

UNTOLD EXPERIENCES FROM THE PERSPECTIVES
OF WOMEN MORTUARY SCIENCE STUDENTS: A
QUALITATIVE STUDY

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my dad, David Dickinson (1960-2019) who didn't get to see me finish this journey but who I know is gleaming with pride and my mom, Iris Dickinson, who has always believed in me and provided encouragement to keep pushing even when life got hard.

To all the women of funeral service. Past. Present. Future.

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To my participants, thank you for sharing such personal experiences with me and trusting me to tell your stories. You are the future of funeral service, so keep up the good fight. You are a remarkable group of women that I have no doubt will make an impact in the funeral industry.

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Title of Study: UNTOLD EXPERIENCES FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF WOMEN
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Major Field: EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

Abstract: Women students are entering mortuary science programs, being retained, and graduating at much higher rates than ever before. This is despite research that shows women in science-related programs often face discrimination and other barriers to degree completion (Bailey & DiPrete 2016; Jesse 2006; Shauman 2016; Steele et al., 2002; Title IX at 45, 2017). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore current and former mortuary science students'—who identify as women—lived educational and professional experiences. A secondary goal was to generate recommendations to improve learning environments. This study focused on 10 mortuary science students' educational journeys. Participants were recruited to participate in two, semi-structured interviews and asked to prepare and handwrite an “open letter” prior to the second interview.

After multiple cycles of coding (initial and focused), salient categories were developed, and I situated themes within them. This study applied an *a posteriori* framework, specifically the theory of gendered organizations developed by Joan Acker (1990) to code and understand how institutions or workplaces remain gendered. Three key findings emerged from data analysis. First, participants were met with an abundance of gendered interaction processes that ultimately influenced their journeys in a variety of ways. Second, participants felt that their gender is either hyper-focused on or disregarded completely (gender blind). Their narratives unearthed that mainstream and gender blindness is present not only in organizational logic, but also hierarchies, jobs, and their substructures, including forms and handbooks and even funeral related equipment. A final key finding of this study is that “bodied processes” and embodiment or consideration of the whole being are not welcome (age, race/ethnicity, body size, religion, sexual orientation, etc.) and affected the participants' educational journey by making it more challenging and forming unnecessary barriers. The outcomes of this study are intended to provide insight into what women's journeys to becoming a funeral director look like and recommendations on how to adapt educational programs, both academically and professionally, to ensure all students are given an equitable opportunity in the funeral service industry.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Nearly 150 years ago, townspeople came together to share the sacred responsibility of preparing the dead for burial (Rundblad, 1995). As the skill of undertaking took the form of a business and became more science-based, funeral rites began to evolve through embalming and ceremonies. So did the dynamics of gender within the industry. Women's responsibilities lessened, and societies' perception of what they were capable of handling restricted their growth in the industry. The profession, in other words, had become gendered.

The history of funeral directing gives further testament to the inlays of gendered occupations, as discussed in Chapter II. As the funeral industry became more complex and specialized (Fritch & Steward, 2016), it demanded a different skill set and stronger stomachs, and it was deemed too advanced for women as it was now considered a science-based career (Rundblad, 1995). The outcome was today's masculine-dominated industry, where the majority of positions of power in the occupational hierarchy are still held by men. Penepent (2018) determined there is an imminent employment crisis lurking that threatens the practice of funeral directing. The trend or phenomenon that has been overlooked, or quite frankly ignored, is that women are entering funeral education programs at much higher rates than ever. However, even with such a positive rise in

women within mortuary science education programs, these numbers do not mirror the gender composition in the workforce. The industry cannot afford to keep losing such a large pool of potential talent, especially as the death rates continue to rise and the original or successional owners of funeral homes reach retirement age. We know very little about this population of students and how they perceive their education and onsite practical training. It is imperative to recognize what they go through to understand how to fix problems within the educational system we may not even know exist.

In the last 50 years, educational research has provided ample support for the assertion that gendering, and gender implications still exist, especially in STEM related majors and careers. Chapter II offers an extensive review of five areas related to this study: Feminism and society, organizational culture and change, gendering, historical perspectives, and gender implications. The succeeding chapters illustrate several ways in which women experience gender implications through gender bias, sex-based harassment, and gender role stereotypes. There has been relatively little research on women mortuary students and their experiences. I was able to pull from two main areas to support the need for this study: (1) STEM, which encapsulates women's experiences within the classroom and (2) women funeral directors' experiences within the professional organization of a funeral home.

The remainder of this chapter provides a descriptive research context, a snapshot of the current mortuary industry, background of the study, problem statement, purpose statement, and the research question that guided the study. Furthermore, this chapter provides a detailed and personal positionality statement that supports my interest in the

overall topic of discussion. In addition, this chapter includes the significance of the study towards research, theory, and practice and a descriptive overview of the methodology practices that influenced the design. This chapter also includes assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. Additionally, I provide definitions of key terms, so readers may understand the funeral-related jargon and language employed throughout the study. And finally, this chapter concludes with a summary.

Research Context

It is essential to describe the context in which this research took place. The years 2020-2021 were like no other in history. A novel coronavirus (COVID-19) affected every aspect of life and caused a global health pandemic. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommended social distancing. State and local government officials encouraged citizens to become vaccinated. Given the social climate and time in history, each state and research location had its own rules and regulations regarding COVID-19 protocol, making in-person interviews almost impossible. Therefore, I decided to conduct all interviews via Zoom to comply with my ethical responsibility to be cautious and protect the participants' health and myself.

The current state of the United States is unpredictable in so many ways. The nation remains polarized on so many issues, from politics to religions, racial tensions, and even responses to COVID-19 (Horowitz et al., 2019; Lichtenberg & Hoffower, 2020; Ollove, 2020; Pew Research Center, n.d.). During these unruly and uncertain times, minoritized groups' voices, including women and Black Lives Matter groups, are finally being heard amid the chaos (Black Lives Matter, 2021; metoo., 2021). Globally, the “me

too” movement has empowered survivors of sexual violence to speak out against the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault (metoo., 2021). The hashtag #metoo, continues to grow in popularity and has provided a forum for support and open communication, which could guide changes that need to be made within systems (metoo., 2021; Wade & Ferree, 2019). Therefore, this study was conducted at the most appropriate time in history as the traditional silence surrounding gendered inequities and gender-based issues has been reduced due to recent attention and traction caused by the #metoo movement.

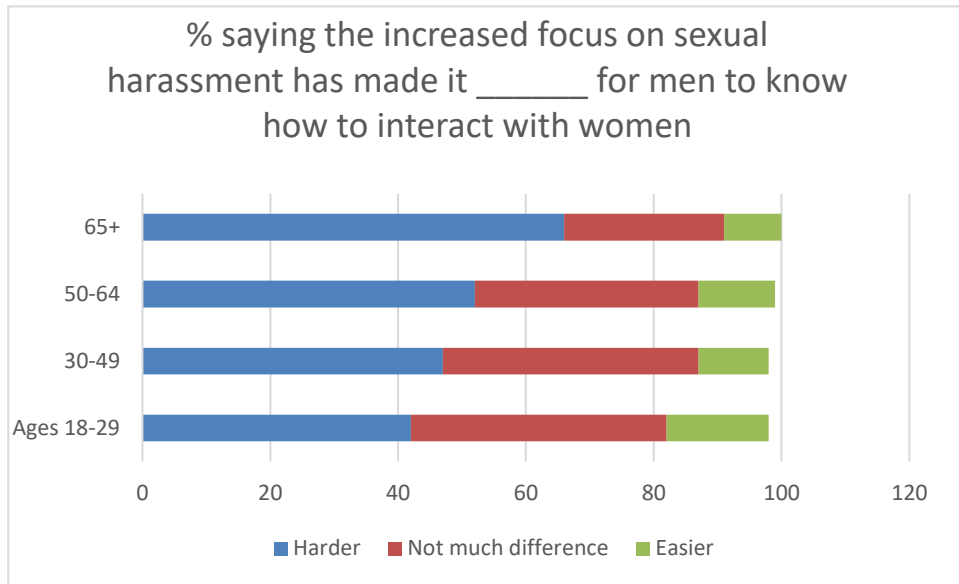
Since 2017, #metoo has become social phenomenon that brought in an inundation of allegations against celebrities and politicians. Society, including workplaces and academia, is now starting to see the rippling effects of such a powerful movement. One of the biggest effects of the #metoo movement is that it demonstrates to society just how widespread sexual harassment, assault, and other misconduct really are (North, 2019). Companies and academic institutions have implemented policy changes and encouraged training to create a safer and more comfortable environment. Victims of harassment or assault are fed up with obstacles faced when reporting through traditional avenues. This movement revitalizes, energizes, and validates their experiences and allows voices to be heard (Lawrence-Hardy & Glennon, 2019).

However, to some, this becomes problematic. For example, it has been reported some men in the workplace and within academia do not want to hire, train, or mentor women out of fear and unknown boundaries (Pettit, 2020; Pew Research Center; 2018). It has also been reported that 55% of men in the workplace say the increased focus on

#metoo has made it harder to interact between genders, correspondingly as displayed in Figure 1, age, also has an influence on this idea.

Figure 1

Percent Indicating #MeToo Affecting Interactions



Note. Adapted from the 2018 *Sexual Harassment at Work in the Era of #MeToo*, by Pew Research Center, 2018 (<https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2018/04/04/sexual-harassment-at-work-in-the-era-of-metoo/>).

Today’s woman expects their employers or administration to not only do more to protect and educate, but also take quick action. A slap on the wrist will no longer be enough; especially as the younger generation emerges (Pettit, 2020). In a survey conducted by Vox, they learned young women’s definition of harassment is much broader than older generation of women and demonstrated that women under 35 are much more likely to report harassment and believe they can change “the system” by reporting inappropriate behavior or confronting the harasser themselves (North, 2018).

Another key finding is that women over the age of 35 were more apt to just put up with harassment but remain hopeful for change in the future and support young women speaking up. Even more attention has been brought on to inequalities that still exist within many systems by the death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, a pioneering advocate for women's rights in education and the workplace (Moniuszko et al., 2020).

The contextual setting of this research affected everyone, and everything involved, including the purposeful decisions I made to proceed and how I conducted this research. The sole idea for this study, the research question, and the research design was influenced by the idea that women deserve to share their experiences regardless of position or status. Because of the brave women who came before them, the participants were able to speak freely about their experiences with lessened fear as movements such as #metoo give women and allies the opportunity to make change from within for the greater good of society.

Current State of Funeral Service/Mortuary Science

Institutions and the Industry

The following information provides some context for this study. The American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE) or the ABFSE directory (2021) reported in 2020 there were 56 accredited funeral service programs in private institutions or public multipurpose institutions; and 10 programs provided by single purpose colleges specializing only in funeral service. Of the 56 institutions, 52 offer associate degrees, seven offer baccalaureate degrees, and five offer certificates and/or diplomas. As of November 2020, 29 of the accredited programs offer some distance education and 42% of

graduates completed more than half of their courses via distance learning. However, it is possible that these numbers are influenced by COVID-19 restrictions. Only six institutions offer an option for bachelor's degree completion in a funeral service-related field after completion of an accredited associate degree (ABFSE, 2021). Whether the program is titled funeral service or mortuary science, each program is unique including admission standards and graduation requirements. Although the programs emanate from distinctly unique educational institutions, offering diverse expectations, requirements, and even degrees, the accreditation standards remain the same.

Funeral Service Students

According to ABFSE Directory (2021), there were over 5,900 students enrolled in mortuary education as of 2020. Of those, 2,560 were new students who entered the programs. The directory reports white students make up 69% of total graduates, African Americans are 18%, and Hispanic, Native Americans, Asian Americans make up the other 11%, and 2% identify themselves as from other backgrounds. The most recent data state 13% of graduates reported being related to someone within the business already. Although there is no median age recorded, 2020 records indicated 46% of new students were age 25 or less and 41% were ages 26-40 (ABFSE, 2021).

The most recent phenomenon-taking place within mortuary science programs all around the nation is the number of women students enrolled continues to increase yearly. The American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE) reported women are entering mortuary science education programs, being retained, and graduating at much

higher rates than ever before. Nationally, 2020 enrollment for females¹ was 72.81%, and the percentage for women graduates was 66.98% (ABFSE Administration Report, 2021).

Current Employment Statistics

As of 2019, the number of funeral homes in the United States was 19,136 (National Directory of Morticians Redbook, 2020). According to the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA; 2019) statistics website, 89.2% of funeral homes in the United States are privately owned, while the remaining 10.8% are publicly traded corporations. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook (2021) listed the employment at 37,557 people in 2020. Overall employment of funeral service workers is projected to grow four percent from 2020 to 2030, slower than the average for all occupations. According to the Occupational Outlook Handbook, about 4,000 openings for funeral service workers are projected each year, on average, over the decade. Most of those openings will be from the need to replace workers who transfer to different occupations or exit the labor force, such as to retire. The slow growth will be directly tied to an increase in families selecting cremation services which can cost less, and, in turn, lower profit numbers.

According to McMurrrough (2021), for the first time in history, there are five generations working together in the funeral homes (Traditionalist, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z). Much like the STEM workforce, the funeral workforce's number representation does not mirror the numbers represented in

¹ Historically this work has been rooted in biological sex frameworks and genderism, in order to proceed towards gender equity the term “female(s)” has been changed to a more inclusive gender term: woman(en) unless used as an adjective.

school. According to the U.S. Census Bureau ACS PUMS report (2019), men make up 65.8% (30, 089) of the funeral occupation and women the other 34.2% (15,657), up 4.8% from the last report. The average salary for men funeral directors is \$65,096 vs \$43,592 for women funeral directors, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2019). They also report the most common race or ethnicity among Morticians, undertakers, & funeral directors are White (non-Hispanic) at 77.6%. The numbers prove this occupation is still very much gendered and monopolized by white men.

The funeral industry has undergone many shifts and changes, but not entirely as grand and noticeable as the gender dynamics right now. I want to clarify that the focus of this study was not defining the complex system of gender and sex but to assert that multiple understandings exist and are tightly associated or used interchangeably within the research and literature. Due to the developing understanding of constructs, shifting usage of terms, and contextual focus, this discussion becomes far more complicated because of the historical frameworks that have existed. An example of this is genderism, the belief that there are only two genders, and that gender is automatically linked to an individual's sex assigned at birth (American Psychological Association of Graduate Students, 2015)

APA 7th manual (2020) stated that to reduce bias, researchers should avoid using adjectives (e.g., female, male) as nouns to label people and to use specific nouns to identify people or groups of people (e.g., women, men). The exception to the rule is “only when the age range is broad or ambiguous or to identify a trans-gender person's sex assignment at birth” or when deemed appropriate and relevant as adjectives (APA 7th

Manual, 2020); otherwise, these terms should be avoided as it reinforces binaries. And for that reason, I have decided to use gender-related terms to remain inclusive and to reach a larger goal of moving research towards gender equity.

Background of the Study

Habenstein and Lamers (2014) described the history and formation of mortuary science programs being composed of two main happenings. Firstly, the carpenters, joiners, and cabinet makers doubled as skilled coffins makers who provided full funeral services, including paid mourners; the woodworkers became the “undertaker” (Habenstein & Lamers, 2014). Secondly, the compounding and distribution of embalming fluid, was monopolized by physicians, surgeons, physiologists, anatomists, chemists, pharmacists, and druggists (Habenstein & Lamers, 2014). As these professions began to withdraw interest, some shifted to the sale of embalming fluids, teaching of embalming techniques, or combination of merchandising and teaching (Habenstein & Lamers, 2014). Therefore, the embalming fluid representatives became the founders of “schools.” The “undertaker” would now need to learn the art of embalming. In the 1860s, during the Civil War, society became more accepting of embalming practices so soldiers could be sent back home to their families. Because this new practice of preservation had taken off, established schools were opened. Mortuary education programs were established and created to support and educate men exclusively as they made up 100% of the students (Habenstein & Lamers, 2014; Shaw, 2005).

At the start of the 21st century, a shift began in the gender composition of mortuary schools. Women started returning to this line of work in large numbers. A

literature search shows limited funeral-related scholarly writing about this trend. There are many opinion pieces funeral service trade journals have published, but not a significant number of peer-reviewed scholarly articles regarding funeral service education. There are even fewer articles addressing this gender shift in the industry or any reported studies focusing on the experiences of this new wave of students. There could be many contributing factors.

Because funeral work is a practice-based career and requires full commitment and working irregular hours, it is not often that funeral directors and embalmers seek further schooling; therefore, limited scholars exist to produce peer-reviewed empirical research. Other factors may be that current conversations and literature revolve around accreditation, quality funeral education, new funeral trends, high turnover, and generational issues; more specifically “issues related to students and instruction, as well as literature investigating specific aspects of instruction and professional preparedness in funeral service education” (Fritch, 2011, p. 39). What the current literature does not provide is insight into women mortuary students experiences and perspectives. This study was an attempt to fill a gap in the research to support higher education mortuary programs and lift the voices of this forgotten population: The future of funeral service!

We know women students are progressing towards graduation at staggering rates. However, we do not know what strategies they are using to move towards graduation or while completing their internships or what their experiences are like in either setting. It is projected, in the next 10 years, women will comprise 92% of mortuary students (Penepent, 2018). It is with this in mind that mortuary programs should pay special

attention to the demographics they are serving and preparing for the future. Donley (2019) concluded there are gender differences in the pathways to funeral work. Women students more often reported funeral service was a calling, while men cited job security or familial connections. The National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA; 2021) makes a claim that many women have discovered and are attracted to the skills and traits needed as a funeral director, including communication skills, compassion, a desire to comfort those coping with a death, as well as organizational and event-planning skills. Researchers Donley and Baird (2017) argued the occupation is currently feminizing, and the queuing theory is currently at-play. The main theoretical premise behind queuing theory is that employers recruit women to replace men because the position has become less desirable. Donley and Baird's (2017) findings lend support to the claim on hegemonic gender beliefs that women are suited for emotional labor, more nurturing, and compassionate.

Contrary to others, Pruitt (2016) put forward the view that women are relabeling the occupation and exclaiming they are exactly where they belong. A respondent in Pruitt's study proclaimed women are attentive to detail regarding the body and the emotions of the bereaved, therefore it is a perfect fit. And lastly, in my professional experience, the sheer funeral service concept such as traditional funerals have changed as they become more personalized and more like events, which could also support the movement of women into the industry.

Problem Statement

Nationally, the number of women students entering mortuary science programs continues to rise and they are graduating at higher rates than ever before (ABFSE Annual Report, 2021). Statistics show, in 2020, women made up 72.81% of the new enrollee students in mortuary programs, and the percentage of women graduates was 66.98%. It appears women are poised to take back the work of tending to the dead and grieving families. This is despite research that shows women in science-related programs often face discrimination and other barriers to degree completion (Bailey & DiPrete 2016; Jesse 2006; Shauman 2016; Steele et al. 2002; Title IX at 45, 2017). It may be that women enrolled in mortuary science education programs, or who once attended, have faced gendered inequities, yet are still progressing through these gendered organizations and cultures towards graduation and completion of practicum or internships. Thus, to better support and educate women in mortuary science, it is critical to understand their lived educational and professional experiences.

Purpose Statement and Research Question

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore current and former mortuary science students'—who identify as women—lived educational and professional experiences in the Midwestern United States. A secondary goal was to generate recommendations to improve learning environments in mortuary science programs and professional settings for all students. Therefore, this study used a qualitative approach to explore aspects of the following research question: What do the lived experiences of women reveal about how gender influences their educational journeys?

Positionality Statement

According to Patton (2015), reflexivity means diving deeply introspectively, being aware of your own culture, and understanding why you are the way you are. I am a Hispanic woman who grew up in a small rural town with my loving, close-knit, happy, supportive family. My house was structured and disciplined, where I was taught to work hard and be better than the rest by way of grades, sports, clothing, and presentation. My mom instilled in me the drive to be competitive, prove myself to the world, and never lose to a boy, which drove me to be an above-average student who held many leadership roles during high school and college. It is crucial to remind myself of the sacrifices made by my parents who gave me the privilege of growing up in an upper-middle-class environment, where I was taught that education was the key to success and always to chase my dreams. I am now a 30-something-year-old doctoral student who works as a full-time funeral service instructor who takes on way too much and cares deeply for others. Personal challenges and the doctoral program have pushed me to grow in unimaginable ways. My journey until now has certainly been an interesting one that deserves to be explored and told.

With my late father's influence and encouragement, I started my journey to become a funeral director in 2007. I took my first mortuary class, utterly oblivious that I entered into a male-dominated profession. I recall when I introduced myself as a funeral service major, the men professors would appear shocked. Comments I heard included "This will be hard for you as a girl" and "wouldn't want you to break a nail." While in mortuary school, I started my one-year apprenticeship in 2010, where I was able to work

and learn from men and women funeral directors and embalmers and was able to help many grieving families.

On my first interview as an apprentice, I was told skirt suits and pantyhose were required, like this somehow made me better at my job. Throughout my career, I observed way too many patriarchal, androcentric, or misogynistic behaviors and attitudes. I recall one of my first shifts as an apprentice, when I went to a residence to pick up a gentleman's deceased wife, I heard him say, "Wow, they sent two women." If only I knew how many times, I heard pastors, hospital security, or the nurses say, "You don't look like a funeral director" or "Oh, they sent a woman." Because of these experiences, I could not help but feel inferior to men in the industry regardless of position. I can still hear their tones; these words that will forever stick with me. I had never questioned my ability or position in this profession, but it was quickly brought to my attention that I did not fit the norm in so many ways. I was a 5'0", 19-year-old, Hispanic, first-generation, woman student apprentice, in contrast to the typical funeral director stereotype. I graduated from the program at the top of my class, but instead of gleaming with pride, I questioned myself: "What was I thinking entering a man's world? I'm young, I'm brown, and I'm a female."

As a funeral professional, I personally experienced and heard far too many challenges and barriers women mortuary students must overcome. I saw how differently I, a woman, was treated by grieving families and men in the profession at varying levels and positions. Unfortunately, as time went on, it did not get any better. My first interview for a funeral director position had a significant impact on who I am as a person. To this

day, I am scarred by the words uttered during a grueling three-hour interview and how the local owner of a local funeral home and his son asked me questions that I now know are illegal regarding marriage and children. I was told that "At some point, I am going to have to choose between having a family or a career because you absolutely cannot have both." I was made to feel lesser and left feeling defeated. I was eventually hired by a funeral home and worked my way up the organizational ladder from funeral director to the manager of three funeral homes and a cemetery. Although my story may sound like a fairytale, I can attest that this was not the case. I grew tired of trying to prove myself to the men in the profession and the families. On top of the daily pressures of being a newly licensed funeral director, I was told to "make sure to do something with your face and hair." This served as the initial spark that grew into a fire within me that I had no idea existed. This one, probably innocent, comment introduced to me what society and organizational culture expected of me. I am still haunted by those words and struggle to leave my house without makeup. As in many cases throughout history, femininity once again fell prey to a misogynistic attitude (Hawkesworth, 2006).

Looking back, this was a revolutionary moment in which my personal experience illustrated issues regarding inequality or feminist concerns. These negative behaviors and thoughts hurt me and have driven me to excel and try to make a difference in the funeral world. Now, I have the privilege of being a funeral service instructor. I know this is precisely where I need to be to make a difference or even the smallest of impact. My journey, passion, and drive stem from the social inequalities I lived through for years in the industry. The daily stories shared, motivate me to share the untold journeys and

experiences from women students' perspective. During the research and writing phases, it was essential to continuously self-reflect, be self-aware, and remain mindful of my position as the researcher.

I was unaware of how much this study had become my identity. I lived and breathed this topic; my voice started trickling into the classroom, friendships, and everyday inner thoughts. Students were heeding advice and advocating for themselves. I was unaware of the impact and emotional rollercoaster I embarked on in this research. In late 2021, my institution, department, and role as a funeral educator were under attack. At a meeting, current funeral directors across the state communicated a perceived shortage of funeral directors due to present educational requirements, even though, statistically, enrollment has remained steady over the last decade.

We, as a funeral service department, proposed perhaps it was the pay, the hours, and working conditions. This conversation has continued for over ten months and recently legislation was approved regarding lowering the educational requirements per the state of Oklahoma. Over those months, I found myself having to politicize and serve as an advocate for my institution and for people who were scared to speak up. This research provided me with strength and empowered me in ways I cannot even describe. I found the courage to speak up at a district meeting and in front of about 50 owners and funeral directors. Yet again, I vocalized my concerns that people are leaving not because of education but because of the low pay, unrealistic work/life balance, and workplace harassment and discrimination received within the funeral homes. The room went silent, I started sweating, and everyone around me was shocked; some got angry, some kept their

heads down, some denied that any of this was a problem. My truth encouraged all the millennials in the room to speak up and encouraged the originating woman funeral directors in the room to share insights and experiences they had to endure; in my opinion, it turned into a beautiful, emotional, yet necessary conversation. Since that meeting, I have received many congratulatory and thank you texts for speaking up and creating a space to share openly. It felt nice to have my previous mentors, now colleagues, tell me how proud they were and how they respected my "thick skin." Shortly after this meeting I received an unexpected phone call suggesting I should not have said anything, I went into hiding and recommitted myself to making a difference through my research because it is very significant to the survival of an industry.

I had no idea how much my research would impact my emotions; some days, I would cry or be so angry I would let it affect my entire day. I would have to take breaks in between reading and coding. Every story I heard reminded me of my daily experiences as a student and funeral director and the hurt that came with being a woman in the industry. There were days during this research when I felt defeated and felt the pressure of saving an entire industry in a short amount of time.

Although I was proud of myself for speaking up and exposing huge cracks, I felt frustrated that I did not have a completed dissertation, "proof" to demonstrate to the funeral board, funeral association, or taskforce, nor did I have those three initials next to my name. I disclose this information as it naturally affected my writings. I used this as a motivating factor to push through and capture the participants' voices and write a dissertation piece that exposes significant problems.

Simultaneously, I conducted interviews in the evenings with mortuary science students and participants across the country, proving education is not the entirety of the problem. I was unaware of how participants' experiences would surface old traumas and exasperate me. There were days I felt defeated and exhausted from all the weight I had been carrying. I could see the writing on the wall from multiple perspectives: A millennial woman, a teacher, a student, a mentor, as a funeral director, and lastly, through the mentality of a manager. It pains me to see the industry I have committed my entire life to, and love, falling apart because of unnecessary reluctance to change established systems and the failure to see the evolution of the world and of society.

I fear for what is to come or what funeral service will look like if we do not take the lessons learned in this dissertation and correct our actions. Communication, workplace etiquette, and even everyday social interactions seem to be suffering due to gender and age differences. I want to shed light on the issues highlighted in the data and enlighten all educational components so, together, we can work towards a better working and learning environment. My research is a way to fill a gap in the research and share and lift the voices of women students and perhaps open lines of communication. Most importantly, these efforts gave me a chance to advocate and fight for my younger silent self.

I am committed to my role as an educator and researcher. I believe the funeral industry could become stronger or more collaborative. Instructors, funeral directors, funeral homeowners, pastors, security at hospitals, nurses, and grieving families can be encouraged to evaluate traditional beliefs and attitudes, pause and listen, and be willing to

work together to fix societal and systemic issues. A shift in attitudes or beliefs could positively influence and enhance students' and interns' overall learning.

Significance of the Study

This research applies, informs, and creates a depth of understanding of women students' perceptions and experiences regarding their education, encompassing formal education at the university/college level and the practical part at the funeral home, such as an internship/practicum. Their experiences, their journeys, their stories have not yet been heard! The end product provides an outlet for an understudied group to use their voices and helped me and many others empathize with their experiences. This study's findings fill a large void and serve as base knowledge for understanding how women are progressing through mortuary education. Conclusions and discussions have the potential to decrease students' gendered experiences and allow for adjustments to be made in the educational system to better support the growing number of women students.

It is vital for funeral service educators and funeral home professionals to recognize women students/interns are here to stay and the absolute need to set them up for success and longevity in the workforce. Funeral services educators and boards must learn to listen, evaluate, and change regressive practices and beliefs in order to push the industry forward. The proposed study sought to generate ways to improve both formal and practical learning environments. Failure to teach, mentor, respect, or guide in all aspects of the profession only creates inferior funeral directors or, worse, influences whether funeral professionals leave the industry. The findings of this study add to the limited body of literature regarding gender in funeral service and provides valuable

opportunities for mortuary education programs. The findings of this study also have significance in research, theory, and practice which is demonstrated in the subsequent sections.

Research

Literature related to women students in funeral service education is limited primarily due to a rapid upswing in enrollment (ABFSE Annual Report 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020). Currently, I found no research about their perspectives and experiences while in mortuary programs, which includes their practicum/internship as part of the educational requirements. This research study advances the knowledge available about women in funeral service education. By revealing their perceptions and meanings, other academic researchers may gain an increased holistic understanding of the challenges related to women students in science-based programs or even broader STEM programs, especially those that require a practicum/internship or collaboration with outside companies.

Theory

This study's findings may assist in theoretical understandings of how the nature of being a woman may influence their time and experience in these programs. This qualitative study provides significant findings that could be applied to feminist theory and many theoretical frameworks. As a byproduct of this study, the hope was to aid women in finding their voice. Their shared experiences can influence and guide up-and-coming students who share the same passions and goals within the mortuary science profession.

Practice

By studying this phenomenon, educational leaders across the industry may gain insight into the lived experiences of women mortuary students and understand how to improve programs to better support them. The outcomes of this study are intended to provide insight on how to adapt educational programs, both academically and professionally, to ensure these students are given an equitable opportunity in the funeral service industry. The findings of this study contribute to all post-secondary mortuary programs, including trade schools, across the nation. Scholastic advice can be offered on revising educational programs to better support women students and ensure women students are given equal opportunities as the men students in the industry. This study addressed this need by exploring women student perceptions and experiences within their current program. Discovering rich information through narrative inquiry offers insight to mortuary programs, long-time educators, preceptors, funeral directors, and embalmers into what women's journeys to becoming a funeral director looks like and how the overall educational experience could be improved to support them.

Overview of the Study

Although a complete description of the proposed methodologies is presented in Chapter III, the subsequent sections briefly explain how I came to decisions regarding research design and analysis. The qualitative research approach is most appropriate for exploring how gendered inequities appear in women's lived educational and professional experiences. The research context differs from any other time before; therefore, a flexible qualitative approach was necessitated. I intentionally selected parts of several

methodologies to produce findings to the field-specific research question. This study focused on the perspectives, perceptions, and understandings of the participants' and allowed for stories to unfold through interview responses, all within a particular context. This study was based upon constructivism. Social constructivists believe human beings seek an understanding of the world and develop subjective meanings. This study explored multiple realities and perceptions constructed by the participants.

The overall flexibility of a basic qualitative inquiry permits the field specific research question to be explored through a feminist theoretical perspective. Feminist theoretical perspectives reveal bias and inequities in various interpersonal settings and institutions and may aid fill in the gaps of knowledge regarding women and the intersectionality's at play (Olesen, 2018). This perspective focuses on inequities, hierarchy, justice, privilege, power, and oppression of women (Hawkesworth, 2005; Trier-Bieniek, 2015). Utilizing this lens may expose social problems, trends, and issues in mortuary education otherwise disregarded. Feminist perspectives promote consciousness-raising or awareness to many traditionally silenced topics but also emphasizes action and social change (Fonow & Cook, 2005; Letherby, 2003; Trier-Bieniek, 2015). Themes explored by feminism include discrimination, objectification, structural inequalities, and gender roles and stereotypes.

I did not wish to limit design or analysis to an *a priori* framework. Instead, the intent was to remain open to all perspectives and allow the collected data to illustrate the participants' meanings and experiences. An *a posteriori* framework was utilized during

the analysis portion of this study. Although, theory of gendered organizations (Acker, 1990) was utilized as the primary framework.

A qualitative approach provided a rich description of the phenomenon under investigation via semi-structured interviews with women mortuary science students or recent graduates (see Appendices D and E). These interviews were conducted via videoconferencing platforms such as Zoom. Participants were encouraged to use their own language and to be themselves. Notes were taken regarding gestures, facial expressions, and voice tones. Using various data sources, such as a two-part interviews, an open letter concept, and memos allowed me to use several lenses to explore and understand their feelings and perspectives on a deeper level and make connections not seen immediately. Data analysis included two phases: initial and focused coding. The analysis began with full immersion in the data, reducing the volume of raw information, identifying significant patterns and contemplating meanings within the units of analysis (chunks of data). Coding helped define what is happening within the data and acted as guide for interpretation of the findings.

It was imperative to understand that I am an instrument in my own research and that my past influenced my research. My experience within the field as a funeral director and working at a university as an instructor and mentor frames my knowledge, opinions, and assumptions. Qualitative research values subjectivity, researcher reflexivity, and positionality, and because of this, I actively acknowledged my biases, values, and attitudes throughout the research process. I embraced subjectivity and the role my subjective self-played in my research. It could also cloud or "get in the way" of

interpreting or analyzing the data. As I proceeded with my research, I continued to self-reflect, be self-aware and mindful, remain culturally aware, and take ownership of my perspectives (Patton, 2015).

