberg (2009), of what we did know, and also in this case the information that we did not. The importance of family narrative, creating and exploring it will be considered in more detail later in this chapter, and in the chapter keeping photographs, objects and using creativity.

Mothers traditionally being seen as curator of family photographs and objects throughout life, may affect what is left behind following a death and the curated image of the family that this reflects. The research sample, and illustrated in photo (3) above, suggests that females within the family also curate photographs and objects after a family death. Reflected in my experience and that of research participant Beth who illustrates here when, following the death of her father, her mother organised his belongings;

Beth;

yes, I know things like the camera he had a Leica and stuff, you know my Mum gave it to, gave it to him, you know I suppose that's sort of that gender stereotyping was very much like that, he had another camera which I think my younger Sister got because she was quite the photographer, I think as my Mum got older she was much more sort of liberal in her old age, but I think growing up in the '50s is a different sort of, different time frame isn't it and girls where girls, and boys you know.

Illustrating traditional gender views of the roles of men and women. Beth goes on to say that following the subsequent death of her mother, she took on the role in curating her belongings, and the hard choices of what to keep;

Beth;

My mother died relatively recently, and I had to clear the house out, I was put in that position where, there's 4 of us, but we had to you know, really decide who is going to have what. You have to make some very hard choices really on what you are actually going to put in a skip, and send to the charity shop, what you are going to keep, so I have a whole house full of things that I do actually remember her by.

Helen also discusses, how it was her, her mum and sister who organised their dad's belongings after his death;

Helen;

I find since Dad's Death, Dad's come into mind a lot, his passions and his commitments, up in the loft I've got papers and papers and papers, letters and letters and letters and letters, that Mum and I and (sister) went through everything, you know, I've got boxes of stuff and letters from his work life.

In the example from Beth, we see how her mother was curating and organising the family stories, with Helen illustrating that it was a collective of the women in her family who were involved in or led the curation of family photographs and objects following a death within the family. Research and writings behind the suggestions to why we curate objects and photographs after a death is discussed in further chapters, now to follow, we see the roles of the mother within the family in the curation of the family image and aesthetics of the everyday.

3.3 Family image, aesthetics and the everyday

When curating family memories and photographs, mothers may wish, through construction of an aesthetically pleasing photograph, to illustrate the family as one harmonious unit as we have seen in such research as family photo aesthetics on Flickr Wang, Alasuttari, Aro (2014) and Gloyn *et al.* (2018), in their exploration of traditional items kept within the family. Hirsch (1997) suggested with mothers passing the curation of photographs to their daughters, potential family norms such as aesthetic continue through the curating. Individual family photographs and object curation may not give a full picture of family life, just one that is aesthetically pleasing of key family moments and at the influence of one person's point of view. All family moments may not be explicitly represented in an album, as Rose's (2010) research suggested that her interviewees would have liked to have had photographs depicting all family life and not just key family events that were considered aesthetically pleasing. The aesthetics of the family image, as Rose's (2010) research suggested was that individuals may have wanted to see the everyday photographs, the mundane, the other acts that made up the family, not necessarily with the family depicted at their best at a wedding for example (Pink, 2007; Sztompka, 2008). Aesthetics of the family image as Wang, Alasuttari, Aro (2014) suggested, concentrated on a pleasing view of a photograph for a particularly special occasion (i.e. a Birthday), however as Chalfen (1987) in snapshot photographs and participant Sally recalled, there is an emergent theme here of the aesthetics of the everyday;

> *Sally;*
>
> *Mum used to always write on the back of photos…..my Dad was a really good photographer, and my Mum loved taking photos…they were always terrible photographs, she would always put her finger in front of the (lens), but she would get one of those like little you know, crappy cameras and just constantly taking photographs but they were always terrible as in they were wonky, she didn't get people in, but I loved her for that so, they were just brilliant like she loved capturing that, especially of the family.*

As illustrated in this example from Sally's perspective recollecting the memories of her mother taking family photographs (for a hard copy album), it did not matter that the photo had been taken '*wonky'* or that "*she didn't get people in*', Sally '*loved her for it*'. Sally's example gives insight into of her construct of aesthetics of a photograph in the everyday that her mother captured, as her father was *'a really good photographer'* he would perhaps capture more aesthetically pleasing photographs*,* in looking at the images her mother took, really gave space

for her to reflect on her mother's personality, who she was and affirming the reasons why she loved her.

The example from Sally is a good illustration in contrast to the work of Wang, Alasuttari, Aro (2014) who suggested that families were not inclined to share photographs online that weren't aesthetically pleasing, Sally's view, i.e. from the view of being the child, wasn't concerned about how her mother took the photographs and what was depicted, but more importantly was that she had taken them.

> *Nikki;*
>
> In my personal experience as a photographer I take photos with an aesthetically pleasing edge to them; however, I am mindful that within my family archive of photographs, some of the photographs I treasure the most are out of focus and *'wonky'*, but I love them for who and what is depicted in them.

It could, therefore, be suggested that we like to see photos from the past curated (and taken) by our mothers not necessarily being perfect. It is worthy of noting here about the work of Goffman (1959) as suggested in the literature chapter, just as people have an element of public and private selves, this links to photograph aesthetics in appear that public; being shared with the world, e.g. online Wang, Alasuttari, Aro (2014) and in private for the family collection only, i.e. those perhaps not as aesthetically pleasing; the aesthetics of the everyday.

Mary also spoke of her mother's interest in the everyday aesthetic specifically about her home and work surroundings, following discussions about how the garden in Mary's family (mothers) home is still well maintained after her death:

> *Mary;*
>
> *it was really, really, important, it was even in business she always thought that your surroundings were really, really, important, if you cared about your surroundings, then people who worked with her would care about the surroundings and take more pride in what they did, so, surroundings were really important…. so, for her it was really important they had nice things, not necessarily expensive things but well cared for things or maintained plants here and there, flowers, you know.*

Mary's example illustrated a connection to Hirsch (1997) of the passing down of curation and aesthetics from mother to daughter in maintaining the garden, and in surroundings of aesthetics in everyday, the mundane with '*not necessarily expensive things but well cared for things or*

maintained plants here and there' reflecting Mary's mothers view on what should be kept nice in the everyday.

3.4 Curator: mother to daughter?

As suggested in the examples from my research in this chapter, primarily mothers, including other females in the family, as key curators of the family image in life, are continuing this role in curating objects and photographs following the death of a family member, perhaps remnant of traditional roles and personality traits of females from the feminist movement, as Jones, Bradbury and Le Boutillier (2011) suggested. The following discussions explore female research participant reflections, as well as other writings, on their beginnings of curation following a death, and thoughts around legacy.

The following example from Beth shows how she was organising her mother's belongings with siblings and illustrates what Phu, Brown and Dewan (2017) discussed with death being a reason for disruption in photographs; I suggest extending this to include objects as well. Some objects in experiences became dislodged within the family as they simply did not know why it was kept and its importance:

> *Beth;*
>
> *when we actually came to sort, you know go through drawers, because we obviously had to clear the house, there were objects or things we found, and we knew nothing about them, there wasn't many but just a few, and it was quite sad really cos, they were obviously were important cos she'd kept them for some reason, but we didn't really know why.*

In noting gaps in and the meaning of photographs and objects changing through generations either through indifference, or other significant event in the family, Hirsch (1997) explored the work of Novak (2005) who changed the view of her family memories in contrast to Wang, Alasuttari, Aro,'s (2014) harmonious presentation, to rework her family album;

> *she can make a space for seeing; differently, she can then reclaim repressed and censored emotions that can perhaps free her to act…using every day technologies to reread and redefine**…..**she can use her anger and her rage as well as her love as motivating forces in her creation, pointing to its distinctive beauty*

(Hirsch, 1997:215)

Novak (2005) redefined her family album photographs in a way that reimagined and re-represented her family photographs and memories in support of having more ownership over what was presented and changed her connections to them.

In my research, there were instances where the passing down of curator role from mother to daughter was equally not as straight forward:

> *Fran;*
>
> *oh, I can be sentimental, but she (mother) doesn't want to keep things like this, she really wasn't interested in keeping all these bits and pieces, and I said well for me, I'm going to pass these onto my children, you know, and they can pass it onto their children and especially the medals.*

The example above illustrates the idea that mothers may change their mind on what family objects and photographs they want to keep (or not), which may not necessarily mirror the desires of the daughter and the associated memory of the object or photograph may not want to be kept, affirming traditional roles as females within the family curating family life through photographs and objects. So where does this sit with those without children but still feel a responsibility to family legacy? Hocker (2010) gave us a glimpse of this in her article; in questioning what the purpose of keeping objects and photographs is if there aren't children to pass them onto. Also, as indicated in the literature chapter, she questioned traditional stereotypes of why her female ancestors had not cared for the objects and photographs, perhaps as much as she was, in curating them. Sally reflected on the curating of and passing family objects and photographs to other family members, highlighting a feeling of responsibility just as Hocker (2010) did:

> *Sally;*
>
> *I feel a responsibility cos I don't have children to, you know, actually pass that on in some way, again not that my life has been exciting or that interesting really compared to some, but I do feel a responsibility for future generations to be able to see what their family was.*

Fran reflected on a time when curating her father's belongings, in particular, the keeping of his notebook, indicating that there was also a thought or need of legacy in keeping objects and photographs (prior to her having children) in anticipation of passing the stories within the object, on at some point in the future;

Fran;

I've got his wee black book of when he's out on the beat, and what's happened that evening, it was very quiet as we lived in a quiet village but there's some funny ones, where you know they'd be chasing people through fields, and there would be a bull in the field, and they'd go 'oh gawd' and have to run for it, you know so there is there's that which is really fascinating which I wanted to keep, I didn't have children when he passed away, but my immediate thought was I'll keep this for the kids if we have any so, that's really cool.

The nature in which photographs and objects are collected and discarded can change meaning for whoever is curating them, as we have seen with the examples of handing down generations from mother to daughter, with the mother being more likely to be the main person in the family to curate, keep or discard photographs and objects. As illustrated earlier in the chapter, I had led the curation of my grandparents' photographs with my mum. As explored in the literature chapter Phu, Brown and Dewan (2017) discussed reasons to why there may be instances of gaps in family paraphernalia, what is curated (kept and discarded), due to death as a disruptive event, or individuals were simply not keeping photographs.

The following examples illustrate a removal of self i.e. the mother in family photographs as she is taking them; Olivia provided an example of this change in her family photographs, highlighted whilst arranging photographs of her mum for a memorial DVD, it illustrates the point after which her mum didn't appear in family photographs anymore and the reasoning behind this, and also highlights the use of technology in curating memories of the deceased:

Olivia;

we go up to a certain point in her life and then the photos stop……. (mum) always the photographer, and yeah but she genuinely didn't like her photograph being taken, she would get pissed off when the camera came out…..so I have this weird thing in this DVD where it sort of finishes, around this sort of time where we're born. lots of photos of us as kids, like very little kids and it stops it kind of finishes.

In a similar way to the example from Sally on how her mother took photos that perhaps weren't aesthetically pleasing, but she loved her for it anyway, Olivia goes on to reflect on those few photographs she does have of her mum, as she had avoided being in photographs, and how this feels to her now;

Olivia;

that were there self-conscious about the way they look or whatever, so avoid being in photos, but then you know it kinda impacts the memories that you have because you don't have, like, I don't care, she's my mum, and I want to see plenty of photos of her, and yeah, these feel like treasure to me now when I find them.

In collating and collecting family objects and photographs women may continue to do this over a number of years and distances, with objects and photographs, as physical objects not in just what they depict, having further meanings for the journeys they take, as we have seen in the literature chapter with the photograph travelling (Pink, 2007), and as Olivia illustrates:

> *I am originally from Melbourne, I don't have this archive stuff, I've had to squirrel away things on visits, and bring back things that catch my eye, and remind me of things, so I don't have this vast collection of stuff.*

In the methodology chapter in reflecting on my position as a female researcher, were my participants more forthcoming as I was female? Is this affirming the traditional roles of females leading on and willing to talk about my research focus, of their role as a curator in families and after a death? All participants spoke of their mothers as being the curators of the family image, with six women having the specific responsibility of organising photographs and objects after a death, there were however participants who did not have experience of organising and curating photographs and objects after a death and reasons noted were regarding estrangement and divorce.

3.5 Estrangement and divorce

Estrangement and divorce are noted here as a way of introduction as both are relevant to my personal experiences, as illustrated in the thesis introduction, this will be covered in more detail in the estrangement chapter.

> My parents were divorced when I was a young child, and I subsequently became estranged from my dad as an adult for 16 years. It has relevance as a disruptive event in the family (Phu, Brown and Dewan, 2017) in having different surroundings and reference points living with each parent (Janning, Collins and Kamm, 2011), or having gaps in family photographs, objects and memories, this is evident in my interview when I was organising my dad's home after his death, and found a number of photographs (including the photo of me in the red jacket as illustrated at the front of this thesis) of my time with my dad in a cereal tin, all of which were of me as a child:

Nikki;

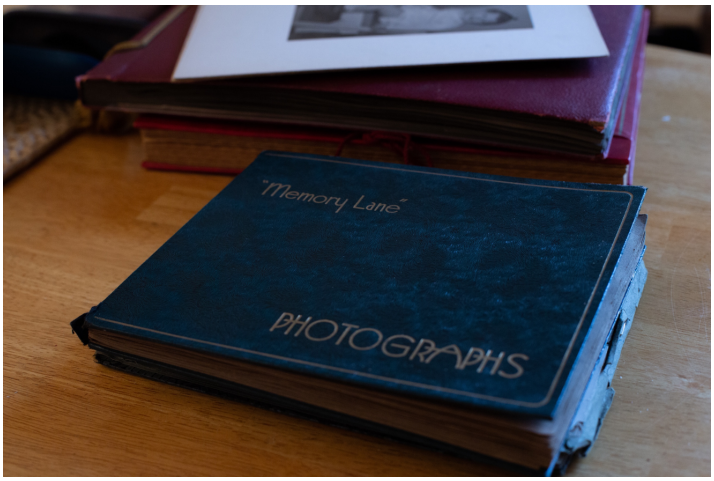
things like that are just a bit difficult to see and obviously you know, it's kind of dwindling relationship or dwindled relationship with my Mum, but obviously you know they kept amicable for me, and it's just really, yeah, really interesting that I came across it and found it and part of my memories and my history is in this box.

3.6 Men as gate keepers

The predominant research findings focus on females being the key curators in the family image during life, and after a death as has been illustrated, it would, however; be remiss to not have a balance from the perspective of my one male participant Eric as gatekeeper (Hirsch, 1997) and curator of his family archive opening up opportunity for future research:

Eric;

I managed to salvage these because my Mum, bless her heart….she got Dementia when she was older, and I think part of the condition she had a thing of sorting and tidying, and of course it didn't happen, the more she sorted and tidied the more confused everything got……so there would be piles of papers, old photos mixed in with bills from yesterday, and these books I thought I'm going to grab these books because they are just going to get either chucked out or something, so you know I grabbed them then, that was back in the '90s.



(4) Eric: family photo albums

As Eric' story here tells of the relationship of the photograph albums mixed in with the everyday objects of his mother. I took a sample of photographs of Eric's photo albums here, I liked that this blue album had an embossed title of 'memory lane', which struck me with importance of

memories and preservation, so included this particular composition, illustration (4). In the exploration of legacy from the perspective of a mother or other females in the family as discussed previously in this chapter, we can see that Eric may also have thoughts about legacy in wanting to keep the albums. Eric's action mirrors a unique insight into challenging potentially misconceptions of masculinity, in how the feminist movement supported women in changing wider views individually and from within their home, in the following research it would appear men could be doing the same, using spaces within the home to reflect and reinvent themselves;

> *Rather, mancaves emerge as therapeutic, integrative spaces. They operate as venues for weaving together the multiple aspects of men's identities at times overwhelmed by professional and familial obligations. Mancaves afford men a place for reinventing themselves as more fully functioning males integrated within the home, family, and the fraternity of other men.*
>
> (Moisio and Beruchashvili, 2016:674)

Although not the primary focus of this research, as suggested further research could be undertaken to see where other legacy paraphernalia travels outside of the traditional route from mother to daughter (and other females within the family), and from the male perspective.

3.7 Conclusion reflection

Females continue to be curators of the family image, with this role sometimes being passed to daughters, the practice of curating providing a space in which to have critical discussion about meaning and purpose. There has been consideration of those without children, and an example from male participant Eric as a balance of gender roles in family legacy through photographs and objects. Females traditionally being key curators of the family image, it is presented that after a death their role remains similar, curating belongings of the deceased. Reasons for gaps, namely death and estrangement, in family paraphernalia have been considered, drawing on other authors and examples from the research sample. I am also aware from an autoethnographic position, as a female within my experiences and the research, I embraced having a traditional role as a female curator, wanting to know more about others experiences of curation after a death.