Assumptions

From the beginning of this research process, I assumed my topic would interest others and motivate them to participate and share authentic and truthful descriptions of their daily lives. This research required significant introspection and honesty about perceptions of social interactions that occur along the way of becoming a funeral service professional. My assumptions are based on my own experience with men in the industry (directly or indirectly). I assumed men treat women differently, unjustly, or unfairly in the classrooms or as the preceptor or mentee in the funeral homes. In general, I assumed patriarchy still holds very true in the funeral industry.

Limitations

Every research study has limitations. The most obvious limitation is the context in which this research took place, discussed in detail in Chapter III. Since this dissertation consisted of qualitative research methods and procedures, and a small number of participants were included, the findings are not generalizable to all institutions; however, the nature of this research enabled some aspects to apply to similar educational programs and serve as a building block to other future studies. And lastly, my personal experience with the topic had the potential to limit how the research study was set up and how data were interpreted.

Delimitations of the Study

For this study, the participant must self-identify as a woman and be 18-years or older. I mean women[an] to mean anyone, regardless of sex assigned at birth, which is not relevant to the study, who identifies as a woman. Participants also had to be currently enrolled mortuary science students who had an affiliation with a funeral home, were working in a university-certified funeral home as part of the coursework or were recent graduates of a mortuary science program. For this study's purpose, a recent graduate was defined as a student who graduated from a mortuary science program within the 12 months prior to data collection. Due to state law differences, some participants internships/apprenticeships already completed their internship for the state while others were not legally allowed to start the internship until after graduation. It was also important to include women who left prior to completing their internship due to personal or professional challenges.

Definition of Key Terms

Sex/Gender Related

Sex: Tends to correlate back to biological differences; genital appearance, anatomy of an individual reproductive system and secondary sex characteristics, hormones, chromosomes, and the brain have all been used to classify someone as male or female (West & Zimmerman, 1987); male, female, intersex.

Gender: A socially constructed range of behaviors, objects, clothing, that have become associated with a particular biological sex; an accepted way of differentiating how a certain biological sex should behave or act, which are then

assigned as masculine or feminine (World Health Organization, 2021); People's identification as a sense of self; man, woman, nonbinary.

Gendered: Relating to or specific to social conventions and norms of a particular gender (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2017).

Gendering: The shift of using gender as a noun to a verb is known as gendering (Davies, 1996).

Gender Role: How society expects certain sexes to act, speak, and dress; a development out of response to their environment; often learned and reinforced by parents, teachers, and peers and are usually characterized as feminine and masculine (Eagly & Wood, 1999)

Stereotype: Set of attributes ascribed to a group and believed to characterize its individual members simply because they belong to that group (Heilman, 1997).

Two types of stereotypes exist: descriptive gender stereotypes (how men and women typically are) and prescriptive gender stereotypes (how a man or woman should be).

Stereotype Threat: Uncomfortable feeling that arises when people are at risk of confirming a negative stereotype in the eyes of others (Steele et al., 2002).

Sexual Harassment: Conduct based on sex that satisfies one or more of the following: quid pro quo conduct; hostile environment that any unwelcome conduct decided by a reasonable person to be so severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive it successfully denies a person equal access to an

educational program or activity; or sexual assault, dating violence, or stalking (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

Gender-Based Harassment: Form of sex discrimination and is the non-sexual act of harassing or oppressing a person because of his or her gender; unwelcome conduct based on a student's sex, harassing conduct based on a student's failure to conform to sex stereotypes (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

Mortuary Science Education Related

Funeral Service Education or Mortuary Science Education: An educational program designed to prepare an embalmer, funeral director professionally, and/or similarly designated professional (ABFSE, 2020). Educating by way of instructing and teaching about the funeral service profession and associated responsibilities, developing skills necessary to pass national board exams and to take to the place of employment.

Institution: A school, college, or University offering a program of funeral service education, whether identified as an academy, a college, an institute, a school, or by similar designations (ABFSE, 2020).

Preceptor: A licensed individual who is a full-time employee of a funeral home who is under contract to the school or department and who meets qualifications as indicated in this manual, to provide on the job training and who assumes responsibilities for a student assigned between the times of regular visitors of the school or department faculty member-supervisor of record (ABFSE, 2020).

University-Certified Funeral Home: A funeral home that has been inspected by a university/college representative for OSHA-related items, proper licensure, and that has been trained regarding the internship rules and the role the funeral home and preceptor play in educating the student on-site.

Apprentice/ Intern (terms vary by state): A person engaged in learning the practice of funeral directing and/or embalming under instruction, direction or personal supervision of a duly licensed funeral director and/or embalmer (The International Conference of Funeral Service Examining Boards, 2017).

Practicum/Internship (school requirement): Where students are assigned to a college-approved or University-approved funeral home to learn actual practical situations, procedures, and policies and perform duties directly relating to the practice of funeral service and embalming techniques as assigned by the preceptor, licensed funeral home staff and faculty members.

Internship (state requirement): A period of work experience required after graduation where the state board registers a person to practice mortuary science under the direct supervision of a preceptor certified by the board.

Industry Related

Removals: The act of picking up a decedent from the place of death (home, hospital, hospice, or nursing care facility) and bringing into the care of the funeral home (Fritch & Altieri, 2017).

Cot (Mortuary Cot): Collapsible or portable bed used to transport bodies from place of death to funeral home (Fritch & Altieri, 2017).

Embalming: The process of chemically treating the dead human body to reduce the presence and growth of microorganisms, to temporarily inhibit organic decomposition and to restore an acceptable physical appearance. (The International Conference of Funeral Service Examining Boards, 2017).

Funeral Industry/"the industry": Any general business activity or commercial establishments involved in some way of taking care of the dead, the families, a part of planning a funeral rite.

Funeral Director: One who possibly participates in the removal of remains, preparing for the disposition of remains, serves, and waits on the next of kin/family to plan and execute a funeral rite, sells funeral service merchandise to the public; uses, in connection with the name of the person or funeral establishment, the words "undertaker" or "mortician" or any other title implying that the person is engaged as a funeral.

Study Related

Cisheteropatriarchy: The idea that biology drives sex, gender, and sexuality. An ideological system that both naturalizes normative views of heterosexual, patriarchal exploitation and oppression of women and sexual minorities and is sustained through language and symbols (Alim et al., 2020)

Generation Z (Gen Z): Generation born between 1997 and 2012. Members of Gen Z are more racially and ethnically diverse than any previous generation, and they are on track to be the most well-educated generation yet. (Pew Research Center, 2019)

Lived Educational and Professional Experiences: Perspectives and experiences women funeral science students reported about the time they were in mortuary science education programs, both in the classroom and during their practicum/internships.

Millennial (Generation Y): Generation of people born in the period roughly from 1980 to 1996 (Pew Research Center, 2019).

Progressing Gendered Structural Terrains: It has been proven numerically that the funeral industry is a male-dominated profession. The massive amounts of women coming into the industry are having to overcome gendered structures and aspects associated with formal education and funeral homes along with inequities, discrimination, bias, harassment, and microaggressions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, women continue to take back the work of tending to the dead and grieving families, but not without barriers or challenges. Limited scholarly work exists regarding women funeral directors and even fewer studies have focused on women students' experiences in mortuary programs. This study explored the educational and practical experiences of women mortuary science students. This dissertation elucidated their perspectives and experiences while in mortuary programs, in the classroom, and during their practicum/internship. Moreover, the participants' thoughts and opinions were then explored and revealed ways in which they are progressing through gendered aspects of mortuary school and perhaps offer solutions to the gender inequities present.

Findings from this study offer guidance for not only mortuary programs but also prospective women students, long-time educators, mentors, funeral directors, and embalmers. By making the womens' experiences the focal point, this research intended to initiate a much-needed conversation and generate ways to improve *both* learning environments: Formal education and practicum/internships.

Furthermore, this chapter provided key terms and definitions used throughout the text, which are necessary to understand this research. The succeeding chapter, Chapter II explores the dense literature involving feminism and society, gendering, historical perspectives of funeral service and education, gender-related issues in STEM education, and the funeral industry as a whole. Chapter III further details the study's design, including how a basic qualitative study design allowed me, as researcher-participant, to capture experiences and perspectives of women mortuary science students. In Chapter IV, the participant demographics and narratives are described, and the presentation of findings are in Chapter V. This research includes an additional chapter, Chapter VI, which demonstrates participants handwritten letters. The data collected is analyzed in depth in Chapter VII.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter provides an extant overview of the literature regarding the gendering process within organizations, including formal education. The chapter begins with literature focused on feminism and how it has shaped today's active movements and then moves to societal norms and expectations of different genders. Subsequently, this chapter primarily discusses literature regarding gender, higher education, and STEM, and a subsection of how mortuary science ties into it. Further, this literature review highlights the historical context of how funeral directing became gendered and what mortuary science curriculum and licensing requirements look like, and a preceptor's role. From there, the chapter centers on the discussion of gender issues and inequalities such as gender bias, sex-based harassment (sexual and gender-based harassment), and stereotypes. This section concludes by narrowing down to funeral-related gender issues that women funeral directors have reported. Looking into their experiences may provide some insight into what inequalities women mortuary science students may experience.

Operationalizing Sex and Gender

A discussion of gender is essential to move further into the work. Sex and gender, though related, are not the same, nor are they always linked. How you define both words depend on the gender school of thought in which one positions themselves. Historically,

many people affixed the relationship between gender and sex, while other feminists sought to remove the fixed connection. Dislodging this relationship became a vital part of the course. Gendered characteristics such as strength, skills, and competitiveness are assumed to correlate back to sex. The perceived lesser status of women limits their fulfillment as individuals and as social beings.

West and Zimmerman (1987) defined sex as correlating back to biological differences: genital appearance, sex hormones, chromosomes, and the brain, which have been used to classify someone into biological categories as male or female. Contrary to this belief, feminist poststructuralist philosopher Judith Butler (1990) proposed sex is not binary but is a socially constructed concept that comes into existence through behavioral repetition processes produced through culture. The sole notion of our society assigning legal sex at birth or deciding that chromosomes or reproductive organs define a person's sex is based on cultural ideals and norms and a social decision that ignores the diversity and variability of sex traits (i.e., intersex).

Gender is defined as a socially constructed and an accepted way of differentiating how a particular biological sex should behave or act, assigned as masculine or feminine (World Health Organization, 2020). People's identification as a sense of self; man, woman, nonbinary. Gender is socially constructed in daily activities, and social interactions are used to distinguish from sex through roles, behaviors, expressions, and identities (Acker, 1990; Connell, 1987, West & Zimmerman, 1987) and can be a complex interrelationship between the actual body and how someone identifies, otherwise known

as gender identity (woman/man/nonbinary), and how someone expresses or does gender, called gender expression (feminine/masculine).

Gender refers to the economic, social, political, and cultural attributes and opportunities of being a woman and man. Gender does not have a biological basis. Children begin to learn gender in infancy and parents must make difficult choices about gendered expectations. From childhood, they are forced to negotiate gender rules and follow them, more or less, because of societal expectations or rules (Wade & Ferree, 2019). According to Wade and Ferree (2019), we do so out of habit, pleasure, encouragement, and punishment from others. When a person's gender identity corresponds to the assigned sex at birth, they are cisgender; for transgender or gender non-conforming individuals, assigned sex at birth may not align with the gender they know themselves to be (Wade & Ferree, 2019).

The relationship between gender and the body goes beyond reproductive functions and biological differences and can be gendered by cultural expectations. Butler (1990) proposed gender and sex are both the product of repeated actions and behaviors, that is, performance or performativity that materialize cultural concepts. Another dimension of gender involves how the public sees a person (gender expression) or gender presentation, regardless of how they identify. Finally, societal expectations (gender role) are the set of functions, activities, and behaviors commonly expected of boys/men and girls/women by society. People often develop their gender roles in response to their environment. Gender is often described as an undefinable spectrum that develops over time and daily processes (Butler, 1990).

Gender can also be used as an analytical category (Connell, 1987; Scott, 1988) and to investigate how “gender influences social relations and by explaining persistence through history and across societies of the subordination of women" (Acker, 1990, p. 145). Employing gender as a tool allows for the investigation of supposed mainstreamed policies and organizations to see how gender is constructed within organizations, and its impact on women’s and men's lived experiences.

Through the thorough reading of the literature, it has been brought to my attention that there may still be a huge misunderstanding or lack of clarity regarding sex and gender. Because there are so many different theories of gender over a small amount of time—a feminist post-modernist theorist may define sex/gender differently, then, say, social feminist theorists or trans theorist. All these definitions are happening at once, drawing from these different theories, with or without attribution, inside various fields of study. Several conversations are happening at once, and not one idea supersedes another; they are just different.

Many of the originating scholarly research and related funeral literature presents conclusions based on sex status. My focus in this study is not delineating the complex system of gender and sex but to declare that contextual understanding from multiple generations exists. In this study, I conceptualize gender as a socially constructed status, identity, and practice. Thus, to move towards the broader goal of inclusivity, and for my work, I use the word woman(en). I mean women[an] to represent anyone, regardless of sex assigned at birth, who self-identifies as a woman.

Feminism and Society

Throughout history, feminism has been a part of developing equal, social, political, and economic opportunities for women. The first wave of feminism in the 19th and early 20th century centered around voting and legal rights; the second feminist wave (the 1960s-1980s) fought for women's rights over their own bodies, aimed to end gender segregation in higher education and job and wage discrimination, which empowered young women to be different than previous generations (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2017; Wade & Ferree, 2019). Family backgrounds, behaviors, and values were no longer traditional; earlier academic preparation for college replaced the idea of marriage and childbearing. A large number of aspiring women were eager to become part of the labor market. That was a monumental change in US culture. The third wave of feminism (the 1990s-early 2000s) embraced individualism, diversity, and intersectionality (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2017; Wade & Ferree, 2019). Intersectionality is a staple part of the third wave because it exposes that people are multifaceted with many identities such as race, gender, social class, and sexuality (Trier-Bieniek, 2015; Wade & Ferree, 2019).

Presently, people are embracing feminist philosophies and approaches, and some would argue the fourth wave of feminism is here (Baumgardner, 2011; Wyre, 2009). This wave focuses on the issues women have been fighting for years. These particular feminists are motivated by the empowerment behind speaking out against sexual assault, body shaming, misogyny, rape culture, and workplace discrimination. A new era of feminism has emerged, demanding change, and pushing against gendered norms that cause women's oppression and marginalization in society. The underlying goal of

feminism is to challenge “entrenched assumptions and values that drive structure, planning, priorities, incentives, values, policies, and practice” (Manning, 2018, p. 90) and to expose social problems, trends, and issues that may otherwise be disregarded if not spoken out against now.

Societal norms, expectations, and ideas evolve as new generations emerge, which will invoke transformation. More than ever, opportunities exist, including in occupations, politics, and religion for both men and women. Change in the culture surrounding gender and gender roles played a massive part in women’s entry into male-dominated professions (Bailey & DiPrete, 2016). However, gender roles and expectations are something society has a hard time letting go because they are taught early on in life and continuously introduced through informal processes like upbringing, family beliefs, media, and formal processes like education and the workplace.

Organizational Culture and Change

To understand the gendering process within organizations, we must also understand organizational culture. Over time, an organization develops distinctive beliefs, assumptions, values, and customs; together, these makeup organizational cultures (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Schein, 2004). Even the ways people and groups interact with each other contribute to the unique social environments, which make up culture. Organizational culture includes an organization’s expectations, end goals, and philosophy and can guide and constrain a group’s behavior with shared norms (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Denison, 1990; Schein, 2004). Culture is based on shared attitudes, customs, and written and unwritten rules that have been developed over time. Culture also includes the

organization's vision, norms, systems, symbols, and language. Culture is continually evolving as new members join and create new groups that generate new cultures (Schein, 2004).

Whether it is cultural or organizational change, change can be intimidating, albeit sometimes necessary for growth. Changing organizational culture is not an easy undertaking as people often either promote or resist change. Transformations do not happen quickly in a culture and change can either be accepted or resisted (Dirks et al., 1996). Resistance to change is usually caused by feelings of ownership or possessiveness over an object. Objects include ownership of entire organizations, departments, programs, jobs, or even ideas (Dirks et al., 1996). This is known as change theory and was developed to explain how individuals with psychological ownership would resist change if it were perceived as unattractive and disrupts an "individual's ability to fulfill his needs for self-enhancement, self-continuity, and control and efficacy" (Dirks et al., 1996, p. 11). In other words, if an individual fears losing their self-esteem, self-preservation, or status, they will not embrace change as easily.

Such is the case in mortuary science programs; women's entry into mortuary science programs was an imposed change over an extended period. To demonstrate this change, in 1971, only 5% of mortuary students were women (Kenevich, 2011). A significant turning point was in 2000 when women enrollees surpassed the number of men enrollees at 51% to 49%. Five years later, more women than men graduated from funeral service education at 52.2% (Defort, 2020). Much like what Dirks et al. (1996) described as imposed change, men in the industry feel a deep connection to the industry,

or psychological ownership, and were forced to react to the growing number of women, which added to the resistance and acceptance of women into the industry. This significant change is initiating culture shifts among universities, colleges, departments, and workplace institutions such as funeral homes to modify their teaching styles, communication, curriculum, classroom activities, and policies. Now is the time for originating members to listen to the “newest members” ideas and perspectives, in this case, the women's mortuary students' perspectives and experiences. These must be heard and considered to build a new cohesive culture within mortuary education and funeral service's survival. Ennis (2020) said open-minded managers and owners open to diversity and changing workforce culture, including habits, will succeed with the current new enrollee and graduation reality. Many funeral service trade journals offer the need to work together, communicate better, to not assume that old policies, procedures, models, or expectations can be applied to this new type of student (Defort, 2020; Ennis, 2020; Merrick, 2010), and offer great advice. A noticeable missing factor, however, is the voice of the students today, particularly women.

Gendering

The shift of using gender as a noun to a verb is known as gendering (Davies, 1996). The use of “gendering” reflects changed understandings of gender as an active and ongoing process rather than fixed. Something becomes “gendered” when its character is either masculine or feminine (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2017). Many things have become gendered, including occupations. Researchers argue, in most cultures of the world, the gendering of objects or behaviors is quite common. This section utilizes Joan Acker's

(1990, 1992a) theory of gendered organizations to understand not only how institutions or workplaces become gendered but also how these processes showcase themselves. Her theory used the gender binary terms of men and women; however, the author gave no further clarification about who was included or excluded in these gendered terms.

Gender(ing/ed) Organizations

Gender is also present in organizations by way of gendering tasks or positions. Acker (1992a) proposed work organizations are inherently gendered, in that they have been created, designed, and controlled by men, and therefore reflect their interests solely. According to Acker (1992a), "gender is a foundational element of organizational structure and work life, "present in [its] processes, practices, images, and ideologies, and distributions of power" (p. 567). The fundamental concept of "gendered organizations" was born in 1990 and is described as "advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine" (Acker, 1990, p. 146).

According to Britton (2000), "to say that organizations are *inherently* gendered implies that they have been defined, conceptualized, and structured in terms of a distinction between masculinity and femininity, and presume and will thus inevitably reproduce gendered differences" (p. 419 emphasis in original). The gendered organization theory attempts to bring together the various findings of the continuation of gender inequality in organizations (Acker, 1990,1992a). It is essential to understand gendered organizations can affect the experiences and perspectives of all individuals.

The problem lies in that organizational culture was created using men's perspectives, leaving out women's input and vantage points; thus, higher education, STEM programs, and policymakers were left to play catch up by enacting underdeveloped or not well thought out policies. This alone could be the root cause of gendered organizations and why we still struggle to understand further and fix gendered organizations, including higher education and other workplaces. It is essential to comprehend what potential biases could await women students in present-day mortuary science education and how they overcome them during their journey to becoming a funeral director.

Gendering Processes

Work and organizations became recognized as gendered in the 1980s (Britton, 2000). Organizations can incite gender through means of language, expectations, or even formal practices or policies. According to Britton (2000), "the key to using the gendered-organizations approach to produce meaningful social and organizational change is an acute awareness of the importance of context" (p. 423); without special attention to context and settings, organizations run the risk of manifesting gender in organizational and occupational contexts. This section thoroughly explains Acker's (1990) gendering processes.

Acker's (1990, 1992a) framework's first process is the construction of division along gender lines through factors like labor division in the home and labor market, allowed or expected behaviors, location in physical space, or power. Essentially, Acker (1990,1992a) stated an organization's ordinary, regular practices are responsible for

producing gender divisions and gender patterning of jobs, wages, and hierarchies. She believed organizations were built upon and concealed gendered structures. An example of this would be bureaucratic hierarchies; the higher-ranking jobs are awarded to the committed, loyal, ideal worker with no other responsibilities, usually favoring men. Masculine ethics are valued as they are "unencumbered by family responsibilities, able to work almost unlimited hours, a rational and forceful leader" (Britton & Logan, 2008, p. 108). This logic immediately discredits women because they may have a "second shift" to attend. The progression of gendering organizational cultures stemmed from public and private beliefs; the public realm (work) is masculine; meanwhile, the private realm (home) is feminine. The concept of public/private has played an important role in women's subordination, exploitation, and power dichotomy (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2017). Joan Acker (1990, 1992a) believed when feminine traits and private spheres are truly valued and when the barrier between public and private are broken down, that is when organizations can truly become gender neutral.

The second of the interacting process is the construction of symbols and images. Often, these will explain, express, reinforce, or sometimes oppose divisions. In Acker's (1990) article *Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations*, she theorized language, ideologies, pop culture, dress, press, and media are sources of controlling images. How an organization uses images, slogans, or metaphors can exude masculinity. Reading into these images has shaped societal norms and values and has shaped our understandings of what is to be masculine or feminine and what is expected of each.

The third of Acker's (1990) process is gendering interactions between individuals, whether it be women with women, men with women, and men with men. A positive example for men would be riding the “glass escalator;” through social interactions or networking, men build positive relationships with other higher positioned men managers and improve their chances to be seen or promoted (Britton & Logan, 2008). However, communication between genders may present dominance and submissive patterns like interruptions or not being able to voice opinions. According to West and Zimmerman (1987), gender inequalities can flow even during ordinary talk and discussion. Women are encouraged to have an empowering "voice," share opinions, or keep similar values with matching communication strategies of men (Baker, 1991); however, they are often condemned or patronized when vocal. Sexuality is an understudied part of this category that adds to women's objectification through verbal or physical interactions (Smith, 2013). I foreground the concepts of objectification and other microaggressions in another section of this literature review.

The fourth process is internal gender constructions of individual identity (Acker, 1990). This process is one of the less expanded on in this theory. According to Acker (1990), this process is what helps create the gendered part of individuality. In other words, it is the act of individual gendered consciousness within an organization. People choose to present themselves in their position, the language they must use, or how someone portrays themselves via dress, nails, hair, etc. Women must often be aware of their tone, volume, and inflection. There is pressure to display "gender appropriate" behaviors and attitudes. For example, appropriate behavior for women in the eyes of

society is to be expressive, reactive, eager to soothe hurt feelings using flattery and being gentle or shy (Baker, 1991). Although many women want to be in a managerial role and have the power, it is denied partly by the depowering communication strategies society expects them to use (Baker, 1991). Societies assumptions and unwillingness to accept that women can hold positions of power creates, and adds to, the gendered problem. Expectations of specific genders create these falsely embedded "rules." Therefore, we are left to do or perform gender daily, known as "doing gender."

Doing gender is a Western cultural belief that gender, rather than being a quality of individuals, is a psychologically embedded social construct that actively transpires in everyday human interaction, where gender is either invoked or reinforced (Butler, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1987). The concept of "doing gender" was outlined by Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1987) and described as an "understanding of gender as a routine, methodical and recurring accomplishment" (p. 126) and was later called performativity by Judith Butler (1990). Performativity of gender is the repetition of acts or production of dominant historical conventions of gender (Butler, 1990). The ability to perform gender is evidence of social know-how involving socially guided activities produced as expressions of masculine or feminine (West & Zimmerman, 1987). The act of doing gender is being created and reproduced all the time; it is a continuous performance (Butler, 1990).

The fifth and final process is gendered organizational logic. Originally, Acker (1990) described this as "the ongoing processes of creating and conceptualizing social structures" (p. 147). She later labeled these as gendered substructures; these substructures

may include rules, contracts, manuals, handbooks, training material, and job evaluations. Although these substructures are meant to represent neutrality, often, it is argued “mainstreaming” only gives the appearance of addressing inequality. Mainstreaming is the strategy for promoting equality by embedding gendered perspectives into all organizational practices and policies (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2017). The impression of equality stems from the bureaucratic structure of jobs and hierarchies and is reinforced by organizational culture and society.

Gendering in Formal Education

Children, at an early age, are introduced to gendering. We are taught girls should like pink and “girly” toys such as dolls, while boys should like blue and prefer cars (Kirkham, 1996; Paoletti, 2012; Wade & Ferree, 2019). These assumed gendered social norms trickle into formal education as boys are often believed to be better at math and science and girls in the arts and literature or verbal skills (AAUW, n.d.; Title IX at 45, 2017; Wade & Ferree, 2019). However, this common myth has been debunked as science has proven that girls and boys score virtually the same in math in fourth and eighth grades in the US and eighth-grade girls outperform boys by five points in technology and engineering (AAUW, n.d.). Girls and boys show equal interest in science and math in middle school, but by high school, many girls no longer express interest in a scientific career (Emam, 2017; Jesse, 2006). Remaining conscious of one's language and behaviors is necessary to achieve equality, especially in any educational setting (Emam, 2017; Hall & Sandler, 1982). Many educators are unaware of bias or stereotypical language that

imposes discrimination or bias within the classroom or in different learning environments (Hall & Sandler, 1982).

Gender, Higher Education, and STEM

Bailey and DiPrete (2018) mentioned, in 1970, 58% of college students were men. By the 1980s, the gender gap in higher education flipped completely (Goldin et al., 2006). A couple of factors that may have contributed to this change was the revival of empowered women and stricter guidelines and laws regarding discrimination in education and the workforce, such as Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (Bailey & DiPrete, 2018; Goldin et al., 2006). Because the mortuary science programs curriculum is heavily science-based knowledge, it is equally important to understand today's trends in science-related fields.

Over the past 45 years, women have made strides in higher education. Equal rights and opportunities are more prevalent in school settings, especially for those who want to study and work in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) related fields (Title IX at 45, 2017). The National Science Foundation (NSF; 2019) reported, on average, women earn 46% of associates and 49.4% of bachelor's degrees in Science and Engineering (S&E), with overrepresentation in social sciences and underrepresentation in physical sciences. Although women have gained ground in STEM majors, specifically psychology, biological, environmental, chemical/material sciences, and social sciences, progress is not uniform across all STEM disciplines and cross occupational categories (Bailey & DiPrete, 2016; National Science Foundation, 2019; Noonan, 2017; Šaras et al.,

2019; Steele et al., 2002; Title IX at 45, 2017). The NSF reported women account for 52% of the college-educated workforce but only 29% S&E employment.

These numbers are concerning as STEM-related fields are so crucial to the US's continual growth and development. The NSF (2019) stated lower representation signals a lack of diversity which could negatively impact productivity and innovation. A massive amount of potential and perspectives is being lost. As educators, we must do our active part in developing and supporting these women. We must actively study this broadly and narrow it down to specific programs to achieve gender parity in STEM education.

The US workforce is made up of 17 million skilled technical workers (STW), who are employed in occupations that require S&E expertise and technical familiarity and whose educational attainment is some high school or a high school diploma, some college or an associate degree, or equivalent training (NSF, 2020). Because funeral directing in most states requires licensing, it is also important to note that in 2017, 26% of those with some college or an associate degree and 36% of those with a bachelor's degree or above held a certification or license (NSF, 2020).

Both interest and achievement in STEM are at an all-time high among high school girls, yet women students are still less likely than their male peers to study and work in STEM fields (AAUW, n.d.; Title IX at 45, 2017). And the ones who do may never finish due to gender bias (different or unequal treatment), discrimination (current or future), or stereotype threat (Bailey & DiPrete, 2016; Morris & Daniel, 2008; Steele et al., 2002; Title IX at 45, 2017). Even the slightest perception of forms of discrimination or future chilly climates in specific industries or occupations can cause an alternative major to be

selected. Women have reported feeling unwelcome in traditionally male-dominated fields and college majors (Morris & Daniel, 2008).

The funeral industry realizes a leaky pipeline exists; however, no one can pinpoint the exact problem. Deaths are projected to reach more than 3.6 million in 2037 in the United States (Devine, 2017), barring this was before COVID-19. According to Penepent (2018), an employment crisis lurks and threatens funeral directing practice. Could it be the industry's own biases, trends, and policies are directly related to the significantly lower number of women in the profession? If these unspoken problems continue to be ignored or skimmed over, the industry will fail and change more drastically than it already has. It is important to understand the rich history of funeral service and how it came to its position.

Historical Perspectives

During the late 1800s, under the agreement of marriage, men were expected to be heads of households and women were considered their property (Wade & Ferree, 2019). In the 1920s, protection laws were implemented nationally, banning women from working long hours, at night, lifting even moderate weights, or taking dangerous jobs. These laws exuded benevolent sexism and more or less dictated which jobs women could hold. The patriarchal/property marriage then shifted to a breadwinner/housewife model. Although this model did not support the idea of having ownership over a woman, it did define roles a wife must play like cleaning, cooking, childcare, and sex. In return, men would support them financially (Wade & Ferree, 2019). Prior to industrialization, the private sphere or “caretaking of the home” was understood to be work. Shortly thereafter,

men were drafted due to World War II and women had to step into nontraditional roles and were now allowed to work to benefit the economy, but once the war ended, they were forced out of the workplace as servicemen returned home (Wade & Ferree, 2019).

Middle- and upper-class women became unpaid silent housewives, which also meant giving up individual incomes to which they had become accustomed. Women's rights groups sought equal rights for working women and resented being pushed out of the workforce (Wade & Ferree, 2019).

Young women of these times were encouraged to seek husbands at the university, settle down and have babies (Wade & Ferree, 2019). A small number of women began to seek higher education and academic opportunities, and of these feminist scholars emerged. French writer Simone de Beauvoir (1953) used the concept of “the Other” to describe women’s position in society (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2017). And the “Feminine Mystique” by Betty Friedan (1963) recounted the lives of unhappy, bored, and unfulfilled women in their traditional roles and encouraged them to seek more. Cultural changes altered US society in the 60s as women were growing in the workforce, often serving as teachers, secretaries, or nurses. Employers were hesitant to train, assuming that women would get married and leave. This kind of discrimination was deemed illegal in 1964 by the Civil Rights Act. The first national women’s advocacy group was the National Organization for Women, formed in 1966 (Wade & Ferree, 2019). It was not until the 1970s that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other discrimination laws were enforced, allowing women to enter higher education and the workplace, but not with other hardships.

Origins of the Funeral Service Industry

As mentioned in Chapter I, originally tending to the dead was the responsibility of men and women (Rundblad, 1995). Among these responsibilities, friends of the deceased and “natural” caregivers of the community, typically women, ensured the body was bathed and laid out for burial. At the same time, the cabinetmakers, who were usually men, would build coffins that housed the prepared human remains before burial, and the sextons, typically men, tended to the cemeteries following the burial process (Habenstein & Lamers, 2014; Pruitt, 2017; Rundblad, 1995). As the funeral industry became more complex and specialized (Fritch & Steward, 2016), it was assumed that different skillsets and stronger stomachs would be needed, hence regarded too advanced and horrifying for women. As a result of industrialization, funeral practitioners saw a need for a stationary place of business; therefore, the concept of a funeral home was born. Legitimizing the occupation even further, meant trade journals and advertisements used images, symbols, and language to portray the masculinity and talent required of funeral directing. Women were often depicted in trade journals as decoration or piece of art and beauty; even early funerary organizations and mortuary science schools discouraged enrollment in school (Donley & Baird, 2017). The dynamics of gender within the industry shifted, resulting in an industry predominately employed and run by men. At the turn of the century, additional tasks were added, such as filing the death certificate, writing and publishing obituaries, and assisting with claiming insurance and governmental forms. The newly found profession, in other words, had become gendered.

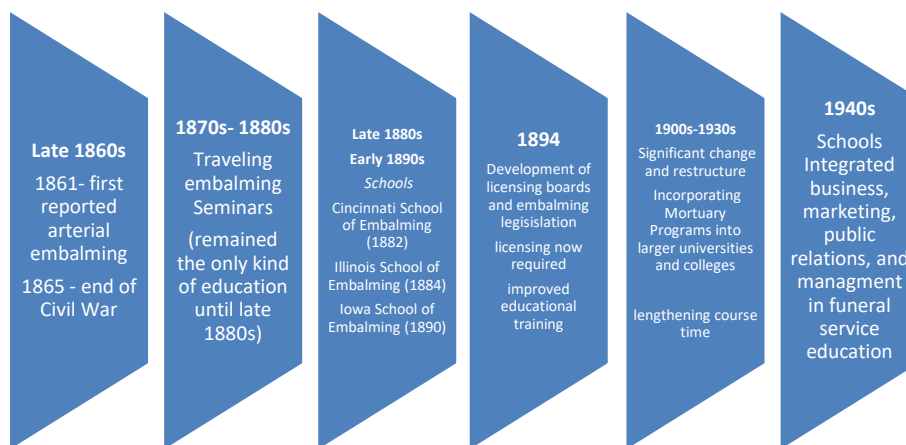
The masculine domination of funeral services has proven true for several decades, except for the most recent turn in events depicting more women entering work in this historically male-dominated field (ABFSE, 2021). More specifically, the number of women students enrolled in mortuary programs has continued to rise annually around the United States. The American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE) reported women are entering funeral education programs, being retained, and graduating at much higher rates than ever. Even with such a positive rise in women enrolling and graduating within mortuary science education programs, the numbers do not support the workforce gender composition, with women making up 34.2% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019).