Chapter 4: Reflections after a Death

4.1 Introduction

The research has highlighted commonalities in individual experiences within female research participants accounts, after a death within their family. I will explore others' reflections after the death of their family members, in comparison to my own experiences in understanding my feelings, grief and responses to the deaths of my grandad, nan and dad as part of my autoethnographic reflections.

There is a common focus around the experiences of family memorabilia and the memories they evoke contributing to work in remembering the deceased, as highlighted by such authors as Hirsch (1997); Novak (2005); Rose (2010). There is a discussion on such anthropological processes as rituals after a death in acts of remembering, spirituality, coincidences, symbolism and senses, including further reflections on grief and memories from a sociological perspective from research participants and concluding with a discussion on the growth in interest around the general topic of death and dying, with death still being considered taboo and how this research contributes to the ongoing narrative of it.

4.2 After a Death: stages

Death is at the core of my thesis research question, as this was my trigger in the change in focus based on my personal experiences of three deaths in my family within four years. Death can act as a disruptive life event as explored by Phu, Brown and Dewan (2017) and one that is emotionally challenging in particular in organising the deceased home, having to make key decisions on what we keep, and what to give away, the rituals and processes we go through.

It would be remiss in a chapter reflecting on death not to include a reference to Kubler-Ross' (1969) 5 stages; denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance, regarding the stages of emotion individuals may go through up to and following a death. My personal

experience of deaths within my family and the Kubler-Ross, (1969) stages enabled me a greater empathy for the timescales in which to include participants in my research following a death in their family (appendix 1). It is not to say that participants or I would or have gone through all the stages or have been more able to discuss their loved one after this time; however, having an awareness of the stages gave context in which participants have felt more comfortable talking about their loved ones (over 12 months prior to interview), for instance, Kelly's interview reflected on the death of her Father which happened over 20 years ago and continued to be an impactful life event for her as noted affirming death as a disruptive moment in life. Worden (2003) and Davis (1998) provide a counter-balance to the work of Kubler-Ross (1969) when reflecting on our differences in experiences and emotional stages that they are all unique to the individual; *'no individual life history can be said to be representative in its entirety, in that each individual set of life experiences are unique to a single person'* (Davis, 1998:207).

The death of someone as a disruptive and emotionally challenging life event can move us into a time of reflection of those individual life experiences, querying our identity, where we sit in the world, surrounded by our memories, and to reflect going on in our lives without the deceased, Worden (2003:32) referred to this as *'adjustments; external, internal and spiritual',* Freud (2005:203) referred to this as *'mourning and melancholia'*.

> *Nikki;*
>
> After the death of my grandparents and specifically my dad, I had a similar response about where I sat in the world and my identity in that I physically didn't have any official documentation proving that I was, in fact, his daughter, therefore questioning my identity both in functional terms (in be able to arrange his estate) as well as socially and emotionally. Once I had received my full birth document (with the full names of both parents), this proved my lineage in my family as exactly that, his Daughter.

All research participants said that the interviews were useful in having dedicated time for reflection on the death of their family member as they hadn't before. The importance of reflection after death echoed by psychotherapist Samuel (2017) case studies of patients; and reaffirmed at a talk given at the Freud Museum I attended, where she spoke about her book *'Grief Works'*. Parkes (1998) suggested that having someone who may or may not necessarily have similar life experiences can be beneficial for mutual (peer) help and support, I am therefore pleased that the research process has been of benefit to participants, as well as enabling me personally as a researcher being in a cycle of reflexivity. The support expressed

by my research participants may also have been due to my positioning as a female researcher, the value in reflecting on my family history alongside reflections of others can't be underestimated;

> *another use of autobiography in ethnography is the consideration of the effects upon the ethnographer in the experience of fieldwork, using others to learn more about it and reflect on oneself'.*
>
> (Coffey, 1999:218)

The discussions to follow in the remainder of this chapter continue the theme of reflections after a death, specifically through symbolism, senses and rituals, traditionally explored under anthropology in looking at the past, as explored in the anthropological use of photographs and objects:

> *This treatment of photographs of the dead person by the mourner corresponds to the use of effigies to communicate with the memory or spirit of the deceased in non-Western societies. Through ceremonial treatment effigies are made to represent the dead person and serve as a focus for the transaction and resolution of grief.*
>
> (Johnson, 1999:231)

it will also give balance to sociological reflections in how participants feel about their memories of objects and photographs today.

4.3 Symbolism in objects and photographs

Objects and photographs can act as symbols or have symbolic meanings, i.e. how they are used as a focus in which meanings are made, and memories and reflections are prompted. Photographs and objects chosen to be discussed by participants varied, as explored in the methodology chapter, and some of the benefits are illustrated in the examples that follow; when reflecting on a memory about the deceased participants had a revelation about a memory triggered through an object or photograph that they hadn't previously. Participants referred to understandings and the processing of a loss;

Nancy;

I do still like my cuddlies have to say as old as I am, but what was interesting looking at that photo was that I would have been 19, and there was a photo of an armchair with a load of cuddly toys and at least 3 of them were gifts that Christmas from my Mum to me, and I thought well what sort of message was she giving that she gave her 19-year-old daughter who had left home, cuddly toys, she never wanted me to leave, but never said anything about it, the day that I left to go to college she was working that evening, and my Dad wasn't there either, an Uncle was coming to collect me to take me to halls of residence, I had all my stuff in the hall I was standing there waiting to go and nobody said goodbye to me, and every time I came for a weekend or for a day visit, I had only gone to a college in London so I could get back and do it in a day, she would never say goodbye to me properly or wish me well, and I think she wanted me to remain the child that she had at home, and I think the soft toys were, you know, symbolic, I hadn't made that connection until today.

Nancy discussed a new thought about the symbolism in objects (in this instance cuddly toys) from childhood and adulthood, and how this was symbolic of her mother not wanting her to grow up or move away, something that hadn't occurred to Nancy until she reflected on the memory through the object. The photo taken during the discussion of Kermit the Frog Illustration (5), was poignant as it was after the moment Nancy had shown me that he had Velcro hands and feet, therefore being able to clap or hold his hands or feet together. The brief rest at her side and relaxed hand in contemplation, thought reminiscent of the photo she described in her interview above that included a chair with *'a load of cuddly toys on it'*.

(5) Nancy: Kermit the Frog

(6) Helen: Windmill

The photo of the small china windmill, also exhibited as part of the Fusion19 exhibition, is symbolic of the moment that Helen experienced loss for the first time loss (not necessarily relating to death but a loss in general), the windmill is placed in front of a photograph of Helens' dad as she discussed;

> *Helen:*
>
> *Dad, at one point, had a job where he would go abroad every so often, Dad was going to go to Holland, and I was 7 or 8. I remember, being really struck by this, I don't know much about stages of child development but I wonder why one reason why I was so struck was, because I was becoming aware of a bigger world than just the suburb of where I was living…..he was only away for like 3 days, I was completely convinced that he wasn't going to come back, and by the third day, Mum was like completely calm as you might imagine, well of course he's coming back, but I was getting quite hysterical, and then he came back and he brought 3 things, something for my Sister, he brought this (windmill), and a little Dutch house with you know the gables, and a little Dutch girl with clogs, I remember thinking this was absolutely amazing, I loved it, I absolutely loved it, now of course since then in my 20s I went to Holland and I realised that this is tourist shit, but for me at the time, I just thought that was the best thing ever and, and I've kept it all these years, I think it is tourist tat but it doesn't matter because Dad came home with little delights for his girls, which is so normal, I mean it's not, not normal, I think why have I kept it? I think it's because it, was a moment of well I suppose realising loss, you could lose, you know you could lose.*

As Helen reflected on the memory through the object, being unsure as to why she had kept the windmill, the meaning became apparent to her, highlighting the importance of reflection through such emotionally challenging times, and in understanding from an early age that you could lose. When Helen spoke about the memory, she held the windmill very gently, as seen in the photograph (illustration 6), and despite it being *'tourist tat'* was a precious object, touching and reminiscent of her loss as a child and adult, the composition of the photograph

including the photograph of her dad seemed appropriate. The haptic in objects and photographs as illustrated here, brings us to consider the importance placed on the everyday object and evoking memory, are we also mindful of losing the memory if we no longer have the object as a prompt? As Riches & Dawson (1998) explored that (specifically) photographs are important in supporting discussions about and to the deceased.

There were similar experiences to Helen with Denise in identifying when she first experienced loss for the first time when recalling a memory through a photograph;

> *Denise;*
>
> *I've chosen this photograph here, because it was a time when my Dad took me back to Italy to visit his family, on my own, and I remember how much I missed my mum….so, I was in Italy I must have been about 3 or 4 but I was just there on my own, I didn't really know why my Mum wasn't there, but that was the first time I really thought 'I really miss her' and I wonder where she is.*

(7) Denise: a child in Italy

It has also been evident through this research that objects, in particular, do not necessarily have been needed to belong to the deceased in order to act as a symbolic object, i.e. it could be something that the living person has chosen in which to represent the memory of the deceased like an effigy (Johnson, 1999), as Olivia illustrates;

> *'..there's that little guy up there and that little candle holder thing, which have absolutely no relation to mum at all……he's like the character, but he kind of looks like he's bowing in contemplation, he's just a little wooden guy…I used to have lots of photos up around, and every now and then, I'd go through a thing where I'd like go like I've got to have stuff instead of photos, that always stays up there, and I do I light that candle every now and again, it's not an obvious thing but is just a kind of, I know in my mind what that means to me.'*

As Olivia highlights, she chose an object which gave a focal point in her home, that was a symbol in remembering her mother, that wasn't overtly obvious, but she knew its meaning. The examples from Denise and Helen's objects has importance as they became symbols, through revisiting and reflecting, in developing new meanings.

4.4 Rituals in the everyday

In our everyday lives, the mundane, the ordinary, as well as using photographs and objects, we can include processes such as socially constructed rituals in remembering the deceased. Day (2017) explored the concept of rituals in the everyday illustrating that individuals going through several processes, i.e. rituals following a death to support ongoing connections to the deceased, with organising the deceased belongings being one such ritual. As well as highlighting the importance of storytelling within families for purposes of memory, belonging and connections, she also discussed an inherent need for more research into the connections between objects and photographs and family memories following a death.

In exploring personal loss, memory and family with photographs and objects after a death, I anticipated there would be a discussion about what happens at the point of a death, highlighted by participant Kelly, who asked me:

> *I probably should tell you about his death. I think that's probably something you should ask people about; have you been asking people about the persons' death?*

Kelly's question allowed me to reflect upon myself as part of the research, and to perhaps include this as a question for my other participants; subsequently, participants discussed the death of the family member within conversation without prompt, therefore enabling me to note this commonality in subsequent interviews.

Koggel (2017:197) reflected on her experience of the death of her mother:

> *The night following her death, we engaged in an intense and powerful sharing of memories of our mother and the dynamics of family relationships. World-travelling also plays a role in coming to know how another's grief emerges from relationships, histories, and memories different from mine,*

Koggel's (2017) work supported an importance of discussing the death of a family member and enabling understanding of commonalities within our own lives. Although not specifically my research focus, in participants talking about the death of their family member, it was a useful starting point in the context of understanding the participants relationship with the deceased, memories then explored non-sequentially as suggested through *'Memory Text'* (Kuhn, 2010:299), a recollection of memories that are accessed as snapshots. How we engage with memories is discussed further in subsequent chapters in reference to Berger (1967). Participants felt comfortable in talking about the death of a family member, and starting discussions from the point of death gave a marker for the exploration of rituals as Day (2017) noted as milestones of; one year since death, birthdays, and holidays, continuing connections to family through storytelling. As Rose (2010) explored in family photography and rituals photographing babies and their 'firsts', walk, tooth etc., at the other end of life, my research gave time in which to discusses the deceased 'lasts', visits, tea's, family events, etc. The following examples illustrate participants using different rituals on specific days in remembering the deceased, mainly through the use of objects;

> *Fran;*
>
> *to remember him we'll have dinner, pie and chips which is his favourite thing, so we always make sure on his birthday that we have pie for dinner.*
>
> *Denise;*
>
> *my Mum loved Strawberries, so we've got a tea set that I found, again in one of the cupboards when I was going through everything, she bought this tea set with all the napkins and a table cloth and a stand all in china, all with Strawberries on. Now I've never seen her use it, but we use it now.*
>
> *Beth;*
>
> *I have things like her Wedding ring which I just obviously put that on each morning, and that sort of, you know, I always think of her.*

The examples of rituals observed by participants illustrate that on regular occasions objects, food, and belongings of the deceased are used in the process of remembering them, the rituals observed highlights *'external adjustment'* (Worden, 2003:32) in the everyday. Explored further in the following example from Kelly in a ritual she had prior to the death of her father, and as she discusses, the emotions attached to the ritual, following his death, eased with time*;*

> *Kelly;*
>
> *I always miss him at Christmas time because he was hopeless at things like clothes, you can see he's not very smart, but I tried to buy his clothes so, every Christmas I'd go into*

Marks and Spencers, and I'd buy trousers and jerseys, shirts and stuff and take them along, well send them along, and for a long time, it's a bit worn off now but, for a really long time I used to miss him at Christmas time, I'd walk through Marks and Spencers, and suddenly it would all come back to me.

In contrast to the above example, and as Day (2017) noted, social rituals such as visiting a grave following a death in remembrance, Olivia reflects on the rituals observed by her family in remembering her mother, in which her ashes were scattered in the Ocean, and that having a set place to visit becomes the ritual as Olivia commented, as opposed to it necessarily being the best way to remember her mother;

Olivia;

It's a bit strange not having a place to go to, but then there's also, I notice it's an obligation, my sister and my dad feel like, that every year on the anniversary of, you know her birthday, or at Christmas or wherever they feel like they should go down and, and visit and it's like and what are you actually visiting, you're visiting an ocean, so all of those sort of rituals sometimes you miss having a thing that seems like quite a standard thing to do, and sometimes it's like when does that tip over to becoming, you're doing that because that's what you feel you should do, rather than the best way actually to remember that person.

Nikki;

Learning of others experiences through rituals following a death within a family has been of great comfort and interest to me, it has made me more aware of the process's others have experienced in comparison to my own realising the social similarities that occur, as reflected by Koggel (2017), when often the experience of bereavement can be a very insular, and as emphasised in this chapter, unique to everyone. My grandparents have a headstone that my family and I visit on occasions, my dad does not, in remembering them all I will often mark a milestone or a moment in my own way that is specific to a memory of them. One year after the death of both my nan and grandad, the family came together and had tea and cake, which was a family ritual which both my grandparents enjoyed. I took the same trip, as I had done with my grandad and mum a year before his death, on an old paddle steamer, on which mum and I spoke of our memories of grandad. Illustrated in a selfie (8) as we were just approaching tower bridge, we remembered how much grandad had enjoyed that day the year prior, tinged with some sadness in this ritual one year on as he wasn't with us, and the unlikeliness that we would take this trip again as it wasn't the same without him. Although I do not wear much jewellery, I have a necklace gifted to me by my grandad that was given from him to my nan on their ruby wedding anniversary and wear this on special occasions.

(8) Nikki: with mum on the paddle steamer

As we have seen, in exploring memories following a death through rituals, objects and photographs, holistically enables us to keep, symbolically, the family member who has died in our everyday lives, i.e. something representative of the person. Discussing the death of a family member through objects and photographs contrasts the sadness of the loss, with the normality of the object in the everyday, supporting understanding and maintaining ongoing connections to the deceased. As explored in the previous section there is also a consideration of keeping objects safe in case of mislaying them and if we do not have these items, then do memories remain, this leads onto an exploration on other things in addition to photographs and objects that may evoke memories of the deceased.

4.5 Senses

The use of various senses, smell, touch, taste, oral and aural, is a common theme in the experiences of participants when remembering their deceased family member. An in-depth study of this area of stimulus of memory is outside the parameters of this research project, however worthy of noting as a further tool in visual ethnography research reclaiming the *'touchy-feely'* (Crang, 2003:494) element of sociology. Photographs and objects as we have

seen, help recall of memories, and support reflections, but as will be illustrated in this chapter, can be supported holistically by our other senses:

Mary;

I tend to play with that one (necklace) when I wear it, I rub it, it's actually nice to feel it, and one of the stones is loose, when you pick it up……I've probably worn some of it away actually, but yeah its very tactile, it's very warm now, very tactile.

Other senses, smell, taste, oral and aural were also important in participants experiences, as the following examples specifically relating to smell illustrate;

Olivia;

This really smells like her, really smells like her, so I kind of have, randomly occasionally I'll just go, I'll just go and inhale it,…and I've hardly ever unpacked because I don't want to lose too much of that, but it sits in the back of a cupboard.

What Olivia highlighted in her example is how she kept fabric belonging to her mother, and on occasion would smell the fabric which smelt of her mother, another important factor in having an object in the everyday in which to recall memories and to keep a presence of the deceased. Denise similarly revisits her mother's button box and experiences remembering her through smell, as we sat together she gently thumbed through the button box (illustration 9), occasionally, as she told me she did as a child, putting the buttons into similar piles;

(9) Denise: mum's button box

Denise;

It's got various things in it, and of course, it's got no monetary value, but it's got so much sentimental value, and so many memories associated with it, and I think the smell of it. When I open it, it still smells of when I was a child.

My experiences of finding my dad's cereal tin and finding part of my history within it, is particularly difficult to revisit for what it now symbolises;

Nikki;

If you still open it now you get that, because dad was a heavy smoker, which obviously led to his cancer and obviously his eventual death, you can sort of smell the smoke and being a non-smoker as well its quite, it's quite difficult to, yeah, it really does smell quite (like) cigarette smoke, when you open it, so that, it's kind of like a double whammy.

Kelly also recalls the smell of cigarette smoke evoking memories of her father;

Kelly;

After he died, he used to smoke as I said, and his memory is very much as well as visual; it's smelling, 20 years ago, the smell has gone off, but for ages, it was a smell that reminded me of his, well him really. I think that's quite interesting really; I mean people talk about songs and obviously objects but smells important too.

It was interesting to note that in Beth's experience the physical place of photographs within the home, supported a relaxed sensory experience in remembering her family members;

Beth;

I don't know I just tend to have them (photographs) as upstairs things, and I suppose there is a significance in that. Upstairs is where you go to be, and you relax, and maybe you just remember things more upstairs, than what you do downstairs, I don't know.

As noted in these interactions with objects after a death, other senses (smell for example) highlighted by Day (2017) and illustrated in this chapter, stimulate memory as well as the physicality of the seeing and touching of the original object. How photographs are kept upstairs in homes, as a relaxed space to be more receptive in remembering the deceased, and others who recalled the smell of their family member following the opening of objects belonging to them. It brings us to sensing the deceased family members in other ways.

4.6 Sensing and coincidences after a death

In exploring the common themes of rituals and senses through photographs and objects, that were observed by participants following the death, the sensing of 'something else' after a death was also experienced by some participants, similar to the case studies described in Fenwick &

Fenwick's (2008) explaining coincidences chapter and similar to *'spiritual adjustment'* (Worden, 2003:34) in understanding our sense of the world.

Denise recalls the day her mother died, and at the same time her daughter was abroad on holiday, whose account she recalled;

> *Denise;*
>
> *We were sitting at the window with this beautiful Lake, they had sat us at the actual, you know, the most spectacular table in the whole restaurant with this gorgeous window overlooking Lake, she said 'they gave us the best table, we didn't ask for it they gave it to us' and she said 'and then we finished our Christmas dinner' and she said 'and then for some unknown reason we ordered a pot of tea' and she said 'we ordered this pot of tea' and she said 'it came with, you know' she said 'like the cups and saucers Grandma would have always had, the china cups and saucers' and she said 'and then the pot moved' and it was just, now she didn't even know that my Mum had died.*

It is worthy to note that these experiences were linked from mother and daughter, and the sensing came from the object of the cups and saucers reminding Denise's daughter of her grandmother. Fran discussed how she felt that her dad was around the year after her daughter was born;

> *Fran;*
>
> *I know he was around, it was quite weird, but when my daughter was born she was my first, my dad was there for the whole year, I know he was there, he was just around me the whole time for the first year of her life, you know, it was, you can't describe, you know, I didn't see anything, but I knew he was, I knew he was there.*

As Fran explored, she sensed her dad there with her the year after her daughter was born, Denise reflected on a similar experience with her granddaughter;

> *Denise;*
>
> *(granddaughter) arriving 5 months after my mum dying, and there's things about her that are just, things about her that are like my mum, she loves cream crackers with butter in the middle, and she loves butter and she goes 'oooh butter' my mum used to say that, but they've never met, it's just so odd, and there's some days that I look at her, and she looks back at me, and I think, there's just something about you.*

Denise goes on to explain that, the family home (in which her mother lived) is being updated so all of Denise's family can all eventually move into it, sensing that her mother is there and approving of what they are achieving;

Denise;

It is a joy to do, and I know 100% that my Mum is in that house with us, I know she is approving of what we do, I know she would want us to be there, and I know at Christmas when all her grandchildren and their partners, husbands, are going to be great-grandchildren there, that she will just be loving that.

Olivia in contrast, touched on how she didn't have any experiences of the sensing kind after her mum died; however, her dad did;

Olivia;

My dad had an experience on the night that she died, where he felt that there was, and he's felt things, and I'm like absolute zero, nothing not a flickering of a light bulb, not a, something will probably happen now, suddenly all the power will go off or something and I'll be like grrr.'

As with the previous section exploring or sensing other things following a death of a family member, highlighted other factors that occur for some in remembering the deceased through experiences and discussions around death through photographs and objects. It illustrated that participants sensed a physical presence without something necessarily being present, and in contrast on occasion was triggered by the presence of a symbolic object.

Discussions about sensing after death and the topic of death in general, may for some be difficult to have. Contemporary writers such as Day (2017); Samuel (2017) and Hilliker (2006) highlight that there can still be taboo or stigma around discussing death, in the case of participants, they wanted to talk about the death of, and explore their memories of deceased family members by being part of this project. The intention of this research project of 11 participants is to contribute to a wider contemporary narrative of death, opening up conversations in the everyday not just discussed in specific parameters. Using photographs at my Medway Open Studios July 2019 exhibition, in my home, and Fusion September 2019 exhibition in a gallery space, has opened conversations in spaces that may not have been traditionally as Johnson (1999) and Ebenstein (2018) discussed, and as also illustrated in this chapter. Contemporary creatives such as Llyod (2019) through her podcast 'Grief cast' are paving the way with increasing conversations around death through the innovative medium of comedy podcasts, opening up new ways of talking about death. As Samuel (2017) suggests, photographs have been great in supporting her patients, prompting conversations around death as part of holistic practice, of which further considerations will be explored in subsequent chapters.

4.7 Conclusion reflection

Reflecting on personal loss and rituals that I observed following the deaths of my relatives gave me ways in addition to photography in which to explore my feelings, in navigating my grief, learning of others' experiences has given me comfort and appreciation of my path. It has illustrated the importance in having time for reflection following a death through conversations using photographs and objects as prompts, in some instances supporting new perspectives or revelations to memories, and in supporting ongoing connections to the deceased. There has been consideration of symbolism in the everyday and objects in acts of remembrance do not necessarily need to belong to the deceased to act as symbols, highlighting the individuality of experiences following a death. The research has illustrated experiences through sensing triggered on occasions by photographs and objects, including coincidences that some participants had following the death of a family member, and the perceptions of death as a taboo subject, supporting the contemporary narrative of discussing death in non-traditional spaces such as galleries.

Chapter 5: Keeping photographs, objects and using creativity

5.1 Introduction

The chapter reflects on how objects and photographs are stored and kept in intimate and domestic spaces, used as time markers to support reflections, touching on examples of sharing and travelling between families, including their familial qualities in everyday life.

The memories photographs evoke are touched upon, as well as how participants used and intended to use creativity in exploring responses to their family photographs and objects after a death, through re-photographing, repurposing, re-membering through stories, highlighting the benefits of using such practices in grief, creativity in the mundane. Photographs and objects are at the core of the research, and alongside our memories are the only things left following a disruptive and emotionally challenging life event as a death. There are reflections on the use of photographs and objects for family legacy, participant reflections on their own photographs, and those taken as part of the research process.

5.2 Time markers

The following explores the use of objects and how, through keeping them, we can use them as prompts to reflect on our memories of the deceased, as a marker for a moment in time.

> *Nikki;*
>
> Following the deaths of my family members not only did I organise my grandparents' photographs with my mum as illustrated in the curation of family photographs chapter, as a photographer I wanted to document items, places and processes that occurred after the deaths of my nan, grandad and dad in understanding my grief.

(10) Nikki: Mirror, Vase and Flowers, Grandparents home

The photograph of the vase also exhibited as part of Fusion19, stands on a sideboard in front of a mirror that reflects my grandparents' front room, I took this photo at a point when I knew my grandad would not be coming home from hospital. I wanted to preserve his home visually at the point he had left it, holding that moment in time before everything changed, through organising his belongings, in the house that I had known since a child. I now have the mirror in my home, and look at it daily, it reflects back at me as a woman and my personal belongings, changing the context in which the original object was used and how it, as well as the photograph I took, acts a time marker for me. I reflected on the moment with the vase in sharing the photo as part of a visual diary on my Instagram in April 2019 and at my Medway Open Studios exhibition July 2019;

> *A Vase on a sideboard that was bought as a Wedding Gift for my Grandparents. The flowers wilting, losing their glorious bloom, the room lays silent, soon to be empty, a whisper in the echo of a memory'. [Grandparents' home 2016]*
>
> *(Price, 2019)*

My grandparents loved flowers, and the family would always take them whenever we visited, I couldn't help but make the connection that the flowers in the moment of the photograph were wilting and would soon fade, symbolic of my grandad and his fading health. The photograph of the vase included in the Fusion19 exhibition for this thesis, and as well as exhibiting the photo at my open studio and online, on all occasions prompted further conversations around death and family belongings, connecting through

the familial as suggested by Hirsch (1997). Including this photograph in this thesis, acts for me as Helen's windmill did for her in the reflections after a death chapter, at the point of realising a loss, also symbolic of the anticipation of loss and a reminder of the family history reflected in the mirror of my grandparents' home. Continuing the memories, connections to and memories attached to the mirror, this thesis was written in the room that it is hung in. As well as remembering how it looked in my grandparents' home and the memories that surrounded it, I feel comfort and connection now it hangs in my home, absorbing and reflecting new experiences and life similar to the suggestions of Unruh (1983).

(11) Nikki: Grandparents' mirror in my home now

Olivia had a handwritten card that she was conscious of the writing fading, and what that meant, as she explained:

Olivia;

This is the thing I look at most frequently, is a Christmas card, it's just a little gift tag that would have been on a present in the last number of years that's probably been sent to me over here, yeah and it's just 'to Olivia happy Christmas love Mum and Dad' in her writing and it is slowly fading which I think is kind of (sigh) I don't know its I was like will it just fade to nothing eventually if I keep it in the sun? and do I feel ok about that?

Nikki;

Reflecting on the death of my dad through photographing myself with his watch next to mine, I knew that one day the watch would stop, symbolic of our ongoing connection

and that something he once loved would eventually stop or fade, just as my granddad's flowers did and Olivia mum's card may have done;

One of the big things for me was his watch, and that I've done a lot of photos with me wearing his watch, alongside my digital, you know analogue alongside digital whatever, I knew it was coming but I knew that the day that this watch had stopped would be another marker, in time I guess so, that he you know, he physically died, but the watch was still going.

(12) Nikki: Dad's watch still working

In the examples from Olivia and I, photographs and objects acted as 'stops' or memory keepers in time supporting reflection of the deceased, enabling revisiting moments in acts of memory and reflection at any given time, in particular after a disruptive event as a death (Phu, Brown and Dewan, 2017). Photographs and objects can act as markers in time, within moments of grief and reflection following a death, they enable a dedicated time in which to step back and reflect as Michelson et al. (2013) and other writers suggested (Berger, 1967; Barthes, 1980; Riches and Dawson, 1998).

As explored in the methodology, participants brought a vast array of objects and photographs from the handmade to kitchen utensils to their interviews. When discussing these photographs and objects, what became apparent from the different experiences was, and as Berger (1967) noted, through photograph's, or objects as markers of time, meaning-making can be reflected by looking, and similarly as Hirsch (1997) described, I connected my experiences to them via a familial look or connection. In having accompanying stories from the participants in this thesis research has been important in giving photographs and objects further context, as it

allows for those things that aren't shown to be known, i.e. individuals feelings and stories that the photograph or object evokes as suggested by Berger (1967); Kearney *et al.* (2009). Using objects and photographs as time markers in this way reflects how '*radial'* memories (Berger, 1967:59) are, with many different reflections and memories, and connections leading to one point, equally as Barthes (1977) in The Death of the Author, suggested in looking the viewer may devise or change meaning through the materials they engage with.

Using photographs and objects as time markers gives space not just to enable a focal point for our reflections but as Plummer (2001) suggested, can in their own right, to be used to rework and change memory and meaning as Rosenberg (2009) suggested in the curation process stimulating reflection, which we will explore further in the chapter. The curation and sharing of family reflections and stories, might also be seen as a creative response as part of an enacted collective remembering.

5.3 Travelling objects

Objects and photographs in order to be organised and curated, become items that move. Through this, additional meanings could be added to it as discussed in the concept of photographs travelling by Pink (2007:133). Objects and photographs become travelling objects through being shared in such ways as; within the family, with the researcher or travelling many miles to be part of a family archive (Steichen, 1955; Phu, Brown and Dewan, 2017). Four research participants explored how their photographs and objects travelled, either through being gifted, as part of the organising process of the deceased belongings or in Tammy's case was always intended as a piece that would travel;

> *Tammy;*
>
> *Whenever you went to her house, as you were leaving she was like 'take this' 'take this' or if you admired something that she had, she would say 'oh have it' 'have it' she wanted to like, give you stuff all the time it was kind of annoying, you could never leave without taking, and you could just, like sometimes you'd just say stuff 'oh that's nice' just to be polite but it's not really your thing, but she would be like 'have it take it, take it', and I remember her saying when I was probably 20, to take these (keys) and I was so tempted at the time, and I was like no I couldn't, you know they were hers, like they had to stay*

in the house until you know, she had died, and then I felt ok about taking them because she had once offered them to me.

In this instance Tammy lived in a different continent to her grandmother and explored a memory regarding keys that were enjoyed as part of her growing up, and then gifted when she returned to her country of birth, to help organise her grandmothers' belongings. As well as having the initial fond memory of the keys as a child, Tammy has an additional story of how they came to be with her, the object travelling, adding to its story, as well as continuing to be a connection to the deceased. Similarly, Olivia explains how items were brought back across continents:

Olivia;

…….because I am originally from Melbourne, I don't have this archive stuff, I've had to squirrel away things on visits, and, bring back things that…..catch my eye, and remind me of things, so I don't have this vast collection of stuff.

Kelly;

...so, it's been on a bit of a journey, never mind its back with me now, so that's what counts……this sits upstairs with my little bits of odd jewellery on it, you know which are quite small and would get lost in my jewellery box sits on that.

Kelly is recounting the time a wooden bowl made in a joint project with her father had been lost and then recovered, adding a second layer of story to the original memory, of her making the wooden bowl. The following example illustrates how Fran was gifted a teddy from her dad, for the sole purpose of it travelling with her, and following her dad's death continued to be taken on holidays. Fran recalls the teddy being symbolic of remembering her dad as a *'big cuddly teddy bear'* and now having it with her after his death;

Fran;

He had a little Ted, tiny little teddy bear that he bought for me when I went backpacking, and he sent it to me before I left, I opened this little box, and there's this little teddy bear in it, with a little note to say you know, 'I'm to come with you to keep you safe'. This little teddy bear has been round the world, and we call him 'Travel Ted' yeah, that's what my Dad named him 'Travel Ted' and it's just really lovely. I always saw Dad as a big Teddy Bear myself really and he was, he was the one who had lots of cuddles, and you know, he was just a big cuddly teddy bear, so it's lovely to remember that side of him.

The examples shared by Fran, Tammy, Olivia and Kelly all indicate a want to keep an object that enabled them to be linked with the deceased, often travelling great distances to be included in their everyday lives, as Berger (1967) suggested in photographs showing an absence, wanting to keep something physical in the absence of the physical person.