Origins of Mortuary Science Education

It is crucial to understand the beginnings of funeral service education and curriculum and the requirements now. A brief timeline can be viewed in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2

Funeral Service Education History



Funeral directing became recognized as a masculine profession, and educational programs were established and created to initially support and educate men, dating back

to the late 1870s and early 1880s (Habenstein & Lamers 2014; Shaw 2005). The cabinetmakers' entrepreneurship skills and the newest need for embalming prompted schooling to formulate. Embalming fluid companies established the first "schools" or seminars in the late 1800s, and "educators" often traveled across the country teaching anywhere from 3-4 days; upon completion, school diplomas were granted, but no testing was required at this time (Habenstein & Lamers 2014; Shaw 2005).

Society became more accepting of embalming practices, specifically during the 1860s and during the Civil War, so that soldiers could be sent back home to their families (Habenstein & Lamers 2014). Because this new preservation practice had taken off, established schools were opened. Over time, significant restructure and changes forced schools to assume responsibility for their students' success in the embalming arena and state board preparation. Courses lasted about three weeks, and during this time, instruction consisted of "anatomy, bacteriology, practical embalming, disinfectants, and the study of contagious diseases" (Habenstein & Lamers, 2014, p. 328). Mortuary schools were looking at other professional schools for guidance. Habenstein and Lamers (2014) stated the development of mortuary schools reflects the important sway exerted through associational committees, licensing boards, legislative acts, and the collective endeavors of other relevant and interested groups. Through time, mortuary schools' development reflects the critical influence of associational committees, licensing boards, legislative acts, and other relevant and interested group efforts. Each program is unique and offers different degrees ranging from associates to bachelor's, requiring specific amounts of credit hours, an internship/practicum, or concurrent employment at a funeral home.

Accreditation

The American Board of Funeral Service Education (ABFSE) is recognized by the United States Department of Education (USDE) by way of the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) and the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), as the sole accrediting body (ABFSE Directory, 2020; Habenstein & Lamers, 2014; Shaw et al., 2011). The Council on Higher Education Accreditation is a national advocate to promote academic quality through accreditation, ensuring and strengthening the academic quality and ongoing quality improvement in courses, programs, and degrees (Council on Higher Education Accreditation [CHEA], n.d.). Further, CHEA is an association of degree-granting colleges and universities and recognizes institutional and programmatic accrediting organizations.

The American Board of Funeral Service Education, through its Committee on Accreditation (COA), is responsible for implementing a process to 1) Develop, approve, and improve the standards of funeral service education and thereby protect the public interest; 2) describe the characteristics of an accredited institution of funeral service education; 3) assist each institution in upgrading its standards through a continuing system of self-study, visitation, evaluation, and consultation; 4) provide a dependable basis for prospective students' evaluation and selection of an institution offering funeral service education; 5) provide an opportunity for inter-institutional relationships; and 6) provide a list of accredited institutions to the public and all agencies interested in funeral service (ABFSE Accreditation & Policy Manual, 2020). American Board of Funeral Service Education sets a universal curriculum, and each school must undergo an

assessment every seven years to secure and maintain accreditation. As of June 2021, according to ABFSE Directory (2021), there were 55 accredited programs or institutions, 44 programs offered in public multi-purpose institutions, and 12 programs in private institutions.

Whether independent trade schools, community colleges, departments at the university level, or state requirements regarding internships, they all provide a component of the educational experience and are central in funeral service education. Accrediting agencies hold significant power regarding the federal standard in higher education. Although each funeral service program is unique, they must comply with the same accreditation standards. Accreditation created a stagnant culture of uniformity in funeral service education, focusing on the information being delivered rather than the method of how it is to be delivered. Schools and funeral homes must enhance the educational experience beyond these minimum requirements. These massive webs of organizations and agencies was created for one reason: accountability. It is apparent that holding schools accountable and producing quality funeral service education is vital, but so is self-reflection, continuous improvement, acceptance of diversity, and acknowledgment of students as an embodied whole; this reign especially true for 21st-century education. With the current gender shift in mortuary science, educators must consider women's education needs and acknowledge they will have different experiences and perspectives than the original mortuary students' demographics.

The accreditation process has a four-stage process which involves: Conducting a self-study utilizing local stakeholders such as funeral directors, alumni, and advisory

board members, program documents to be put together and given to the external evaluators (no connection to funeral service), an onsite visit from evaluators, and site visit report drawn up with their findings (CHEA, n.d.). Reinhard (2010) indicated a lack of gender diversity exists with respect to the ABFSE accreditation site visit teams as the majority are men. Dr. John Fritch (2011) stated the disparity between the demographic makeup needs to be "addressed from a research standpoint if the academy is to be forward-thinking and work to represent the diversity of the funeral service industry" (p. 74). Gender and gendered perceptions of inequities have never been discussed via scholarly writing from solely a woman's perspective. It is my opinion, as a researcher, that we can no longer simply ignore this group. This study serves as a grounding piece for further research within funeral services like the gender pay gap, generational communication gaps, or insight into women directors' attrition rate after graduation.

Current Mortuary Science Curriculum

Higher education faces new challenges like adapting to new technologies, globalization, and internationalization, dwindling resources, shifts in faculty roles, climate change, social media, and most frequently utilized in funeral education, collaboration, and competition (Manning, 2018). Universities are forming partnerships with other institutions or outside organizations to enhance their appeal. For example, mortuary programs require students to complete all educational components consisting of certain classes, receive passing grades, and partake in a practical element where they participate in an internship or practicum (term varies by state) either before, during, or after funeral service education, depending upon state licensing laws (ABFSE, 2020). The

internship/practicum includes hands-on activities like learning to prepare the deceased bodies and grasping the intricacies of funeral arranging and directing through a licensed funeral home under the direct supervision of a preceptor. A preceptor is trained by a higher education representative like a faculty member or staff of the funeral department. This blended approach allows students to be taught in the classroom and at a funeral home by a professional. While enrolled in mortuary science programs, students must complete a certain number of cases (funerals and embalmings) or a certain number of hours to become licensed. Most mortuary programs work together with funeral homes in the same state; these partnerships allow professors and mentors to see students' growth in understanding how the two components intersect. They work in tandem with each other (Budrow, 2020).

The Role of a Preceptor

Mortuary schools provide foundational knowledge, and students must put learned information into practice under the responsible preceptor's supervision and guidance. This leads to the question, what are preceptors and their role in funeral service education? The American Board of Funeral Service Education Accreditation and Policy Manual: Appendix A (2020) defined a preceptor as a licensed individual who is a full-time employee of a funeral home under contract to the school or department, provides on-the-job training and assumes responsibilities for a student. The school or department faculty member-supervisor of the record is responsible for guiding and instructing the preceptor about their obligations to actively participate in teaching funeral service practices.

A funeral service preceptor should take their time to teach, mentor, and train an intern or practicum student (Cozine, 2017). The opportunity to serve as a preceptor/mentor requires them to invest time and energy in fostering an intern to become a better funeral service professional than themselves (Cozine, 2019). Instilling knowledge in upcoming funeral service professionals should be considered an honor and not taken lightly. Not seeing it this way could be detrimental to the funeral service profession's future and will create inferior funeral directors (Penepent, 2018). They are responsible for cultivating a respectful, unbiased organizational culture that strives to build trustworthy work relationships. Helping with the learning curve and providing positive reinforcement goes a long way in developing attitudes, exposure, knowledge, and confidence necessary to excel in all aspects of the profession (Kenevich, 2011; Lovas, 2011). Preceptors need to remember that interns/apprentices are more than just cheap labor and should take advantage of all teachable moments, from phone etiquette to forms to embalming techniques. Most recently, the founder of the Association of Women Funeral Professionals found women often get frustrated in this industry because the men do not allow them to do all they can.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Culturally Relevant Leadership

Valuing, embracing, and celebrating new insight and culture is what years of Ladson-Billings work, specifically 1995c, refers to as culturally relevant pedagogy. This formal pedagogy focuses on both academic and non-academic success, demands ongoing understanding of self, others, and context as the foundation of education, assumes knowledge is constructed by leaders, educators, students, and community members, and

lastly, stresses the importance of learning from each other to construct a new dynamic (Fraise & Brooks, 2015).

It is crucial that during this time of change in funeral service, administration, classroom teachers, and preceptors of funeral service (hereinafter referred to as educators) consider the framework of culturally relevant leadership. Culturally relevant leadership is grounded in culturally relevant pedagogy. Culturally relevant leadership (CRL), according to Beachum (2011), is made up of three major ideas: Emancipatory consciousness (liberatory consciousness; McCray & Beachum, 2014), equitable insight (pluralistic insight; McCray & Beachum, 2014), and reflexive practice. This particular framework specifically calls upon administrators and classroom teachers; however, the role of a preceptor could also benefit from utilizing this framework.

As mentioned above, CRL calls for liberatory consciousness and begins with the self (leader). Ezzani and Brooks (2019) described this as a time for self-exploration, questioning one's beliefs, and realizing that inherent flaws exist in systemic and educational programs. Choosing to look past or idealize a blissful state will unknowingly perpetuate inequities. According to Beachum (2011), "The essence of an emancipatory consciousness is a change in thinking for educators, making them realize their power with students/colleagues and potential in society" (p. 32). In other words, funeral educators have a direct impact in many areas.

The second idea related to CRL is pluralistic insight. Regardless of race, language, gender, faith, ability, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status, all students deserve to be treated with respect and given equal attention. There is a need for both

excellence and equity in education. Believing this and that students hold other social identities will help progress education along. Deficit thinking is cancelled, and dominant cultural norms are challenged (Ezzani & Brooks, 2019). Eck (2006) presented four ideas to enhance pluralistic insight: (1) Engage and interact with diversity, (2) seek understanding with those who are different, (3) be trustworthy and reliable, and (4) be open. By valuing different perspectives, respect and appreciation is earned.

And lastly, a reflexive practice which McCray and Beachum's (2014) framework calls upon educators to serve as change agents for increased student success. Reflexivity of oneself as an educator could overtly oppose student stigmatization and stereotyping. McCray and Beachum (2014) defined reflexive practice as leaders "engag[ing] in both practice and reflection upon what is morally right and equitable in their schools" (p. 407). Specifically, in funeral service, formal educators are connected to the outside community and society at large; educators may serve as the catapult for change and in awakening students, teachers, and extended communities. This idea centers on thinking about one's actions and engaging in continual learning and self-improvement.

As a process, culturally relevant leadership begins with emancipatory consciousness, which encourages change, leads to equitable insight, which could change educators' attitudes, and finally results in reflexive practice. In reference to practice, Beachum (2011) suggested: 1) Continual personal development in raising consciousness levels, 2) the affirmation and inclusion of all students, 3) breaking down previously constructed ideas and stereotypes created by society, and 4) actively confronting misidentification, miscategorization, and misassessments.

This framework could serve as a catalyst for inclusion, consideration of different perspectives, and liberation of women students by allowing their voices to be heard. The students may then feel safe to recognize, understand, and challenge equitable social norms and practices. This means that for education to be culturally relevant, teachers and students must begin their work together by reflecting on their own culture, values, knowledge, and situations, and seeking to understand other people with whom they will co-construct their education and in multiple contexts.

The fluid and changing diversity on campuses continues to amplify. In today's changing environment, it may be beneficial to pause and acknowledge that a massive shift has taken place in the last ten years and is coming from all directions, including a new generation and wave of women students. American Board of Funeral Service Education statistics shows that the most likely people enrolling in funeral service education programs in 2020 were white women ranging from 21 to 25 years of age with no funeral service ties (ABFSE, 2021).

The described practicum student is in complete contrast to the familiar male student just 20 years ago; therefore, culturally relevant leadership is a must. Educators may be unmindful of other obligations or challenges that come with being a mortuary student, let alone the extra challenges or inequities that present themselves because of gender. And for this reason, communication must improve. Even as educators, our beliefs can influence students' lives and performance within a program. A conscientious educator actively listens and adapts to students' learning styles and educational needs to succeed.

It has been said that an employment crisis is looming and threatens the profession of funeral directing and was "brought on by ignoring employment trends and a decreasing workforce" (Penepent, 2018, p. 41). One of those trends was the uptake in women entering the profession. Women were "literally an afterthought in the industry," says Kenevich (2011) in *The American Director*; thus, rules, policies, and even curriculum remained unchanged. Change is looming around funeral service, including disposition trends, ideas for celebration of life services, the gender shift in the workforce, and even the power dynamics among families as more and more women are arranging and planning services. The demand for less traditional services and the aging population will require more funeral directors to meet the anticipated and everchanging consumer needs (Dempsey, 2011). Funeral service leaders across the nation began the much-needed conversation about the need for attrition research. Significant improvements will need to be made to retain women in funeral service, like open and honest communication between educators and students, allowing women students to voice physical limitations or feelings without fear of retaliation, and mutual respect and understanding. According to Kenevich (2011), women in funeral service already feel their gender limits them; they do not need to be reminded by their preceptor/mentor, professors, colleagues, or peers. Indeed, many women funeral professionals report feeling the sting of rejection.

Gender Implications in Organizations and Higher Education

The transition into a mortuary program can be difficult for all genders. However, it can sometimes be more difficult for women because men are still considered "the One" and women "the Other." Several processes and social interactions within higher

education and the industry still underpin dominant thoughts that maintain patriarchal views. In a way, patriarchy was institutionalized and built into social systems like the economy, health, and education. So much so that men or masculine traits are considered superior or the norm (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2017; Tuana, 1993). As forementioned, organizations are made up of culture. Whether consciously or unconsciously, organizational cultures stemmed from a deep-rooted patriarchal society. It is with this mentality that mortuary programs and curriculum were designed. For example, the pronoun “he” has routinely been used in textbooks until most recently, contributing to women's marginalization in the funeral industry.

Whether it be within classrooms or at the practicum site, the quality of teaching can either facilitate women students' entry into the mortuary science world or add to the existing problem by using bias or stereotypical language imposing gender bias or harassment. Although limited, funeral-related scholarly work and trade magazines continue to speak on the archaic and outdated views or beliefs present in *both* learning environments. Research has shown women in STEM-related fields are more likely to encounter discrimination and stereotype threat (Bailey & DiPrete, 2016; Jesse, 2006; Steele et al., 2002; Title IX at 45, 2017). Hence, it is essential to have a comprehensive idea of women's gender inequality issues in STEM education like mortuary science. Limited empirical work exists about the funeral service industry or mortuary science education, let alone any focused-on women mortuary students, which commanded an examination of two separate research areas: Gender issues in STEM education and women funeral directors' reported experiences. Gender bias, sex-based harassment

(sexual and gender-based harassment), and stereotypes are common issues reported at higher education institutions on a macro or micro level and even in the workplace.

Therefore, it is crucial to examine how these may present themselves to enact acknowledgment and change in the future.

Gender Bias in STEM

Prior studies have documented that many girls and women encounter gender-biased messages about their gender group's presumed competence or fit in STEM (Leaper & Starr, 2019). Bias occurs when an individual unintentionally assigns certain attitudes and stereotypes to another person or group of people. Although being actively worked on through policies and practices, gender bias is still embedded in education, whether subtly or overtly through instruction, materials, or texts used, informal exchanges, and even through praise and feedback (Hall & Sandler, 1982, Morris & Daniel, 2008; Title at 45, 2017). Gender bias is a form of discrimination that shows preference or prejudice towards one gender over another. It is necessary to discuss what women students have reported in STEM-based classes, especially since part of the mortuary science curriculum is science classes such as anatomy, biology, and embalming.

Although women are making strides in higher education and are becoming much more prevalent in school settings, studies have shown women's enrollment still lacks in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields but has risen in other areas (Steele et al., 2002). Some women develop an interest in STEM fields in high school and choose related college majors but may never finish that degree path due to different or unequal treatment (Hall & Sandler, 1982; Robnett, 2016). According to

Emam (2017), "the National Science Foundation and the Department of Energy have set up programs to investigate sexual discrimination in the context of federal grants for STEM fields" (p. 24).

Women students in men-dominated majors have been sexually discriminated against not only by peers but, in some cases, also by faculty and staff (Hall & Sandler, 1982). Often, women will not finish their degree in a man-dominated area because they have experienced sexual discrimination, may anticipate sex discrimination in their future job, or have lost confidence due to harsh or negative feedback (Hall & Sandler, 1982; Robnett, 2016; Steele et al., 2002). Feelings of not being good enough or as capable as men eventually take a toll on women's mindsets, causing them to change majors to social science or drop out altogether (Jesse, 2006). Shauman (2016) said what women graduates can expect in a men-dominated industry, such as funeral service, is heightened visibility, increased pressure to be better or prove themselves, and sometimes social isolation. These pressures affect their performance and the likelihood of entering or staying within a given STEM field (Title IX at 45, 2017). These perspectives imply that graduates who major in fields not traditional for their gender will have less positive labor-market outcomes than their counterparts with gender-normative majors.

Sex-Based Harassment

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) enforces Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which prohibits discrimination based on sex in education programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance. Sex-based harassment comprises sexual harassment, including sexual violence and gender harassment. Based on

experience as an apprentice and funeral director, my focus areas are sexual harassment and gender-based harassment.

Sexual Harassment

The newest regulations established by Title IX Final Rule (2020) defined sexual harassment as conduct based on sex that satisfies one or more of the following: Quid pro quo conduct; a hostile environment, and any unwelcome conduct decided by a reasonable person to be so severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive it successfully denies a person equal access to an educational program or activity; or sexual assault, dating violence, or stalking (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Quid pro quo harassment occurs if a teacher requests sexual favors or sets conditions in exchange for an educational decision or benefit. Hostile environment sexual harassment has the effect of interfering with a person's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment that psychologically affects the victim. Several studies, including most recently Leaper and Starr (2019), have proven sexual harassment and bias are still prevalent in higher education today. A harassment-free environment is a right students should receive, including an equal opportunity to excel. According to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine Consensus Report (2018), 20 to 50% of women students reported encountering or experiencing sexual harassing conduct in academia; however, the number of incidents is far greater than the number reported

Gender-Based Harassment

Gender-based harassment is a form of sex discrimination and is the non-sexual act of harassing or oppressing a person because of gender. This is often the most difficult to

identify and can often be dismissed because it is not considered egregious as sexual assault. Examples include derogatory comments, verbal bullying, offensive remarks, sexist slurs, gender derogatory nicknames, or even conveying negative attitudes about a particular gender. When a student is verbally harassed solely based on gender, they are put in a hostile learning environment, limiting their ability to participate in or benefit from the school's program (Kaplin & Lee, 2014). Encountering belittling, condescending, or adverse comments may deprive students of a positive educational experience, and they may suffer irreparable harm to their self-worth in the form of denied education.

Demeaning or disrespectful comments convey negative attitudes toward women students and cultivate an environment where they may not feel good enough or believe they are not performing to the standard as their men counterparts (Hall & Sandler, 1982).

Violations of Title IX may affect women's attitudes about themselves, causing them to change academic majors or leave an educational program altogether (Steele et al., 2002).

Each year, higher education trends evolve or change, whether the change is the content being taught, the demographics within the classroom, policies, or law.

Gender Microaggressions. A subsection of gender harassment is gender microaggressions, which are everyday actions or behaviors that exclude, demean, insult, oppress or otherwise express hostility or indifference toward women, whether intentional or unintentional (Basford et al., 2014; Sue & Spanierman, 2020). Microaggressions are a construct of everyday discrimination and a subtle and overt range of sexist experiences. Whether consciously or not, sexism can be manifested overtly through hostile sexism or subtly via benevolent sexism. Penepent (2018) stated, "sexism has deep roots in the

funeral profession even when funeral directors do employ women" (p. 41). Although blatant sexism is now on the decline, some researchers say it is not disappearing but continues in more subtle and indistinct forms (Basford et al., 2014; Sue & Spanierman, 2020). Through personal experience, countless examples of microaggressions occur in the funeral industry daily. Subtle sexism remains hard to identify and is "potentially harmful to well-being, self-esteem, and standard of living of members of many marginalized groups in society" (Sue & Spanierman, 2020, p. 36).

D.W. Sue and Spanierman (2020) proposed three types of microaggressions: Microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. Microassaults are what society associates to old-fashioned sexism meant to threaten, intimidate, and make victims feel unwanted or unsafe. They described microassaults as "conscious, deliberate, and either subtle or explicit racial, gender, or sexual orientation biased attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors that are communicated to marginalized groups through environmental cues, verbalizations, or behaviors" (Sue & Spanierman, 2020, p. 41). Microinsults are characterized by verbal and nonverbal interpersonal exchanges that convey stereotypes, rudeness, and insensitivity and demean a person's racial, gender, or sexual orientations, heritage, or identity (Sue & Spanierman, 2020). They are subtle slights that may convey a hidden insulting message through name-calling, avoidance, or discriminatory acts. Reportedly, some "male funeral directors or owners have made shocking and appalling pejorative comments that denigrate and belittle female professionals" (Penepent, 2018, p. 42). Microinvalidations are characterized by communications "that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of certain groups" (Sue

& Spanierman, 2020, p. 52). Dr. Derald Wing Sue depicted them as the most subtle and harmful form of microaggression. Victims are discredited and made to think they are paranoid and oversensitive, or their experiences of discrimination or bias are not real.

Forms of gender microaggressions towards women include sexual objectification, assumptions of inferiority, assumptions of traditional gender roles, use of sexist language, denial of individual sexism, invisibility, rejection of the reality of sexism, and environmental microaggressions. Microaggressions can cause physical and mental stress, and the impact is usually subtle, not immediately visible, and effects often delayed or not noticeable (Sue & Spanierman, 2020). These interactions may explain why the number of women funeral directors remains so low.

Gender equality has yet to become a reality, and sexism is still alive and well in the modern U.S. workplace, including funeral education and work. Women continue to experience discrimination when learning in school, seeking employment, and even when working on the job (Donley & Baird, 2017; Hall & Sandler, 1982; Jesse, 2006; Leaper & Starr, 2019; Morris & Daniel, 2008; Penepent, 2018; Shauman, 2016; Steele et al., 2002; Title IX at 45, 2017).

Trade journal interviews indicate employers refuse or hesitate to hire women (Penepent, 2018; Rundblad, 2000). According to Rundblad (2000), women have a harder time finding employment, and women have a less direct social connection to the funeral industry than men. One main issue is that graduates report funeral homeowners only looking for men, which maintains men's domination and power (Penepent, 2018). Gender plays a massive part in income, power, authority, position within the hierarchy, and how

autonomous they let you be, especially in the funeral world. Because men have dominated funeral service for so long, the power and subordination dichotomy very much exists within the funeral industry realm.

Gender Role Stereotypes

Another attribute to the sidelining of women is the day-to-day expected gender roles, which create gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes and roles may be one of the many culprits of sidelining women. According to Eagly and Wood (1999), gender roles are formed due to the expectations and characteristics of each gender. Gender role is how society expects specific sexes to act, speak, dress, and change over time. Gender roles are often learned and reinforced by parents, teachers, and peers and are usually characterized as feminine and masculine.

A stereotype, according to Heilman (2012), is "generalizations about groups that are applied to individual group members simply because they belong to that group and gender stereotypes are generalizations about the attributes of men and women" (p. 114). Examples include how men and women are expected to act, speak, dress, and conduct themselves based on sex. An assumption or idea of a particular sex's expected attributes or behaviors may be positive or negative, accurate or inaccurate, justified, or unjustified (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2017). The problem with stereotypes is that they are not always true or accurate, typically leading to disadvantages of one group or discrimination against another. The overgeneralizations and assumptions make an all-inclusive claim about a group. These are still not realistic as there are many subtypes of individuals, meaning that they have a mix of both qualities.

Two types of stereotypes exist 1) Descriptive gender stereotypes (how men and women typically are), and 2) prescriptive gender stereotypes (how a man or woman should be; Heilman, 2012). Descriptive stereotypes of women include kind, considerate, warm, concerned with others, comfortable with feelings, obedient, respectful, and understanding or less favorably, deficient, weak, passive, indecisive, dependent, emotional, and insecure (Fiske 2012; Heilman, 1997; Zaikman & Marks 2016). Feminine traits and stereotypes such as nurturing, caring, emotional fragility, unpredictable, and incompetent are all too common, especially in the funeral industry (Donley & Baird 2017; Fiske 2012; Pilcher & Whelehan 2017; Pruitt 2017) and constitutes a significant cause of inequity.

Prescriptive stereotypes are how gender *should* act or behavioral norms, causing the devaluation and denigration of women who directly or indirectly violate gender behavioral norms. Prescriptive gender stereotypes also designate "should nots." Some examples include a woman who dresses feminine but manages in a masculine manner or a woman who dresses more masculine; to some, that would seem like a violation of gender norms by engaging in stereotype-inconsistent behaviors and would receive adverse reactions (Heilman, 2012). Stereotypes then become the basis for bad reasoning or judgment, leading to biased feelings and actions and disadvantaging (or advantaging) others because of the groups they are deemed to belong to (Heilman, 1983). Not acting according to gender stereotypes or not fitting into the "imaginary mold" imposes a significant threat to women, even in the workplace. The mortuary students selected to participate in this study also worked in a funeral home, so it was essential to consider

what factors or added pressures they must deal with daily. Performance expectations are determined by the fit between an individual's perceived attributes to a work setting and the job's requirements in terms of skills and orientation (Heilman, 1983).

Funeral service requires a lot of emotional labor and care work by means of compassion and caring for grieving individuals. These characteristics are often devalued because they are seen as feminine, soft skills that cannot be learned. These "natural" characteristics are described as descriptive stereotypes (Donley & Baird, 2017. Fiske (2012) also found that "traditional women" are presumed to be warm, cooperative, submissive, and liked by many but viewed as low status, non-management material, and not particularly respected. These pressures and gender stereotypes may negatively affect their performance, their work evaluation, and their likelihood of persistence and success (Shauman, 2016). According to Heilman (1997), when a position is male-sex-typed, like funeral directing, women tend to be judged less qualified, less likely to be hired, underutilized, compensated less, and have more missed training opportunities. Understandably so, for some time, there was no need to challenge the way of thinking or doing things until the early 2000s, when the increase in women students began. It should be noted that the following perceptions and examples were from woman funeral directors, not students. As stated earlier, there is limited knowledge of new-age women mortuary science students' experiences in mortuary education; therefore, this research is crucial to jumpstarting conversations and change.

Of course, society's gender stereotypes followed women as they returned to funeral service's once masculine space. Funeral work is currently a feminizing

occupation and in a sense, is disrupting or troubling gender norms. Women's movement into masculine-dominated professions, like funeral directing, is seen as positive and negative depending on the context and the situation. According to Donley and Baird's (2017) study, a dominant theme in the US depicts women as having devalued characteristics such as being communal, nurturing, caring, and nice; which most consider better suited for dealing with families, organizing the funeral or memorial service, making burial arrangements, decorating the funeral home, and doing hair and makeup rather than performing removals or embalming; thus, gendered divisions of labor exist. Despite women's numerical inroads, men continue to occupy positional power within the occupational hierarchy. Donley and Baird's (2017) study also revealed a common concern: limitations of strength in women. Perhaps funeral professionals should instead acknowledge that strength limitations will exist and moving a decedent will be a feat for anyone, regardless of gender (Donley & Baird, 2017). Another theme emerged: women were often excluded from specific tasks based on expectations about their abilities. Research indicates between employers buying into negative gender stereotypes, refusing to hire women, and often questioning their abilities, women have a more challenging time finding employment (Donley, 2019; Rundblad, 2000).

Symbolic and real restrictions placed on women limit women's acceptance in funeral directing, which allows for the persistence of labor division to be placed on gender rather than individual capabilities. Gendered beliefs about emotional labor, going on removals, and embalming the deceased are used to organize labor and perpetuate gender inequality in the funeral industry. Women enrolled in funeral service education

programs may face challenges and stereotyping from peers, school faculty, bereaved families, and staff at hospitals, nursing homes, and public service entities (police, firefighters, and EMSA). Additionally, women in funeral service may experience stereotype threat, which is a growing research topic, especially in STEM areas.

Stereotype Threat

A stereotype threat is described as an uncomfortable feeling when people are at risk of confirming a negative stereotype in others' eyes (Steele et al., 2002). It shows up most when a person is worried about confirming a negative stereotype about members of their group. When people are aware of a negative stereotype about their group, they often worry their performance of a particular task could confirm other people's beliefs about their group. An example in the educational context is stereotype threat can prevent women from focusing on a test because she may be worrying about affirming that girls are bad at science.

A funeral-specific example would be a woman apprentice who does not want to confirm the negative stereotype of being weaker and refuses to ask for help. Not acting according to a gender stereotype or not fitting the "mold" imposes a greater cost to women than men. To avoid the threat of negative stereotypes, women in men-dominated fields may decide it is not worth continually living up to society's outdated standards or rules. In academia, women students may choose to continue their education but instead select a woman-dominated academic area (Hall & Sandler, 1982; Jesse, 2006; Steele et al., 2002). And those already in the funeral industry may decide to leave. To my

knowledge, no published research has focused on the number of women that leave the industry and for what reasons.

Funeral Specific Gender Implications

Funeral directing is a unique profession that uses hard science and social sciences. The occupation consists of “back of house” duties, including removal of a decedent from the place of death, the professional work of embalming, dressing, and cosmetizing, and “front of house” duties, including answering phones, meeting with families, and planning and conducting services. Gender beliefs are used to organize occupational tasks and perpetuate gender inequality in the funeral industry as women are viewed as more suitable for care work and administrative duties (Cathles et al., 2010), and often their physical strength is questioned when it comes to performing removals and their supposed emotional fragility (Donley 2019; Cathles et al., 2010). Funeral home owners who are men have gone on record questioning women's physical strength and emotional fragility and seeing it as valid reasons to deny women apprenticeships (Cathles et al., 2010; Donley, 2019). Donley and Baird's (2017) study revealed masculine duties are often valued over feminine tasks within the funeral home. It appears gendered ideologies are engrained in gendered assumptions. These deep-rooted embedded thoughts made it very difficult for the advancement of women. Funeral service has been a gendered occupation, favoring men for decades, so when the “norm” or “societal expectation” is broken or does not “fit,” people are shocked or uncomfortable. Movies, shows, and media often display what a funeral director should look or sound like, so when a woman intern or funeral director walks in, imagine the shock, concern, or trust

issues that may be subconsciously present. Below are some specific funeral gendered ideologies from women funeral directors' perspectives and what they have encountered. As a reminder, because there is little scholarly work on mortuary science education or women students' experiences, I had to use research from the perspective of licensed women directors to support the need for my research.

Families and Third Parties

Being a funeral director means serving families and working with third-party personnel. Third parties include hospital and nursing home staff, public service entities (police, firefighters, and EMSA), religious leaders, and vendors such as casket representatives and florists (Fritch & Alteri, 2015). When women funeral directors are on removals, they are usually met with dismay or disbelief from the families or third parties. Often surprised, the funeral home would even send a woman to do the heavy lifting or be in charge of an entire funeral (Donley & Baird, 2016; Pruitt, 2017). It is of no fault of their own, as funeral work has always been framed as a masculine line of work. Women directors reported the need to prove themselves to the families and third parties, after hearing comments like "Are you sure you can lift that?" or "did they just send you?" (Donley & Baird, 2016; Pruitt, 2017) or my very own personal favorite, "oh, they sent two women?" Many women funeral professionals, according to Kenevich (2011), feel the sting of rejection and hear the same phrases over and over again. Opinions from clients often shift when working with a woman director as long as she is performing "front of house" duties. Even trade journals started describing how beneficial it was to have

women on staff because clients (families) feel more comfortable speaking and working with a woman director (Donley, 2016).

What is most tiresome is that even if a woman director gains her coworkers' trust, her abilities will continue to be questioned or doubted by third parties and families until the gendered occupational lines are blurred. Until then, the cyclical problem of earning trust and proving competency to each new set of families, police officers, hospital staff, and religious leaders still exists. From personal experience, it is exhausting. Ultimately this creates what is commonly known as gender role strain.

Gender Role Strain

Although there is no agreement nor formalized literature about whether role strain exists for women in mortuary science education, the idea that women do not fit or they feel not welcome is a recurring theme within the excerpts of interviews and findings from existing literature. As the most recent literature unfolded, it seemed as if women in funeral service, regardless of position, experience role strain in the form of gender stereotypes (Donley, 2019; Donley & Baird, 2017; Pruitt, 2017). This leaves women in the industry to explain why they chose funeral service or frequently defend their achieved status. It is almost always assumed that the woman is an administrative employee (Pruitt, 2017). There is added pressure to do the same work as a man and an unrealistic personal standard that physicality is the only way to prove competence or credibility (Donley & Baird, 2017). It is not uncommon for women to conform to male practices of funeral directing, dressing less feminine (when allowed), becoming more rational, apathetic, and business-minded, ultimately leading to discomfort, unhappiness, and stress. Somewhere

along the line, society failed to learn and appreciate the different skills or qualities different genders bring and did not consider how these gender differences shape perspectives, lives, experiences, and opportunities.