5.4 Keeping photographs

In seeing and exploring others family archive objects and photographs after a bereavement has provided a unique insight into where these objects and photographs are kept, stored, used and re-used, and referred to in everyday life as Unruh (1983) suggested. Being within a domestic space that we may not ordinarily have access to as suggested by Pink (2007), can open up space in which to be creative and reflective, within the *'third sociology'* (Sztompka, 2008:2). In contrast to the family photo archive organisation I completed with my mum in the curation of family photographs and objects chapter in chronological order within an album, Sally kept all her photographs mixed within a box, reminiscent of non-unilinear (visual) recollections of memories (Berger, 1967), Sally goes on to explain*;*

> *Sally;*
>
> *I've never really had albums of photographs, I've tended just to keep them in a box, and I started to think about why I do that and trying to explain it, which is that I see time as non-linear, so you know when you put something in an album……it's basically an object which represents time, and I like the idea that my time you know, I've got this time in a box, and it's all mixed up, and it's all messy….life is messy it's not linear, it's not straight it's a messy thing and there's generations of my family in here who are no longer with me, but they are still with me, do you know what I mean, they're still with me through that process of like just having this.*

Sally's example illustrates how she reflected on why she chose to keep photographs in a *'non-linear'* way in a box, for her *'which represents time'* she knows that they are all in there as physical objects and representative of the memories and generations in her family who *'are still with me'.* Sally's example echo's Berger's (1967) suggestions on how the memory works radially and that photographs may be revisited at any time not necessarily in chronological order.

It was during Sally's exploration of storing of photographs within a box; we came across the 'Bisto Kids' photograph, also exhibited as part of Fusion19, linking how photographs are kept and the creative and connecting uses of family photographs;

(13) Sally: Bisto Kids

Sally;

This is quite, this is quite a funny photo….so my dad used to do this, take slides, and it was a thing in our family and a lot of families actually probably in the '70s and stuff where you know, my dad did all these slides and have a slide show on a Saturday night or something and it was a real treat, anyway this was a slide and whenever we got to this slide we'd spend about an hour laughing because it was so hilarious….like called ourselves the 'Bisto Kids' or something, because we were like really scruffy……..I don't know what my mum was thinking, but I've got like a red jumper, no skirt or anything, in just tights, red tights and red shoes, we all just look completely scruffy and horrible, so it's really funny…..we used to laugh ages at that one, but no I love that photo, so my mum actually got some of the slides turned into photos, which was really great.

Sally's photo explores the beauty and creativity of domestic family photographs taken in the moment, not necessarily conforming to a perfect aesthetic as explored by Wang, Alasuttari, Aro's (2014) Flickr research. Looking at the 'Bisto Kids' photo, Sally recalled a memorable moment, in the sharing of photographs within her family home, pointing herself out in the photograph of her and her sisters as in illustration (13), taken as a snap shot of Sally's instinctive pose. The non-unilinear storage of the photographs and recollection was important as we may not have experienced such a *'punctum'* (Barthes, 1980:27) as we did to explore the photo further, had we not had this serendipitous moment, now the photo of the moment Sally came across the 'Bisto Kids', has been a talking point for visitors in the Fusion19 exhibition (appendix 4). Both Sally's use of keeping photographs in a box and the story of viewing the 'Bisto Kids' photograph on a slide show with her family reminiscent of Rose's (2010) looking with mother to know family connections, and highlighting the beauty of keeping photographs and objects in intimate spaces. Sally's Bisto kids example also illustrates how curation and sharing family stories can be creative processes in themselves, used throughout family life, and

beyond, being shared within the family and now as part of this research, reinforcing connection to all family members, and collective memories.

In exploring ways in which families obtain and keep objects and photographs between them after a death, Beth worked with siblings to organise the collection, recording and sharing of family photographs in a methodical digital way, with Beth suggesting that she thought that she and her siblings would argue over them, but in enabling each to have a digital copy, they didn't;

> *Beth;*
>
> *We've realised we would fall out over, were things like the photographs and things like this letter. So, although I had the original one, what we've, well my brother who is actually a photographer, he suggested that he would collect all the photographs from all of us, and he would re-photograph them, and he would put them onto a memory stick, and he would share them all with us. So, we all have that on that hard drive, so we've got all cine films that go back to 1942, and we have got all the photographs.*

Beth, as we recall from the reflections after a death chapter, accessed photographs and kept hard copies of the photos upstairs in her home, as part of *'curating photo displays for particular audiences as domestic order'* (Durrant, Frohlich, Sellen, & Lyons, 2009:1019) as it was where, as Beth suggested as '*the audience'*, you perhaps go to relax, in supporting her memories. Similar to Sally's experiences, Beth's photographs were accessed in intimate spaces, connecting directly to them either through direct looking on the computer at digital copies in a more linear manner or in relaxing upstairs.

In keeping photographs as illustrated in the examples of Beth and Sally, there can be different ways in which to keep physical and digital photographs after a death, all supporting the unique ways in which participants wanted to keep them, accesses them and used them in remembering. As we saw in the literature chapter Novak (2005) reworked her family photo album to create her story and response to memories.

The following section of this chapter continues that reflection and explores how some participants used or expressed how they intended to use, their gifted photographs and objects creatively or had other creative responses after the death of their family member.

5.5 Creative practice and responses

This section explores how participants used a creative practice; writing, photography, etc., or felt they needed to use family objects or photographs creatively or work creatively after a death in their family. As explored earlier in the chapter, the creative responses and practice I had to the deaths of my grandparents and dad were to photograph their homes, and curate our family archive photographs and photographing objects. I wanted to share a balance of experience from a female perspective with Eric's experience and what he intended to, and did do with a recording and photographs relating to his mum was a beautifully rich project;

(14) Eric: Mum and Dad on honeymoon

> *Eric;*
>
> *That picture is interesting, of my Mum and Dad on their honeymoon, and they were walking along, and the interesting thing about this picture, apart from that it's an old picture, that a few years back (Eric's' Partner) said that she needed to do an interview because she was doing a training course, and she needed to do an interview on DAT tape as it was a new thing then, so she interviewed my Mum and we luckily, we found years went by, my Mum passed away, and we found the DAT tape, well we didn't really lose it we knew it was there, but we recovered it, and I have transferred it….. to a file so I've got it on my laptop now, so I am planning to edit the interview and make a little film, using stills and making a little film of my Mum.*

Illustration (14) is a photograph from the 'memory lane' album in illustration (4). Eric positioned the album towards me, with him sitting at the side to enable him to turn the pages for me (you can see his hand resting on the table at the top of the photograph). Eric positioned

the album for me in case I wanted to take photographs, and then stopped at this poignant photo of his parents on their honeymoon.

After listening to the recordings, Eric suggested it was important to record the voices of our family members, and expressed how he was pleased he had this recording of his mother and offered me this advice;

> *Eric;*
>
> *I'm sure you've thought this too, record your parents, that voice is just irreplaceable obviously, and everybody's voice is slightly different, you know, and I'm, it was luck sheer luck that that happened and I'm really glad, I mean over the years as kids we were given tape recorders and things and I'm sure somewhere along the lines I've had recordings of my Dad but they've all gone, they've all disappeared into the, you know, but that's, you know I planning to do something with it.*

As explored here Eric had a creative response and used a creative practice as a means of re-capturing and re-working his mother's stories using stills and film, during our second meet up he showed me a draft of the film. Eric's experience is similar to Novak (2005) in that he reworked original photographs and sounds, into something different for him, something he could listen to on occasion in the everyday, supporting ongoing connections to the deceased as Unruh (1983) suggested, more of which to be explored in subsequent chapters.

In the following example, Mary explored how after the death of their mother, felt compelled to write and paint;

> *Mary;*
>
> *I think I have to write, I don't write because of her, and I don't paint because of her……I think it is a lesson to everybody you know, if you've got it in you, I didn't know whether my writing was going to be rubbish, I still don't know…..with the painting I don't know whether I'm going to be like a 5-year-old! It's like I do it and I'm incredibly fortunate that I'm that I found it, or it found me or whatever it is, you know it's like with your photography, you have those moments like, oh wow I did that, incredible moments are painted out, or I wrote that actually, I do it all for me. I don't think I'm going to make someone proud, maybe after the fact you might think oh I wonder if they would be proud, I hope they would be.*

Mary may have felt compelled to go on living her life doing what she felt compelled to do and *'do it all for me'*. In keeping the stories alive from deceased family members, through having a creative response, Kelly produced a book of the poems written by both parents as she discussed;

Kelly;

They both left poems after they died, and I put the poems in a book, and I thought which would I put first and I knew it would really, they would be cross to be second, well my Mother would be cross if she would be second, so I made a book, so you can start from that side is my Fathers poems, but to get my Mothers poems you turn the book over and start from the other end.

As we explored in the chapter reflections after a death, Olivia spoke of smells evoking memories opening a bag, in which she had kept some of her mum's clothing and various fabrics, supporting an intimate way of remembering. Olivia goes on to explain how she had kept the fabric hope of reusing them in creating something else;

Olivia;

…. I have a lot of 'I don't know quite what I'm going to do with things', but they remind me of her so, and then this one here…is the bag of randomness. I have a couple of her shirts, so, and I can't think of what I would want to do, but I like the fabric I'd never obviously wear these but, I love the fabric and the colours, and I thought, oh one day, I'll, even if I have just them for now, but one day I'll do…..

Using a creative process in being, or intending to be, creative with photographs, objects and memories of the deceased have been important in the examples of Olivia, Eric, Kelly and Mary, having these responses creatively after the death of a family member. From this research project would suggest that there is scope for using such activities in future projects, over a longer period with a greater number of participants. As we have seen in the methodology and earlier in the chapter using photographs as talking tools facilitates ongoing conversation and space for consideration creativity, the benefits of which have highlighted the use of Photovoice (Hegarty, 2016) and Photo Elicitation (Harper, 2010).

5.6 Benefits of a creative response and legacies

Objects and photographs can transform or take on additional meanings depending on how individuals use and interact with them as explored with the examples from Eric, Olivia, Kelly and Mary similarly to the example of *'Thick Photography'* (Deger, 2016:112) where objects and photographs were used creatively to support connection to the deceased.

All research participants, including me, said how useful it was in having time to talk about deceased loved ones as they wouldn't normally have given themselves the time to. Reflecting through photographs and objects as Riches & Dawson (1998) and Samuel (2017) advocated, opened up conversations about and to the deceased. Participants responding favorably in having time to talk about their deceased loved ones supports the importance of being reflective following a death.

The use of creative practices and its benefits after a death have been illustrated further in the literature chapter by such writers as Wedemeyer (1986) in using a variety of materials in exploring grief and Unruh's (1983) exploration of what is kept after a death. Eric through the film of his mother and Olivia's intentions to re-use her mum's fabrics, perhaps helped them both to have some control over the disruptive and emotionally challenging life event, having a symbol of the deceased in their everyday lives, keeping them in the everyday. Relevant to include here (although in the context of the death of a child) is the benefit of re-photographing; *'But in this act of re-photographing our child's image we began to see some real therapeutic possibilities in the way we can continue our relationship with her/him with less pain'* (Harris & Edmonds, 2015:79).

In the interviews holding time for participants to reflect, was powerful and beneficial as Eric expressed, which opens up possibilities of future research from a male perspective;

> *Eric;*
>
> *I sit here and go yeah I remember, (laughs) go memory lane, oh god you know, but so I mean I'm very, I'm appreciative, no honestly I appreciate that because it's nice to communicate and talk about somebody who's is sort of interested you know.*

Through participants presentation and discussion of their objects, photographs and memories of the deceased, many thought of how their family items would form part of their legacy;

> *Sally;*
>
> *I wonder with these photographs…..what will then come to them when I die will they just kind of, you know have a house clearance and somebody will sell them to whatever. That they go into this cycle that's how I've you know, accessed all these things over the years like other peoples…..I sort of hate the idea that they get lost again, but I kind of like the idea that I've rescued them at this point and I've bought them to life again somehow so that they weren't just completely lost in this spiral.*

Beth;

I only have the photocopy because I gave up my original, to go into the family archive, which hopefully when we're all dead, will go to our Grandchildren, well our children and their children.

During a follow-up meeting, Kelly said that after the interview she had been inspired to sort through old objects and photographs and think about what objects and photographs her children and grandchildren would like as part of her legacy. As we have seen in changing narratives of our family archives, and this occurring through the frame of curation, what her children may want to keep could be very different from what the Kelly might have originally thought.

Going through the research process and exploring photographs and objects had benefits for legacy, creativity, and impact on self, as Sally explained in finding out more about her deceased grandad, she learnt more about herself;

Sally;

I've kind of gone, done a reverse and because this has given me more of a sense of who I am as well, so yeah this is the only photo I've got of him, so there's all this stuff in, up North about like about my Great-Grandad that I didn't know.

Participants inspired to use creativity following project interviews highlighted a beneficial impact of the project on the group of participants at this specific time, in line with Davis's (1998) visual ethnography being research snapshots at a given time, acting as time markers in which to reflect further. Creative reactions or responses after a death could support the navigation of grief and reworking and reflecting on our histories to make new meanings in the absence of the deceased.

5.7 Conclusion reflection

This chapter has explored objects and photographs as time markers and how meanings can change. The research has shown commonalities in how participants use and keep objects within their homes, and how creativity has or was intended to be used following a death, rounding up with the benefits of having creative responses after a death, and participant reflections on their legacies. Organising the deceased belongings, either individually, through

choice or necessity, curating in conjunction with other family members, or not at all in some instances were highlighted across experiences. The timescales varied in which participants would and could organise belongings, with vast distances, with participants living in different continents, being the decider in accessing physical objects and photographs. I feel I am now holding stories and photographs representative of participants memories, alongside my personal experiences through research photographs and recordings, supporting my understanding navigation of grief and death. Engaging with and the curation and the family stories and memories sharing, might also be seen as a creative response, and therefore worthy of future research in this area.

Chapter 6: Identity, disruption, connections and belonging

6.1 Introduction

The chapters focus is, how through photographs and objects, participants reflected on the identities and characteristics of deceased family members and explored their self-identity after their relatives' death, through a process of an internal adjustment; a loss of others and a sense of self, as suggested by Worden (2003).

Throughout this research, there have been commonalities and benefits in using objects and photographs in remembering the deceased. Reflections of self-identity and the identity of the deceased are explored following on from the work of Unruh (1983) who in using photographs and objects after a death, suggested it was fundamental i.e. a benefit, in preserving key identities and traits of both ourselves and the deceased.

I wanted to explore others' responses around identity after such a disruptive life event as a death, after my personal experiences in which I needed to reassess who I now was without my deceased family members. How traditional social action through family activities such as organising and keeping family photographs and objects within the home, supported my identity and connection to my family, as had the practice of looking through photo albums as a child had done. Towards the chapter end, there is an example of a participant's identity concerning heritage, before the conclusion reflection.

6.2 Connecting to a life before us: more of a person than a mum

Objects and photographs support the ongoing connection to, and opens up conversations about the deceased (Johnson, 1999), they give research participants space in which to remember the deceased in a more reflective and participative way, a physical object in the absence of the physical person, that they may have not previously. In looking at photographs and objects, the notion of a reflective space between a participant and what is being viewed can be considered

as an '*abyss'* (Berger, 1967:63) a '*Third Meaning'* (Barthes, 1977:52) or a '*Third sociology'* (Sztompka, 2008:2). Through which reflections on self, the memories evoked, and meaning-making could be discovered, made or reworked, bridging the gap between what is known and what is to be known in the everyday. Using photographs and objects in this way highlights that through visual methods, we can have time and space in which reflections and meaning-making take place.

What was apparent in conversations with some participants, and as was the case in my personal experience, was a practice similar to Barthes (1980) looking for his mother's true self, in looking at photographs of the deceased before our timeline, in the hope of finding their true identity. If we can relate to or surmise how the deceased was before we knew them (i.e. before we were born), then this may help us reflect on our lives without them, as was evident in my personal experience as we see later in the chapter.

Participant Olivia explained how she connected to her mum differently in reflecting on her identity through a treasured Wedding day photograph, taken before Olivia being born;

(15) Olivia: Mum on her Wedding day

Olivia;

> *The thing I really love about this photo is it's kind of my mum in a world before I knew her. It's just, and it's very, I don't know there's something about it, that kind of, makes me see her more of a person than a mum, if that's a kind of odd thing to say, but like I suppose as a kid you are always like that's my mum, and that's, she's mum, and she does mum things, but it's a younger photo of her whilst fooling around…….I really like that because there's just something about it that just feels different to what I was used to.*

Olivia shared how she *'really liked'* the photo of her mum *'whilst fooling around'* and identified some new traits of her mum in happier times (photographed on her Wedding day) in contrast to Olivia remembering her mum in her life as it was *'different to what she was used*

to'. In identifying different characteristics, Olivia was able to connect with her mum in a way she possibly hadn't before. I took the photograph in illustration (15) as Olivia was passing the photograph of her mum to me to be able to see it better, it also illustrated another wedding photograph of both parents (dad obscured by the main photograph) and in the top left includes the Christmas card as discussed in chapter 5.2 time markers section.

Similarly, in the experience of Olivia reflecting on the photograph of her mum on her Wedding day identifying new characteristics of her, Tammy reflected and speculated on the characteristics of her Grandmother in what she might have been if circumstances in her life were different;

(16) Tammy: Movie star

> *Tammy;*
>
> *She was a very glamorous woman, so that's the main photo, and then I've also got some digital photos of her, and I think she was the kind of person if she hadn't been in Poland and then been a refugee, she could have been like a Movie Star, she was very dramatic and vivacious, and… a very stylish woman, very creative.*

As seen in Olivia and Tammy's examples, connecting to their deceased family members through photographs and objects, supported a sense of the person before they knew them and to reflect on their identity.

(17) Nikki: Dad -revisiting the pub

Nikki;

In similar reflection to Tammy and Olivia exploring their relatives identities before they knew them, on what would have been my Dad's 60th birthday, and shortly after the one year anniversary of his death, I took the photo above with me (found in my Dad's archive) to the place where I thought it was taken (a local pub near to where he used to live, the building of which has since changed usage), it is of him taken in his early 20's and before I was born. In discovering the photo, I instantly thought of how young he looked and in good health. The family resemblance struck me as he concentrated on the slot machine, and how this must have been a poignant time for him in our family timeline sometime shortly before I was born, and what his life might have been like then. Using the photograph to physically go to a place I knew he had visited allowed me to reflect on our lives at similar ages and their differences and similarities and connect to him as a person. Similarly, to Olivia's reflection of '*more of a person than a mum',* in this photo, he was '*more of a person than a dad'*, carefree and out with friends at the pub, in seemingly good health and his whole life ahead of him.

The examples from Tammy, Oliva and my personal experience illustrate the use of photographs just as Barthes (1980) did in exploring his mother's identity before he was born, exploring the qualities, different aspirations, identity and persona of the person they didn't know then. In using frames as suggested by Goffman (1959) in presenting our self in everyday life, our relatives before we knew them, would have been performing a different role to that of which

we knew them, i.e. our mum, dad, grandmother etc., therefore our connection and relation to their surmised characteristics might be new to us, as was illustrated in Olivia's example. As we have seen in previous chapters Hirsch (1997) reflected on Barthes' (1980) connection with his mother and suggested that his experience allowed him to not only reflect on his mother's identity through the photo but it opened up a space in which to reflect on his identity. In connecting to deceased relatives through objects and photographs, we can reflect on identities both of ourselves and the deceased in identifying traits we wish to keep for the future (Unruh, 1983). Olivia, Tammy and my experiences highlight an understanding of the things that were unfamiliar and familiar to us of the deceased through objects and photographs, but mindful that although useful for reflection *'the full import of the artefact can never be fully transferred from the dying person to a survivor'* (Unruh, 1983:344). We may fully appreciate the importance of the object or photograph to the deceased; however, it will be our memories, reflections, and identity traits we may choose to continue for the future.

In connecting to a life before us and as explored in the curation of family photographs and objects chapter, the social acts of keeping objects and photographs relating to the deceased varied but were always personal and meaningful to the individual who curated it, stimulating memories or reflections on the deceased's identity, and traits good or not so good are explored further in the estrangement chapter.

6.3 Creativity and identity

Exploring identity through the use of creativity is illustrated in the following recollection from Helen. We have seen earlier in the chapter, having space in which to look and reflect on photographs and objects is beneficial, using a process such as *'familial looking'* as explored by Hirsch (1997:9) enables this multi-layered looking between object/photograph, self and other. Helen's example of looking and reflecting through paintings, one drawn by her father (who as well as a painter was a musician) and one drawn by her sister of their father, I wanted to enhance the concept of multi-layered looking, self and other, further in illustration (18), by having a photograph taken by me looking in a mirror, looking at the painting completed by Helen's sister of their father. Having the paintings gave an example within Helen's home of her father's

identity and persona, however as Rose (2010) suggested, having photos, in this case the paintings, in the everyday highlights an absence, in Helen's case of her father, but in contrast could also support ongoing connections as Helen explored;

Helen;

I always liked that drawing it wasn't about likeness, what it tells me about (sister), and what it tells me about (sister) saw in dad, at that time, but I think she's captured quite a lot in that drawing actually, and again not so much about likeness, but this, this sort of intensity of the, of dad's gaze, you know the way he's looking, focus on the eyes there, and also that the mouth is quite sort of sensual in a way, because dad had quite a lot of power in him, he could be quite, I wouldn't say frightening but quite imposing, because he was quite tall and, quite a lot of presence…..after dad died and I re-did that wall, I thought can I put dad, is he going to look at us, it's actually my sister looking at my dad, looking at us, you know what I mean? It's actually more layered than that it's my sister looking at my dad, looking at us.

(18) Helen: Dad's portrait

Then referencing the second painting made by their Father;

Helen;

You know it's technically challenging lots of different foliage and he's done pretty well, it's a secret place, I don't know I just find it, I like to look at it and think of dad, in his complexity as a man and as a thinker, and as a dad, yeah, I'm going to keep that on the wall.

(19) Helen: Dad’s painting

Helen's exploration of the paintings was supported through having the physical object in her home, enabling her to reflect on her dad's persona, not just as she saw him but through how her sister saw him, allowing for multi-layered looking, creativity in the familial. The addition of me taking the photo of the paintings adds another layer of looking and meaning to the narrative.

(20) Eric: as a baby with dad

The photo above, also exhibited as part of the Fusion19 exhibition, explores both the deceased and Eric's identity providing a multi-layered reflection similar to Helen’s illustration (18). This thesis is from the perspective of a female curator; however, I wanted to include Eric's voice as a counter balance and to highlight a possibility for future research from a male perspective. Eric holds the photograph of his father checking if it had information about where it was taken, who in turn is looking down at a photo of Eric as a baby looking back at himself, we are then

looking on through the photograph I took. Eric explores an element of his father's identity and his self-identity through their mutual passion of photography, and as Gloyn, et al. (2018) and Eric suggest, stories and memories can support knowledge of, and ongoing connections to the deceased;

> *Eric;*
>
> *He ended up at the end of the war with a commission, he was a leftenant or something or other, and he had his posh uniform and they complained about it 'oh what's he walking around with this uniform on' as if he was showing off and mum was like well that's what he has to do you know. This is all kind of passed down and these are stories are obviously passed down as I wasn't around then…… so, the photography bit was what he, and I have very distinct memories of him showing me how to develop film and how to process film, he didn't have an enlarger, eventually I bought an enlarger when I was a teenager, but, we used to do it with contact print, because the negatives were big you know…. and he showed me how to do that.*

The photograph of Eric's father and him as a baby illustrates how ideas of identity can overlap, change and be reaffirmed with reflection, in that we are all *'inherited material'* (Lawler, 2008:31) i.e. products of our ancestors changing and growing through our social interactions as Goffman (1959), and Unruh (1983) suggested.

As we saw in the keeping photographs, objects and using creativity chapter with Sally, in discovering more about her grandfather's identity learned more about herself, Kelly similarly in finding stories from her father felt *'very touched'* and connected to him. Kelly found she knew more about who he was, and their relationship, and how if he couldn't say how he felt about his relationship with her, his writings expressed how proud he was of her;

> *Kelly;*
>
> *Oh, it wasn't poems, it's just a bit he wrote in here, which is quite nice really, there we are, well it sort of fills in the story a little bit, but I was very touched. I only found that recently cos, when you are a child you and your parents write their life, this is my father, this is his own life story, which he wrote in 1973 and that bit there tells you about the boarding school, I was very touched by that really.*

Exploring reflections on the deceased's identity, brings us to a reflection on self-identity, how we place and identify ourselves in the world after such a disruptive live event as a death (Phu, Brown and Dewan, 2017). There will need to be time for reflections as part of an *'internal adjustment'* as suggested by Worden (2003:32), who is our anchor? Where is our point of reference after a death? Sally explored this further;

Sally;

I mean at some point somebody is going to die in life, well we are, do you know what I mean? Our own death but also you know people around us, you know, everyone has to deal with that and has to deal with our own kind of mortality and our fragility, cos when you are younger you don't really have a sense of that, I didn't, well yeah and I don't think you should, because you know you are young, and you shouldn't have to think about that, but obviously when you get older you know, and like I'm an orphan now you know, and its surreal like it's a surreal notion, and it's also a fact of life, so everyone will have to embrace that at some point in their lives and whether that's somebody dying or, or you know a relationship ending.

Sally, similar to Barthes (1980), in exploring the topic of death using photographs, and reflecting on her parents' identities, reflected on her mortality, and as the example above illustrates with the deaths of both parents her identity as a female adult changed to include '*orphan'*.

In my experiences of the deaths of my relatives and having experience of fragility and mortality has encouraged me to be more aware of things I am photographing, recording and the positive way I'm living my life, mirroring the reflections of Hocker (2010), in affirming my identity as a female researcher, photographer, family member; daughter and granddaughter, feeling more of a connection and passion about the importance in keeping and curating our family memories and stories. As Harper (2012) suggested in exploring our community we inevitably explore ourselves, this research has given me a greater depth of reflection, and peace with my experiences, that I may not have had. Reflecting on self and experiences of others after a bereavement has given me a greater understanding of commonalities we may experience after a death in the family, feeling better equipped to move forward in future research, and supporting others in the context of after a bereavement.

6.4 Identity, heritage and legacy of the deceased

In exploring the identities of our family members and self, the research highlighted through participants experiences, that family heritage, i.e. our culture, and legacy from the deceased had an increased importance to us after they died. On reflecting through photographs and objects as illustrated earlier in the chapter, new meanings on self-identity and belonging can

be made after a death, the self, being conducted within frames and performances, that are subject to changes within social connections (Goffman, 1959, 1974). One such change highlighted for me was the importance of having a full birth certificate to affirm my identity. As explored in detail in the reflections after a death chapter, I could now prove I was lawfully a relative of my dad's, i.e. his daughter, enabling me to arrange his estate. It gave me, in writing, documentation to prove who I was, his legacy and my belonging, having such documentation was also important for Tammy, following her grandmother's death, when needing to obtain documents from her estate to affirm her Polish family heritage in order to continue living in the UK as she discussed;

> *Tammy;*
>
> *I went back to see if I could get Polish citizenship through my heritage, which is subsequently what happened, but what we had to do was to trawl through all her belongings to find the right paperwork, we found her naturalisation documents as well, and a questionnaire listing everywhere she had been, basically from birth until she got to Australia and then, we also had to find evidence of whether she had renounced her Polish Citizenship, but she hadn't, but yeah, we just found all this information, like oh my god at last!*

As Tammy noted, she felt relieved in that her grandmother still had the evidence of her family heritage enabling affirmation of her Polish heritage, to continue living, working and identifying in the UK as a Polish citizen. Tammy's story highlighted that finding the documentation of her grandmothers' legal heritage supported her family for the future;

> *Tammy;*
>
> *I'm not going to get any inheritance in monetary form, but being able to call myself Polish now is, that's my inheritance.*

It is worthy of reflection here that as Tammy suggests that *'being able to call myself Polish…that's my inheritance'* suggests that our greatest legacy from the deceased may not be a photograph or a watch, but us as people, our lives.

6.5 Conclusion reflection

The chapter has highlighted the importance of using photographs and objects to explore identity traits of deceased family members and self-identity along-side a need for belonging and knowledge of our heritage. We may question our identity following a death within the family, reflecting on what frame in which we now live our life. In having objects and photographs in our homes relating to deceased can support our ongoing connections to them, supporting wellbeing and avoiding compassion fatigue (Kearney *et al.*, 2009) or melancholia (Freud, 2005) both detrimental to our mental wellbeing. In the practical everyday functions in organising my dad's estate, having the legal document of a full birth certificate, affirming my identity eased the navigation of legalities of what needs to be organised after a death. I have gratitude for my being and belonging to my family; I also have a greater appreciation for my surname as a legacy from dad.

Chapter 7: Estrangement

7.1 Introduction

The research highlighted experiences of estrangement within families. Estrangement can be a disruptive life event like a death, and as such, those who experience estrangement within their family may experience similar feelings as if the person to which they are estranged had died. A loss without a death may evoke similar feelings all over again when the individual does die. Estrangement as a loss will be explored, as well as a methodical exploration in a context of estrangement through the main themes of this thesis as in previous chapters; female curators, identity, reflections on death and creativity.

I wanted to explore if others had experiences of estrangement, as I had with my dad, and in particular, a focus on a death following a period of estrangement. In navigating such periods as estrangement highlights that sometimes relationships within a family may not always be amicable and straight forward but turbulent and complex.

The chapters focus is from an autoethnographic perspective and that of one other participant Nancy who also experienced estrangement within her family. It reflects on if we do not have or want to keep objects or photographs from the estranged deceased. How objects and photographs can highlight absence and as well as exploring what is left after a death following an estrangement, around themes of memories, time markers, rituals, identity, connections and the use of creative practices, and will conclude with an overall reflection.

7.2 Absence of dad

The following section explores the estrangement between me and my dad and reflections on that period and beyond.

Discovering the photo of me in the red jacket at the seaside, illustrated at the beginning of this thesis, found in my Dad's belongings after his death, reminded me of a forgotten part of my identity and sense of self (Goffman, 1959). My Dad's death was preceded by 16 years of estrangement, the last time I saw him prior to this was when I was 21 and reflecting on the rediscovered photograph of me in the red jacket, the photo became a symbol of a lost, absent memory. As identified in the reflections after a death, and curation of family photographs and objects chapters, participants experience of knowing about loss happened at pivotal stages in childhood. For me, the photo of the red jacket is symbolic of a pivotal stage of loss at an early age, as around the time the photograph was taken, my mum and dad had divorced.

Describing estrangement as a loss (Agllias, 2013) with similar feelings as a death and grief through Kubler-Ross' (1969) 5 Stages (denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance), rediscovering photographs or indeed an absence of them can be a disruptive force in our lives, resurfacing past feelings. Would I have remembered that moment of me at the seaside as pivotal in my history symbolic of a loss, if I hadn't found the photograph of me in the red jacket?

The following photographs from my family archive show a Christmas scene, one with me and my Mum, and one with me and my Dad, brought together by me following his death acting as a *'travelling object'* (Pink, 2007:133) and therefore adding another layer of story to them. I am very familiar with the photograph of mum and me as it was in our family album, as I lived with my mum as a child, affirming traditional roles as mothers as caregivers. The accumulation of my objects and photographs was within the main home, as explored further by Janning, Collins, & Kamm (2011) with the main possessions of children being within the key caregivers home. I discovered the photograph of dad and I in his belongings at the same time as finding the photo of me in the red jacket. As I was not aware of the photo of dad and me, and not having photographs of him and me when I was a young child, his image was absent from my family album, reinforcing a theme of absence as suggested by Rose (2010), and our later subsequent estrangement. As explored further in the reflections after a death, I reflected on rediscovering the photographs in a Weetabix box of my dad's during my self-interview, (in the example that follows), dad was a heavy smoker and having this object that is still tainted by cigarette smoke, which included documents and photographs from my life, was difficult to keep and revisit;

Nikki;

It's really quite, to open this box is really quite, what's the word I'm looking for, it's quite difficult because you know that's what led to his death, and the contents of the tin are all his divorce papers from my mum, and a mixture of kind of, legal bits and pieces and maintenance letters and but then it is kind of interspersed with real sweet things.

(21) Nikki: Mum and Dad at Christmas

The reflection of the photo of me in the red jacket also found in my dad's box, and unease of keeping the box felt reminiscent of reflections on a photo of Hirsch (1997) and her son at the time of her divorce;

there is a complicated story embedded here, one that has kept this and other pictures like it out of family albums……broken relationships with his father….family photographs tell stories it is complex, plural contradictory and interruptive if telling a story, the maternal photographers take on, it is no wonder they do it so hesitatingly.

(Hirsch, 1997:187)

In not having the photograph of me at the seaside and the photo of dad at Christmas, due to estrangement and divorce, did not highlight absence at the time, as I was not aware of their existence, i.e. a person is kept in mind if photos are displayed in the home as suggested by Rose (2010). However, when I discovered photos and objects stimulating my memory, good or otherwise, it magnified the years of absence and the what if's. Exploring absence through family photographs highlighted by Rose (2010) and also Berger (1967:20) who commented it *'is as revealing about what is absent from the photograph as about what is present in it'* when bringing together the Christmas photographs of my mum and dad, it highlighted the absence

of the other. As Agllias (2013) suggested, it may continue to be complex and challenging in keeping photographs during and after disruptive events.