Contrary to what is presented above, Pruitt (2017) presented interesting findings concluding that gender can be done, undone, and redone by women in the funeral industry. Donley and Baird (2017) reported, "women's very presence as funeral directors undermine the assumption that funeral directors can only be men" (p. 109). Debunking gendered myths is known as undoing gender, which can reduce gender differences by disrupting the linkage between women and femininity (Butler, 1990). According to Pruitt's (2017) research, some women directors *undo* gender by calling out sexism or deflecting it with humor and doing the same job as men. Others may redo gender by intentionally using or reconstructing gender differences to their advantage—for example, relabeling the occupation as in more feminine terms, embracing the emotions, the nurturing, and caretaking side of the funeral industry. Women funeral directors essentially deconstruct gendered expectations and selectively contest or embrace them to benefit their standing at work and treat gender essentialism as a privilege in care work and to assert their belonging (Pruitt, 2017).

Conclusion

With respect to everything I have laid out, it looks as though women funeral service professionals, regardless of status, are exposed to stressors, whether it be on-call or working with the bereaved daily, but on top of everything else, must deal with the consequences of working in nontraditional occupations and which unfortunately include

harassment and discrimination in the funeral industry (Goldenhar et al., 2001). According to Goldenhar et al. (2001), the added stress can impact how women perform in a specific situation, be distracting, and causes mental exhaustion and bouts of anxiety and depression.

I hope by sharing gendered perceptions and experiences of women mortuary science students, individual perceptions and beliefs will change through disconfirming experiences, like women funeral directing. The increase of these "contradicting" gender experiences will likely modify customers, employers, and the general public's perceptions about women's roles and abilities in funeral work. By ignoring the gendered perceptions and experiences, we as educators are ultimately adding to the problem. The gender ratios within mortuary education have officially shifted; therefore, the societal rules, expectations, and norms need to be redefined and reconsidered. Forms of gendering in mortuary science education, discrimination, job segregation, and gender biases have been thriving from women's silence. The time has come to speak up and speak out.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

As presented in Chapter II, women are enrolling and graduating in increasing numbers across mortuary programs in the United States. To better understand and address the needs of the present-day women students in mortuary programs, up-to-date, inclusive qualitative research was needed. This chapter describes the problem, the purpose statement, research design, methods, and procedure, including research sites, research participants, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness.

Statement of the Problem

According to the American Board of Funeral Service Education Annual Report (2020), nationally, the number of women students entering mortuary science programs, being retained and graduating is higher than ever before. Of the new enrollee students, women made up 72.81 % of the students in mortuary programs, and the percentage for women graduates was 66.98 %. This is despite research that shows women in science-related programs often face discrimination and other barriers to degree completion (Bailey & DiPrete 2016; Jesse 2006; Shauman 2016; Steele et al. 2002; Title IX at 45 2017). Based on STEM research, it may be that women enrolled in mortuary science education programs or who once attended have faced gendered inequities yet are still progressing towards graduation and completion of practicum or internships. Thus, to

better support and educate women in mortuary science, it is vital to understand their lived educational and professional experiences.

Purpose Statement and Research Question

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore current and former mortuary science students'—who identify as women—lived educational and professional experiences in the United States. A secondary goal was to generate recommendations to improve learning environments in mortuary science programs and professional settings for all students. Therefore, this study used a qualitative approach to explore aspects of the following research question: What do the lived experiences of women reveal about how gender influences their educational journey?

Research Design

Qualitative research is an inductive approach utilized to explore and understand meaning-making processes individuals attribute to a social problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). Qualitative research aims not to be generalizable but rather to explore and understand deeper meanings and demonstrate how humans make sense of the world. Because qualitative research focuses on individuals' interpretations and experiences that form their reality, the participant number is typically small to allow the researcher to dive deep into their stories to capture and understand their perspectives (Patton, 2015). This research explored how gender influences women's lived educational experiences and what their perceptions and narratives reveal about mortuary science education. Therefore, the research approach most appropriate for exploring these areas of interest was a qualitative research design.

Methodology

The dynamic, complex, and ever-changing nature of US higher education mean new trends and tensions will emerge. Things like budget cuts, new technologies, the shift in the gender composition of students, and more competition have required different avenues to be explored (Manning, 2018). One of those is collaboration with outside entities or internships. More researchers will need to conduct basic qualitative research as each major, field, or industry is unique and may face its own challenges. Basic qualitative research aims to understand how people interpret, construct, or make meaning from their world and experiences (Merriam, 2002).

The interconnectedness and complexity of colleges and universities demand more sophisticated and imaginative approaches to structure, function, and processes (Manning, 2018). Therefore, there is an absolute need to develop new methodologies such as basic qualitative research, an unconventional and innovative research design that provides different possibilities for other programs. Basic qualitative research supports using mismatched theoretical perspectives, asking new questions, and applying new approaches to problems that continue to exist (Caelli et al., 2003; Kahlke, 2014). The beauty of a basic qualitative design is that it can blend established methodologies to create something new to support a new field of research (Kahlke, 2014).

Although there are benefits to using already established methodologies, I remained mindful that qualitative approaches derived from other disciplines may not fit the unique demands of mortuary education and the objectives of this study. Staying within the guidelines and rules of established methodologies would not serve this

pioneering research study to its full capacity. I am studying a topic that does not have much literature and is, therefore, exploratory in nature, aligning with the basic qualitative inquiry. A basic qualitative study fit best as I explored multiple students' experiences throughout the many aspects of mortuary education. This approach allowed me to draw on other methodologies' strengths and develop my research design that best fits my worldview, field, and field-specific research question (Kahlke, 2014).

Methodologically, I deviated from the prescribed rules and guidelines and made decisions that were beneficial to the study. This also guides future scholars who wish to develop or “play” in the basic qualitative research realm. An explicit methodology did not guide my proposed study; instead, I intentionally selected parts or ideas of several methodologies that would best produce findings for my particular research question. These methodological decisions and aspects are described in detail in the following paragraphs as the rationale behind these imperative decisions.

Phenomenological studies typically focus on the lived experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants and include the meaning made of their experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). Phenomenological research employs unstructured, open-ended interviews, and findings are typically reported through a rich narrative to portray the phenomenon through the participant's eyes. Typically, these studies collect stories that will be analyzed for significant statements that depict the crux of the participants' perceptions and experiences. From phenomenological design, I called upon the data collection method of conducting several individual open-ended interviews to capture subjective experiences and interpretations. This qualitative study explored

women students' perceptions and lived experiences regarding their education at universities or colleges and during their practicum/internships, but that is not all I was interested in exploring. Other areas of interest included what these experiences reveal and how women are progressing through gendered structural terrains. Therefore, this methodology did not fit the study perfectly.

A narrative inquiry explores the participants' stories, which reveal social and cultural patterns through the lens of individual experiences (Patton, 2015). Through interviews and specific interview questions, stories may unfold and reveal gendered aspects of mortuary education. Stories allow people to talk about their decisions, success, and failures, allowing others to understand journeys holistically. It is crucial to understand how women students report progressing through gendered structural terrains of mortuary science and what their reported experiences offer to the practice and field of formal education and on-site training. The data collection methods typically used for narrative inquiry are interviews and document reviews. The study does not fit neatly into this one methodology either, as the goal was not to retell their stories chronologically, nor was this a collaborative project between myself and the participants.

A third methodology I considered was case studies. Case studies are often used in the social sciences and are especially valuable in practice-oriented fields such as education. According to Patton (2015), case studies stand on their own as a detailed story about a person, organization, event, campaign, or program. A case study explores a bounded system or unit of study focusing on a phenomenon or a case (or multiple cases) in an amount of time and place (Patton, 2015). It is yet another inquiry method that fits

my overarching goal: to shed light on a phenomenon under investigation within a particular context but is difficult to pinpoint to this one methodology. Case studies call for exploring a bounded system, yet nothing is bounded about this study. The origins of this study are complex and interwoven. For example, gender remains a fluid concept that many understand differently through space and time. Mortuary programs are also fluid in that they involve not only formal component but also the practical experience of working within a funeral home for college credit. And lastly, case studies involve using various methods such as interviews, questionnaires, document analysis, artifacts, and observations. Out of the many methods of data collection, I utilized in-depth interviews and artifacts. The ability to do direct observations remained doubtful as COVID-19 was still very much present during this study's timeframe.

A qualitative research methodology was ideal for the study because it tried to understand how a gendered phenomenon is being promulgated. Still, it also sought answers that could drive changes in the future of research and practice. In qualitative research, the researcher is a critical instrument in collecting multiple data sources and analyzing the data. The researcher showcases the interpretation and representation of the data and provides insights into the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). This qualitative study assessed the participant's perceptions regarding their education at universities or colleges in mortuary programs and during their practicum/internships to generate recommendations to improve learning environments. We need to understand the participant's journeys to become a funeral director. Understanding how they progressed highlights current students' or graduates perceived

inequities and perhaps leads to change in these gendered environments to better support women students in the future.

Epistemology

Epistemology, sometimes known as a worldview, is a "general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 7). It is how a researcher defines their reality and how they orient themselves in the world. Worldviews are influenced by upbringing, education, society, and mentors. Understanding the researcher's epistemology is important because it influences how the researcher will interpret the data collected.

This study was based on constructivism. Social constructivists believe human beings seek an understanding of the world and develop subjective meanings of situations through daily interactions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Leavy, 2017). This study aimed not to reach generalizability but to use the findings to learn more about this gendered phenomenon and what the participants' reported experiences can offer to mortuary education. According to Leavy (2017), understanding the participants' meanings will help the researcher see the multiple worldviews and values that influence their subjective interpretations and perceptions about their experiences or circumstances. Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated subjective meanings form through interaction with others and depend on historical and cultural norms. Women mortuary science students interact daily with peers, professors, funeral director preceptors, and third parties. Social constructivists focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work. Understanding these

contexts was necessary as each participant constructs their realities based solely on their unique experiences.

Theoretical Perspective

Theoretical perspectives guide the researcher on what problems to examine and the people who need to be studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). They also shape the questions asked and inform how data are collected and analyzed in ways that call for potential actions or changes to improve lives and society (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The overall flexibility of qualitative inquiry permitted the research question to be explored through a feminist theoretical perspective.

A feminist theoretical perspective is a broad lens associated with women's overall inequalities and subordination. It focuses on inequities, hierarchy, justice, privilege, power, and oppression of women (Hawkesworth, 2005; Trier-Bieniek, 2015). Feminist perspectives not only promote consciousness-raising or awareness of many topics but also emphasizes action and social change; therefore, it is both theory and practice (Fonow & Cook, 2005; Letherby, 2003; Trier-Bieniek, 2015). Overarching feminist perspectives can be used with other lenses to promote activism and challenge oppressive structural systems such as postmodern, liberal, socialist, radical, Black, and lesbian. This is a perfect illustration of how feminist theory and feminist activism work together. Themes explored by feminism include discrimination, objectification, structural inequalities, and gender roles and stereotypes. Through time, feminist perspectives have challenged assumptions and values that drive structure, planning, priorities, incentives, values, policies, and practice in organizations (Manning, 2018).

Letherby (2003) stated, “feminist researchers start with political commitment to produce useful knowledge that will make a difference to women’s lives through social and individual change” (p. 4). Fonow and Cook (1990) also expressed the importance of feminist research to mean something. In other words, if a scholar is going to use a feminist perspective, then they must be committed to making sense of women’s experiences, committed to social action and awareness of injustices in our systems, and provide plans for change (Fonow & Cook, 2005; Hawkesworth, 2005; Letherby, 2003; Trier-Bieniek, 2015). A feminist perspective may be used to “rewrite” historic systems, structures, and policies and advance many marginalized people.

In this dissertation, I examined how being a woman in mortuary science education bumps up against the gendered norms, social processes, and interactions within mortuary programs and how these norms may reinforce androcentrism and patriarchal beliefs. Specifically, feminist theory exposed social problems, trends, and issues in funeral-related organizations that have otherwise been disregarded. This research assesses the women students' perceptions of their experiences. My findings offer ways to improve mortuary science learning environments for women and men.

Theoretical Framework

Anfara and Mertz (2015) defined theoretical frameworks as "any empirical or quasi-empirical theory of social and/or psychological processes, at a variety of levels (e.g., grand, midrange, explanatory), that can be applied to the understanding of phenomena" (p. 15). Theoretical frameworks are much more specific than theoretical perspectives. *A priori* theoretical frameworks offer a place to start and provide framing

for researchers to construct research using a particular theory or theories as a guide. Following data collection, the theoretical framework serves as a lens from which to view data during inductive and deductive analysis (Anfara & Mertz, 2015; Patton, 2015)

I did not wish to limit design or analysis to an a priori framework for this study. Instead, I wanted to remain open to all perspectives and allow the collected data to illustrate in detail participants' experiences. According to Anfara and Mertz (2015), whether *a priori* or *a posteriori*, a theoretical framework should resonate with the researcher's thinking, make sense of the data, clarify understanding, provide direction, and generally seem to 'fit'" (p. 230). The analysis used the theory of gendered organizations as the primary a posteriori framework.

Methods and Procedures

I have been a licensed funeral director and embalmer for ten years and am a full-time tenure track instructor. I also serve as assistant chair and advisor for Sigma Phi Sigma, a funeral service student organization. As a licensed professional and part of my service piece to the university, I am a member of the Oklahoma Funeral Director Association, District 7 Chairperson, and presenter at continuing education seminars. I serve as a funeral director at local funeral homes and attend conferences to stay current with laws and trends when time allows. My accessibility, personal connections, and contacts as a funeral service professor and licensed funeral director are plentiful. Knowledge of both realms added strength to my study.

Research Sites

This study consisted of in-depth semi-structured interviews with women mortuary science students or recent graduates via Zoom. Three higher education sites were purposefully selected as they offered varying experiences directly linked to a university and community college, offering mortuary science education. These institutions have regional similarities, and their mortuary curriculum and internship requirements are comparable. However, their new enrollment numbers, number of graduates, and National Board Exam pass rates are not the same, providing me with different contexts.

Research Participants

Before recruiting participants, I obtained permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Oklahoma State University. Once I received permission to conduct the research study, I started working on approval from the other universities and colleges through their IRB processes. After I was granted approval from all institutions, I began working with institutional research and was redirected to work with program directors/chairs and assigned faculty.

Sampling is the "process by which you select a number of individual cases from a larger population" (Leavy, 2017, p. 76). With the recent increase in women students and graduates in mortuary science, the targeted sites focus on research, and the states require association with a funeral home, thus rendering a representative pool for sampling. Purposeful sampling is based on seeking out the best cases to produce the best data and research. This study's purpose required the utilization of purposeful sampling as I was looking for information-rich cases for an in-depth study. According to Patton (2015),

"studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations" (p. 264). This study applied a purposeful homogenous sampling strategy to select very similar cases to study the characteristics they have in common. The target sample size to analyze was 10-12, and the study had exactly 10 participants.

Criteria and Eligibility for Participation

To participate, the participant had to be at least 18 years or older and meet one of the following:

- 1) Women-identified student enrolled in a mortuary science program who has an affiliation with a funeral home or that is enrolled in the internship/practicum portion of their degree program at a university certified funeral home as part of the coursework.
- 2) Women-identified recent graduates of mortuary science programs completing their internship for the state.
- 3) Women-identified recent graduate who is no longer or never completed their internship for the state.

A university-certified funeral home is defined as one inspected by a university representative for OSHA-related items, proper licensure, and has been trained regarding the internship rules and the role the funeral home and preceptor play in educating the student on-site. For this study's purpose, a recent graduate was defined as a student who graduated from a mortuary science program within the 12 months prior to data collection. As mentioned in Chapter I, this included women who left prior to completing their

internship due to personal or professional challenges. Participants were not eligible for participation if they did not meet the age requirement of 18 or older and were not affiliated or enrolled in practicum/internship hours or has graduated from the program more than 12 months ago.

Recruiting

My goal was to create and maintain relationships with identified mortuary science program directors and to work with IRB for each site to recruit participants. As mentioned in Chapter I, COVID-19 created many uncertainties regarding travel and the disruption of traditional in-person classes. It would have been unreasonable at such an unprecedented time to expect others to gather for a presentation. Therefore, no live group meetings were held. I built intentional relationships with program directors and requested they, or assigned faculty, posted this opportunity on their learning platforms to pique interest and serve as a reminder until the deadline. The recruitment process was a collaborative effort between me, the program directors, and the assigned faculty.

Instead of making a live presentation to recruit, I created a brief recruitment video and distributed it along proper channels and a recruitment email (see Appendix A). It was essential that the video showcased my enthusiasm and passion for this topic and thoroughly explained “the why. The recruitment email thanked them for their time, summarized the study, revealed participation incentives, and concluded with asking them to consider participating. If interested, they were asked to click on the Qualtrics link to continue to an electronic consent form (see Appendix B) and a demographics

questionnaire (see Appendix C). When reviewing the questionnaire responses, I ensured the answers matched the established participant criteria.

As part of the screening process, if the participant did not match the stated criteria and eligibility, they did not participate in the study. Participants were given a deadline to respond; therefore, participation in this study was based upon first-come-first-serve basis based on the target sample size. My goal was to earn the participant's trust, respect, and cooperation and get them to understand the importance of hearing their voices. In exchange for participation, two e-gift cards were emailed to participants and a special message thanking them for their time and sharing their life experiences.

Data Collection

The data collection methods utilized were adapted from areas described before: Phenomenology, narrative, and case studies. Data collection began pending the identification of the participants and obtaining their consent. The goal was to use environments and formats where participants felt safe, open, and honest in their responses. The collection procedure consisted of in-depth, semi-structured interviews, researcher memos, and an open letter concept. Using these data sources allowed me to use a variety of lenses to explore and understand the participants' feelings and perspectives on a deeper level.

Interviews

I recruited and interviewed ten participants and conducted two semi-structured interviews with each participant (see Appendices C and D) via the videoconferencing platform, Zoom. Zoom is a no-cost cloud-based company that allows video services for

virtual communication and is easily accessible and would be convenient for the participants to use. Each Zoom link sent out was password protected and university-sponsored. All video files were stored on the password-protected OSU One-drive. I recorded every interview with permission from the interviewee and organized them chronologically within each pseudonym password-protected file on a password-protected computer. The length of the interview depended on the participants and which interview was being performed; the initial and second interviews consisted of open-ended questions. Interview questions were strategically organized to maximize the amount of rich data accumulated. Open-ended questions provided the participants with a way to describe, in their own words, inequities and what strategies helped them progress through gender barriers they faced in mortuary education. If necessary, probing or more intrusive questions were utilized to further my understanding. The participants were encouraged to use their own language and provide detailed responses (Leavy, 2017), allowing me to explore and understand their opinions, perceptions, and journeys.

In the two-part interview series, the first one-on-one interview explored the participants' past, built rapport, and provided research context for each participant (see Appendix D). The length of this interview lasted anywhere from 45-60 minutes. At the conclusion of this interview, participants were given directions regarding the "open letter" to be written prior to the second interview. Participants were asked to identify someone, someplace, or something to write an open and honest letter to.

Qualitative researchers have a long history of pulling on documentary sources such as diaries, life histories, photovoice, visuals, or art (DeVault, 2018). Visual

methodologies may become more appealing in the science-based fields such as funeral directing or nursing, where there is minimal leeway in standard research approaches for the expression of emotion (DeVault, 2018). An “open letter” called for participation other than interviews and had the potential for empowerment. Working from an “arts-based” approach, I adopted and adapted the concept of diaries or journal entries but into a concise letter. This process served as a catalyst for an ever-widening conversation of differing realities (DeVault, 2018).

The goal was to elicit raw or genuine thoughts in their own language in an open letter concept, which allowed a time of reflection and emotions to flow freely through pen and paper. Research has proven expressive writing to have positive and psychological benefits (Pennebaker, 1993, 1997b; Pennebaker & Beall, 1986). Therefore, these letters were handwritten and at a minimum of one page in length. There is no one prescribed way of creating this content. Free handwriting allows individuals to actively think about their experiences and acknowledge their emotions (Pennebaker, 1997a). According to Barclay and Skarlicki (2009), expressive writing can be relevant for organizational injustices that a) impact individuals’ physical health and psychological wellbeing, b) involve emotion, and c) require cognitive processing. The letters received served as a rich source for feminist analysis.

The second interview began with a summarization of interview one, and then participants read their letters with a follow-up reflecting on what they wrote. Further, the conversation migrated to the second set of semi-structured interview questions that prompted them to critically reflect on their experiences in mortuary science (see

Appendix E). The second set of interviews lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and I asked questions like “What would you say the strengths and weaknesses of your mortuary science program in assisting you on your journey to becoming a funeral director? Describe any experiences that made you feel uncomfortable about being a woman while doing your internship/practicum” (see Appendix E).

Interviews were transcribed by a transcription service such as Rev.com. After the third party completed the transcriptions, all transcriptions were saved and uploaded to OSU one-drive under the pseudonym file name. Copies of the transcripts from interview one and two were sent in one encrypted file to the corresponding participants for the opportunity to read over and ensure accuracy through member checking. The transcripts were encrypted to keep them confidential and private.

I completed extensive researcher memos after each interview, taking notes and observations of the participants' gestures, facial expressions, body language, posture, mannerisms, and inflection in their voice, which can be used as compelling data as they may convey a message or add something to what is being said (Charmaz, 2014; Merriam, 2002). Some questions could have been interpreted as uncomfortable, leaving the participants feeling exposed; therefore, observational data, though restricted, added depth and detail to the information collected. Memos are an ideal way of documenting impressions, feelings, ideas, and understandings; therefore, I, the researcher, become a crucial part of the data.

Data Analysis

Patton (2015) described the process of content analysis as "reducing the volume of raw information, sifting the trivial from significant, identifying significant patterns, and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal" (p. 521). Content analysis refers to any qualitative data reduction and sensemaking efforts which could include searching for patterns and/or themes classifications to help make sense of the massive amounts of data (Patton, 2015). The analysis begins by full immersion in the data by reading it, looking at it, listening to it, and contemplating meanings within the units of analysis (Leavy, 2017). As the researcher, I began by reading each transcription as it became available and oriented myself with the data by listening, memoing, and summarizing each interview.

One way of analyzing qualitative data is through coding. Coding, according to Saldaña (2009), involves "assigning a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 9). Through coding, I defined what was happening in the data and began to face the meaning behind it all. As a researcher, I wanted to perform several cycles of coding as it "further manages, filters, highlights, and focuses the salient features of the qualitative data record for generating categories, themes, and concepts, grasping meaning, and/or building theory" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 9).

The first cycle of the coding method works in combination with initial coding (Saldaña, 2016). Initial coding helped whittle away irrelevant pieces of data and begin the conceptualization of categories and themes. The goal was to remain open to what the

material suggests and stick closely to the data (Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2014) recommended beginning with line-by-line coding, which works well with detailed data about first-hand problems or processes. Line-by-line coding is naming each line and pulling information to support any initial codes and themes. In this phase of collection/analysis, I coded in yellow line-by-line anything that stood out, and I thoroughly examined the transcripts looking for patterns or similarities. Once I had my data broken down into smaller chunks, I began to write them out in short descriptors on larger-sized post-it notes. This coding allowed analytical synthesizing of the data and helped find significant quotes, words, and *in vivo* codes. The idea was to unify ideas analytically; therefore, constant comparative methods were a must for analytic distinctions. Charmaz (2014) suggested comparing data to data to find similarities or differences. The idea is not to dismiss the researcher's ideas or connections because they too matter and may help make logical sense of the material.

From there, I went into my second cycle of coding, that was much more specific. The second cycle coding method used was focused coding, allowing me to view data through a different, clearer lens. I found myself going back to my own chapters, my research question, and contemplating the meaning and processes of gendered organizational theory, but through the eyes of 10 participants. As the researcher, I searched for the most frequent significant codes to develop the most relevant categories (Charmaz, 2014; Saldaña, 2016). I concentrated on the initial codes and drew from the comparisons between them. Focused coding required making decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorize the data. They take the researcher

out of immersion in the data and further into emerging analysis and constant comparative processes (Charmaz, 2014). I developed salient categories by utilizing focused coding and situated themes within them, which is how I organized the data in the findings chapter. This process was the most difficult for me, pulling myself out of the data, looking from a broader scope, and applying a word or phrase to fit such important and precious information. Challenges included organizing, moving around data, the second-guessing, and the pure volume of data because this is a unique industry with all the nuances to go along with it. After themes emerged, I called upon the work of Joan Acker (1990), specifically the theory of gendered organizations to code and understand how institutions or workplaces remain gendered.

Coding, categorizing, and theming are cyclical; therefore, it was crucial to engage in memo writing throughout the process as the final literary work came to fruition. According to Charmaz (2014), memoing plays a central role in creating theoretical categories, expediting analytical work, and accelerating productivity. The memos served as a connection between coding and interpretation. Interpretation in qualitative research involves summarizing the overall findings, comparing my findings to the literature, discussing personal views, and stating limitations and future research possibilities, which I thoroughly discuss in Chapter VII.

Trustworthiness

Methodological alignment strengthened the trustworthiness of this study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness means establishing credibility,

transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These tools are necessary for self-examination and important to verification strategies. See Table 1 for more detail.

Table 1

Trustworthiness Approaches

Credibility (Reliability and Validity= Rigor)	Prolonged Engagement Observation (N/A) Triangulation Peer debriefing Negative case analysis Member checking	Spending time interacting with participants Rich, thick descriptions to convey findings Multiple data sources to create themes Having colleagues review the work Present contrary evidence Member checking - Taking the final report back to participants to ensure accuracy
Transferability	Thick descriptions Generalizability (Creswell and Creswell, 2018)	Having a set detailed criterion for purposeful sampling Using relevant data Particular description and themes developed in the context of a specific time A clear and concise research design that accurately details the steps of the study
Dependability	External Assessments Member checks	Good documentation of procedures Utilize outside member of the committee to provide an objective assessment
Confirmability	Reflexivity Triangulation Reliability (Creswell and Creswell, 2018)	Validates findings Reflexive notes and memos Multiple sources Consistency of codes Document procedures in detail Check transcripts for mistakes

Qualitative studies must be conducted with extreme rigor because of potential subjectivity. As a researcher, I embedded rigor throughout the design of the study. For

example, by gathering numerous types of data, data saturation, and remaining thorough and accurate. I continued to embed rigor even through analysis. Evaluation of rigor was accomplished through member checking and saturation. Saturation is more than seeking for replication; it links concepts and processes in different instances, experiences, contexts, and events and provides the reader certainty in the analysis and findings (Morse, 2018).

By assessing numerous and sufficient aspects of the analytic process, my study became more credible. As a researcher, I planned on building credibility into my research by conducting thorough rich in-context interviews with participants that reflected their views. Both data triangulation (multiple data sources) and theory triangulation (using more than one theoretical lens) were utilized to examine claims (Leavy, 2017; Patton, 2015). I did this to allow different interpretations to emerge, especially since I was looking for diversified links between categories, concepts, and themes. Throughout the research process, it was essential to have colleagues and committee members read over my work as a form of peer debriefing and incorporate member checking by allowing participants the opportunity to review the emergent themes and ensure final product accuracy.

Another important aspect of trustworthiness is transferability. Transferability was created by establishing a clear and concise research design, including specific participant criteria and producing thorough documentation and memos of my processes, and remaining reflexive by writing detailed, thick descriptions in memos or field notes. My findings prove to be useful in other contexts and be transferable to other mortuary

education programs. Dependability was achieved by member checking or providing participants the opportunity to review polished transcripts and check for accuracy. Lastly, confirmability was established by having an external researcher evaluate whether the data support the findings, interpretations, and conclusions and whether they are consistent. A clear description of all research procedures from start to end adds to confirmability.

Additionally, Creswell and Creswell (2018) added awareness of researcher bias (reflexivity), presenting contrary evidence, and generalizability. All are very important in analyzing the appropriateness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of a research study. In qualitative research, the researcher is viewed as an instrument. I produced vivid descriptions, and my background and position affected my design and how my data was analyzed and presented. Reflexivity shapes the entire research.

Conclusion

This qualitative study explored how gendered inequities appeared in women's lived educational and professional experiences and what their experiences revealed about mortuary science education. Because this was a basic qualitative study, there was no one methodology used to frame the study, but instead this study used parts of several already established methodologies. A blended approach allowed me to borrow methods in order to answer my field specific research question. Included in this chapter was an overview of the research context, research design, process for selecting participants, data collection, and analysis. Direct observations were not possible due to restrictions on travel at the time of data collection. By using purposive sampling, I was able to recruit 10 participants for the study. I then utilized interviews, analytic memos, and "open letters"

as data. The analysis included full immersion in the data, contemplating meanings, coding, and descriptive interpretation of my findings. Trustworthiness was ensured through the methods described above.

CHAPTER IV

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS AND NARRATIVES

This chapter presents demographical and background information to provide contextual knowledge pertinent to the study, especially since each participant was unique and brought something different to the study. Rich narratives from each participant were captured, including their decision to begin their mortuary science educational journey, which is portrayed in the following sections and paragraphs. This chapter serves as added support and an overview of mortuary educational experiences from the participants' perspectives. Chapter IV looks at how mortuary students see their educational journeys as a whole.

The Participants

Participants in the study were all recent graduates of a mortuary program. One participant was an upper-class person currently enrolled in a program and affiliated with a part-time funeral home. Some participants attended in-person programs (before the pandemic), while others went the all-online route for various reasons. The ease of access to online mortuary programs allowed me to speak to participants from varying states, including Kansas, Oklahoma, Iowa, Illinois, Nebraska, and Pennsylvania. Before entering mortuary school, the participants' education levels range from high school graduates to having a prior associate's or bachelor's degree in other areas. Six of the ten women were in different professions prior to entering their respective mortuary science

programs and had other interests outside of funeral service before entering mortuary school. It is important to mention that all participants who answered prefer not to respond, and identified themselves as white except for one. Four of the 10 participants decided to continue their education to the master's level. The participants selected pseudonyms for the study. Table 2 presents the age range, self-identified race, status, years of experience in the funeral profession, state, and any prior degrees obtained before entering mortuary school.

Table 2

Self-Identified Demographics and Characteristics of the Participants

Pseudonym	Age Range	Race	Status	Total Years in Funeral Profession	Prior Degrees
Annie Walker	21 - 29	white	GR	8 years	n/a
Audra Johansson	30 - 39	Preferred not to respond	GR	2.5 years	Bachelors
Clair Sinor	30 - 39	white	GR	13 years	Certificate
Claire Smith	21 - 29	white	GR	1.5 years	n/a
Frances Johnson	21 -29	white	GR	3.5 years	n/a
Hazel Davidson	21 -29	white	GR	3 years	Bachelors x2
Jane Doe	21 - 29	white	GR	3 years	Associates
Jenny Smith	21 - 29	white	Sr.	2 years	n/a
Josephine Kravitz	21 - 29	white	GR	2 years	Bachelors
MJ Jenkinson	50 - 59	white	GR	15 years	n/a

*GR is graduate

I found myself going back to my own chapters, my research question, and to inspect through gendered organizational theory through the eyes of 10 participants and myself. I had to examine and analyze my own thoughts and manage my feelings and emotions throughout this journey. Having once been a young minority woman in a mortuary program, I felt the participants' pain and hurt on an emotional level and made connections to their narratives and each word uttered. By utilizing focused coding, I developed salient categories and situated themes within them. Challenges included organizing, moving around data, second-guessing, and the pure volume of data because this is a unique industry with all the nuances to go along with it.

I state this collection and analysis process because all of my participants came into the industry with prior experience, even shadowing. Initially, this research focused on the practicum/internship component, but due to the nature of this study, I had to adapt. During my research, I learned that each state has laws regarding what mortuary students are allowed to do, and each university or college has its requirements or discourse. At times, the practicum/internships were completed simultaneously with clinical or apprenticeships to capture the entirety of their educational journey. I could not, as a researcher, leave out important information regarding women and their experiences in mortuary school, regardless of what stage of the process they were in. With this in mind, the study continued to use practicum/internship but note this could include experiences in clinical or state-required apprenticeships/internships. Not all of the participant's comments or stories are revealed here. Only statements that best illustrate these themes are used. Women in mortuary education are part of an ignored group within the funeral

profession, and therefore I felt it was important to emphasize their voice and perspectives. Only one of the women, Jane, canceled or rescheduled the original time of the interviews due to illness and work conflicts. All interviews were conducted via Zoom; therefore, participants could choose the most comfortable and convenient location.

Participants' Decision to Start Their Mortuary Science

Educational Journey

All the women who participated were high school graduates. Four of the ten participants enrolled in mortuary school right out of high school, while the rest entered the funeral industry from a different profession. For example, one participant held an associate's in psychology, and 3 of the ten obtained bachelor's degrees or certifications in other areas of interest before starting mortuary education. Three of the ten are currently working on their master's, and of those, one plans on pursuing her Juris Doctorate. As a researcher, I wanted to understand and provide context behind their decisions to embark on this educational journey and what they saw they brought to the industry.

Jane Doe

Jane was a little shy, and timid at first. Her first interview was in a park with a lot of distractions. We were both pretty nervous but adjusted well and eased into the interview. Initially, she started working in a psychiatric facility, realized it was not a good fit, and changed paths to mortuary school. She is concurrently breaking other barriers in her community as a volunteer firefighter and an EMT part-time. Through connections via volunteer work and a working relationship with the funeral home owner, these conversations helped her decide to enter mortuary school. Qualities or skills Jane felt she

brought to the table were experiences in psychology, dealing with interpersonal interactions at her previous employment, and her own experience of losing someone special.

MJ Jenkinson

MJ was in mortgage banking for the first 20 years of her career life, and in her late 30s became a single mom with a three-year-old and an infant. She relocated closer to family and found herself in mortgage banking once again, which according to MJ, was tough hours. She reevaluated the quality of her life and decided she was done with banking. She went back to the funeral home that had taken care of her late father and said:

You have no women on your staff. I have all the suits, and I'm in mortgage banking. I present well. I'm a great bridesmaid, I won't reinvent rules, I'll just do what you tell me do. And I'm not leaving until you say yes.

Her adamant self left that funeral home and was hired on as a funeral assistant. When she retold the story, her facial expressions were everything. Seeing her funeral directors were both reaching or nearing retirement age, she started reaching out to several mortuary colleges to begin her journey as a student. MJ said her most significant quality or skills are her maturity and compassion.

Claire Smith

Claire had a calming voice, was passionate about the industry, and had extensively thought about the topic. Claire had a fascinating story of becoming interested in the funeral industry. At a young age, she received donor tissue and had several

questions as a curious child would regarding cadavers and the process. She also mentioned she "grew up going to funerals," and high school is when she started exploring this option. Like Jenny, Frances, and Annie, Claire began mortuary school right out of high school. Claire gleamed with pride as she affirmed her skills as a "huge people person" and a writer. She truly enjoys helping write obituaries and designing folders to help tell a story.

Jenny Smith

Jenny entered mortuary education as a second choice as her original plan was no longer feasible. She picked mortuary science because it seemed interesting. She described being fascinated by dead animals at a young age and made sure to clarify "but not in a weird way." Although Jenny was nearing graduation, she ultimately decided she would like to continue her education and will most likely not be staying in funeral service. She relayed the funeral service industry was not meeting her expectations throughout her interviews. She wanted "a nine to five, not have to get called in the middle of the night kind of thing. And it's hard to find the pay that's good." She shared when one of her teachers showed them starting pay, for her state it was 32,000 (the average), and she was like, "Wow, that's not very good for calling me at 3:00 AM and having me come in to get a body."

Frances Johnson

A first-generation funeral director, Frances became interested in going to mortuary school her junior year of high school, where she was assigned, a book named *Stiff* by Mary Roach. She did not even know mortuary school was an option, it was

"weird enough" to keep her interest, and somehow, she knew this was what she was meant to do. With her father, Frances researched several mortuary schools and weighed the options. Frances described herself as a type of person who is always the "mom friend" or takes care of everyone; she realized this skill transitioned well into funeral directing, on top of understanding and being a good listener.

Clair Sinor

Clair came into the interviews a little nervous. Like some other participants, she lost a special someone, a best friend in high school. In her senior year of high school, she enrolled in a voluntary careers class for health science. While everyone else explored nursing homes and hospitals, her interest gravitated towards the funeral home. Clair wanted to become a beautician, but her mother had a little heart-to-heart about job demand. Clair brought an exciting perspective to this study. She entered a mortuary education program in the late 2000s, left after the school's loss of accreditation, started a different career within funeral service, and then returned to finish her mortuary degree in 2019. Her skills or qualities to the industry are her enjoyment of project management, checklists, event coordination, empathy, work, and life experience.

Audra Johansson

Audra came into the mortuary science program with a prior degree or certificate like Josephine and Hazel. Before entering mortuary college, she was an English teacher in a country overseas for about four years. During her last year at the school, the principal passed away, and they went to this huge, elaborate funeral, which was utterly unlike anything she had ever seen. In 2019, when she returned stateside, she had her eyes set on

working in the death-care industry, so she started looking for a way into it. Going to that funeral solidified her interest in the death-care industry and expanded her knowledge culturally. She said, "knowing that there's other ways of doing things and not just how the white protestants in my community do them." She viewed her cultural awareness as a strength that she brings to the table.

Josephine Kravitz

Josephine blew me away with her poise and professionalism. She became interested in science as early as high school and achieved a degree in anthropology. Josephine later decided she could get the same satisfaction from funeral service where there was a better job market. Josephine, much like Audra, recognized the importance of cultural relativism and saw it as a strength she carried over from her previous career. She felt her knowledge and background in anatomy, osteology, and infectious diseases made her a great candidate for mortuary school. Josephine had many goals now that she had graduated.

Hazel Davidson

Hazel described herself as a degree collector and as always having a weird fascination with the concept of death. As mentioned previously, Hazel graduated with a bachelor's degree in molecular biology and started a lab tech II career where she experienced burnout. She decided to return to school to finish her bachelor's in forensics and funeral service and is now working on her master's. Her future goal included getting a Juris Doctorate to add to her funeral director portfolio. Hazel said she is goal-oriented,

which helps her follow through with families to the end, and has been known to take charge and serve as a leader.

Annie Walker

Annie's interest in funeral service developed as early as she was five years old. She mentioned growing up around the funeral home as a family friend worked there, so she was always there. Her middle-school best friend's passing only intensified her interest, and she became determined to become a funeral director. She saw the beauty that can come from helping families in their time of grief. She said she "always saw funerals as a ministry to people." She described herself as a dedicated, caring, and compassionate woman funeral director who is creative and pays attention to detail.

Overall Experiences

The participants' experiences overall varied in mortuary school. Out of the 10 total interviews, nine responded they had an overall positive experience in mortuary school and had fun learning. Although the following is not the focal point of the study, it is beneficial to do a "check-in" on mortuary programs from the students' perspective.

Most participants felt the formal component of school prepared them for the National Board Exam they must take to become licensed and for real-life scenarios in the classroom. They spoke highly of the organizational makeup (faculty, classes, class sizes, scheduling, assignments, textbooks, etc.). Jane, Claire, Hazel, and MJ praised the instructors and believed they genuinely wanted them to succeed. MJ mentioned she thought there was a great mix of people. As she elaborated on her answer, she described

each one having their own specialty "one was very good at prep. The other was very good at law. And the third was very good at people."

Likewise, Claire "loved hearing from my professors and their industry experience. And everybody that taught in the program had very different experiences, both professionally and personally." They both commented how much they loved the opportunity to learn from classmates and hear what they like to do in the prep room or style of working with families. Several participants expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to learn about other religions and cultures. Without that in school, Josephine felt, "they would get a limited viewpoint when you're only learning from the people at your firm."

Claire, Josephine, and MJ all specified how beneficial it was to have hands-on activities throughout the program, whether flag folding in the classroom or participating in embalmings at the affiliated funeral home as part of their coursework. Students quickly realized the need for both theoretical and practical to succeed. They receive the best of both worlds by working in a funeral home.

MJ mentioned her appreciation for some of the assignments that forced her to go into the prep room and inventory their embalming fluids. She stated,

I wouldn't have seen that closet until I was an intern. Had they [school] not required that I sit in on five embalmings, I probably wouldn't have sat in on any embalmings because it just wasn't something that was embraced.

Participants also reflected on their experiences at their respective funeral homes. Many of the women reported having, for the most part, positive working relationships

with their preceptors, colleagues, and third parties companies. Seven of the ten participants specifically mentioned how accommodating, helpful, and understanding their funeral home preceptors, owners, and mentors were throughout their educational journey. Claire said her funeral home was incredibly flexible with her while in school. For example, "they didn't want me to be on call because they just wanted me to worry about school in the evening." She described herself as being very fortunate because she learned from

two or three embalmers who were excellent teachers and they were so willing to teach me the craft and to hear my questions and they were so supportive, they were excellent ... And they've been very upfront of "Don't be afraid to ask for help. There's nothing wrong with asking for help. Please give me your questions."

They made her feel comfortable, encouraged her growth, and never judged.

Frances described how much she learned from one particular embalmer, "he definitely was the one to take his time and to explain it very thoroughly and to take more of a scientific approach to it than in real life, "Hey, this is what I'm doing." Essentially this embalmer took the time to teach and share each step of his processes. As Clair's coworkers also did. She recalled her coworkers being super supportive:

my boss would often come ask if there's anything that I'm doing in school that they could help me with, like talk about, advise on. If I needed to do something more with families or do paperwork or something, they'd always check to see if it's something that they can help me with.

And lastly, Josephine described her experience with her preceptor and was the most descriptive in summarizing what she liked most:

So, I was a student worker there. I'm 5'4" and 170 pounds, I'm pretty small. The guy that I was working with who was the prep room manager was, I don't know, probably 6-foot, 300 pounds, or something. But he understood that there's all this misogyny in the field and trained me to be able to do all the physical stuff that the men could do ... even opening and closing dressing tables, I had to do it a different way because I didn't have strength in the same places.

To put it simply, her preceptor realized gender differences and taught according to her needs and her strengths.

The participants also discussed overall frustrations within the mortuary education programs. Most of the participants' experiences referred to the impact COVID-19 had on their overall educational experiences; naturally, some COVID-19 restrictions ultimately limited their exposure to normal mortuary activities due to liabilities. Notably, they voiced concerns regarding frontline people not calling back, academic advisor turnover, the lack of attention to detail in work by way of misspellings or grammatical errors by professors, the financial strain of travel required for online schooling, juggling practicum, and studying for the National Boards, and such low or no pay.

Online Education

COVID-19 hurried the adoption of digital technologies and pushed mortuary schools to online formats. Some participants were online learners already, while others entered mortuary school in person and had to switch to online abruptly. Participants

reported that going virtual made things easier, allowing more freedom to work in the funeral home, and making their formal educational component feel gender neutral. MJ, an online student, described this as a strength:

I feel it was gender neutral. No one could look at my name and decide if I was a male or a female. No one could look at my name and decide my age. So, I feel as though the beauty of that is I got the exact same opportunity the person next to me did.

Jane communicated, "I really enjoyed the freedom of being able to do my classes completely online and I felt like that helped me do things at my own speed. I was more in control of my education that way." Online education is advantageous because of the availability and ease of access to online school; however, a few participants described feeling disconnected from professors and having trouble navigating state requirements alongside an online mortuary program in another state. MJ depicted possible tension between online programs students and preceptors not feeling responsible for training. She described her preceptors' behaviors as "disappointed, angry, annoyed, and hostile" because they thought the school should be teaching these things.

Expectations Upon Entering

Most of the participants did not know what to expect entering mortuary school. All went into the industry knowing it was "male-dominated profession" as stated by Audra or "man's industry" or "man's world" as quoted several times in Annie's interviews or "predominately male" like MJ and Claire mentioned. Jane described doing research online and quickly realizing it was more of a "man's profession." It should be

noted these were direct phrases from the participants' interviews and provides evidence of how others see a profession as part of the larger archaic cisheteropatriarchal system, which still emphasizes the binary construction of gender, that they must navigate. In other words, cisheteropatriarchal systems, adopt and normalize heterosexual, patriarchal exploitation, and oppression of women and sexual minorities (Alim et al., 2020). Even with this bit of knowledge, that did not deter them from starting or continuing their educational journeys.

Jokingly, Frances shared,

I honestly thought it was going to be a bunch of older men in school. I just figured like you're born a 52-year-old white man and you become a funeral director.

That's the image I had in my head. But that's what I expected on all my classes.

Josephine did her research by word-of-mouth. She expressed:

I didn't know anything about the industry until I started talking to people. But I definitely quickly figured out there's a lot of misogyny in the older generations.

So, I came in prepared to feel like I needed to be able to do everything that the men could do.

In other words, she came in with a predetermined mindset.

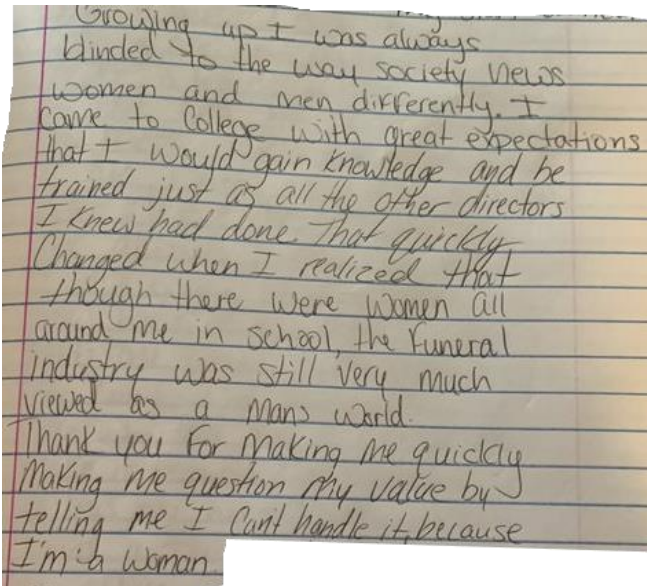
When they got into classes at their respective university or college, they were comforted by the fact that "[a] good chunk of my classmates were women," said Jane. Clair Sinor described the gender ratio difference compared to her first experience in mortuary school back in 2008. She mentioned, "I expected just to go in and just be one female in the class again. But yeah, it was really interesting and nice surprise." Frances

disclosed, "when I saw so many females, that's kind of cool, that's not what I was expecting, and it was nice not feeling like I was going to be the only girl and being looked at." Similarly, Jenny shared, "because most of my classmates were female, I didn't feel like I was outnumbered or anything and I didn't really feel like out of place at any time."

Hazel described seeing so many women enrolled and strong women professors that she "just assumed that it was going to be very pro women. And then I actually got out into the industry and that wasn't it. And so, my perception had to do a complete 180." Sadly, Annie described a similar situation where she had to adjust to this new warped reality. She went in with this idea that everybody's treated equally due to her experience at her hometown funeral home. Annie stated, "I never expected to encounter and endure the things I did when I started in it." Below is an emotional passage from Annie's letter detailing what she expected versus what she experienced. Her letter was dedicated "To all the men who made my start difficult."

Figure 3

Excerpt of Annie's letter



Growing up I was always blinded to the way society views women and men differently. I came to college with great expectations that I would gain knowledge and be trained just as all the other directors I knew had done. That quickly changed when I realized that though there were women all around me in school, the funeral industry was still very much viewed as a man's world. Thank you for making me quickly making me question my value by telling me I can't handle it, because I'm a woman.

Conclusion

In summary, all the participants brought a unique story or perspective to my research. Participants did not hastily decide to enter mortuary school, and even more, they decided to persevere through a known gendered structural terrain. The data gathered allowed me to share their overall experiences, the impact of online education, and their expectations upon entering.

The following chapter, Chapter V, presents the findings, reveals how gender influenced the participants' educational journeys, and supports the theory of gendered organizations. Their words and stories reflect how gender is always an underlying concept, consciously and subconsciously. I titled Chapter V as "Rites of Passage? Before and during." "Rites of passage" is a play on words as it usually refers to ritual activities and ceremonies signifying a transition. The title suggests there may be certain "rituals"

you must go through to be let into the group. Four themes and multiple sub-themes emerged based on the data collected during this study. The themes are listed in Table 3.

Table 3

Themes and Sub-Themes

Themes	Sub themes
Challenges Before Getting Started	Finding a Funeral Home
	Unnecessary “slush” or difficulties to navigate
	Hazing-like behaviors and sexism demonstrated in interview processes
	Not knowing how to navigate finding a funeral home or what to do or who to speak to when challenges exist
Inequities During the Journey	No one was listening to struggle or context
	Participants report negative interactions (bias, stereotypes, microaggressions, feeling not welcome)
	Experiences include lower pay, gender jokes, feeling not good enough, being yelled at, watched closely
	Participants felt left out, stereotyped, that there is a double standard
	Participants also realize that this is all very hard to prove and felt fearful about telling the truth to superiors
Overall Improvements	They described not knowing how to navigate finding a funeral home and wish they had more guidance
	Participants stated they want open and honest discussion about issues being swept under the rug
	More guidance and safety net/ HR or employee handbook
	Help making those connections/ local exposure or finding affiliation
	Educating funeral home and employers regarding gender etiquette
Future of Funeral Service	More dialogue around how women are treated
	Enthusiasm for being a part of “the shift,” however participants realize change will be difficult.
	More work, life, health balance
	Consumer dynamics and the business model are changing
	Participants heed warning/ advice to others.

Perhaps because I was an insider or because they felt like I understood where they were coming from, I was able to capture the true essence of what these women go through and their most authentic thoughts. The creativity allowed this generic study and allowed for an additional chapter to be created: Chapter VI. Through our interviews and written intimate letters, I was able to identify empowering moments and impactful advice that need to be shared. The final chapter of this research is Chapter VII where I discuss three key findings and recommendations for not only mortuary programs, but on a much broader scale.

CHAPTER V

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS:

RITEs OF PASSAGE? BEFORE AND DURING

"They're stuck in what they're used to the culture that they're used to serving and working with. They're very slow to work outside of their comfort zone."- Hazel

Chapter IV presented four themes and multiple sub-themes from data analysis.

These themes are:

- 1) Challenges Before Getting Started
- 2) Inequities During their Journey
- 3) Overall Improvements
- 4) Future of Funeral Service

This chapter focuses on the first two themes: challenges before getting started and inequities during the participants' educational journeys.

Theme 1: Challenges Before Getting Started

Depending on the selected school, requirements may include, at a minimum, an affiliation before beginning the program and while enrolled in certain classes. Several participants described getting started as the first of many challenges and barriers.

Josephine, like others, felt like "funeral directing industry is so insular for how you find jobs and learning how to navigate that is kind of tough." More than half of the participants identified trying to find a job opportunity and placement in a funeral home

was a tremendous roadblock and challenging at times.

The participants described three possible reasons this search might be more difficult. First, like other higher education areas, mortuary education has had to adapt delivery methods and implement online programs. For the students, this is perfect because they can take the classes from wherever they are in the US. However, some participants described being overlooked because local funeral homes may be biased towards selecting local students over an online student from another program.

Another reason participants described why they might be receiving pushback is because they do not come from mortuary-career families. Audra informed me, "If you're not born into it, it's kind of hard to get into for some people." Like Audra, Claire expressed, in her second interview, she also heard, "You don't come from family, and I don't really know why I'd want to hire you when there are people who have been doing this their entire lives, and you have not." And though Claire understood experience does apply in the hiring process, she did not appreciate how he phrased it; Claire identified trying to get her foot in the door as her massive challenge. An additional barrier the participants identified was their gender. Below I share how gender affected Claire's search from the beginning. I chose Claire Smith as an example to illustrate the struggles and challenges placed upon women trying to find placement.

"Oh my gosh, is anyone ever going to hire me?"

Claire went in, "a little bit oblivious and a little bit optimistic, and I guess I thought, me being a woman, wouldn't matter?" She was very surprised when she had difficulty finding a funeral home that did not concentrate on her gender, as her narrative

demonstrates below. Claire shared infuriating stories about a string of very interesting interviews. She thought, "Oh my gosh, is anyone ever going to hire me?"

Claire Smith described her first interview to me and giggled as she retold this painful experience, but not out of humor. The experience very much still bothered her. Claire, a new member of the funeral community, was also told, "women are physically unable to keep up with men in the industry." She described, "just thrown in the prep room that day." She thought this was an odd practice but obliged, stepping into this unfamiliar territory. The gentleman leading the interview stated, "Well, make sure she has a trash can because she might need one." Later, he "joked" about how he wanted to see her lift a casket on her own. It was almost as if he needed her to prove herself worthy of an opportunity. It took a third-party spectator to step in and say, "Nope. We're not doing that," to end the harassment.

Claire categorized this experience as a hazing situation and did not feel it was for learning. She shared:

I don't really think it was for the sake of giving me an opportunity to determine if this is what I really wanted to do. I think, like I said, more of they thought it would be funny if I had an adverse reaction, which I did not.

Claire knew what she experienced but called her dad to verify she was not being "too sensitive." Claire had the realization that she had experienced sexism for the first time. Claire had to endure this sexist behavior not once, not twice, but three times with entirely different funeral homes.

At an unrelated second job interview, a male interviewer commented "... from his observations, male apprentices could pass their exams and female apprentices couldn't." Therefore, he didn't know if he wanted to "invest the time in a female apprentice who couldn't pass their exams." Claire was stunned and felt discouraged before she even began her journey. She reflected that the funeral home where she worked at the time of the interview was the only one that did not say anything to her about being a woman during the interview process.

Theme 2: Inequities During Educational Journeys

*I think the best way to describe it is I think sometimes women are held to somewhat of a "higher standard" that even if a man can't lift a 400-pound body on his own, if **you** can't do it, it's because you're a woman. – Claire*

Participants described how gender affected their journey in school and how it continues to in their daily navigations within a masculinized industry. Claire described feeling heightened visibility during practicum and a level of difficulty throughout, where it did not need to exist.

Every little mistake made, it was a big deal, or if I had to ask for help, it was a big deal. There's quite a bit to navigate through, as far as ... How would I word this, getting your foot through the door and establishing yourself as a good worker and a capable worker. There's been a lot of slush I've had to navigate through, getting to that point, but that's okay.

Claire elaborated on "slush" and responded with a scenario to best describe the word. She recalled working with a retired funeral director who explicitly said: "that it was harder for

them to be working with a woman.” Claire mentioned funeral directors did not take her seriously. She shared that colleagues' offensive remarks and toxic behaviors are tolerated behind closed doors. Claire indicated, "he does walk around and slam stuff and yell, and that's okay, but I know if I were to ever act that way, oh my gosh, I'd be loads in trouble." Implying there is double standard between genders. Another participant, Hazel, emphasized how “everything's a double standard, I guess. Men don't have to take the time to learn how to do makeup and hair, but I have to take the time to learn how to lift things that are four times my body weight. What is wrong with them?” In other words, Hazel indicated if she is forced to change who she is and push her limits, then men should be equally as comfortable learning the soft skills the job requires, including excelling at feminized tasks.

Every participant described having to prove capable of doing their job as a practicum student or their first year after graduation. Hazel's words captured this gendered pattern:

I feel like my gender has influenced my educational journey in general because I always felt I had to prove myself because everyone just assumed I was stupid and didn't know what I was talking about. like the first five minutes, I have to sit there and convince them [families] that I'm qualified to do the job. It's so infuriating. Hazel indicated, "you just have to sit back, remember that people aren't used to young women being funeral directors. They're not used to it. Then you can't let it offend you because it's what their conception of what funeral service is." In other words, society expects, consciously or not, that a funeral director equates man.

Furthermore, Annie shared that even now, as a full-on director, everybody, including families, expects a man. Because this controlling image is reinforced, she felt that families automatically assumed she did not know what she was doing, "...it's almost like they're trying to catch you not knowing what you're saying... You're basically having to prove that you know what you're talking about." Later in the interview, she admits, "I love what I do, but I hate being a female in this profession." This exact point came up several times in her narrative.

Participants felt the concept of "how to be a woman funeral director" was overlooked and hardly discussed. MJ discussed the concept that everything in the mortuary industry is designed for men. She voiced, "everything, the van, the cots, the coolers, the PPEs and even the equipment, none of its made with women in mind, right?" MJ illustrated the importance of being gender aware like her preceptor:

[S]he's taught me some great tricks that nobody, no men would ever think about doing. As a female, I'm shorter than the average guy. The cots are designed for someone taller. There are little tricks of the trade that women use, that maybe men don't, about height and things like that, that you're just not going to learn unless you're in class with a really great professor or teacher, or you have a really hands-on preceptor, it's not something that you can learn out of a book.

Annie conveyed that she:

never knew the kind of physical struggles I would have out on the first call because it was just always, "Yeah, you'll get 500-pound people," but there was never any guidance on how you maneuver that as a woman that's five foot four.

Annie also noted the faculty and preceptors did not acknowledge gender differences. Consistent with everyone else, Claire indicated the gender blindness present in the formal component of mortuary education added to her struggle. She also mentioned that there was no discussion or understanding that some students might struggle more to find a funeral home willing to take that affiliation on to continue with their education simply based on their gender.

In summary, the participants shared that getting started in the program and finding funeral homes were the most challenging roadblocks and offered several reasons why the entry is so difficult. The gender inequities create an uninviting and unwelcome atmosphere and generate problems where they do not need to exist. Examples included heightened visibility, double standards, proving themselves to others, and stating how gender blind the industry is.

Gendering Interactions

Gendering interactions naturally became a more prominent sub-theme of inequities in the industry that deserves to be explored in depth as the funeral service is very much a people industry. Gendering interactions were interwoven into the stories participants told and proved to be a massive piece of this study. As discussed in Chapter II, gendering interactions occur between individuals and encompass all dominance and submissive patterns. Daily interactions illustrated a grim story situated within gender bias, stereotyping, and several microaggressions: intersectional microaggressions, microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations.

Gender Bias and Stereotyping

In society, there is a general perception that funeral directing is a man's job, so it is no surprise that unconscious gender bias happens all too often. Automatic associations stem from traditions, norms, values, culture, and experiences but feed into gender stereotypes, perceived norms, and gender roles. Although subtle, gender bias still exists through a network in which these participants live daily. As stated in Chapter II, gender bias is when one unintentionally assigns attitudes or stereotypes towards a specific group or gives preference over another. These may be subtle or overt through instruction, material, text, informal exchanges, and praise and feedback. The participants described gender bias in about every interaction with the public, including peers, faculty, families, hospital staff, and other colleagues they encountered during their practicum/internship or first-year funeral directing. Below are a couple examples of gender bias, stereotyping, or gender-based harassment by professors and families.

By Professors ...

Faculty inadvertently reinforce the mainstream, or a chilly climate. Some participants described some of their professors as "old fashioned;" however, they never said anything directly offensive. Before COVID-19, students reported being subjected to a chilly climate and, at times, recalled noticing different, better, or friendlier relationships between the men instructors and the other men enrolled in the program. Jenny stated:

they would make jokes about golfing and stuff and some of the male students would walk in like 20 minutes late. And I remember one time this girl got locked out of the lab and he wouldn't let her in.

Jenny also explained:

I guess I could just tell one of the teachers would assume that the women couldn't all lift the body or something and he didn't have to say directly "I think women are weaker." But by the way he assumed I was like "Oh."

Annie said she was treated unequally or differently at times and more attention was devoted to answering the questions of the men in the classroom. She said her male professor "would stop class and explain everything to him in detail but noticed she did not receive the same attention in return. Annie also felt one professor was much harder on the women and was very insensitive to women's feelings. Annie did not know whether to attribute that to him being uncomfortable with outward emotions or if it had something to do with her gender. She recalled when some of her classmates and herself were visibly upset over a low grade they had received, and she suspected "that kinda of like drew him away from us." She stated he did not interact with women well or did not know how to.

Annie also shared responses she would receive after sharing her major or interest in general education classes:

"Oh, what's your major?" And I would tell them, they'd be like, "Oh, that's not what I expected you to be in." So never really a direct slam on, "Oh, you're a woman getting into that," but it was kind of like, "Oh, that's what you do?" type thing.

She explained these comments "often made me question what I was doing. Why am I doing this? Every time I tell somebody I'm going into this; they're making rude comments." In other words, each time she heard these comments it created uncertainty regarding her decision to enter a men-dominated industry.

By Families ...

Jane described and captured a common theme among participants, which is categorized as "the look." It happens when a woman intern enters a home to do a removal and all eyes lock on them, and the family registers they are the one there to pick up their loved one. Jane stated, "a lot of times, we get that look, like, 'Really? This is what we're getting?' And then they're like, 'Oh, okay.' They underestimate us, but they don't want to say anything." Jane indicated it typically happens at the initial meeting or with families they have never served before. Clair Sinor's words mimicked Jane's in which families would say things like "Oh, I can't believe they just sent such a small girl," "you're so little. Can you pick them up?" or "Oh, they sent a girl?"

And unfortunately, it does not stop there. Participants described it continues into the arrangement room and services. Regardless of the participants' position, many indicated they are treated differently and fight the stereotype daily. For example, Hazel, the recent graduate, now funeral director, proclaimed, "when families come in and visit, they just assume I'm the secretary ... it takes them a good five minutes to figure out that I'm actually a funeral director, even though my name tag says it on there." In other words, proving herself is among the many tasks she must balance every day, which is tiresome. MJ, this study's most experienced funeral participant, repeated similar phrases. She

chuckled and shook her head from side to side, and like the others, she confirmed having "sat down with families, so it's just been silence, they're waiting for the guy. There's nobody else coming in the room. I am the guy."

In many mortuary science programs, as part of the practicum requirement, students must lead services independently under the supervision of a preceptor. Annie recalled her excitement as her preceptor would allow her to take charge and do "her thing," but that moment was dismantled many times when she realized the harsh truth: She will always be seen as "the helper." Annie recalled, "if I had an older man, or a man at all, working with me, and I would try to talk to them, they would be looking at the man." Along the same storyline, Frances shared, "I always felt like if there is an older gentleman standing next to me while doing a service, everyone directs to him." These actions and messages imply that the participants—as women—only occupy assistant or supportive roles and supports gendered beliefs that women could not possibly lead a funeral.

Microaggressions

Unfortunately, most of these women mentioned they were not supported in their funeral home component of the educational journey. Words like "survive," "endure," "harassment," "belittled," and "constantly questioned" were frequently used. Clair Sinor and Audra insinuated things get stressful, and voices get raised. Sadly, these descriptive words used to describe their experience directly result from microaggressions they indicated they encountered in everyday work life. As participant stories revealed, the

gatekeepers of funeral service have created a not so inviting atmosphere, whether conscious or not. MJ added in her interview:

so, for a woman to come up the ranks, I say, "I'm going to be a director," there's a lot of hurt feelings and anger and it's not a warm welcome. I'm showing up on the wrong side of the fence. I thought they would be like, "We're so happy to have you." Dummy me. Dummy. No, no, no, no. It's the same traditional business.

MJ felt like she was not accepted or welcomed. Her body language conveyed frustration while she patted her temples between giggles, animated eyebrows, and facial expressions.

Claire verbalized that at her funeral home there is one gentleman who she described as "not so amazing," and:

he's pretty clear about his stance on women and women in the field. And there were some weeks where he was giving me a really hard time, and I kind of questioned like, "Is it worth it to feel this miserable at the end of the day?" Like, "Is this what I want to be subjected to?"

In the same sentiment, Hazel described:

I felt very unsupported when I started in my apprenticeship because the funeral home I was at, it was very traditional. Everyone was set in their ways, and they didn't like that I was this cute, tiny, petite little girl trying to be an embalmer, trying to do their job. The whole time I was trying to learn, they were just sitting there trying to convince me that I didn't have what it took to be a funeral director and embalmer.

During the second interview, Hazel clarified who she meant by "they" and replied:

The best way to define 'they' is just the old school funeral directors who have been around the block and think they know everything. They're just like, "Yep, I'm a straight white cisgender male so I run the world and you just, you got to get in your place." That's they.

Hazel continued on to say:

It seems like there was always that roadblock in the apprenticeship situation because you're learning from these people who started doing funeral directing back in the '70s and '80s in the glory days of funeral services, they like to say. Now that it's evolving and the makeup of who's going into funeral service is evolving, they're obviously very uncomfortable and don't know how to deal with it.

Hazel mentioned how she felt there was a little bit of a community of people with similar experiences. She explained:

even though I felt alienated as soon as I actually got out into the industry, I had that little group of girls who I knew were dealing with the same sort of thing as me, and it was nice to have that camaraderie.

Microinsults

As referred to in Chapter II, microinsults, in this case, are communications that convey stereotypes, rudeness, and insensitivity and demean a person's gender. Often, these are unconscious and delivered daily without offenders' awareness. For example, Claire shared how her experiences may have differed from that of her men peers because

she did not "think that they ever had to hear retirees or different people in the field asking like, "Oh, well, do you plan on having children? Do you have a boyfriend?"

Similarly, Audra looked disgusted and mimicked these all too familiar phrases. Questions like "when are you going to start having kids?" "When are you going to start popping out babies?" and "When are you going to get married?" were common. These constant assumed stereotypes are upsetting and lead to the notion that you must fit their neatly cisheteronormative prepackaged box or "do the expectation thing for a woman," as Audra put it. The messages the participants shared revealed the portrait that only the cultural values of white, men and straight groups are normative, and women should be married or conform to traditional gender roles or stereotypes.

In contrast, Jane, made it clear from interview two that she does not "pay a lot of attention to the gender roles or how things are maybe ... I don't know. There's some things, it might be there, but it doesn't phase me, it doesn't affect me, and I just move on." However, not all of these participants mentioned they were as forgiving.

For example, MJ and Josephine's interviews demonstrate how benevolent sexism influenced their opportunities and educational journey. Benevolent sexism is hidden under "chivalrous expressions" or manners but really, it just perpetuates the dominance of men. For example, MJ shared her original mentor informed her from the get-go that, as a woman, "you cannot help with a casket, you cannot be a pallbearer, you cannot go stand in the parking lot and direct traffic, and it reflects poorly on my upbringing." MJ was not upset by this in any way because he communicated his reasoning. She stated, she did not feel as if he told her she was not capable. MJ interpreted what he said as "I think you are

of a higher standard.” MJ added, "what good would come of me trying to undo an 80-year-old man's belief or a 60-year-old man's belief because it's not going to go anywhere."

Josephine shared how benevolent sexism allows for job-segregated tasks by gender in the funeral home. She describes her duties tending to the cookies out of the oven and keeping the calendar and phones while her male counterparts were asked to do the more masculine tasks. Josephine disclosed, "I have no problem getting dirty. It doesn't bother me. Having those gender roles will suck sometimes, but it doesn't necessarily make me uncomfortable." These unconscious beliefs also exist outside the funeral home walls. An example from Hazel is, "older pastors, they give me a backhanded compliment, like, ‘oh yeah, you did so well. I can't believe a woman would be able to do that.’ I know they have good intent behind it but it's so rude."