> Bringing together the Christmas photographs of my mum and dad were symbolic for me, acting as *'memory hooks'* (Riches and Dawson, 1998:133), symbolic of capturing that time of loss, absence and estrangement, to a time of coming back together and symbolic of our reconciliation before he died.
>
> In the reconciliation with my dad, Koggel (2017:195) in *'travelling to her Mothers world'* resonated with me about the similarities and complexities of a fractured relationship that she had with her mother just as I had with my dad, all centered around compromise, the following extract from my journal after reading her article;
>
> *Nikki-reflective journal;*
>
> *Travelling to dad's world was a real test of my strength. I was playing multiple roles, daughter, independent woman, someone from the great unknown, food in the lion pit, someone who had experienced this before, a stranger in my dad's world. I was there not only for care of his failing body but also to negotiate over our failed/lost relationship. People are very resilient as both me and dad were through that six weeks before he died, I couldn't help thinking about the deaths of nan and grandad, travelling with them physically through this journey, and caring for them until and after the exact moment of death, I wondered what happened to them after we left and couldn't think of them being there and alone after all that care.*

Sharing personal experiences of estrangement and death within the context of this thesis, supports ongoing dialogue around the themes, giving a voice to those for which it may not have been possible, the themes explored further by Denshire (2014) and Drabble & Leader (2019). In sharing my experiences I have been able to navigate through my feelings of them, in identifying commonalities in the experiences of others, being open where I can in talking about the subjects, breaking away from the taboo and absence of conversations about death (as explored further in the reflections after a death chapter on taboo), and estrangement that may still carry a social stigma (Agllias, 2013).

7.3 What is left?

So what is left after a disruptive event (Phu, Brown and Dewan, 2017) in family history such as an estrangement? Estrangement, as a loss, can lead us into experiencing loss twice in our lives once when we are estranged and once when the family member dies (Agllias, 2013; Scharp and Thomas, 2016).

> I met with my dad six weeks before he died, being his only relative I organised his estate and his funeral in the month preceding the start of my research. Being estranged from one another, I didn't have a connection to his life (nor him to mine) during that time, so arranging his belongings reflecting his life during that period, was a strange process. As explored earlier in the chapter, my only connection to him was through the memories I had associated to photographs. I had no desire or connection to other items in his estate, nothing relating to identity that I wanted to keep for the future as suggested by Unruh (1983). I did, however, keep some of his ties and old cards I had sent him as a child, that I found in the Weetabix box, alongside his watch.
>
> After dad's death, I would regularly look at his watch, knowing inevitably at some point it would stop. The watch became symbolic of the time when he died, a marker in time and the last physical connection to him, perhaps a metaphor of holding on to the last part of something in movement in living, of his. I reflected on this as part of my visual journey on Instagram;

(22) Nikki: Dad's watch stopped

I knew this day would come, Dad's watch battery has stopped, 4th September 2017 was the day he died. I placed a great amount of willing in that watch to keep going but knew it would stop eventually, a metaphor for life, I guess.

(Price, 2019) *Instagram Post 13.11.2018*

Looking at dad's photographs in an attempt to connect with his identity during the time we were estranged, to piece together what his life was like, I knew he had remarried, and I came across a photo of him wearing one of the ties I had kept after organising his home;

Looking through an old album, I noticed this photo, of dad on his wedding day to his second wife. I remembered the suit as it was the one I chose for him to wear on the day of his funeral. Whilst clearing his home, I randomly kept a small selection of his ties, and only realised today that I have the one he wore on his wedding day. It is interesting as I feel I have something physical that connects me to that day, although I was never physically there.

(Price, 2019) *Instagram Post 18.11.2018*

The tie and the ticking of the watch, as mundane, everyday objects brought us together, contrasting the normality of the innate object to my feelings around the loss. It gave space for reflection, turning an object or photograph into something precious, being mindful of losing the memory if I mislaid the object. I could have replaced the battery in the watch, but went with the battery's life span, if I had remade it into something, it would not have been 'of him'.

(23) Nikki: Dad's flat and my school photo

As well as looking for cues of dad's identity, who he was, during our estrangement, as I had done with his tie, looking through his photographs in an attempt to place myself with him during that time in the everyday through familial looking as described by Hirsch (1997). I reflected on this as part of my photo journal, as I surmised he perhaps used the photo of me to keep me in the present as suggested by Pink (2007), that we use photos in the home to remind us of the absent, and he did during our estrangement;

wanting to see myself in his memories and lived experience. I look through his photograph's and see on a table, school photographs of me in infant and senior school. Always a presence in absent of present. I also forgot he used to play golf until I saw the two clubs propped up on the table; as Berger, Kuhn, Hirsch, Barthes and many other photography theorists would say, photographs are about the what is shown and often more about what isn't.

(Price, 2019) *Instagram Post 30.11.18*

In exploring with others what objects and photographs are kept in the family when there is estrangement, and having objects as reflections of identity, Nancy spoke of a traditional ring that was bought by her Mum;

Nancy;

I did have……. a Claddagh ring, which is….an Irish love ring and my Mum had bought it for me when I was about 14 from a kiosk, we were going home, 'to Ireland' as we did during the summer and I'd had it on my finger for so long it had got misshapen, and the silver had sort of gone to a strange shape and not long after I decided to break contact with her, I took it off my finger and I threw it in the river….it's a place that I still love the river and the bridge, but, yes it just felt symbolic, to take this ring off and to throw it into the river, I didn't want to throw it into a bin or anything, and somebody else find it, so it's probably sitting in the mud at the bottom of the river.

As Nancy suggested at the start of her estrangement, symbolically no longer wanted to keep the ring that was gifted to her, thereby throwing it into a river. Nancy's experience echo's a reverse of Rose (2010) as suggested earlier in the chapter using photographs and objects keeps the absent in mind every day, by not keeping objects and photographs we may therefore not be reminded of the absent, similar to my experiences of the Christmas photograph of my dad. In finding the photograph of me in the red jacket at the seaside, through something physical again highlighted a vast absence, of which others' may have felt regret due to a lost time. Similarly in not keeping objects or photographs could also relate to the reverse of Behrens & Umemura (2013) research in that if children didn't have favourable responses to or good attachments to photographs (or objects) they may not be as inclined to keep them for the future.

As well as sharing reflections on their estrangement, Nancy shared that due to difficult family relationships, she had not attended her mum's funeral. Following Nancy's mum's death, as we saw earlier in the reflections after a death chapter, the use of objects and photographs in symbolism and rituals were observed;

> *Nancy;*
>
> *Something that I had already done and decided to do was that I held my own wake, I had, at quite short notice, I invited a few people, and it ended up just being four of us, whether people thought it was a weird invitation or just short notice, most of them would not have known my mum. I have very few, very few objects, I've got a few pictures of her, and when I had my little wake for her, I dug out a few photos and put them on the table I dusted because she never would have had guests round without the place being dusted, and we had to have a spread, I lit a candle in my candle holder, a catholic thing and we, I read out something about her.*

Observing such rituals such as attending a funeral can support an individual's grief (Worden, 2003), and here Nancy observed a traditional ritual of having a wake in the absence of attending her mum's funeral in which friends supported her. We may observe other rituals as those explored by Day (2017) and Ebenstein (2018) for example in visiting significant places in remembering the deceased, as I illustrated earlier in the chapter on what would have been dad's 60th Birthday, and as Nancy's experience illustrated, may still be observed despite having turbulent or estranged relationships. Dad and I reconnected for what became the final six weeks of his life, Agllias (2013) suggested that unreconciled estrangement could be detrimental to all individuals involved, however could be supported by what is suggested as *'redefining the negative'* (Unruh, 1983:346) in rethinking our relationship with the estranged, in particular after their death.

The illustrations in this chapter around autoethnography and that of Nancy's with estrangement in the family has highlighted similarities and contrasts to the themes of death, identity, symbolism, wellbeing using photographs and objects. As illustrated in the findings of my research and such writers as Hirsch (1997); Kuhn (1995); Rose (2010), women continue to choose what objects and photographs to keep in the curation of their family memories, even in turbulent or estranged circumstances during and after a death.

If objects and photographs support reflections on loss, then how do we relate to loss, without them, after estrangement, and then after death, navigating our feelings around two disruptive life events within our lives? One answer highlighted in the research findings could be through the process of creativity or having a creative response, a view also shared by Samuel (2017).

7.4 Creative responses after estrangement and death

Through the process of this research, participants found that a creative response whether painting, writing, film making, poetry, was beneficial in exploring their feelings around remembrance and reflection of a deceased family member, also illustrated further in the keeping objects, photographs and using creativity chapter.

In periods of estrangement, illustrated earlier in the chapter, there may be fewer photographs and objects due to not having many (if any at all) shared experiences. After a death or following a period of estrangement, using creativity to reflect upon these times can be beneficial, as Nancy explored through writing, with her words providing a re-imagining and rewriting of a new history;

> *Nancy;*
>
> *What I have got, is just a pile of notebooks because I'm a writer, and I have written so much stuff, about family but particularly my mother…….all fictionalized and many of the stories aren't real, but they were all based on growing up in Irish community in England, all the women's stories…. I was able to work through a great deal in the writing of that book, and by god it hasn't ended, the Irish thing still comes through. I've been since mum died particularly, I've been writing a memoir and these notebooks are just all full absolutely full of stuff. These are the notebooks that I haven't typed up yet and there all tagged of things I want to write, I've got notebooks upstairs that I've already worked on and have stored away, so that's, that's her legacy, but I didn't start writing until after she and I were estranged……..once I was released from that it felt that I could write what I liked, having said that, it's not full of anger the mother character in the book is actually a lot nicer than my own mother, so I could write a better mother, I wrote myself a better mother.*
>
> *Nikki;*
>
> As a photographer documenting my life through photographs, enjoying its possibilities for creativity and exploring the world, in part, stems from not having many photographs of my life as a young child, those I do have are treasured. After my dad died, I documented my experience of organising the belongings in his home, using my camera through grief allowing me to step back from the all-consuming tasks that followed after someone dies, giving myself something to revisit on how I felt about my experiences at a later stage if I wanted.
>
> Being in dad's home surrounded by his things, I ensured I was capturing every part of his life, placing myself as adult taking photographs of a space we never shared together, (as the only photos we had together was of when I was a child), attempting to connect

with his life through the everyday, the mundane the ordinary (Unruh, 1983; Pritz, 2011; Plowman and Stevenson, 2012; Kalekin-Fishman, 2013). I wanted to get a sense of how dad lived through photographs and objects as a way of connecting to him during the time of our estrangement using *'material for interpretation, to be interrogated, mined, for its meanings and its possibilities'* (Kuhn, 2010:303). In exploring what types of food, he ate, the ornaments he had, the way he appeared to have relaxed in the space, was interesting to compare to my own life, what similarities we shared, perhaps we may have done these things at the same time, in our separate homes.

The photographs I had taken in organising his belongings, when I felt able to revisit them, became a time for reflection on my experiences of grief, and further processing what happened during those two months, as Pink (2007); Riches & Dawson (1998) suggested, photographs enabled me to have markers in time in which to later reflect on. Through photographing his belongings, I was fully able to appreciate what I had done for him towards the end of his life and before leaving his home, after which I did not need to return.

As Berger (1967) suggested, through photographs, I felt I was connecting to him on one level, through places, objects and photographs, but now have a permanent record of absence, of us from each other's lives. In revisiting photographs and reimagining them as part of a different story, I, as Nancy did, can rework my thoughts around them for example; in this thesis, sharing my experiences, having the photographs travelling on in support of others in their journeys, prompting conversations of estrangement and death of family members.

The process of using creativity or having a creative response following a family death supported participants in sharing their family stories in the absence of a shared history. Exploring through alternative realities, reimagining's and new connections, e.g. writing new mothers or piecing together missed fragments of a life, if desired. Creativity further supporting ongoing conversations in overcoming taboo and potential stigma of discussing these topics as highlighted earlier in the chapter. As Harris & Edmonds (2015) suggested that using creativity after a death we can attempt to navigate our lives with less hurt, though specifically their research was from the perspective of a parent to young child, the examples in this chapter of child (as an adult) to parent loss also stands. Time for reflection in considering our lives differently using creativity can be beneficial. The use of photographs act as prompts for conversations, as we have seen in participants responses, and as Samuel (2017) suggested, can

be beneficial talking tools in counselling, and other networks such as peer support suggested by Worden (2003) would be encouraged to be used alongside any creative practice if needed.

7.5 Conclusion reflection

Through turbulent or estranged family relationships and then a death there can still be a place for creative responses and meaning-making, with women as main curators of the family image and story, disposing of, or re-imagining histories. Rituals may be observed after a period of estrangement and death, such as attending a funeral, having a wake, visiting a place the deceased visited, each acting as time markers to reflect upon. The research highlighted it was Nancy and I that had specifically experienced estrangement and then death within the family. I would, therefore, be mindful to note that reflections relating to themes aren't assumed for a wider group of people, as all experiences are individual, giving space for further research in this area. In including such personal experiences around estrangement and then death, has not only supported the navigation of my feelings around, losing someone twice through both these emotionally challenging experiences but hope that in sharing it will reach out in supporting others, opening up conversations around perceived stigma.

Chapter 8: Conclusions, the role of women curating, creating and connections after a bereavement

This project has explored photographs and objects within families in the context of after a death of a family member, with core themes of women curating, using creativity in maintaining and remaking connections after a bereavement.

8.1 Methods

The emotional investment in the research when revisiting memories around the subject of such a disruptive life event like a death with others, has been vast, this is not to say that such emotive topics should not be discussed, however in using a variety of qualitative methods; such as interviewing, voice recordings, discussions through objects and photographs, for this auto/ethnographic research, supported a holistic exploration of a sensitive subject and is therefore held within established methods with integrity. In having the variety of methods in which participants and I could explore within the project, facilitated how things are remembered, i.e. '*radially'* (Berger, 1967:59), through a variety of memories at a particular time. Interviews in participants homes provided a base for a relaxed environment in which to discuss potentially sensitive topics and may have been willing to share more due to this, as illustrated with over half of participants taking me to the places in their home to show me other items that they wanted to discuss. The practicalities of having a ready group of participants nearby supported the ease and timely completion of which to conduct the interviews within the time parameters of the study.

8.2 Practice: reflecting through photographs and objects

Using visual items such as participants archival photographs and objects complemented the organic nature of interviews led by participants in what they chose to share, using similar methods of discussion to photo-elicitation (Harper, 2010), in supporting reflections 'through'

photographs and objects prompting the recall of memories. In taking photographs at pertinent moments during interviews as part of my visual recordings, giving space between the participant and me, allowing a change in the flow of the interview, giving participants another route in which to 'present' their objects and photographs. Using visual methods supported this intimate interaction of a sensitive subject within domestic space. I wanted as part of this thesis to embrace visual ethnography. As we learned of our connections to family through photo albums, by the inclusion of the oral stories, presented through quotations from participants memories, as well as the accompaniment of rich photographs I wanted to continue the visual as a talking point, as has been successful through this research, in opening up the conversations around death. Text and photographs exploring this intimate third sociology (Sztompka, 2008), sharing private within the domestic, to public. Including four photographs from this project at Fusion19 exhibition gave favourable reactions in bringing the subject into a public space and prompted further poignant conversations.

8.3 Self-Reflection: an autoethnographic perspective

The autoethnographic nature of this research in including my personal experiences as well as others required reflexivity and self-reflection throughout, there were times that I worked in multiple roles such as participant-researcher-friend, interviewer-photographer. In working in this way and consistently reflecting through my written and photographic journals, supported me in having a holistic view on the research and data, updating methods or process where needed. Being researcher-participant allowed for me to have a greater understanding and empathy with the subject and supported me in holding stories and participants reflections navigating emotion and embracing the stories of others. As Coffey (1999), Pink (2007) and Harper (2012) suggested that researchers integrating into research, are not only learning about others, but themselves as well which has been the case using autoethnography as part of this project, supporting navigation and understanding of my grief through photographs and objects as Hilliker (2006) suggested.

In supporting the navigation and understanding of my own grief through the research, I have come to a level of peace with the deaths of my family members. I am more comfortable talking

about death, dying, and of the creative practices I used in support of my grief in supporting others, which I will extended into further research. I am immensely proud of myself and my strength for undertaking this research in what was, in the beginning, a raw process of succession of deaths, and particularly starting one month after my dad died. I may not have given myself that intimate and in-depth looking into my relationships with my family members and my grief had I not undertaken this research. What this process has given me is a greater appreciation for the seemingly smallest everyday things with my life, cherishing my relationships more, it is equally about good living as well as what happens after a death. Learning of other experiences has given me insight into how I can continue connections to my deceased family members, in a life without them physically, but connections always through memories, photographs and objects.