Sexual Objectification. Numerous participants shared that their funeral homes expected women to wear pantyhose, dresses/skirts, heels, and a full face of makeup. Clair shared she worked in a funeral home "that women were not allowed to wear pants. I had to wear a skirt or a dress. I always had to have tights on. I always had to wear makeup. I always had to do my hair." She added, "I wore my hair natural two days in a row and got a talking to."

Participants' stories revealed the consequences of these industry "standards" have resulted in sexualization and sexual objectification. Audra shared an uncomfortable encounter between herself, the funeral director, and a family member. They were at a graveside waiting for the casket to be lowered, and "the director would kind of make

jokes about pairing us up, like, 'Oh, you guys are both available,' or something creepy."

These comments made her feel extremely uncomfortable, and Audra wanted to get out of there yet had to stand there and be professional. Jenny disclosed how uncomfortable it was "some people are sexualizing you or looking at you in an inappropriate way when we really are just there to do your job, and that's just like anything being a woman though."

Annie shared:

on the first calls I would go on, [security guards] always being like, "Oh, I was expecting a man to come," or "Oh, you're too pretty to do this. Why are you doing this?," or "Oh, you're going to move them by yourself?"

Frances also recalled hearing nurses say, "You're too pretty to be doing that." Frances shared how dumbfounded she was by the idea that "attractiveness has to do with ability to do the job."

Hazel also shared similar experiences but, in contrast, shared how her gender may have helped.

I feel like nurses were more comfortable with me going in because I was a female and because they're females too. They'd be a little bit stunned when they'd find out that I was the embalmer or the apprentice or something like, and they'd just be like, "Oh, that's a little weird." They'd be, "But you're so cute." And I'm like, "Yeah, well you're cute too," and then we'd just start chit-chatting and then build that rapport.

These three women all agreed that once nurses or hospital staff saw they could handle their own, the comments eventually subsided or stopped altogether.

In her narrative, Hazel firmly stated she believed making comments about other people's bodies or body parts is not workplace conversation and is highly inappropriate. She added how unprofessional policemen were to comment, "you're too cute to do this job," and then follow up by trying to get her phone number. Hazel shared that her funeral directors made "borderline inappropriate comments about my body and stuff like that too. And I'd just be like, 'Don't. No. That's gross and creepy.'" Hazel did not hold back and truly captured what is wrong with these microinsults and how they impact others:

No, this is not a safe work environment for women and you're making it that way. They view us as objects and not as funeral directors and they're like, "Oh yeah, no, they're just something pretty to keep in the funeral home to attract more customers." And I'm like, "No."

She pleaded:

No, you should just respect me because I'm a person, but that's not a thing and apparently old men can't get it through their heads. So, treat me like I'm a person, not an object. I'm not a pretty thing to look at [at] work.

Microassaults

"Well, that's what happens when you're not strong enough or know what you're doing. -

Josephine

Microassaults are what society regards as old-fashioned sexism. They may appear as gender jokes, snide remarks, or sexist language. MJ unearthed:

So the older funeral directors, it's kind of funny, they smirk and are like, "Check this out, watch this," like they're expecting me to fail or fall or... They will, what

is the expression? Haters will hate? They'll always find something that I don't do as well as they feel they do and be happy to point that out.

Microassaults may appear as subtle overgeneralizations like Claire's expressed during her second interview, where "first words out of his mouth were, 'Well, the first woman we hired as a funeral director, we had to fire because you know women, they don't get along with everyone.'"

Annie shared she remembered when she and another woman colleague were sent on a problematic apartment removal. The police greeted them with, "We always look forward to [name of funeral home] coming out because they always send the two women, and it's always comical to watch you guys struggle trying to get somebody up off the floor." Claire Smith indicated overhearing phrases like "Oh, good luck just having her to help you unload at the church," or "Claire would've been useless." Conceivably the most hurtful was when she was belittled and told she would be a "shitty embalmer."

Many participants described being ignored or being avoided by outside third-party entities and having to recruit male colleagues to step in to handle everyday tasks because specific individuals refuse to speak to women. Jane shared:

There's a cemetery that we use sometimes that he might not always listen to us, just because we're women and we have to have the male funeral director give him a call, like, "Hey, can you take care of it?"

Participant narratives revealed reoccurring offenders of microassaults were priests and pastors from different denominations. Annie narrated:

They're always looking to the man ... I don't know why this is always kind of the norm, but priests in the Catholic church, they will not talk to me. So, if I have a service, I almost have to send my part-time staff member that's a man to talk to them ... I have to send my part-time staff member to relay messages to them because they won't even answer my calls. They won't talk to me.

Hazel echoed the same issues in her area.

[T]here are some pastors who won't even talk to me and they'll talk to me through my part-timers that don't know jack squat. And so they'll talk to my part-timers because they're old guys with gray hair and look like they've seen a couple of things and they're just like, "Oh no, she's the one in charge. I'm just here to move the flowers."

Microinvalidations

Microinvalidations can be harmful communications that exclude, negate, or nullify someone's thoughts, feelings, or own realities. Microinvalidations in the mortuary world may sound like, "Well, that's just funeral business," "That's just funeral service," or "Well, just get used to it" which left Clair Sinor and Audra both feeling unsupported and frustrated. Audra shared, "for people who have been in this business forever, and they're like, 'Well, that's just the way it is, and if you can't handle it, don't get in it.'"

Both participants suggested there is no room for expansion or change. Participants used the term "gaslighting" rather than microinvalidations, which mean the same thing.

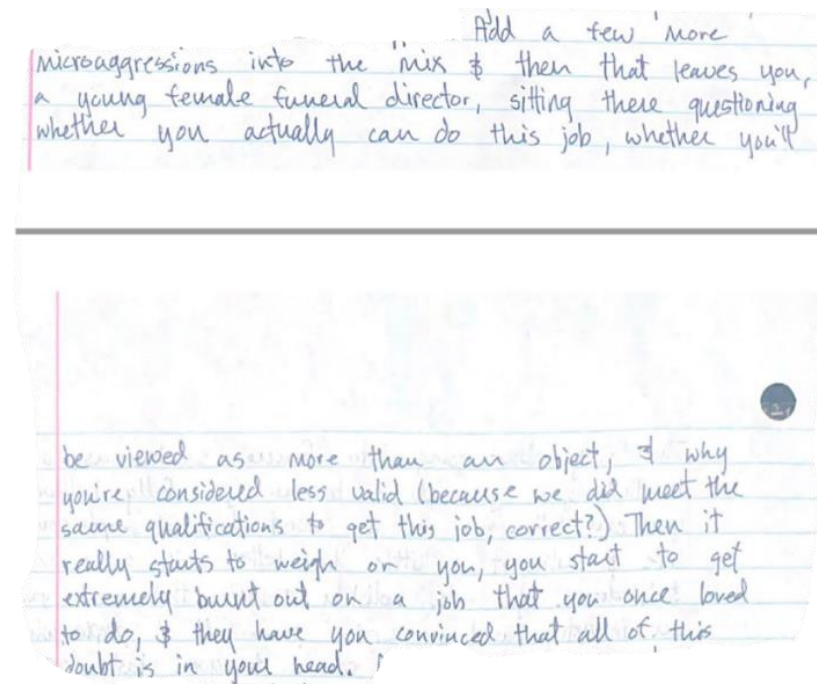
Hazel illustrated how these microinvalidations get inside your head:

... And then you wonder what's wrong with you and then you have to sit there and go to therapy and figure it out. And then you're like, "Oh yeah, I'm not the issue here, the old men running this industry are the issue."

Excerpts from Hazel's letter are provided in Figures 4 and 5.

Figure 4

Excerpt One of Hazel's Letter

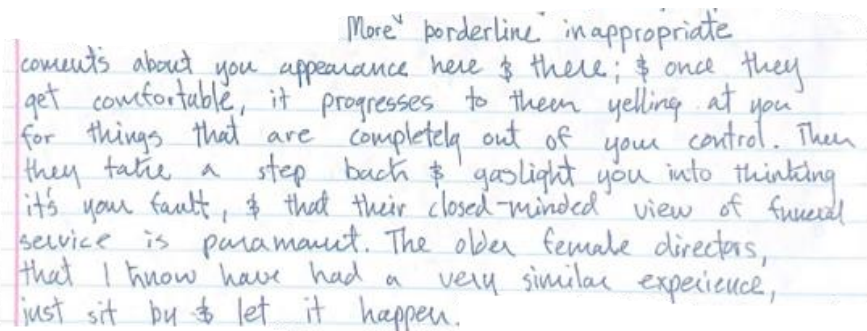


microaggressions into the "mix" & then that leaves you, a young female funeral director, sitting there questioning whether you actually can do this job, whether you'll

be viewed as more than an object, & why you're considered less valid (because we did meet the same qualifications to get this job, correct?) Then it really starts to weigh on you, you start to get extremely burnt out on a job that you once loved to do, & they have you convinced that all of this doubt is in your head.

Figure 5

Excerpt Two of Hazel's Letter



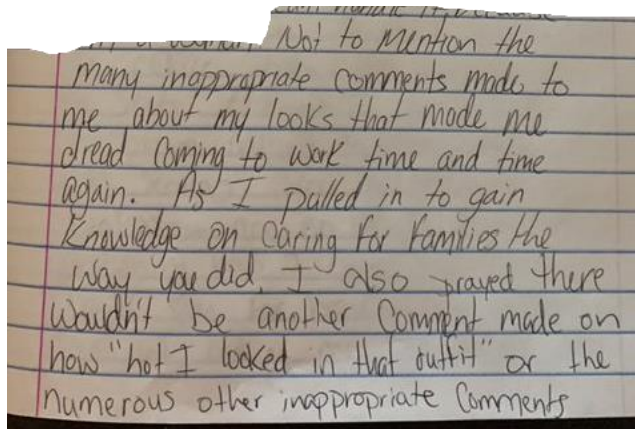
More⁴ borderline inappropriate
comments about you appearance here & there; & once they
get comfortable, it progresses to them yelling at you
for things that are completely out of your control. Then
they take a step back & gaslight you into thinking
it's your fault, & that their closed-minded view of funeral
service is paramount. The older female directors,
that I know have had a very similar experience,
just sit by & let it happen.

Another participant, Claire, had a tough time labeling what she experienced. "... This is probably an extreme word, but I would say just kind of 'harassing.' He was just picking on me all week. He was always trying to pick a fight. Just critiquing every body, I worked with." It got to the point where avoidant behavior became the solution at her funeral home. Claire said her manager instructed everyone that, "If Claire works on a body, don't tell him she worked on it because then he's not going to have anything to say about it." The impact of daily microinvalidations were making her experience miserable.

Annie described several situations in which the male owner of her funeral home would often say things like, "well, you're a woman you're being too sensitive," or "why are you tearing up? This is why women shouldn't be funeral directors." Annie experienced blatant sexual harassment from the owner's son and reflected how this affected her learning journey in her letter provided in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Excerpt of Annie's Letter



Annie tried addressing the issue, but the owner responded with a "yeah, right. my son would never do that," and it was never investigated further. Annie's voice cracked, and she admitted to me she even began thinking maybe some way or somehow provoked those comments or that she was seeking them. She added, "that was hard for me. So, when it's the owner telling you, who do you go to? So it was like you had nobody to turn to in that situation."

Intersectional Microaggressions

In relation to ethnicity, Jenny shared how inappropriate it was for her ethnicity to be questioned with no couth in front of her classmates and said this professor "picks on darker women." An example Jenny observed in person, was when an instructor commented to her Hispanic friend, "... that she would have a hard time finding her a place because of how dark she was." The professor suggested that because she did not fit

the “norm” or “ideal image” she would have a more challenging time than some of the other students.

Hazel Davidson shared how being a Jewish woman added an additional layer of struggle to her education journey. She described going through training and trying to learn as very interesting, especially since she was working mainly Christian services; "there was always pushback about it because they were like, 'Oh, you should already know this because we live in the Bible Belt.'" Hazel added, "they just assume that I should know this, but that's not how I grew up." Failing to recognize intersectional identities exist is detrimental to educator/student co-existence.

Annie and MJ both shared how age impacted their journeys were as well. Annie said, “when family members come in with the expectation of this is a man's world and when they sit across from a 23-old-female who is young, looks young, it's definitely different, you have to earn the respect." On the other end of the spectrum, MJ, a second-career funeral professional, felt her age made school sometimes challenging but in a positive way that forced her to grow and further mentioned how peers treated her differently because of her age.

In the study, sexual orientation was brought up by participants naturally in conversation. Audra expressed, "it is hard for me to differentiate why I'm being treated differently, if it's because of my sexual orientation or it's because of my gender." Hazel recounted how a pastor imposed his beliefs on a family and even altered their obituary because he did not believe in gay relationships. She opened up about how that made her feel:

I'm sitting there and I'm like ... I'm an openly queer woman. Not a lot of people in the industry know that, and so I'm just sitting there like, you're actively disrespecting me, and you have no idea who you're talking ... You are talking so much mess about queer women to a queer woman, and it is the most infuriating thing.

Conclusion

The findings of these interviews and letters indicate the participants all had very similar experiences. Gender, along with other intersectionalities, underlies and influences their daily lived experiences, thoughts, actions, presentation, and mindset. The funeral industry's continued efforts to preserve the mainstream has presented challenges to the women entering the industry. Through stories, deep conversations, and reflective memos, I saw the connections between my work and the theory of gendered organizations (Acker, 1990), which I further explore in Chapter VII.

In the next chapter, through analyzing their handwritten letters, I present the many kudos and acknowledgements to those who took the time to teach. Through various interview questions, I explored days the participant felt like a "superstar" and echo the needs of today's students. These trailblazers set the path for future mortuary education students and serve as advocates, and I applaud them for stating their truths.

CHAPTER VI

TRAILBLAZERS AND ADVOCATES

"Go ahead, lead car. It's you. Here's your two assistants ... that was my superstar day. That was the day that I made the announcements, and I asked my team to get the flowers from the back of the trucks and ... That was my day."- MJ Jenkinson

It is important to note that not every day in mortuary school is as defeating as some of the situations described by the participants. Specifically, there were days when the participants described feelings of enthusiasm and happiness with their mortuary education journey and retold stories of accomplishment. Their eyes lit up with excitement when sharing their narratives; these are the days and moments that stick with them. These “superstar days” are just as much part of the educational journey and would not have been possible—as they stated—without the help and guidance of the instructors, preceptors, mentors, funeral directors, and embalmers. Later in this chapter, I present the latter two themes: overall improvements described by participants and the future of funeral service.

Superstar Days

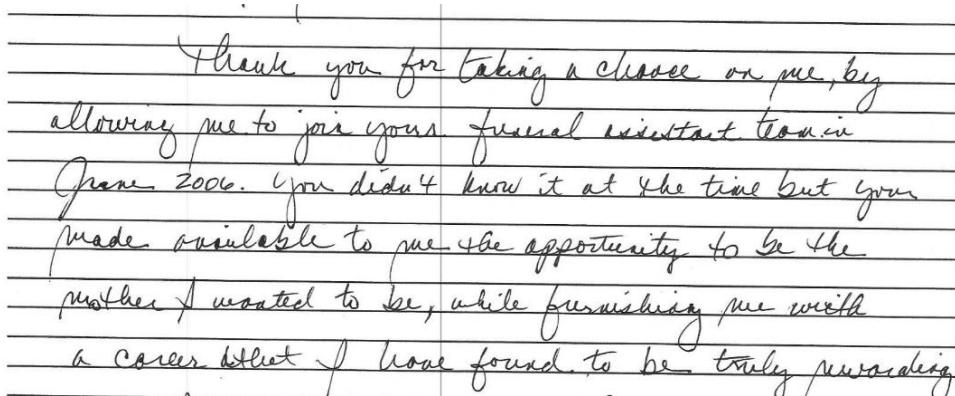
As aforementioned, participants were asked to write an open and honest letter regarding their reflective journey in part of the research process. The majority of the participants noted one thing in common: an appreciation and deep gratitude for others

who have come before them and continue to instill knowledge within them. Further discussion of the shared letters data is discussed in Chapter VII. Below are excerpts of two participants saying, “thank you.”

MJ read her letter with such poise and focused on the opportunities that funeral service has brought to her and her family. She wrote her letter to the gentlemen who gave her a chance in 2006 (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

Excerpt of MJ's Letter



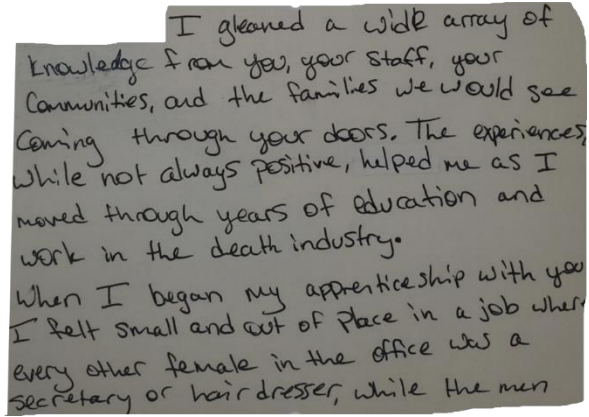
Thank you for taking a chance on me, by allowing me to join your funeral assistant team in June 2006. You didn't know it at the time but you made available to me the opportunity to be the mother I wanted to be, while furnishing me with a career that I have found to be truly rewarding.

Another participant, Clair Sinor, mentioned she had trouble pinpointing who she wanted to write the letter to because so many people have had a meaningful impact on her. Ultimately, she settled on writing a huge thank you to the originating funeral home that gave her a chance. She began by reading the letter (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

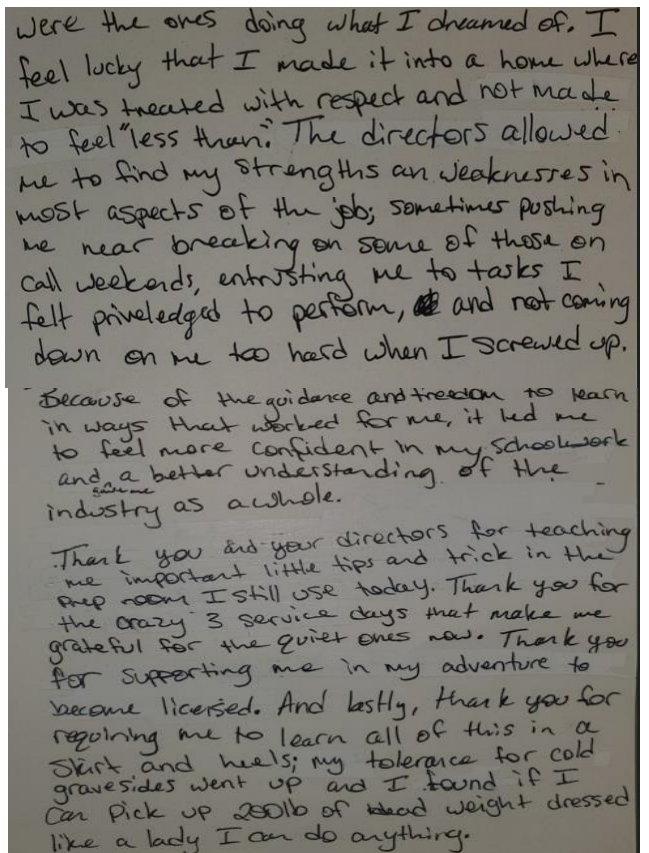
Excerpts of Clair Sinor's Letter

(Front)



I gleaned a wide array of knowledge from you, your staff, your communities, and the families we would see coming through your doors. The experiences, while not always positive, helped me as I moved through years of education and work in the death industry. When I began my apprenticeship with you I felt small and out of place in a job where every other female in the office was a secretary or hair dresser, while the men

(Back)



were the ones doing what I dreamed of. I feel lucky that I made it into a home where I was treated with respect and not made to feel "less than." The directors allowed me to find my strengths and weaknesses in most aspects of the job; sometimes pushing me near breaking on some of those on call weekends, entrusting me to tasks I felt privileged to perform, and not coming down on me too hard when I screwed up. Because of the guidance and freedom to learn in ways that worked for me, it led me to feel more confident in my schoolwork and a better understanding of the industry as a whole. Thank you and your directors for teaching me important little tips and tricks in the prep room I still use today. Thank you for the crazy 3 service days that make me grateful for the quiet ones now. Thank you for supporting me in my adventure to become licensed. And lastly, thank you for requiring me to learn all of this in a skirt and heels; my tolerance for cold gravesides went up and I found if I can pick up 250lb of dead weight dressed like a lady I can do anything.

Clair's voice shook, and she cleared her throat to read the letter. She was initially giggling in-between pauses to collect herself. She read, "Because of the guidance and freedom to learn in ways that worked for me, it had me to feel ..." it is here where Clair eventually succumbed to the overwhelming emotions she was feeling. She said, "I don't know why I'm getting ..." and wiped away tears. When she finished reading, and once she had composed herself, I asked, "what are these emotions that are bubbling up?" She

responded, “I don't know, it's been a really long time;” in other words, a long journey. She also described missing the people she had worked with for so long.

Another participant, Claire Smith, described her “superstar day” when she had worked on an individual start from finish. “I had helped with the embalming. I had cosmetized them. I had dressed them. I had done their hair.” She recalled how happy she felt to receive praise for her work. Claire said, “That was so rewarding. It was really rewarding to know that I had helped that family have a positive viewing experience, and I really enjoyed that.”

Similarly, Hazel divulged,

[O]ne of my most positive experiences was at the end of my practicum when they let me take the lead on a funeral a little bit and just sat by and watched me do it, and it went so well. By the end of that funeral, that family was so happy with the product, and I was like, "Oh my God, I came so far. I can do this. I've shown that I can actually put together a good funeral and order caskets and flowers, and make sure that everything's put together." I embalmed that lady too and they thought she looked beautiful. It was just like, everything felt into place. That was like one of the few times where it has happened, but it was a magical moment.

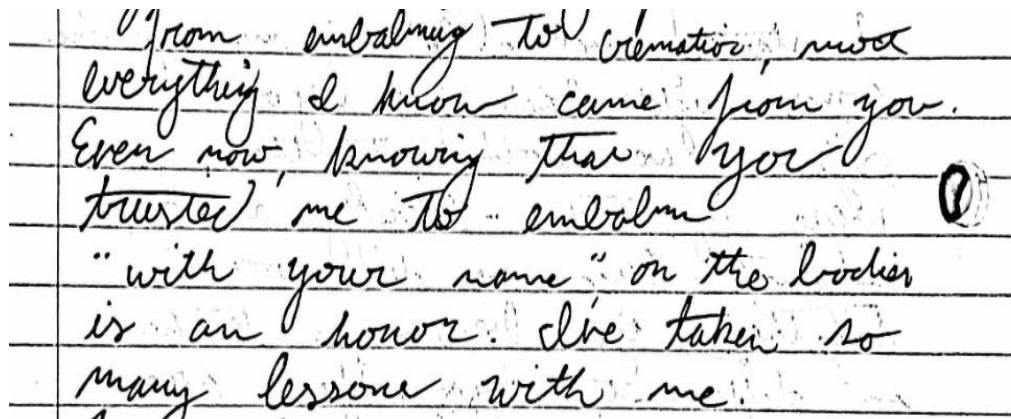
The moments the participants described indicate that without mortuary education leadership and willing mentors, their experiences may have been different. The participants took notice of efforts, kindness, patience, and trust.

Josephine thanked her man preceptor for being her “single biggest influence in this career path.” He forced her out of her shell, and for that, she was most thankful

because it has made making relationships at her new place of employment and meeting with families easier. Excerpts of Josephine's letter are provided in Figures 9 and 10.

Figure 9

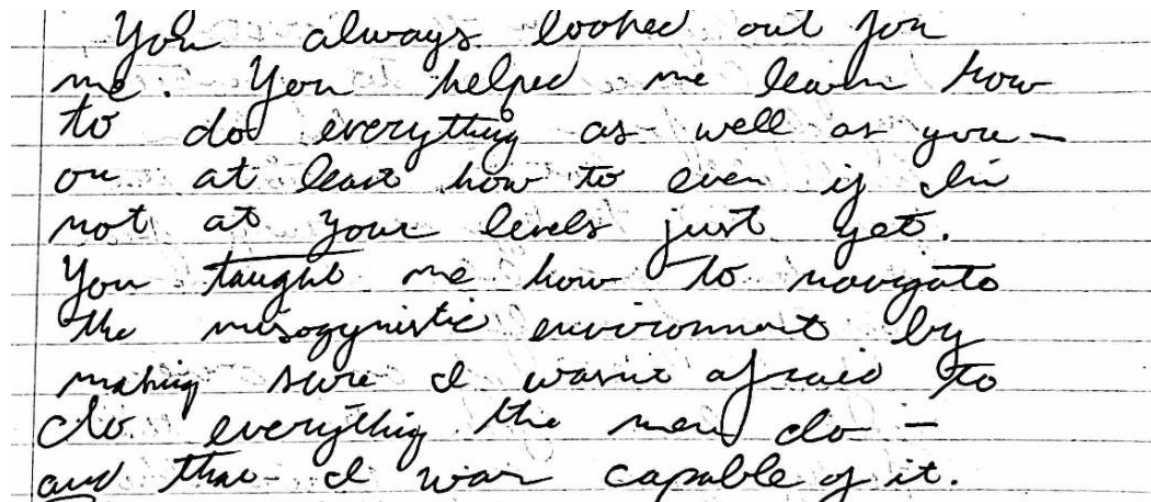
Excerpt One of Josephine's Letter



"From embalming to cremation, most everything I know came from you. Even now, knowing that you trusted me to embalm "with your name" on the bodies is an honor. I've taken so many lessons with me.

Figure 10

Excerpt Two of Josephine's Letter

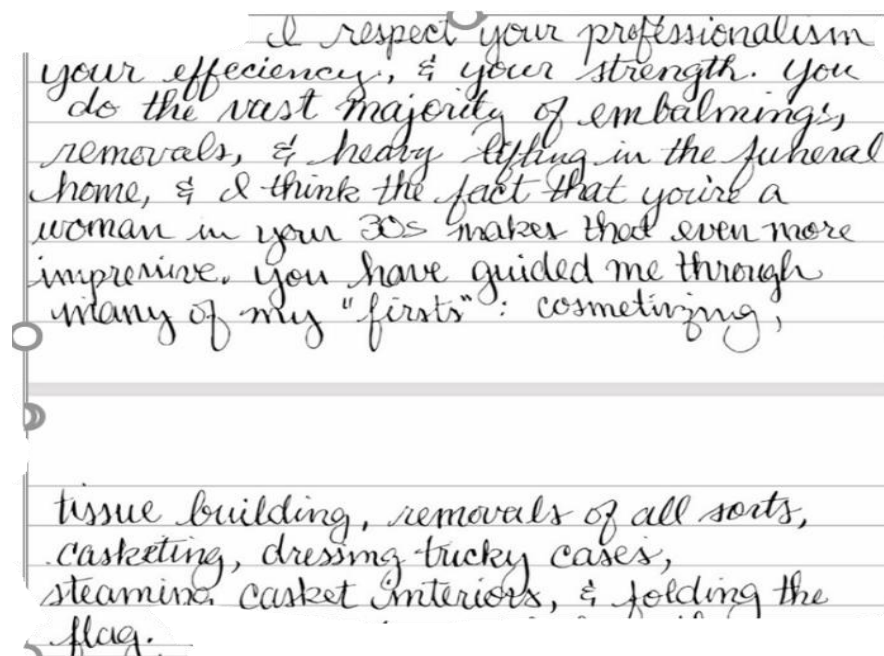


You always looked out for me. You helped me learn how to do everything as well as you - or at least how to even if I'm not at your levels just yet. You taught me how to navigate the misogynistic environment by making sure I wasn't afraid to do everything the men do - and that I was capable of it.

Two other participants, Audra and Jane, wrote very touching letters to their women preceptors. An excerpt of Audra's letter is provided in Figure 11 below. Audra added that her preceptor had instilled confidence and inspired her to be able to walk into any nursing home, hospital, or house and say, "If (name) can do, then so can I." Jane's letter (see Figure 12) was written with sass and truthfully described a close relationship with her preceptor, which is inspiring and refreshing to hear.

Figure 11

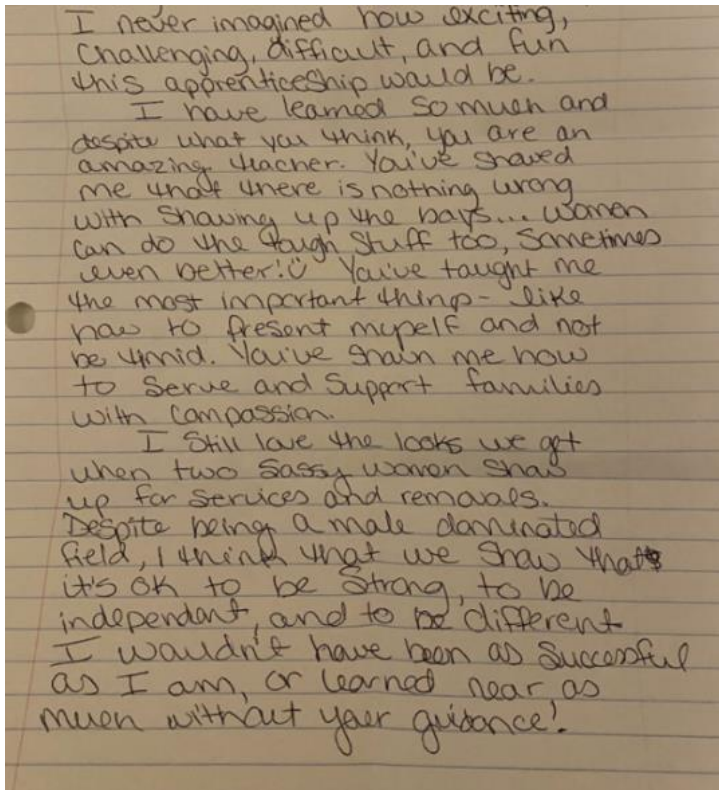
Excerpt of Audra's Letter



I respect your professionalism
your efficiency, & your strength. You
do the vast majority of embalmings,
removals, & heavy lifting in the funeral
home, & I think the fact that you're a
woman in your 30s makes that even more
impressive. You have guided me through
many of my "firsts": cosmetizing,
tissue building, removals of all sorts,
casketing, dressing truck cases,
steaming, casket interiors, & folding the
flag.

Figure 12

Jane Doe's Letter



As appreciative as the participants are in their letters, they believed mortuary education needs a revamp. For example, as Claire put it: “sweeping gender differences under the rug” or, in Hazel’s words, “in general is ignoring the switch,” or in other words, the additive approach is being noticed and critiqued. More recent mortuary textbooks include pronouns like “her” or “she;” however, most participants indicated this is not enough.

Theme 3: Overall Improvements - What They Want

The reality is that the changes women seek will play an instrumental role in the advancement of mortuary education. Common patterns discussed among the participants included the need for transparency, open communication, protection, allyship, and guidance in navigating this industry as a woman. They wanted to know what it means to be a woman funeral director. This section is organized by commonalities between what participants suggested because it accurately conveys today's students' needs or wants.

Hazel and Annie

Hazel and Annie suggested that funeral departments host seminars, dedicate a unit, or develop a woman-based mentorship program where women can come together and discuss the realities of what it is like to be in funeral service. Annie stated, “I think actually having a formal organization for women of funeral service would make all the difference.” Hazel shared, “because I went in with this completely different perception of what being a woman in funeral service is, and it bit me in the ass the moment I got out into the thing.” She was describing the gender difference between what she saw in school versus at her funeral home. Hazel added, “because it's going to keep happening, and I feel the majority of them are not prepared.”

Jenny, MJ, and Claire

All three participants alluded to the importance of getting everyone involved in the conversations to enact change. They said they would have appreciated if their mortuary education programs would have spoken concerning the realities women may face in the industry. In Jenny's case, she only recalled gender being brought up once in

class. Jenny shared, “I wish that more teachers were more like honest about the fact that it is different and that you probably will experience some kind of discrimination.”

MJ’s words reiterated the same concept. She wished “teachers were more honest not only to say this to women, but to say this to all students, but speak to the women in the room.” Claire added, “let’s just talk some more!” She specified:

if programs could just have that discussion with the men and women going to the program because I think it could be very beneficial for the new generation of gentlemen to have an idea of how things have been and how things could change and how they could support the women who are going to the field beside them.

Claire was descriptive in providing details regarding changes she hoped to see mortuary programs implement to help women navigate through the “slush.” It was clear Claire had given this topic lots of thought. She put the responsibility back on all the stakeholders involved, including mortuary programs, associations, and funeral homes. She truly believed more dialogue and transparency could benefit all involved, men and women. She shared, “there were a couple times in lectures where professor would say, ‘I know that this a predominantly white male industry,’ but that was just the ... end of it.”