Including others has had a beneficial impact on them too with one noting that it was nice to have someone to talk to about this subject, and for another, one of the best night's sleep they had had! In having personal experience on the subject supported the openness of interviews and recruitment of participants, and again may have been due to the researcher-friend-participant relationship. I have such gratitude for participants involved in the research and it has been a privilege in learning of their journeys after the death of their relatives. I do feel now I hold their stories as precious as I have my own.

8.4 Theme findings and chapter conclusions

Using multiple methods of exploring objects and photographs after a death in the family, has allowed a breadth of experiences to be discussed, however, has shown that any categorising of or separation out into specific themes is not straight forward, as the themes evident from the research are interwoven.

A core theme through the research was one of women within a family as well as taking the role as curator of family photographs and objects in life, took the role organising and curating after the death of a family member. Women actively sought out and felt a responsibility to objects and photographs in which to keep as a family archive, for legacy; either with an intention in passing them down directly to their children, or other children within the family such as nieces

and nephews. It also highlighted how curation as a social construct could change over time in what individuals may think important to include, and with whom they are passed, including a balance of perspective from a male participant. The role of women organising and curating after a death also from an autoethnographic point of view with myself as participant-researcher was predominant in my family. Being a woman actively exploring the arena of my use of photographs and objects after a family death, alongside other women within my family taking the lead in organising deceased families belongings and curation of memories, continues this theme and narrative. However, for the future as Hocker (2010) suggested, will it still be all down to us?

Participation in the research showed a willingness and want to talk specifically about the death of the family member, an openness to reflect on experiences after a death, reflected in my friendship with participants. Death is a disruptive life event, (Phu, Brown and Dewan, 2017), having a reflective space after in which to explore through photographs and objects, has supported new meanings to two participants through objects. It supported a change of a previously held view about themselves and in the meaning of an object relating to the deceased. It also highlighted participants symbolic meanings on photographs and objects that may or may not have belonged the deceased, supporting the theme of women as curators. In the discussions on the deceased, participants explored not only the physicality and memories through objects or photographs, but they also spoke of sensing the deceased and the rituals they undertook following the deaths, highlighting a commonality of practices between participants. The openness and variety of methods used in the research provided a supportive space for reflections on and discussing death, not just in participants homes, but now as part of this thesis and a gallery space where my photographs were exhibited and generated further discussions. Including myself in within this research project, feel as Davis (1998) in discussing the feminist movement suggested, that exploring in our individual lives, we can use this to then bring about change and meaning within wider society. Including personal and participant experiences and sharing these within the context of this thesis and exhibition opens the research up to a wider narrative of talking about death in the everyday, overcoming perceived stigma or the subject as taboo as highlighted by Samuel (2017).

Being invited into participants homes in sharing where they kept and used everyday objects and remembered the deceased, highlighted an essence of ordinary, the everyday in the objects kept, for example, kitchen utensils to clocks. There was a commonality with objects and photographs having additional meanings associated with them in journeys they had in order to

be with the participant (reminiscent of Pink (2007) travelling object). How photographs were stored and reflected upon keeping a connection to the deceased as suggested by Unruh (1983) through objects and photographs, had benefits for participants keeping the deceased in their lives, the physical in the absence of the physical person. Participants expressed a wish to have more photographs and objects where there were gaps in their archive, highlighted through the research was even in situations of estrangement; participants kept items belonging to their estranged parent. Following the initial interview participant, Kelly expressed that she had been inspired to organise her belongings and photographs to think about legacy items for her children, again highlighting the core research theme of women curating and organising the family archive. Mindful of the research timescale, I would have liked to have worked more with participants over a longer period in supporting the development of a creative response to objects and photographs and explore more practices of creativity that followed after a bereavement and estrangement. As a photographer using photography in documenting my experiences and in exploring my grief, it was encouraging to see, that three participants had intentions to or had completed a creative project in the duration of this study.

Using photographs and objects to explore the identity of the deceased and self, without the deceased, and our mortality, was reminiscent of Barthes (1980) exploration of the photo of his mother in the winter garden. Identity and legacy in obtaining official proof of belonging was highlighted in participant Tammy obtaining her Polish citizenship and through me obtaining my full birth certificate with both parents named. In the absence of not having any monetary inheritance, physical objects or photographs highlights that perhaps the greatest legacy of the deceased is us, which has been the case for me and a greater appreciation of my surname, for a while it felt that my surname was reminiscent of loss, a disconnect, an unknown, being at peace with my relationship now with dad, I can't think of it being anything else.

The final theme from the research; estrangement, was highlighted with Nancy and me. In turbulent experiences such as estrangement, there was a need to keep photographs and objects, as well as having creative responses, such as writing and photography. It supported participants to navigate, not just estrangement as a loss (Agllias, 2013), but a further loss and grief, when the family member dies.

Opportunities for future research are exploring responses, or observations of meanings associated with objects and photographs, including creative practices, with a specific group after a death, over a longer period of time. There would be merit in refining the research sample

to similar age groupings, perhaps comparing different generations. An opportunity to explore reflections and conversations around death in different places and using creative media could be beneficial to explore, following the favourable response to this research exhibition and in supporting an ongoing narrative. There is also the opportunity of exploring men as gatekeepers and curators of family archives after a death.

This research project and its benefits supporting the navigation of my grief, and that of participants, is one that I am grateful for. In bringing all the data and findings together, I have a greater sense of belonging and connection to others around this topic, in contrast to the start at which felt like a lonely place, it has also been a lesson in living well. In continuing my research journey, I hope to hold space for others in which to support further reflections and opportunities for creativity after a bereavement.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Participant information sheet and consent form

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Personal Loss, Memory and Family: an exploration of family photographs and objects after a bereavement.

Name of Researcher: Nikki Price

Contact details:

Address:	
Tel:	
Email:	

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	
2. I understand that my participation is **voluntary** and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.	
3. I understand that any personal information that I provide to the researchers will be kept strictly confidential	
4. I agree to take part in the above study.	

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Name of Person taking consent (if different from researcher)	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Researcher	Date	Signature

Copies: 1 for participant

1 for researcher

Personal Loss, Memory and Family: an exploration of family photographs and objects after a bereavement.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

A research study is being conducted at Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) by Nikki Price.

Background

One month before my Masters by Research was due to start in 2017, my Dad died. Also, my maternal grandparents died in 2013 and 2016 respectively and these experiences of death spurred a change in my research focus. I had undertaken previous photo projects with my Grandad (Horsebridge Centre Whitstable Skin Project 2016) in what was to be the last year of his life, and I decided to maintain his memory and my connection to him through documenting how the family cleared the house in which he lived, remembering stories that were told there, the cakes that were eaten, the family parties, then eventually the sadness through photographs and objects.

I wanted to further research how other people maintained connections to family members following a bereavement, through the looking and organising of photographs, keeping objects and how these held stories, memories, and how these enabled re-membering, re-photographing, and re-using them.

The research will include a large part of my own experiences, through documentary photography, other stills, filming, and sound, however I feel it important to include others experiences and thoughts to get a more rounded understanding.

What will you be required to do?

Participants in this study will be required to:

- Talk about family photographs / family objects from those who have died
- Express what these photographs and objects mean to you (around loose themes set by the researcher)
- Have their photograph taken/be filmed in a 'documentary style' talking about the above

You have been selected to take part in this research as you have previously expressed interest in our informal conversations about my research, or you have read this information sheet and are interested in participating.

To participate in this research you must:

- Have had the death of an adult within your family recently (12 months prior to participation date)
- Have artefacts/objects belonging to the deceased
- Have family photographs (digital and hard copy) that you are willing to talk about and will be used in the final research outcomes
- Be comfortable and willing to talk about these potentially sensitive subjects

Procedures

You will be asked to participate in semi-structured conversations with the researcher about the topic, on a range of themes.

Timeline: 1 hour initial conversation, follow up hours and extension possible

Feedback

All participants will receive a copy of the written transcript of the conversations should they wish.

Confidentiality

All data and personal information will be stored securely within CCCU premises in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the University's own data protection requirements. Data can only be accessed by <state whom; this will normally be the same person(s) listed in the initial paragraph of this sheet>. After completion of the study, all data will be made anonymous (i.e. all personal information associated with the data will be removed).

Dissemination of results

The results of the conversations and photography, filming sound bites will all be used in a final exhibition/visual piece set by the researcher. (To date the final format is TBD).

Deciding whether to participate

If you have any questions or concerns about the nature, procedures or requirements for participation do not hesitate to contact me. Should you decide to participate, you will be free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason.

Appendix 2: self-reminders for interviews

What?	Prompt Questions
To work with adults (24+) who have experienced the death of a parent/grandparent/sibling within their family, over 12 months ago, to learn how they use objects and photographs after a bereavement.	**Personal Loss, Memory and Family: an exploration of family photographs and objects after a bereavement.**
To learn from an individual about their memories of a deceased member of their family	What can the use of objects and photographs in acts of memory, tell us about the relationships to the deceased? How can I support individuals in their process of remembering? How can photography best be used by individuals to support this process of remembering?
To learn about what particular objects hold significance with the family and why about the deceased.	What objects are chosen / gifted? What in particular stimulates the memory / remembering? How are these objects used (if at all) in everyday life? How do families work through distribution of photographs and objects? What do people find are the benefits of having something physical in the absence of the deceased? Do individuals find it beneficial to have objects belonging to the deceased visible in their home? Do they make them visible? How are these made meaningful? How are the objects interacted with? How can I use this information/experience to share wider to supporting discussions around the subject?

	How can I support the process of remembering through the discussion/organisation of objects of the deceased? Are there any objects that the individual remembers fondly but doesn't have?
To learn about what memories and stories are stimulated through the looking of photographs of the deceased member of their family.	What photographs are chosen to discuss? Who is chosen to be spoken about? What in particular is chosen to be shared about the photograph? How are these photographs used (if at all) in everyday life? How can I assist individuals to collate and organise any inherited family photographs into something meaningful to them? What do individuals find are the benefits of having photographs of the deceased visible in their home? How then is the above used in acts of remembrance? How does this help individuals? What are the immediate and ongoing benefits? What is the significance of these discussions? How can I use this information/experience to share to others supporting discussions around the subject? How can I support the process of remembering through the discussion of photographs (and the practice of photography) of the deceased? In what ways can we use photographs in supporting the individual to remember something they may have previously forgotten? Are there any objects that the individual remembers fondly but doesn't have?

To enable individuals to use the project to visually remember the deceased in a way that they may not have done.	How can I work with individuals to support them in expressing their connections to the deceased family member through photographs? How can I support individuals to re-photograph, photograph as part of visual storytelling? In what ways do/can individuals use the project to retrospectively look at objects and photographs that are from or show the deceased? How can I use all the options open to me as part of my approved ethics for recording this? (sounds photo film etc.).
To develop a better understanding of how as a small part of society connected by loss, can understand and process memories of the deceased through the use of photographs and objects as a stimulus for remembering.	How does the use of objects and photographs support our understanding of the connections to the deceased? How does this support our connections to the deceased? How can I support others in a visual process in expressing their understanding of the connections to the deceased? How can I work towards disseminating the outcomes to a wider audience? (to aid a wider understanding of the subject)? How does this support our long-term mental health? remembering? Connections?
To provide a platform in which these subjects can be discussed.	How can this (how do individuals want this) to happen? -is this through digital or hard copy means? How can I in the future use this information to reach out to more people through the use of workshops?

Appendix 3: Medway Open Studios July 2019 and July 2018

Medway open studios and arts festival (MOSAF https://medwayopenstudios.org) is an independent arts festival run in Medway Kent over 2 weekends in July. Local artists are welcomed to exhibit work either in galleries or in their homes.

I used July 2018 as an opportunity to display some of my early explorations of the thesis subject (as well as discussions through peer critique at The Photographer's Gallery London) through my own family archival photographs. In July 2018 I had around 100 visitors over the 2 weekends, in July 2019 visitors were around 70.

Both exhibitions supported my navigation through the title of the thesis as well as providing a talking point for visitors. Some of the photographs and words shared here include stories that visitors could read as well as perusing the photographs, in 2019 I welcomed visitors to include their thoughts and reflections on a memory board, something interactive and creative. All visitors stayed for a while and welcomed the opportunity to discuss family photographs and objects after a bereavement in the context of their own families, supporting creative methods and non-traditional spaces in which to discuss the topics covered in this thesis.

I wrote a blog for both exhibitions on my website:
https://nikkipricephotography.wordpress.com/2018/09/08/mosaf18-masters-and-everything-else-in-between/
https://nikkipricephotography.wordpress.com/2019/07/25/mosaf19-the-end-of-the-masters-is-in-sight/

Welcome to my Open Studio 2019

Research into family memories using photography was prompted by the death of both my Grandparents (Nan in 2014, Grandad in 2016) and then in 2017 my Dad, after which I felt 'lost' about who I was and where my life sat without them.

Talking with others about their family photographs and objects over the last couple of years, has shown me some common themes of family memories and items that we preserve, which support and reinforce understanding of our family unit, and our identity and connections within.

The photographs exhibited include a selection of my responses to the death of my Grandparents and photographs taken during my interviews with participants (11 in total), during which they shared their memories of their deceased family member.

I was interested to see if there were any common themes shared by my participants that reflected my own experiences of loss in the family, and if there were any similarities in which objects and photographs were kept, and memories shared.

Using photography as a reflective tool has supported me in exploring how I continue to integrate the remembering of family members and their stories within my life and my connections to them.

It has been a great privilege to share in others family memories, and in some instances have followed up on their stories, by visiting places, reading recommended books and have generally become closer to my participants as a result of this experience.

I have been a social researcher who uses photography for many years, only recently realising this term. I am passionate about speaking about Death, and also living and dying well. As well as being a photographer, I am a Creative Outreach Tutor, Arts Award Advisor, researcher and artist, and a top notch administrator.

A big thank you to everyone who has taken part in my research and in particular my family who have shown me how to live, love and die well.

Nikki x

Nikki Price Memories:

Church

Both photographs relate to my Grandparents Wedding day but taken at different points in time; digital copies I took of the original, and a recent photo I took of the Church door outside which they are standing in the original, both are acting as connectors to that moment where my immediate family began.

Mirror

My family gifted this mirror to me from my Grandparents, it hung in the same place in their home for as long as I can remember, the smaller photograph shows where it was. I like to think of a mirror being a portal for me at different times to look at my family timeline, remembering Nan and Grandad looking at it when they first hung it their home, my parents looking into it and then me as their grandchild. I have found reflection both physically and mentally helpful in understanding my feelings around loss. Throughout my interviews I have taken photographs of either myself or participants in their mirrors, supporting me in a constant cycle of reflection through time, it says I was here, one day I will see myself in the mirror as an old woman.

Vase with wilting Flowers

A Vase on a sideboard that was bought as a Wedding Gift for my Grandparents. The flowers wilting, losing their glorious bloom, the room lays silent, soon to be empty, a whisper in the echo of a memory.

[Grandparents' home 2016]

Vests

Whatever the weather Grandad wore a vest, in colder days it was tucked under a shirt, braces, pullover and tie, warmer days worn with an open shirt. I saw this empty packet lying on his bed when Mum and I were arranging his belongings, a realisation that I would never see him in those vests again, the packet so empty and compounded my feelings of losing him, but I also great comfort by the memories of him wearing them.

[Grandparents' home 2016]

Empty Room

I felt a great connection to my Grandparents two up two down home, I rode my bike around it as a child, helped Grandad pick runner beans and water the vast number of flowers he grew in the garden, listened to him whistling whilst he made lunch in the kitchen. When his belongings were gone, the house stood as a shell, cocooned the echoes of the past, I walked past his home sometime after his funeral, and saw a light on, my heart skipping a beat, before realising obviously that a new family had moved in.

[Grandparents' home 2016]

Participants:

Windmill

"Dad at one point had a job where he would go abroad every so often, and Dad was going to go to Holland, and I was 7 or 8. I remember being really struck by this, I don't know much about stages of child development, but I wonder why one reason why I was so struck was, because I was becoming aware of a bigger world than just the suburb of where I was living. I became completely convinced when Dad was away, (he was only away for like 3 days), I was completely convinced that he wasn't going to come back, by the third day, Mum was like completely calm as you might imagine, well of course he's coming back, I was getting quite hysterical, then he came back, and he brought a little Dutch house. I remember thinking this was absolutely amazing, I loved it, I absolutely loved it, now of course since then in my 20s I went to Holland and I realised that this is tourist shit, but for me at the time, I just thought that was the best thing ever and, and I've kept it all these years. I think it is tourist tat, but it doesn't matter because Dad came home, and Dad came home with little delights for his girls, I think why have I kept it? I think it's because it was a moment of well I suppose realising loss, you could lose, you know you could lose."

[Interview participant February 2019]

Bisto Kids

"Dad was a really good photographer and my Mum loved taking photos, so I don't know whether that's why becoming interested in photography as they had that interest but she was always taking photographs, they were always terrible photographs, she would always put her finger in front of the, but she would get one of those like little you know, crappy photos, you know cameras and just constantly taking photographs but they were always terrible as in they were wonky or you know, she didn't get people in but I loved her for that so, they were just brilliant like she loved capturing that, especially of the family.

My Dad did all these slides and have a slide show on a Saturday night or something and it was a real treat, and whenever we got to this slide we'd spend about an hour laughing because it was so hilarious cos like we, like called ourselves the 'Bisto kids' or something because we were like really scruffy, I don't know what my Mum was thinking, but I've got like a red jumper, no skirt or anything in just tights, red tights and red shoes, we all just look completely scruffy and horrible so it's really funny so yeah, we used to laugh ages at that one, um, but no I love that photo, my Mum actually got some of the slides turned into photos, which is, was really great." [Interview participant February 2019]

Kermit

"I love Kermit, um, I came across some photos a couple of weeks ago of the Christmas when I got Kermit, he was a present from my Mum and I think it was the Christmas that I went home for the first time after going away to college, I loved the Muppets Show, he has got Velcro on him, so you can put him into all sorts of odd positions and my Granddaughter loves him as well now. I do still like my cuddlies have to say as old as I am, but what was interesting looking at that photo was that I would have been 19 and there was a photo of a an armchair with a load of cuddly toys and at least 3 of them were gifts that Christmas from my Mum to me, and I thought well what sort of message was she giving that she gave her 19 year old daughter who had left home, she never wanted me to leave, she would never say goodbye to me properly or wish me well, and I think she wanted me to remain the child that she had at home. I think the soft toys were, you know, symbolic, I hadn't made that connection until today."

[Interview participant January 2019]

Flowers

"I've bought a Rose bush from this nursery 8 years ago, I thought it was a climbing Rose, it's actually a rambling Rose so its scrambled all over, the smell of it is a reminder of my childhood really, and I can remember, when she was having Chemo, going up to the hospital in London, and then I'd drop off and go and see a gallery or something and I picked up a book called 'the language of flowers' and I can remember sitting there with her whilst she was having Chemo and discussing the language of flowers, and being really excited about, 'oh my god Poppies mean this and Roses mean that' and the different colours, and you know this is the Victorian meaning of the plants but subsequently in the years since her death, I have got more fascinated with flowers, they symbolise so much, different flowers symbolise so much, so yeah its 'the' thread really."

[Interview participant February 2019]

Father and Son

"I'm a very keen photographer and I got this really from my Dad, he had a creative side which wasn't really expressed in his life or his work, he sort of quietly passed it onto me, he was no expert, but he did teach us to bang in a nail, saw in a straight line and things like that. He ended up at the end of the war with a commission, he was a leftenant and had his posh uniform and they complained about it 'oh what's he walking around with this uniform on' as if he was showing off and Mum was like well that's what he has to do you know. This is all kind of passed down and these are stories are obviously passed down as I wasn't around then. I suppose if you are talking about tangible things, the photography bit was it and I have very distinct memories of him showing me how to develop film and how to process film, he didn't have an enlarger, eventually I bought an enlarger when I was a teenager, but, we used to do it with contact print, he showed me how to do that, I haven't got any of it anymore, I gave it all away to somebody who could use it, I wish I'd have kept a few little bits to be honest, now, but there you go." [Interview participant January 2019]

The story of the Cannon - or the 32 pounder

"He made lots and lots of things he was always in his workshop making things, so he made this, this is a canon, as you can see, and when we were children it was terrific because, it actually fired cannon balls. It's got all the gear you see, so you put the cannon ball, there are the cannon balls, many of them have got lost, you take a cartridge like that and unpick it cos it's got gunpowder inside it hasn't it? so you stuff the gunpowder into the cannon and put the cannon balls in and then you have, I can't remember what he had in the way of a fuse, but then you light the fuse and when it lights the gunpowder the cannon ball fly's out, and then we all, children had to run about the lawn and finding all the cannon balls, so that's why there's not many cannon balls left, cos most of them are on the lawn!

He writes about it in this book, 'I tried my hand' it says 'in mathematical toys and made a firing model of a 32 pounder as in HMS Victory, it was made from a motor cars half shaft' so, so this is, he made that, 'and would fire a lead ball through an inch thick plank of wood' so he must have tried that, that's all he's written about it, he makes toys, that's right, he made a, he made a violin, and various other, and lots of lamps and things, he tells all about it in this book." [Interview participant January 2019]

On the Mantlepiece

Stems and Symbols

"I realise how much once someone's gone, how much you own how you remember them, and how much it's not necessarily, the way that they would remember themselves, or the way that, like, yeah I dunno, like you want to do things that feel like they're remembering people the way they would want to be remembered, but also its so personal about your relationship with them that you kind of, you start to do odd things like placing meaning onto objects which the person has never seen, never touched, and would have no association with but because that makes you feel the same way as a memory or something you go ok that kind of reminds me."

[Interview participant December 2018]

Wedding Day

All the blossom was out you know it was a stunning day, you see there wasn't a cloud in the sky, it was just absolutely beautiful, and one of things I remember from the day was in the evening, my Dad came up to say goodnight to me because they were heading back to the hotel and he said 'I think I've been round and spoken to everybody I don't know' and he made a point and, one of my husband's best friends came up to me and said um, 'your Dad's lovely, he was having a good old natter' he said 'he's been round everybody' he says ' I've been watching him go round everybody' and he did, he went to everyone in the room, and like all my friends, because there was like 70 of us in the evening do and he went round everybody. [Interview participant February 2019]

Could have been a Movie Star

"Grandma was born in Poland in the 20's came from a middle class family her Dad was, in the outbreak of World War 2, her Dad was sent to a labour camp, and her Mum became ill with cancer, and so she was left with her older Sister. Russians also invaded Poland they were taken into a Russian labour camp and taken to Kazakhstan, and they spent the next 20 years, going from Europe through what was Persia, they lived in Iran for a little while and then spent 10 years in a Polish refugee camp in Uganda and that's where she met my Grandfather and then when they closed down the resettlement camp in the 50's they waited for their visas and resettled in Australia, which is where she lived for the rest of her life.

I don't actually know who took the photo, I might have been a self-portrait, cos she was an artist, no actually it was my Cousin. So, this is her in her house in Australia. She was a very glamorous woman, and I think she was the kind of person if she hadn't been in Poland and then been a refugee, she could have been a Movie Star."

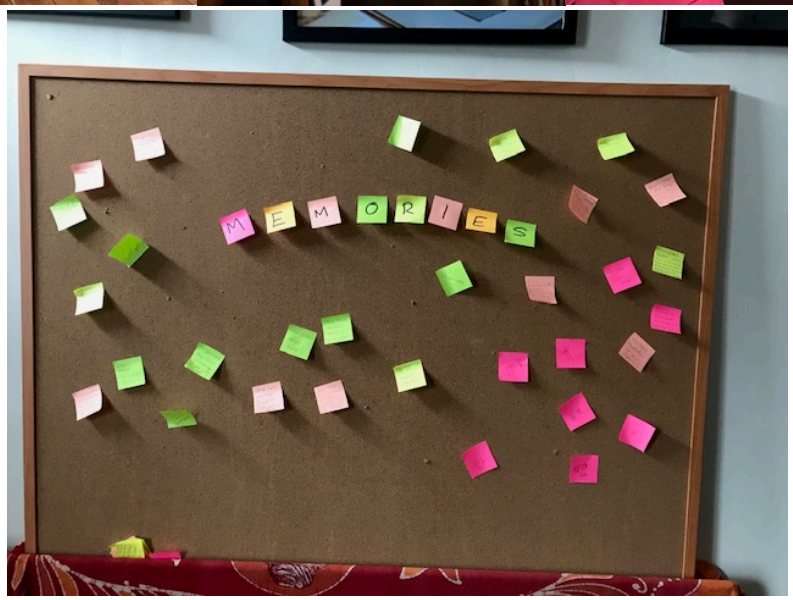
Sewing Box

"This is a sewing box which belonged to my Grandmother, which was passed down to my Mother, though I'm a really bad sewer! This actually was my Mum's, which she obviously put this in the box, she was passed this on, oh I don't know, this came from my, this is my Uncle who joined the Navy and went all around the world, and every time brought back things, so that's what was obviously bought back from China, and all the needles are rusty, but you know, it's got all these lovely things in it and she, my Grandmother, was fantastic, but, um, I never use it. It's a beautiful box, it's just sort of just a lovely thing really she was obviously into darning, so I mean all those, I could use them, but I just think they are, they're just a museum piece really, I hardly ever use it, I've got my own, it's just nobody wanted it, nobody wanted it, but it couldn't go into the skip, so it's like all these little cotton reels which you don't get anymore. I actually remember that as a child, she used to make a lot, she made us all patchwork quilts, out of all our old dresses, and Mum's old dresses." [Interview participant February 2019]

Mum's Garden

"Although there's dust and there's building work going on and everything, its coming back to life, it's coming back to life, and she's in that house everywhere you go, she is in that house, she's in the Garden, she's, when you walk up the path, I just feel her, I feel her there, but when they saw that house, it was my Mum that fell in love with it, and she used to walk up and down with us as children to the beach, and she used to pass the house on the way, and she told me that she walked up and down it, she saw the sign going up for sale and that the lady that owned it she was from London and it was her summer house and she had a horse in the Garden, out the back she used to ride the horse on the beach, and when she died she left money in her will that the Garden, that's why the Garden was so spectacular when they first bought them, that the Gardener should be employed and kept, that it was kept beautiful until the house was sold,

the house needed lots doing to it, but the Gardens were spectacular, because they had these Gardens, I mean they aren't spectacular now, just normal Gardens now but um, they were, they were stunning." [Interview participant January 2019]

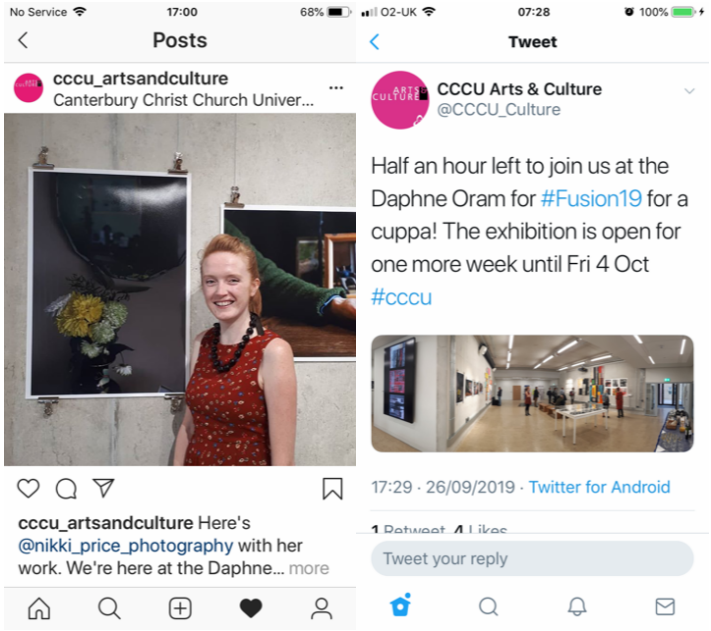


Appendix 4: Fusion19

Fusion19 was a Canterbury Christ Church University Masters Students exhibition from August to October 2019. Held in the Daphne Oram building there was an evening event to celebrate the successes of Master Students.

Four of my photographs (contained within this thesis) were exhibited, alongside the participant stories that accompanied them. Visitors included a variety of public, friends, and participants, and my photographs was a talking point over the themes of family photography and bereavement, with many visitors connecting to the photographs through the familial.

The following explores the written pieces that were included in the exhibition as well as the set up and final display layout of the final exhibition. Thanks go to the Arts team for their support in arranging the works and supporting the evening.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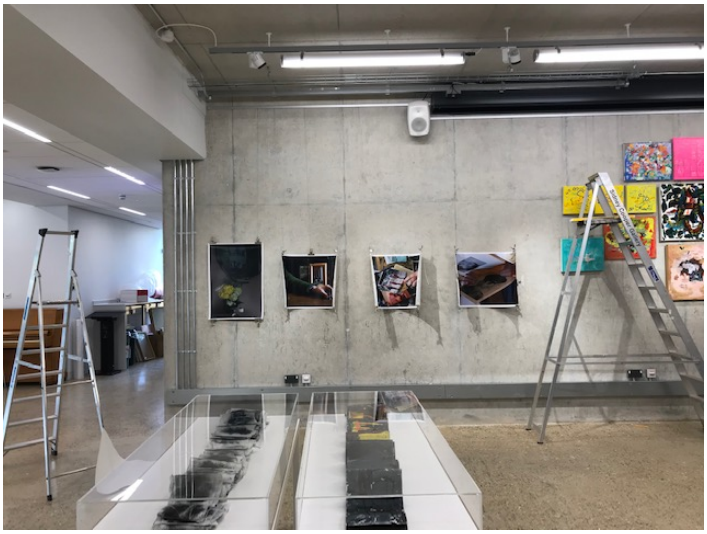
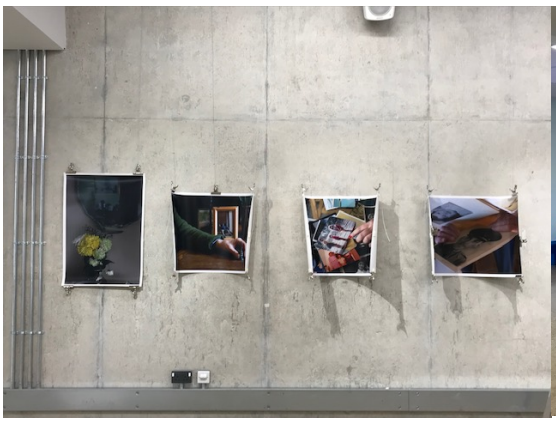
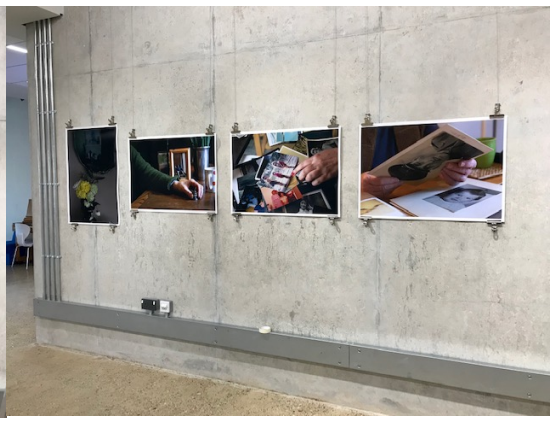
Posts
cccu_artsandculture
Canterbury Christ Church Univer...
cccu_artsandculture Here's @nikki_price_photography with her work. We're here at the Daphne... more
O2-UK 07:28 100%
Tweet
CCCU Arts & Culture
@CCCU_Culture
Half an hour left to join us at the Daphne Oram for #Fusion19 for a cuppa! The exhibition is open for one more week until Fri 4 Oct #cccu
17:29 · 26/09/2019 · Twitter for Android
Tweet your reply

Nikki Price
Masters by Research in Fine Art
Personal, Loss, Memory and Family: an exploration of family photographs and objects after a bereavement
Photographic Prints
Exploring family memories using photography and objects was prompted by the death of both my maternal grandparents; Nan in 2014, Grandad in 2016, and then my Dad in 2017 (one month before I started my Masters).
I was interested to see if there were any common themes shared by others that reflected my own experiences of loss in the family, and if there were any similarities in the objects and photographs which were kept, memories shared, and key moments which supported and reinforced understanding of the family unit, our identity and connections to them.
The photographs exhibited include my grandparents' Vase and Mirror (which I now have) in the original place in their home photographs taken during participant research interviews in which memories of a member of their family were shared.
My research highlighted that after a bereavement, photographs and objects can be used as a tool for stimulating memories. My participants felt that having time for dedicated reflection with family photographs and objects was beneficial, recognising that they may not have previously afforded themselves time to do this. It was notable that females in the family were usually the curators of family history, perhaps reflecting traditional gender roles.



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