Claire was very passionate that there needs to be open and honest “discussion about what the women in the program might be dealing with.” After talking to some of her classmates, Claire realized she was not the only one who had struggled or experienced toxic behaviors in the beginning or throughout. She added, “there were times where I shouldn't have felt afraid or unsafe for asking for help, but I did.” She found, “there really wasn't anyone to turn to where I could be like, ‘Oh my gosh, this keeps

happening to me, and I don't know what to do.” Claire clearly felt unprotected. She felt the departments should be responsible for creating a safe place to seek advice and guide them on “how they can be successful and kind of overcome some of the things that they're being approached with in the field.”

Claire stated she wished there had been a wider safety net. She had a difficult time describing what she meant but ultimately landed on,

had there been more of dialogue just to tell students, “If you're struggling, come talk to us and we can help you troubleshoot that and see what we can do so that you can be successful with this educational path and in your future career.”

She added, but “that was never said, so I didn't really feel comfortable seeking advice and it was hard because I really didn't have any industry professional to talk to about it and to say, "how can I handle this professionally, so that I can keep moving forward?" She described how small of an industry funeral service is and how she

also had that fear that if I went to a professor, perhaps they knew that funeral home I had talked to and maybe their best friend work there, you just don't know. So, I was also apprehensive about seeking advice from the program about placement and an internship.

Claire added programs or schools could lead discussions with the funeral homes that may have students working there regarding “things to keep in mind” or gender diversity etiquette, “dos or don'ts” to ensure everyone is comfortable. Claire also recommended state funeral directors association get involved. She stated,

there are times that I don't feel like they're doing a lot for me ... they're having their meetings with different funeral homes in the state, and they're talking to owners, but I don't think that this is something that's coming up ... how are women treated in the funeral home?

Theme 4: The Future of Funeral Service - “The Shift”

It is going to be a painful... it's always been, and it's going to be, a painful transition- MJ

Change is okay. I know it's hard, but it's okay.”- Audra

All the participants in the study viewed recent gender shifts as a good and positive change that has been a long time coming. Josephine said, “it feels very much like breaking into an industry.” To her, the movement of women into mortuary school means: seeing the tides changing, and I think it feels kind of like badass to be a part of that change, but it's also a cool chance to help influence it, instead of just coming in, in 20 years, when hopefully things are different

Her tone illustrated hope but not assurance or confidence that things will change.

Frances also shared her excitement, “but to me it literally feels like being part of history. So just being part of that movement is kind of cool ... it's very interesting to see men become a minority in this.” MJ predicted the first round of change will begin with the 30-something-year-old's coming up the ranks: “they are going to take it, and we're going to run with it, and it's going to be a beautiful transition.” She realized she is going to have to break down some barriers for the people behind her “and learn some new things, and it's going to be exciting and rewarding, and harder than most, that I think I'm ushering in a new millennia.”

Both MJ and Claire spoke on the importance of having men and women in the funeral home and how no one person needs to do it all, but rather the focus should be on who does it best. Audra shared her internal struggle about staying in a very traditional state and trying to initiate change or leave her home state to explore other more progressive states regarding disposition options. She said spearheading change “is really scary to think about because I know some of the people that are in charge in terms of on the boards and stuff, and they're not going to want to listen to me.” Frances shared her frustration about seeing only men in those positions related to funeral boards or governing bodies or associations and added, “I think that there's going to have to be a change higher up ... I think that eventually there will be more women on there.” This supports the gendered theory of organizations as it has historically been men who serve on boards and associations.

Audra, when asked how she perceives the recent gender switch in mortuary science education affecting the industry, lit up and said, “I love this topic!” Audra explained, “I think it's going to take some time, but it's really going to butt heads with that whole work-life balance thing.” She made clear that the expectation of a woman funeral professional to be on call 24/7 and still be the caretakers of children and households is impractical. Audra mentioned,

for people who have been in this business forever and they're like, “Well, that's just the way it is, and if you can't handle it, don't get in it,” I don't think that's realistic anymore. Change is okay. I know it's hard, but it's okay.

She also made an interesting point regarding millennials being less likely to “just lay down and take it. I don't know how to put it. But we will fight for work-life balances a little more, maybe.” This point brings up an entirely new perspective that has recently been studied, which is briefly discussed in Chapter VII.

Josephine remained hopeful that the entry of women into mortuary school and into the industry will move the needle towards a better work-life-health balance. In her time in the industry, she has noticed women tend to be more conscientious about health and wearing personal protective equipment. She hoped funeral homes will consider overall health, including pregnancy in the workplace.

Many participants felt families utilizing a funeral home service will benefit from this shift in the gender makeup of funeral professionals. Jane and Audra were quick to point out that the face of funeral consumers is changing. It is the women who are making the arrangements, the daughters, or the wives. Jane pointed out that families were perhaps more comfortable with women serving them. MJ also described, “patrons are expecting a more polished product, where before it was just embalm them, put on some powder, we're good to go.” Indirectly, Clair Sinor added:

we'll start making a switch from more mass marketing kind of traditional services that you get this book and this folder and this is the DVD and things like that ... I feel like it's going to be more family focused instead of money driven.

Hazel agreed the business model will need to alter sooner rather than later.

There's so much you can do with funeral service. There are so many cool ideas and so many people going into it with new innovative ideas and how to make it

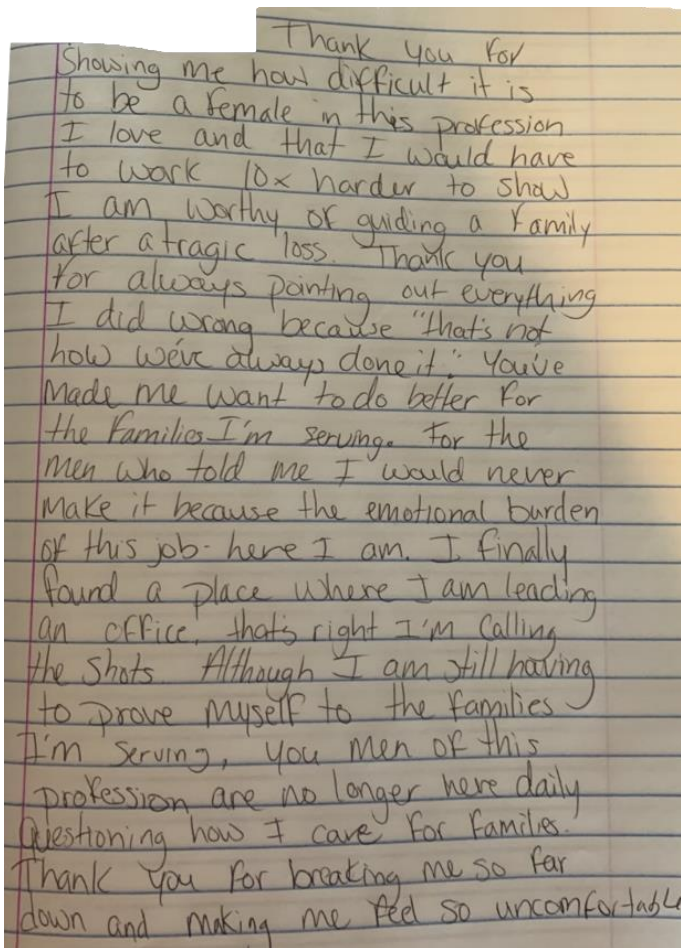
special and how to make families feel loved and welcome, and they're fighting it. Funeral service could be so cool, and so interesting, and so innovative, but it seems like everyone's so set in traditional ideologies and how to, "Oh yeah, this is what we've always done. This is what we do because it's worked for us up until now," but it's not working anymore. There has to be a turning point.

Strong Messages for the Gatekeepers

This group of participants felt empowered to use their voices. Large portions of the handwritten letters overlap across themes and could not be dispersed because they demonstrate hurt and the anger participants are forced to conceal daily. Annie's letter had hint of a sarcastic undertone. Her voice quivered as she read her letter, not from sadness but years of pinned-up anger. An excerpt from Annie's letter is provided in Figure 13. She concluded her letter with, "without it I wouldn't have ever ventured away from your toxic work environments and found a place I love."

Figure 13

Excerpt of Annie's letter

A photograph of a handwritten note on lined paper. The text is written in cursive and expresses gratitude for being shown the challenges of being a female in a profession. It mentions the difficulty of working 10x harder to show worthiness, the emotional burden of guiding families through loss, and the desire to do better for the families being served. The writer also mentions being told they would never make it and finally finding a place where they are leading an office, though still having to prove themselves. The note ends with a thank you for breaking down old ways and making the writer feel uncomfortable.

Thank you for
Showing me how difficult it is
to be a female in this profession
I love and that I would have
to work 10x harder to show
I am worthy of guiding a family
after a tragic loss. Thank you
for always pointing out everything
I did wrong because "that's not
how we've always done it." You've
made me want to do better for
the families I'm serving. For the
men who told me I would never
make it because the emotional burden
of this job here I am. I finally
found a place where I am leading
an office, that's right I'm calling
the shots. Although I am still having
to prove myself to the families
I'm serving, you men of this
profession are no longer here daily
questioning how I care for families.
Thank you for breaking me so far
down and making me feel so uncomfortable

Hazel paints a dark narrative in a letter she wrote to herself (see Figures 14 and 15). In interview one, she said, "everyone's going to have to sit down and realize that one day the majority of morticians across the country are going to be women." She shared, "that is the reality of the future of funeral service. It's going to be women. It's going to be cremations. We're going to have green burials. We're going to do all these cool different things." Hazel felt like everyone she encountered is holding onto the old ways and

combatting change. She said "NO, you have to evolve with what people want." Hazel felt very strongly about gatekeepers needing to adapt the culture.

Figure 14

Excerpt One of Hazel's Letter

The thing about going into funeral service as a woman, is that you go into it because you fully believe that you can take one of the worst days of ~~people~~ someone's life & make it a little bit better with some compassion & kindness. You also foolishly assume that you're going into an industry based on service & is full of people who are doing the job for similar reasons to you. Fast forward through mortuary school, apprenticeships, & becoming a practicing funeral director/embalmer; you then start to realize how disheveled the industry actually is. There's so much unspoken segregation & aggression against those who don't fit the mold of what society believes a funeral director should be. As a woman in funeral service, I've definitely made my journey to becoming a licensee out of pure spite. There was very little support, & you were constantly told that you weren't cut out for the job. "Are you sure you want to be an embalmer? You seem a little small to be moving these heavy bodies." "They don't want you to help with this funeral because of how young you are." "Maybe they'll actually respect you if you put on makeup & dress better."

Figure 15

Excerpt Two of Hazel's Letter

My consensus is that they break down perfectly good funeral directors to a point of no return, & then they leave. The industry is obviously progressing, & they need to allow for some change or the industry as a whole will die out. Personally, I think that it should start with old-school funeral directors leaving new female funeral directors the hell alone. We are very tired.

MJ said because the number of women has increased, “it's going to force our colleagues, our classmates, and our coworkers to step up, or to compromise.” Essentially, the gender shift is forcing the men of the industry to pick up their game. She said, “everything's cyclical and I would recommend just moving over and letting us in ... Let's work together or I think you're going to get dusted.”

Advice for Future Students

The participants wanted to impart knowledge that would aid other women who decide to enter mortuary education. As far as the classroom component, participants suggested the importance of learning how to manage time and not “... study for grades. You're going to do this the rest of your life. If you study for grades and pass, that's not going to be as helpful as if you actually own it and learn it,” suggested MJ. Others suggested reviewing material frequently and asking questions, no matter how intimidated someone might feel regarding their role.

In particular, Audra Johansson wanted to warn others that “you will hear about comments regarding your strength and ability to move a deceased person because I think that's the softest way that I've heard people object to the idea of women in this industry.” Clair Sinor said, “don't be afraid to stand up for yourself,” and added that trying different funeral homes is ok until you find one that fits. Jane proposed, “find a good mentor, a good female mentor, someone who's been in the field.”

Josephine suggested, “learn how to do everything and learn how to do it. Be confident and detail-oriented, but ask for help if you need it ... know your limits” For example, “you also shouldn't move someone you can't by yourself, because you should

put your safety first.” MJ said to “define your role, know who you are and what you are capable of.” She also advised others to shut things down: “that’s my advice to any females that are coming up; don’t allow myself to be subjected to gender jokes.” Spoken like a veteran, she said, “if you start off on that premise then you will not find yourself in uncomfortable situations.”

Josephine, Audra, and Hazel each suggested the importance of going in with a certain attitude or mentality. Josephine said, “I need to do as well as the men if not better!” Audra commented on being a woman in this industry:

I think that kind of pumped me up a little bit, like, Yeah, I'm doing this. And kind of, I wouldn't say ... That wasn't the motivation or anything, but it definitely kept me going, maybe just a fraction, to be like, "Yeah, I'm going to do this and prove anyone wrong who thinks I shouldn't be doing this."

Similarly, Hazel noted there will be pushback: “you have to go in with the mindset like, “I’m going to show you that I can do this because none of you believe in me.” Hazel also wanted to add: “you have people who are rooting for you. They’re not all against you. There are people who actually want to see this industry progress. You’re not doing this alone.” Annie advised:

don't take the comments that you receive from those around you personally. Those don't define who you are. So, keep that motivation of "This is why I'm doing this." Don't lose sight of that because if you get wrapped into all the comments that are being made to you by your peers, by your professors, by

people you're working with, you'll lose sight of why you're doing it, and you'll quickly get out.

And lastly, spoken like an older sister from Claire:

I would definitely tell them just not to give up. That some difficult things might happen, but just try and keep your eye on the goal that by you getting started and being active in the industry, you can really make a difference. Sometimes it can be hard to remember that when you're dealing with people in the field who have some things to say about that and who want to kind of make things a little bit more difficult for you, but just remember, you got this and you have the potential to really make some changes.

Conclusion

Chapter VI began by describing the excitement and enthusiasm of the participants as they described their “superstar day,” days when they were given more responsibility or were able to run a funeral on their own. This chapter was developed out of a pattern noticed while analyzing the letters. That pattern was a deep appreciation for shared knowledge and for others who came before. The participants were thankful for the lessons, guidance, and mentorship. Still, they did conclude that mortuary education needs updates and improvements like the need for transparency, open and honest communication, protection, and allyship. This chapter also explored the participants' wants and needs of several stakeholders. And lastly, Chapter VI illustrated that change can be positive in many ways, but the transitional phase will be painful.

CHAPTER VII

DISCUSSION

There is an abundance of organizational culture embedded both intentionally and unintentionally into mortuary education, which can hinder change or reject the entry of others. Although the past is crucial to "the story," it does not tell a complete one. Too much dependence on organizational culture can constrain change, create conflict, limit learning from newcomers, and help maintain the rules of the game (Schein, 2004), ultimately producing mainstream.

As discussed in Chapter II, organizational culture is developed over time and is difficult to change, especially in an industry as old as funeral service (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Dirks et al., 1996; Schein, 2004). Opposition to change could be caused by feelings of psychological ownership or possessiveness over the industry or departments/programs (Dirks et al., 1996). The imposition of women has raised havoc on the mainstream, causing ripples and challenges never seen before. There has never been a time in funeral service where many generations, genders, and opposing ideologies are working together simultaneously, yet there is great tension surfacing.

Much like what Acker (1990) theorized, this study's findings prove how gendered organizations can destructively affect not only culture but the experiences and perspectives of all individuals. Taken together, the findings of this study illustrate how gender influenced, intersected, and greatly impacted participants' educational journeys.

The findings show that women today are ready and willing to speak out against issues such as misogyny and workplace discrimination.

This new era and generation of individuals demand change and are like no other in history (Baumgardner, 2011; Wyre, 2009). Within the first day of sending out recruitment emails, I had six participants lined up and eager to share their stories with a stranger. As influenced by the #metoo movement, women of all ages are finding their voice and encouraging one another to challenge the status quo or the mainstream (metoo.com, 2021). Seven participants were between 21 and 29 years old, which illuminates that Gen Z has officially made it into the funeral services workforce. As generations come together in the workplace and new members join, work culture will need to be evaluated.

In the following section, I demonstrate the intersection of extant literature, the findings, and Joan Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations. By utilizing an overarching feminist perspective to challenge the mainstream, my research exposed the realities of a not-so-inclusive industry that leaves out pertinent gender-specific perspectives, ideas, guidance, and lessons. The findings address a large void in the research to support higher education mortuary programs and lift silenced voices. In congruence with Penepent (2018), these findings contribute to an already bleak employment crisis in the industry, and as a profession will continue to change more drastically than it already has. I specifically want to mention that I use "we" purposefully throughout this chapter because I am a member of the educator community. I am just as

responsible as my other fellow educators and should hold myself to the following standards.

Findings

The findings depict women's lived experiences and focus on their interpretations that form their reality. The discussion section offers key findings of the study as they relate to the overall research question: What do the lived experiences of women reveal about how gender influences their educational journey? This study's findings are organized into the following two concepts:

- **Gendered Interactions.**

Finding 1: Participants were met with an abundance of gendered interaction processes that ultimately influenced their journeys in a variety of ways.

- **Preserving the Mainstream.**

Finding 2: Participants felt that their gender is either hyper-focused on or disregarded completely (gender blind).

Finding 3: "Bodied processes" and embodiment or consideration of the whole being are not welcome.

Gendered Interactions

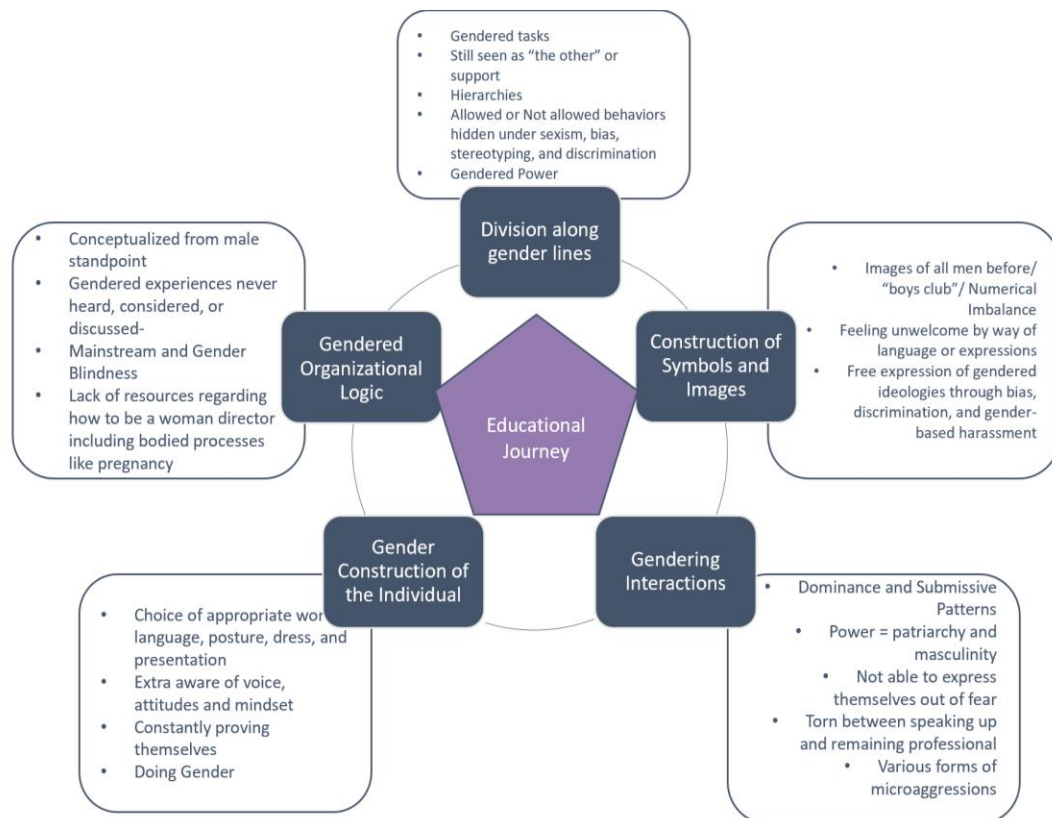
Finding 1: Participants were met with an abundance of gendered interaction processes that ultimately influenced their journeys in a variety of ways.

Gender is not an addition to organizations or institutions but a fundamental part. Gendered processes are part of that same reality and overlap and intersect throughout women's educational journeys. A key finding is the abundance of gendered interacting processes (Acker, 1990), which influenced women's educational journeys in mortuary

science. Everything from the division of gendered tasks, language that reinforces gendered beliefs, interactions at school or in their practicum that enact dominance, "doing gender" individually, and gendered substructures reinforcing the idea that women are lesser than or not equivalent to men. Figure 16 is a comprehensive look at examples drawn from Chapters V and VI and a clear demonstration of how these gendering interacting processes impact the educational journey of women daily, specifically in this study.

Figure 16

Gendering Processes Present in this Study



Division along gender lines. As demonstrated in Figure 16, gendering occurs in at least five interacting yet distinct processes. This research indicates women are still

considered "the other" and through societal expectations, presumed to serve in supportive roles rather than those in charge. Moreover, gendered behaviors are regulated or controlled through white cisheteropatriarchal systems policed through masculine and hetero perspectives; behaviors—allowed or not allowed—are situated under an umbrella of sexism, gender bias, stereotyping, and discrimination. For example, gatekeepers have the organizational power. They often defend why women are not allowed to do specific tasks, like in MJ's description of benevolent sexism, or why women do not fit the masculine ideal worker needed for funeral service, like in Annie's case of gender-based harassment. In the funeral world, the "ideal worker" image is masculine, committed, loyal, with limited other responsibilities, which results in constant comparison to men and masculine mannerisms and behaviors. Claire demonstrated how gendered power looks through her lens "... it's very old school. It's very traditional. It's kind of the same people who've always been there or are still there. And it could be hard to kind of initiate changes." She and many others say the same type of person still holds power. The message is that women do not belong in positions of power, top of the hierarchy and that there is a glass ceiling to breakthrough.

Construction of Symbols and Images. The second interacting process as displayed in Figure 16, is the construction of symbols and images, including language, gendered ideologies, and dress. Women students enter the industry and realize this is a "boy's club" (as participants shared), reinforcing gender divisions. The overwhelming majority of members before them have been men, and the numerical imbalance in the workforce is sending gender macro-aggressive messages and creating a chilly climate for these

trailblazing women (Morris & Daniel, 2008; Sue & Spanierman, 2020). Several participants were aware of discriminatory comments or "jokes" made at the funeral home. Several others reported overhearing language and phrases like "I'm surrounded by women, I can't get away from it," and "Oh, all these women around here now," which only adds to the division and impacts the participant's psyche and wellbeing. No wonder this study's participants reported feeling unwelcome in traditionally male/masculine-informed and dominated fields and college majors.

Further, the findings support the notion that gendered ideologies are rooted in gendered assumptions. These assumptions can seep into the workforce through gender bias, sex discrimination, and gender-based harassment expressed through derogatory comments, verbal bullying, offensive remarks, or negative attitudes towards or about women. Participant narrative examples include telling a woman apprentice that she is physically unable to keep up with men in the industry, telling someone they cannot do something because they are girls or women, or lastly, implying that women are helpless or useless in certain aspects of the job.

An added pressure is the expectation of women to dress a certain way in funeral service, a pattern throughout the participant narratives and that presents an open target for sexual objectification. Dress became an unavoidable topic as so much focus of funeral service is on presentation. The narrative data indicates that many funeral service professionals continue to police and control not only students' bodies but also funeral directors, men and women, by restricting specific shoe wear, hair color and style, nail polish, facial hair, and tattoos.

Gendering Interactions. Findings support the third gendering interaction process, as shown in Figure 16. Patriarchal and androcentric ways of thinking perpetuate gendered power in daily interactions. The women in this study felt like they could not voice their concerns in fear that their future was in the perpetrators' hands. They felt torn between speaking up and remaining professional and were sometimes scared to report issues because they felt they did not have anyone to go to or trust. Annie and Josephine confirmed that family dynamics within the funeral homes made it difficult; like so many others, they felt they had nobody to turn to.

Claire expressed she has actively "just been trying to maintain my professionalism, but also that balance of sticking up for myself. I never want him to think he can just push me around. So, I try hard to maintain that fine line." Often, women in this study felt the need to win approval of the person(s) in power, yet they tried to appease the situation by re-engaging which created a lose-lose situation. Claire Smith reported:

I tried to flatter him a little bit and be like, 'I'd really like to learn from you. I think you're really good at what you do.' And I tried to facilitate asking questions and then it became, "Well, you're asking too many questions to be successful."

Claire feared being honest because she did not want to seem like a liability or potentially endanger her job.

The research findings uncover persistent microaggressions, one of the most extensive problems. These microaggressions specifically occur within the funeral home component of education exclude, demean, insult, oppress, or express hostility. Hazel

explained how these microaggressions "just build and build and build" and "then as they get more comfortable, it just progresses, and it weighs on you, and you get burn out."

These appear to be the most prominent and perpetuate a division across positions and create a hostile environment. The constant state of feeling devalued, disrespected, and discouraged produces anger, frustration, and harmful psychological consequences.

Microaggressions (microinsults, microassaults, microinvalidations) may seem harmless, but in reality, they shape educational opportunities and experiences. Sue and Spanierman (2020) found the "inequities in employment and education are not so much the result of overt racism, sexism, or bigotry but the unintentional, subtle, and invisible microaggressions that place members of marginalized groups at a disadvantage" (p. 26).

In other words, it is the hidden microaggressions that come up daily in gendering interactions that place women at a disadvantage in the funeral industry.

Gender Construction of the Individual. Furthermore, the findings also support Acker's (1990) theory regarding pressures of internal gender construction of an individual by choice of appropriate work, language use, awareness of posture, dress, and doing gender, as represented in Figure 16. It should be noted that this is not gender-specific, but that "doing gender" or daily performances affect everyone. Specific to this study, one participant, Annie, shared,

I've got to go in with that confidence, show them I know what I'm doing, take no crap, and sometimes I have to be a little bit more stern with people than I would like to be just because I have to prove myself.

She described that she is conscious of her gender within the organization and presents herself as more authoritarian. Josephine also shared she thinks her gender primarily influenced her attitude and mindset. She elaborated:

So just from the beginning, knowing that I'd have to work harder and have more confidence than my male counterparts to be taken seriously. Then, I think it's learning the simple, stupid things. I don't know if this is just thing I do, or other people, but if I'm at a funeral, I won't put my hands together in front of me because it's a very feminine posture. I'll put them behind me because it's more masculine. I feel like I've been taken a little bit more seriously like that, so it's kind of learning those little things along the way.

Josephine was describing an additional challenge women students face. There is a hidden layer or added pressure of "doing gender" and consciously thinking of their actions.

Hazel explained she had to present herself in a particular way to families. She believed because she looks younger, she could not get away with not wearing a lot of makeup:

... because then people would treat me like a child. That component is definitely important, especially when you look younger. Because if you don't look professional, they're not going to respect you and they're not going to truly believe that you can take care of their loved one. It always takes a shot at your ego.

Hazel also went against the pressure to display gender-appropriate attitudes and gender roles and described herself as a very outspoken woman, which often got her in trouble and had grave effects on her experience.

I was a very outspoken woman because I was trying to learn, I was trying to do things, I felt like I was constantly being punished because I kept having to prove myself to them. And it was just an infuriating cycle because the more I'd have to speak up to get any shred of respect in that firm, the more they would try and fight me.

Her payback for speaking up and standing up for herself was retaliation by revenge scheduling, which affected her learning opportunities again. The last of Acker's (1990) gendered processes is organizational logic which aligns with the idea that jobs and hierarchies, and substructures, imply gender neutrality but in theory this only preserves the mainstream.

Preserving the Mainstream

I use mainstreaming to define the result of the way things have always been as discussed by the participants' stories. The findings reveal the experience of women in mortuary science and argue how being a woman in mortuary science education bumps up against the gendered norms, social processes, and interactions and how norms and continued practices reinforce "malestream" and patriarchal beliefs. For example, the continued idea that an ideal worker only demonstrates masculine ethics and values adds to the rejection of women entering the funeral industry. This ideology has brought many challenges to the participants lived experiences. Preserving the mainstream became a theme through listening to the stories and events in which women felt that funeral service was hesitant to change or embrace diversity. Diversity in funeral service continues to grow. As educators, mentors, and directors, we cannot keep turning people away that do

not reinforce the invisible standards and unwritten patriarchal rules that perpetuate environments of hostility and chilliness—making it hard for non-traditional people to enter and remain in the industry.

In the last 10 years, there have been so many changes in funeral service from every direction, and COVID-19 progressed the industry even further. Everything from the original business model to the changing consumers to generational and gender issues are causing a crack in the foundation of funeral services. Leili McMurrough (2021) wrote a telling blog on the Cremation Association of North America website confirming that there are five generations in the workplace for the first time in history. She also suggested just because someone is of one generation does not mean they will necessarily fit the “labels,” but rather, those labels (Traditionalist, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, Gen Z) should be considered hints on how to most effectively connect and work with people. Her article also provided tips for managing millennials. McMurrough (2021) went on to say, "planning for the future includes the millennial and Gen Z employee" and "when funeral professionals learn the right approaches to working with the different generations, it alleviates a great deal of stress and frustration in the workplace" (para. 18). These principles are no different when applied to gender. As educators, we must let the student tell us who they are and their limitations or boundaries: Every person/individual is different just like every “body” we embalm is different. The goal here is inclusion and open-mindedness.

Finding 2: Participants felt that their gender is either hyper-focused on or disregarded completely (gender blind).

Conceptualized ideas and dialogues in organizations originated from the standpoint of men, and therefore men's experiences are seen as the one truth or as representing all humans. Gender is difficult to discern when only man's logic has been accounted for. We, as a society, have come to understand that man equals human when that is not the case (Acker, 1990,1992a; Britton & Logan, 2008, Pilcher & Whelehan, 2017; Wade & Ferree, 2021). Organizational logic and its substructures, jobs, and hierarchies imply gender neutrality. This study's findings reveal that being a woman led either to heightened visibility or being difficult to see, otherwise known as gender blind; there was no in-between.

In the first instance, heightened visibility, participants described being constantly monitored and their gender being blamed for their lack of being a good fit or not able to complete a task. Overgeneralizations in the data were framed as jokes like "phones are like women because they're just so temperamental" or hateful comments like "this is why women shouldn't be funeral directors" and stereotyping all women as emotional, weak, or passive. These all-inclusive claims about a certain group gives rise to stereotype threat. Participants shared there was an increased pressure to be better or to prove themselves to others and, at times, felt at risk of confirming negative stereotypes (Steele et al., 2002). Through interpretation, participants were worried about confirming women were weaker, and all felt a need to do what men can do, but better. This could lead to women becoming physically hurt or added stressors like unnecessary pressure or anxieties

Secondly, some women who participated felt like their gender, perspectives, and experiences were never heard or considered and they felt they were not represented. This

phenomenon is known as gender blindness. Acker (1990) described gender blindness in her work, but it was not until recently that the term was coined. According to Lane (2021), gender blindness is a term that describes treating all genders the same regardless of their biological or historical differences. Members of a group with this ideology may choose not to see differences between genders which can be harmful. This emerging culture of gender-blindness has created another way to allow women's issues to be swept under the rug and furthered gender inequalities. From listening to the participants describe their practicum experience, gender blindness is present in organizational logic, jobs, and their substructures. For example, Claire shared, "I think it's pretty common across the funeral industry as a whole is we're pretty lacking in the HR departments and the employee handbook. I mean, there really isn't anything like that."

Overall, participants noted the concept of "how to be a woman funeral director" was overlooked and hardly discussed. No one talked about physical or emotional struggles, or how weight/height difference affects different aspects of the job. Perhaps instead of getting frustrated or raising voices as the participants shared in this study, educators should teach them ways to be successful or not create a fearful environment where they are scared to ask for help.

Finding 3: “Bodied processes” and embodiment or consideration of the whole being are not welcome.

This research proves that several components of an individual's identity interact with gender. Gender is not the only component that affects the experiences of women. This study found that age, race/ethnicity, body size, religion, sexual orientation, and

normal expression of "bodied" processes affected the participants' educational journey by making it more challenging and creating unnecessary barriers. As Acker (1990) described, a bodied and gendered person may have emotions and sexuality and may choose to procreate.

Phrases like "whenever it was just men, we didn't have to worry about people's feelings" ultimately deny them their freedom of emotional expression.

Hazel described demonstrating the controlling of emotions, "and you just have to sit there and smile because you're at work. But on the inside, you're just screaming because they're being extremely bigot[ed] and rude and you can't do anything about it because that's unprofessional." Annie also described an example of controlling emotions:

that shift of compassion in women and being able to just fight it, fight off how you're feeling and put your best foot forward I think that has definitely been a positive change with women being in the funeral industry.

Wade and Ferree (2019) suggested taking notice that "*all* the things that make us who we are shape our individual personality traits, emotional tendencies, cognitive abilities, and physical potential" (p. 60). By not allowing these expressions, organizations ultimately control members' gender and body Claire added such thoughtful insight:

I think sometimes the critique of having a woman in the industry is that you're "too emotional" or whatever. And I think that level of empathy is very important and it can really help balance out some things in the funeral home.

When it comes to sexuality, participants naturally brought it up in conversations proving that it is an essential part that makes up a human being. One participant, who was

open about her sexuality at work, could not pinpoint whether it was her sexuality or gender that affected her treatment. Another participant described having to be performative because she was not open about being a queer woman and how hurt she was when others put down the LGBTQ+ community. The findings of another study conducted by the LSE Business Review ranks funeral service as the 11th queerest profession in the US. (Cummins, 2021). After speaking to the author of this article, Eleanor Cummins, she shared how she attended the National Funeral Director Convention and learned just how separated the industry really is regarding sexuality. She described attending a LGBTQ+ continuing education course where she experienced nothing but clashing ideologies and tense atmosphere. Eleanor recalled that some business owners would rather push back and threaten to retire than learn about others. At the national convention, Eleanor Cummins interviewed Glenda Stansbury, educator, teacher, trainer, and seminar developer who predicted:

“they” will be replaced by women, bilingual, queer people—a whole range of funeral directors who can do a traditional embalming and burial, plus a cremation, an aquamation, a human composting, and any other service a family might dream up.

Lastly, findings demonstrate how pregnancy is not equated into the picture, not in forms, research, or organizational substructures. Evidence from their narratives indicates education is in dire need of updates that consider women's perspectives and bodied processes. Three young women shared their frustration that there were no resources,

including in school, research, or employee handbooks, regarding pregnancy “do or don’ts” while working in a funeral home.

The topic of pregnancy was a surprising finding and was a blind spot for me as the researcher as I am not a mother. We, as educators, are expressing there is no room for human reproduction or motherhood in an organization. Jane said her pregnancy was a first for her funeral home in all hundred-and-some years. She specified, "because it's been male-dominated for so long, navigating what I was allowed to do as far as my health and still being able to do my job ... it was new for all of us." The lack of resources made Jane's experience of navigating practicum while pregnant difficult. For example, prenatal health, limitations on lifting, and effects of embalming on pregnant women and/or baby.

Similarly, Josephine, a recent newlywed, hoped to have children one day, but her search for information came up empty. She mentioned, “I can’t find hardly anything. It’s all word of mouth, at least that I’m seeing, and then you don’t know who to trust.” Not having these resources available is inappropriate and further proves that by ignoring gender differences, we are creating a non-representative culture. The numbers continue to prove this upward trend in women enrolling will not go away. When speaking to Josephine, I asked how she felt the mortuary educational programs could better serve women entering the profession? She responded:

This one, I think, the main thing is kind of education of just how to be a woman in funeral directing ... There's just no education on how [to] handle that, whether it's things like pregnancy, or just in general, how do you balance all of that?

Frances revealed a lead funeral director told her "he could easily push to get her fired if she were ever to become pregnant" because she would be rendered useless and unable to embalm or go on calls. This is another example of how women's bodies are used as grounds for control and exclusion. Not only is what he is saying illegal, but he was insinuating she would be of no use, even though there is no existing research proving any need for pregnancy restrictions.

Not until recently did the National Funeral Director Association hire a scientific consulting firm to conduct an exposure study on the use of formaldehyde in embalming, something that has not been tested in almost four decades. The results of this study could determine if the chemical presents an unreasonable risk to human health or the environment. The study, currently underway, will be a multi-phase assessment and is expected to take until 2025. The study will "include a range of exposure scenarios for workers in the profession." I am anxious to see what this means and how the results may directly impact the profession.

In summary, emotions, sexuality, procreation, embodiment or consideration of the whole being are not welcomed, especially in a workplace setting. The separation behind mind and body must continue to be challenged as we are all embodied beings. As Pilcher and Whelehan (2017) put it, embodiment is the concept of understanding the body as an unfinished biological and social phenomenon.

Implications

These research findings informed and created more depth of understanding from a silenced gender perspective. This study allowed women to be heard and empowered to

use their voices. Through the participants' words, I paint a daunting picture of the journey for women while progressing through mortuary education and maintain optimism for what the future holds. The findings identified in this study contribute to research, theory, and practice.

Research

There is minimal empirical research about the funeral service industry or mortuary science education, let alone any focused-on women mortuary students. This study was unique in so many ways, especially in its methodology. This study was unique in so many ways, especially in its methodology. More qualitative research of this kind will be necessary to identify program strengths and weaknesses as higher education continues to change and collaborate with outside companies by way of internships. Therefore, I hope this research serves as groundwork for future academic researchers (STEM programs or even broader), who will need to conduct similar qualitative research as each major, field, or industry is unique and may face its own set of challenges. This study gives access to never heard before experiences and perspectives, which provide an increased holistic understanding of the challenges related to women students, especially in programs that require a practicum/internship.

Findings in Chapters V and VI suggest significant improvements will need to be made to retain women in funeral service. This research is crucial to jumpstarting much-needed conversations to promote change in formal education and practicum/internships. For example, findings point to the need for open and honest communication between

educators and students where women may voice physical limitations or feelings without fear of retaliation.

Theory

Through utilization of a feminist theoretical perspective, this study revealed bias and inequities in various interpersonal settings. Utilizing this overarching lens exposed social problems and issues in mortuary education that were otherwise disregarded. The results of this study added insight and overall support to feminist theory, gender theory, and organizational theory and reinforced the idea that you cannot categorize women into a single category. No one clear form of feminist thought was demonstrated among participants even within the same age group. The findings suggest every woman has individual thought processes and worldviews.

This work expands and builds upon Acker's (1990) theory because words like “mainstream” and “intersectionality” were understood differently at that time and concepts like gender blindness and cisheteropatriarchal had not yet been expressed. Active memos and reflection allowed me to see the connections between past and present literature, providing language to describe, and name experiences as they are presented in this study.

By revealing their perceptions, narratives, and meanings, the study filled a gap and advanced knowledge related to gendered theory by further identifying how gendered processes, gender blindness, and disembodiment beliefs affects women’s already gendered education. Moreover, as part of a sub concept of Acker’s (1990) theory, this research was able to add to organizational theory discourse and frameworks, more

specifically organizational culture and change theory, by exposing how organizations and institutions are inadvertently gendered and can affect the lived experiences of women in mortuary education.

Practice

This research adds to practice by providing educational leaders across the industry insight into the lived experiences of women mortuary students and potential ways to improve or adapt programs to support them better. It is adaptable to many men-dominated institutions or industries such as fire and emergency management, engineering, or construction. By implementing these recommendations, institutions will ensure women students are given an equitable opportunity in the funeral service industry.

It was striking that, when presented the opportunity to write an open and honest letter to whoever, a majority of the participants chose to write to their preceptor or mentor. The end results corroborate that the participants appreciate and are grateful for the individuals who influenced their educational journey. The majority of the letters expressed gratitude with some underlying messages or tones. For example, though the letters thanked preceptors and mentors, there was usually a brief mention of the challenges present, like “misogyny,” “pushback,” or “not always positive.” By dissecting the letters, I noticed a significant mood shift of the letters compared to the interviews. This could mean several things: a) They are hopeful for the future and wanted to express a deep appreciation to those that had an impact, or b) they feared putting their negative thoughts and word on paper because of fear of retaliation or perhaps they did not want to

commit to publishing such a negative piece in their own handwriting. Two of the ten participants used this method as an outlet to express anger, frustration, and satire.

George Lovas (2011) suggested funeral directors, owners, and preceptors look at themselves and stated that the entire internship process needs to improve before working on the formal educational component. Similarly, findings suggest both parties step away from the blame game and acknowledge that nothing can be improved until differing perspectives are heard.

Recommendations

This study illuminates that mortuary programs and funeral homes, and all other stakeholders must no longer contribute to the problem but instead must become the solution. The time has come to pause, reflect, reevaluate the beloved systems of the past and consider revisions to better support women and all students entering mortuary education. The findings conclude women students and recent graduates who have reflected on their time in school felt little to no advocacy or allyship. The following recommendations section is organized into three parts: Stakeholders, Leadership, and Policy.

Stakeholders

For example, Claire Smith's narrative put the responsibility back on the stakeholders (universities, colleges, mortuary programs, funeral associations, boards, and funeral homes) and how they can all work together as a more inclusive industry. Regardless of where the student attends mortuary school, the funeral home component should not be siloed from university standards. Departments may need to involve career

development centers associated with the university as an added layer of protection and non-bias sanctuary for students and recent graduates to seek advice. I also suggest mortuary programs work with diversity, equity, and inclusion departments/consultants to help facilitate and implement programs and initiatives designed to expand awareness, understanding, and appreciation for culture, ethnicity, social, and spiritual diversity in the classroom and beyond. Additionally, mortuary programs should consider adding seminars or dedicating time to teaching gender differences and inclusivity as it relates to funeral service. Moreover, mortuary education needs to consider adding more education on ethnic backgrounds (e.g., hair and skin) so graduates feel confident in serving all variations and forms of people unlike themselves.

Claire also recommended state funeral directors associations get involved by talking to the owners. Whether it be at the mortuary program or industry level, adding a culturally relevant mentorship program would give voice to gender diversity but also other underrepresented groups. Discussions at conferences or continuing education centered on the realities of what it is like to be in funeral service will more adequately prepare the new generation of funeral directors for possible challenges. I also suggest associations involve a third party to guide interactive workshops or exercises that explore racial identity, diversity, inclusion, sensitivity, and unconscious bias in today's modern workplace. This would be effective because it would promote open and honest dialogue, increase awareness of unconscious bias which would avoid its negative effect on recruiting, hiring, and other business decisions. If we, as stakeholders of the profession, are genuinely interested in the industry's survival, then educators need to begin actively

listening and adapting to students' learning styles and educational needs. The importance of getting everyone involved in the conversations, no matter how difficult, cannot be stressed enough.

Leadership

My recommendations for leaders in the industry are rooted in culturally relevant leadership, as discussed in Chapter II. Leaders can be long-time educators, preceptors, funeral directors, embalmers, mentors, or anyone in a prominent role over a student. First, we, as leaders, should take time to reflect on our own beliefs and identify flaws in our overall educational and occupational systems. Choosing to ignore current realities or idealize a previous blissful state of funeral service perpetuates inequities. This will require a change in the thinking of the people in power to promote and implement change.

Secondly, there is an absolute need for both excellence and equity in education and understanding that students and recent graduates hold other social identities, including race, language, gender, faith, ability, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status. All students deserve to be treated with respect and given equal attention. As presented by Eck (2006), we do this by engaging and interacting with diversity, *seeking* to understand those who are different from us, being trustworthy and reliable, and being open. Respect and appreciation is earned by valuing diverse perspectives.

Lastly, we as leaders and educators are there to serve as change agents, protect, and show these women how to be successful, not belittle or degrade them because of their gender or biological makeup. As requested by participants in this study, perhaps it is the

time for formal educators who are connected to the outside funeral community to serve as leaders in change and be part of the awakening and shifting of others' realities or beliefs.

Change can begin by reflecting culture and values, seeking to understand the multitudes of people, personalities, generational views, and communication styles, and then speaking up respectfully. Like Beachum (2011), I also suggest personal development as a means to raise consciousness levels, leading to inclusion of all students regardless of race or gender, breaking down any previous notions or beliefs or stereotypes, and actively confronting misidentification.

Policy

Universities/ Colleges

If universities, community colleges, or trade schools require an affiliation prior to entering into school or during practicum, then perhaps the schools should be more involved in helping find an affiliation with a safe unbiased funeral home with updated policies and practices. I recommend establishing or maintaining an active working relationship with career development centers, career services, or job placement specialists. These specialists will keep roles within the university neutral but also lend aid with gender-neutral and culturally relevant policies and practices. They can also serve as an advocate for students, graduates, and alumni.

There is an urgency to create safe places, protocols, and policies that protect all students entering the business. As Kenevich (2011) stated, women were "literally an afterthought in the industry;" thus, rules, policies, and even curriculum remained unchanged. Additive approaches, like presuming the methods of teaching, policies, and

procedures from years ago can just be applied to this new group of people, is absurd. To add, performative representation is no longer working, and it is time to reflect an accurate representation of mortuary professionals. I recommend that universities/colleges, funeral homes, associations, and boards evaluate and adjust substructures as needed to include perspectives of not only women but also a diverse group to protect all parties involved. For example, I recommend that the curriculum be evaluated for gender inclusivity and that preceptor agreements have language that protects individuals identities outside of gender like pregnancy for their protection. Another example includes preceptor training presentations and forms need to include gendered topics like discrimination, gender bias, and gender-based harassment.

Funeral Homes

As supported by this research, more women entering this profession may choose to become pregnant during school or practicum or want to have a family in the future. Pregnancy and motherhood are aspects of their lives that can no longer be wished or threatened away.

Funeral homes participating in educating others, formally or informally, should not be excused from updating their policies and forms. It is my recommendation that all forms, packets, and employment information should actively be updated to include pregnancy, paid time off, Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) , and maternity/paternity leave. Today, a diverse group of individuals may be responsible for caregiving, and caregiving comes in many different forms. We must get out of the mindset that asking for work/life balance equates to lack of commitment (Slaughter, 2015). Family is a part of

life whether it be caring for a child, an aging parent, or a sick relative. Slaughter (2015) said, “we cannot control the fate of our career and family; insisting that we can obscures the deeper structures and forces that shape our lives and deflects attention from the larger changes that must be made” (p. 43). Family care is an everyone problem; on a broader scale, it is about fixing the organization and culture. According to Slaughter (2015), a tipping point often occurs when a caregiver can no longer balance it all.

The rigid inflexibility of a traditional workspace creates a disproportion in work/life and health balance. The women in this study felt isolated from their friends and family because of the demands of the job and schedule. They also felt lonely in the workplace. They noticed when they do not get invited to lunch or are the punchline of every joke. What little support the participants had in mortuary school or during practicum/internship stemmed from finding camaraderie with others going through similar experiences. The thought of women coming together to support each other because they all suffer intolerable work environments in silence validated my reasoning for doing this research tenfold. This study illustrates women in mortuary education want to have their voices heard, but they must be empowered to share. As mortuary education stands, women are silenced, fearful, and unprotected.

An underlying issue explored most recently was sexual harassment and its prevalence in the workplace, even in the death-care industry. This could explain high absenteeism, unexplained turnover, higher use of healthcare and mental health leave, and worker and manager loss of productivity (Campagno, 2021). The article also focused on prevention in the workplace. Several examples shared included:

- Conduct thorough pre-employment background screenings.
- Set clear standards, maintain detailed policies, and model expectations for acceptable behavior.
- Train new hires and regularly train existing employees.
- Provide multiple reporting options for victims
- Ensure that all employees know the procedure to report harassment.
- Include a non-retaliation clause and enforce it. The complaining party should not be punished in any way for a good faith claim, including any negative job impact.
- Thoroughly document and conduct a thorough investigation and resolve the situation (discipline or terminate) promptly.

Students are real people who have other obligations and identities and have enough challenges ahead of them without having to also worry about gender stereotypes, bias, and harassment. For this reason, communication must improve.

In the Oklahoma Funeral Director Association newsletter, Pierce (2022) wrote that keeping an open mind and showing appreciation goes a long way and added how showing interest in the apprentice encourages a partnership. I suggest rather than stomping around, yelling, throwing things, or degrading others during stressful times, as reported by participants, educators remain as positive as possible, empathize because we are all learning, offer advice, or take advantage of teachable moments. By building rapport and being courteous, educators gain the students' commitment and determination to grow, succeed, and continue within the industry long term.

In summary, gender differences certainly exist, but that should not be the fundamental reason funeral professionals cannot work together or learn from each other to keep the industry going. It is critical at this moment in time to raise the level of motivation and inclusion for women entering funeral service because, for too long, they have been left out of the equation. It is time to learn and listen to a new set of perspectives, the silenced ones. In the above environment, interns will gain the most knowledge and confidence, ultimately producing “trained, qualified, and educated” women funeral directors. Evaluating our own beliefs and being open to diversity, a changing workforce culture, and different ideologies is how the industry will survive. This includes listening to and accepting, the current new enrollee and graduation reality. By exposing the harsh truths in this study, I expect this research to start intentional and important conversations to better support today's students, which in turn will support a thriving funeral services industry for the long-term.

Limitations

As discussed in Chapter III, the research study's most obvious limitation is the context and time in which it took place. Another limitation of this study is the sample size; nine of the ten participants identified as white, limiting racial perceptions. By looking at the constructs of gender, I excluded other constructs of identity, race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation. These aspects of identity play a role in the women's experience and their stories. However, this study looked specifically at issues relating to gender and organizations. Because of the smaller sample size, the findings are not generalizable to all institutions; however, the nature of this research enables some aspects

to apply to similar educational programs and can initiate meaningful conversations.

Another limitation is that I had a previous relationship with three participants, which led to particular and detailed personal disclosures. And lastly, my personal experience with the topic limited how I interpreted the data. Some of the narratives participants shared left me nothing short of stunned. After the interviews, I would often relive the countless degrading experiences, the “look” of disappointment, and memories of the blatant disrespect I experienced. Many emotions fled over me day after day.

Future Research

This qualitative research design shall serve as a building block and model for other future studies or programs, especially those requiring a practicum/internship or collaboration with outside companies and serves as a guide for future scholars who wish to develop or "play" in the basic qualitative research realm. This unconventional and innovative design provides a roadmap of how mismatched theoretical perspectives, asking field-specific questions, and applying new approaches to problems, allows researchers to create something unique to support a new field of research.

Quantifying the results could confirm if the findings are happening elsewhere, and on a larger scale. The findings of this study should serve as a grounding piece for further research within funeral services like the emotion and care work, gender pay gap, or generational communication challenges. Using an *a priori* feminist framework to develop more specific answers would also be beneficial. Further research in this area may include specific areas of intersectionality and embodiment, including exploring sexuality. Other ideas include document analysis research, state-specific case studies, and perhaps getting men's perspectives in the industry but through a feminist lens. Other areas to be explored

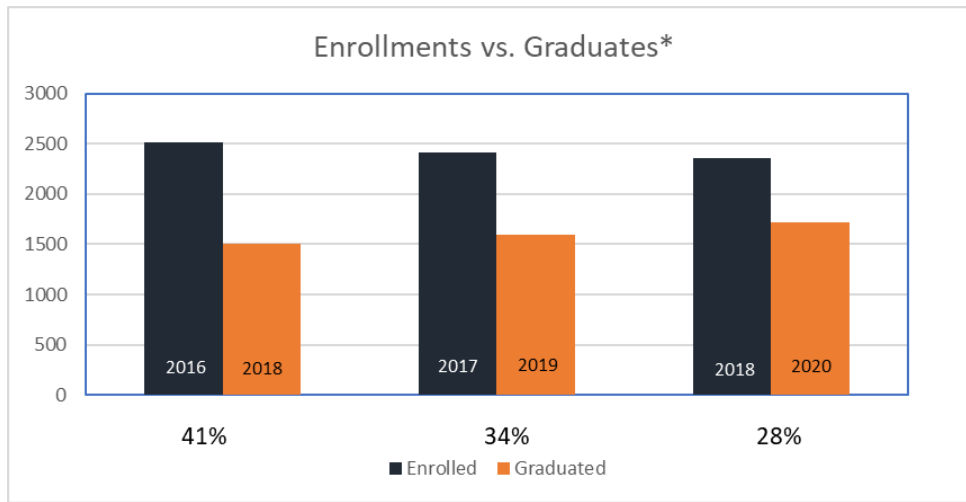
include bridging or collaborating with several stakeholders investigating the queuing theory and the feminization of the occupation through specific feminist and gendered lenses.

Recently, funeral service leaders across the nation began the much-needed conversation about the need for attrition research. They should consider researching where all those missing licensees go or why they leave the profession. As mentioned, the funeral service industry realizes there is a leaky pipeline, yet no research exists regarding professionals' unexplained high turnover. Burnout has always been the assumed answer; however, the research findings suggest that on top of occupational burnout, there is “gendering” burnout due to always having to overcompensate or prove their worth, in line with emotional labor.

While enrollment trends have remained consistent, attrition rates are another part of the story that needs to be explored through a qualitative lens. The American Board of Funeral Service Administration Reports report that attrition-withdrawal from programs are due to various reasons like transfer to another mortuary institution, changed majors, academic reasons, financial reasons, personal reasons, and others. For example, in Figure 17, new enrollees for 2016 were at 2,511 compared to 2018’s graduating number of 1,501, meaning 41% of students had not graduated on time or had not graduated. I am happy to report that number decreased to 28% in 2020.

Figure 17

Enrollments vs. Graduates



Note. This figure is based on two-year programs. Not all mortuary science students graduate in two years.

By doing field-specific research on the reasons why people have left, perhaps we can learn why we keep losing people and why the directors' attrition rate after graduation is so low. For example, in Oklahoma, over 272 licensed funeral professionals are not working in a funeral home (T. Stiles, personal communication, August 25, 2022). To my knowledge, many schools or boards have not investigated these numbers. We need to understand why the workforce numbers do not represent the numbers of graduates.

Final Thoughts

Independent trade schools, community colleges, departments at the university level, or state internships, all provide a component of the educational experience and are central to funeral service education. In summary, men have always represented the industry, and accepting others has proven difficult; which leads to further exclusion and marginalization of women.

It was an honor to meet and interview 10 ambitious women who continue progressing. They truly exemplified bravery and courage by speaking about topics that are often just accepted. Every aspect of being a student, practicum student, intern/apprentice, or funeral director/embalmer are affected by gender; however, despite the many challenges and barrier presented, they proved to be committed to an industry they love or have a calling for. Powerful gendered messages are delivered; I am just not okay with staying silent about it anymore. I firmly believe that the quality of teaching can either facilitate women students' entry into the mortuary science world or add to the existing problem demonstrated throughout this dissertation. Failure to teach, mentor, respect, or guide in all aspects of the profession will only create inferior funeral directors or influence whether funeral professionals leave the industry. This revolutionary change of gender dynamics within the funeral industry can be positive.

As I write these final thoughts, I find myself full of emotions because I am an embodied individual who cares deeply. Through in-depth conversations and analysis, I learned that long-standing gendered assumptions and a lack of honesty and respect limit women's potential in the industry. The discoveries viewed through Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations uncovered several societal constructs and gendered processes women in men-dominated institutions face and demonstrate how men are still very much equal human, individual, or person in our profession. Conclusions and discussions of this study can decrease students' gendered experiences and allow for adjustments to be made in the educational system to better support the growing number of women students.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Untold Experiences from the Perspectives of Women Mortuary Science Students:

A Qualitative Study

Greetings!

First, thank you for giving me time out of your busy lives to present a topic of interest that is very near and dear to my heart. As part of my research, I am conducting a study about women in mortuary science programs and would love to have you participate in the first of its kind.

Your participation would consist of:

- A two-part interview series (interview one 45-60 min; interview two 60-90 min)
- Handwriting a letter

Your academic progression and grades in the program and your place of internship will not be influenced by your participation in this research or lack thereof. However, if you do choose to participate, your experiences and stories as a student will remain confidential and will not have identifying information in the final report. The outcomes of this study will provide insight on how to adapt educational programs, both academically and professionally, to ensure students are given an equitable opportunity in the funeral service industry. Your ideas, perceptions, and experiences as mortuary science students is a central factor to this research.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. Your participation will be rewarded through a financial incentive of an Amazon e-gift cards totaling \$30 dollars for full participation.

If this sounds like something you want to be a part of please click the Qualtrics link below.

https://okstateches.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8BQI4XJJ7F8T6NU

Please sign the consent form and fill in the demographic questionnaire to its entirety if you desire to participate. We will be contact soon.

Thank you SO much.

Lucia Dickinson

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

Untold Experiences from the Perspectives of Women Mortuary Science Students:

A Qualitative Study

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this doctoral dissertation research study with me, Lucia Dickinson, doctoral candidate at Oklahoma State University, under the direction of Dr. Amber Manning-Ouellette Assistant Professor, Oklahoma State University (OSU). This form outlines the purpose and provides a description of your involvement and rights as a participant.

Background Information

As part of my research, I am conducting a study to explore current and former mortuary science students' journeys, lived educational and professional experiences, and perceptions of your overall mortuary science education. A secondary goal is to generate recommendations to improve learning environments in mortuary science programs and professional settings for all students. We ask that you read this form and ask any question you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Procedures

If you agree to participate your participation would consist of:

- A two-part interview series (interview one 45-60 min; interview two 60-90 min)
- Handwriting a letter

I hope to conduct two, semi-structured interviews with each participant via videoconferencing platforms such as Zoom and upload the recording to a private OSU one drive. Each zoom link sent out will be password protected and university sponsored. No identifying information will be linked to recordings. The recording will then be transcribed and sent back to you via email to ensure accuracy. The file will be encrypted for your protection. Transcriptions will be password protected and uploaded to OSU one drive with no identifying information. Your experiences and stories as a student will remain confidential and will not have identifying information in the final report. All reasonable steps will be taken to protect your identity.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

There are no known risks associated with this project, which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. There are no known direct benefits to you other than the opportunity to discuss and process your experiences.

Overall Benefit: I truly believe that if as educators we understand how you are progressing through the programs and what potential barriers you may face then perhaps together, we can make adjustments in the system to better support the growing number of women students. Although you may not see the immediate improvements, know that your stories and shared experiences will provide insight on how to adapt educational programs in the future, both academically and professionally, to ensure these students are given an equitable opportunity in the funeral service industry. You are a central factor to this research!

Compensation

You will receive a financial incentive of an Amazon e-gift card of \$10 after completing interview one and scheduling the second interview. An additional e-gift card of \$20 will be emailed after the completion of the second interview. I will use the email address provided in the demographic's questionnaire.

Confidentiality

The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially and the records of this study will be kept private. During transcription phase, your direct identifier will be removed and replaced with the pseudonym that you selected. Thereinafter, saved documents or the final product will be saved utilizing the preferred pseudonym name. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the data will be destroyed. Only the researcher will have access to the data.

We will collect information through the Qualtrics demographic questionnaire, Zoom interviews, and in the form of a letter. All information provided will be stored on the OSU one drive and each file will be password protected and, on a password, protected computer. All transcriptions will be saved to the OSU one drive and under the pseudonym name you chose. If for some reason, hard copies are needed, they will be kept in a locked drawer in a restricted-access office. When the data has been analyzed is no longer needed and a final product is complete, recordings, transcriptions, and letters will be deleted at the end of the study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time. The alternative is to not participate. You can skip any questions that make you uncomfortable and can stop the interview at any time. Your academic progression and grades in the program and your place of internship will not be influenced by your participation in this research or lack thereof.

Contacts and Questions

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human research participants at Oklahoma State University has reviewed and approved this study. Your questions, suggestions, and concerns are important to me so please feel free to ask any questions

about the study or methods, please contact the Principal Investigator, Lucia Dickinson at 405-315-7674, or email lucia.dickinson@okstate.edu or to my doctoral advisor, Dr. Amber Manning- Ouellette, (405) 744-9445, amber.manning-ouellette@okstate.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer or would simply like to speak with someone other than the research team about concerns regarding this study, please contact the IRB at (405) 744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu. All reports or correspondence will be kept confidential.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have my questions answered.

- I wish to participate in the research described above, have read the consent form, and agree to be recorded

- I do not wish to participate in the research described above.

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Contact Information

1. Please provide your personal contact information.
 - a. Preferred name (for interview purpose only):
 - b. Email address:
 - c. To protect your privacy, what would you like your fictitious name (First and Last) to be used when I write up the research:

Demographic Questions

2. Which category below includes your age
 - a. 17 or younger
 - b. 18 – 20
 - c. 21 – 29
 - d. 30 – 39
 - e. 40 – 49
 - f. 50 – 59
 - g. 60 or older
 - h. Prefer not to respond
3. What is your gender?
 - a. Man
 - b. Woman
 - c. Other
 - d. Prefer not to respond
4. Race/Ethnicity
 - a. African-American/African/Black/Caribbean
 - b. Asian/Pacific Islander
 - c. White
 - d. Hispanic/Latino
 - e. Native American
 - f. Other
 - g. Prefer not to respond
5. Educational Level:
 - a. Junior or below
 - b. Senior
 - c. Graduate of a Mortuary Program
 - d. Transfer Student
 - e. Second degree
 - f. Prefer not to respond

6. Are you currently either 1) doing your internship/practicum at a funeral home as part of the coursework or 2) a recent graduate (within the last 12 months) doing your internship for licensing requirement?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. N/A

7. If you answered N/A on question 6, are you a recent graduate (within the last 12 months) that was unable to complete the state required internship for whatever reason?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

8. How long have you been working in a funeral home?
 - a. Less than 3 months
 - b. 3-6 months
 - c. 6-9 months
 - d. 9-12 months
 - e. More than one year

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW ONE GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

1. Tell me about yourself. What your educational background?
 - a. What do you like to do for fun?
2. How did you become interested in mortuary science? Describe why you wanted to become a funeral director.
3. Describe what qualities and skills you possess that made you a good candidate for funeral school?
4. What are your future goals?

EDUCATION

1. Describe the organizational make-up of your mortuary science program (i.e. classes needed? how many faculty? Gender of faculty and students? What college is mortuary science in?
2. Describe your experiences in the mortuary science program.
 - a. What do you enjoy?
 - b. What is challenging?
 - c. What are areas of opportunity in the program?
3. Describe your biggest supporter.
 - a. What do they do that is supportive?
4. When do you feel unsupported and why?
5. What expectations did you have about your gender and experiences in the mortuary program?

INTERNSHIP

1. Describe a typical day as an intern.
 - a. Probing questions: duties or schedule? What you are you allowed to do and not to do?
2. What do you expect to gain out of your practicum/internship?
3. Describe what kinds of memorable experiences you have encountered during your internship?
 - a. Positive experiences?
 - b. Negative?
4. Now that you are working in the field, is the funeral profession what you expected to be?
 - a. In what ways has it satisfied your expectations?
 - b. In what ways has it not satisfied your expectations?
5. Describe any challenges (or roadblocks) you have experienced thus far.
 - a. How could your formal education and school have prepared you better for those?

Miscellaneous or Combo Questions

1. Describe your overall learning journey including formal and practical site.
2. The number of female/woman graduates continues to rise each year, how do you perceive the recent gender switch in mortuary science education affecting or playing into the industry as whole?

Open Letter Script

{ describe the why, describe open letter concept, and assign task }

Identify a someone (i.e. yourself, supervisor, peer, faculty, etc., someplace, or something you would like to write an open and honest letter to regarding your mortuary science educational experiences. This letter should be handwritten on notebook paper and at least one page in length. Take time to reflect on who and what has influenced your educational journey. Please write the letter in your own language, just as if you were writing to a friend or former partner. This is your truth and your opportunity to use your voice!

I ask that you bring your letter to the second interview so that you can share, and we can discuss further. Anything you share (including names or businesses) will remain anonymous.

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW TWO GUIDE

Summarize and reflect on the first interview

Lead into letter reading

EDUCATION

1. What would you say the strengths and weaknesses of your mortuary science program in assisting you on your journey to becoming a funeral director?
 - a. Describe the ways in which gender may have influenced your experiences in the program.
2. Have you considered leaving the program? If so, why?
3. Reflect on a time that you felt that you were treated differently by a faculty member (outside the department and inside) or any individual associated with your educational journey.
4. Describe your experience as a mortuary student and how it may differ from that of your peers in school.
5. Suppose I was a new female/woman student entering the program, what advice would you give to me to navigate and to succeed (graduation)?

INTERNSHIP

3. Tell me about your relationships and dynamics with faculty, staff, preceptors, mentors, funeral directors, embalmers, third parties (police, security guards, hospital staff, nurses, pastors, families, etc.).
4. Does your workload differ from that of your apprentice counterparts? If so, how?
5. Describe experiences where you felt like you were treated differently in the funeral home because of your gender.
6. Describe any experiences that made you feel uncomfortable about being a woman while doing your internship/practicum.
7. What do you consider to be the most difficult aspect of your gender while completing your internship?

MISCELLANEOUS

1. In what ways do you feel that your gender has influenced your educational journey?
2. What strategies did you employ while in school or during your internship that you believe led to your success?
3. What does it mean to be woman in a mortuary education program?
4. How do you feel mortuary education programs could better serve the women entering into the funeral profession?

APPENDIX F

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: 09/16/2021
Application Number: IRB-21-378
Proposal Title: UNTOLD EXPERIENCES FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF WOMEN MORTUARY SCIENCE STUDENTS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Principal Investigator: Lucia Dickinson
Co-Investigator(s):
Faculty Adviser: Amber Manning-Ouellette
Project Coordinator:
Research Assistant(s):

Processed as: Exempt
Exempt Category:

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in 45CFR46.

This study meets criteria in the Revised Common Rule, as well as, one or more of the circumstances for which continuing review is not required. As Principal Investigator of this research, you will be required to submit a status report to the IRB triennially.

The final versions of any recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are available for download from IRBManager. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be approved by the IRB. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, adviser, other research personnel, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any unanticipated and/or adverse events to the IRB Office promptly.
4. Notify the IRB office when your research project is complete or when you are no longer affiliated with Oklahoma State University.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact the IRB Office at 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Sincerely,
Oklahoma State University IRB

VITA

Lucia Dickinson

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Dissertation: UNTOLD EXPERIENCES FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF WOMEN
MORTUARY SCIENCE STUDENTS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Major Field: Educational Policy and Leadership Studies

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Policy and Leadership Studies at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in July, 2022.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Business Administration in Human Resource Management at Capella University, Minneapolis, Minnesota in 2017.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Funeral Service at University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma in 2011.

Experience:

University of Central Oklahoma

Full time, Tenure Track Instructor & Assistant Chair June 2017 – Present

Temporary, Non-Tenure Track, Practitioner-in-Residence Aug 2016 – Jun 2017

Service Corporation International

Funeral Director (2011-2014) and Combo/General Manager (2014 – July 2016)

Professional Memberships:

Oklahoma Funeral Director Association (OKFDA)

2011 - present