UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,

SANTA BARBARA

A Qualitative Examination of Discrimination After Death: The Distortion and Erasure of Transgender and Other Marginalized Post-Mortem Identities

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in Communication

by

Stephenson Brooks Whitestone

Committee in charge:

Professor Howard Giles, Co-chair

Professor Daniel Linz, Co-chair

Professor Karen Myers

Professor Jennifer Tyburczy

December 2022

The dissertation of Stephenson Brooks Whitestone is approved.

_____
Howard Giles, Committee Co-Chair

_____
Daniel Linz, Committee, Co-Chair

_____
Karen Myers

_____
Jennifer Tyburczy

December 2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This has been quite an adventure -- the iconic, “long and winding road.” I should apologize for making my list of acknowledgements so long. But the truth is, this list is much too short. I owe everything I have, everything I have accomplished, and everything that I have enjoyed to the people around me.

I will begin by thanking Dr. Carlos Cortés, professor emeritus of history at UC Riverside, who started me on this journey. Probably the first person I got to know in the Communication Department at UCSB was Tricia Taylor. Even before I applied to UCSB, she was my point person and general provider of knowledge about seemingly anything with regard to pursuing a doctorate in the department. Later, when I was accepted, she continued to provide valuable counsel and assistance, as did Tania Dunson and the other members of the fabulous UCSB Communication staff.

The faculty at UC Santa Barbara have been very kind to me throughout my time here. I particularly want to call out my dissertation team: Howard Giles, Daniel Linz, Karen Myers, and Jennifer Tyburczy. While taking his class in *Communication and Aging*, Howard Giles, my co-advisor, first introduced me to topics associated with queer death and end-of-life communication. With his encouragement, I continued to pursue this line of research – with a particular emphasis on the transgender community. I am also specifically indebted to Howie for his thoughtful notes that have helped to bring shape and coherency to this dissertation. His estimable knowledge in the fields of end-of-life communication and communicated identity has proven invaluable to my progress. I once begged Karen Myers to teach a class that she was not schedule to teach. But I knew that she had taught *Mixed Methods Research* in the past, and I was eager to learn sound

research practices outside the realm of quantitative analysis. I was very grateful when she agreed to teach the class, but I think I am even more grateful to her as an endless source of support and comfort as I have negotiated graduate study and graduate life. Jennifer Tyburczy, who has provided both an academic and emotional link to queer theory, has been a constant and enthusiastic supporter of me and my work since I arrived on campus. I was fortunate to take her class in *Queer Theory*, to see her interact with her undergrads, and to be exposed to many authors, writers and theorists in the queer canon. She was also the first person to mention the concept of "discrimination after death" – a moment that gave my research a clear direction and focus. Finally, I owe a great deal to Dan Linz, my co-advisor who has been a part of my journey since my first visit to UCSB. Dan should receive hazard pay for all the times he helped me overcome the challenges associated with my total unfamiliarity with the way that graduate study in a research institution is conducted. I'm absolutely certain that I wouldn't have made it this far without you, Dan.

I would also like to mention a few other faculty members and classmates who left their imprint on my work. People like Tristan Bridges, Young Ji Kim, Andy Merolla, and Dan Lane provided excellent academic counsel. But I like to think that they also became good friends. I want to thank my original graduate cohort: Sandi, Roselia, David, Katie, Freddy, Jacob, and Mohammed – we are bonded together forever. But I also want to acknowledge other dear friends in the department including Matt Giles, Afsoon Hansia, Monica Cornejo, Camille Grace, Avi McClelland-Cohen, and my official buddy, Nicole Zamanzedah. Unfortunately, I could not possibly list all of the research assistants who have helped me throughout my career at UCSB. But their contributions to my work were

invaluable, and they were some of the individuals who I became closest to during my time at UCSB.

I would also like to mention my family – most of whom are back on the East Coast – but who have been unconditionally supportive and understanding throughout my gender transition. To my brothers, Rob, Ken ,and Tom, my sisters-in-law, my nephews and nieces, and all of their families, I cannot thank you enough for embracing me and loving me today just as you did 25 years ago or 55 years ago. I also want to thank my ex-wife Pat and my stepson, Casey. It was Pat who saw me through much of my early explorations in gender. Later on, after we had gone our separate ways, I asked Pat what she really thought of me and my gender identity. Her response to that question has provided me with one of the guiding principles of my life. She said, "I accepted before I understood." It is that sense of trust and generosity of spirit that has helped our friendship endure a fairly tumultuous, but ultimately, happy (I think), 30 years.

I will conclude by mentioning the amazing transgender, fluid, and non-binary individuals I have met in my life. I was fortunate to begin that journey in Southern California where one could find a wealth of social, recreational, and support services designed specifically for trans people. I hesitate to name them because I will probably miss someone important, but I am going to try any way: Stephanie Rene, Divinyl, Gina and Nikki (founders of the Sin City Soiree), Ben and Lee Ann, Gina Ortiz, Lou Ann, Mika, Tiffany (now sadly deceased), Stephanie, Shelbe, Al, Victoria, Emi, Andrea, Roxy, Kymi, Kim, Savannah, Amber, Kevin, Sasha, Brenda, Veronica, Isabel, Samantha, and Shelley. Trans friendships meant so much in those early days, in the 2000's and early 2010's. Those were the days when an individual risked losing their family, their friends,

and their career simply by going out in public. Yet, so many did. They were my heroines and heroes then, and they are still my heroines and heroes today.

My longest close relationship in the trans community is with my friend, Mellissa. We met on MySpace, and although separated by 2,500 miles, we have shared the up-and-downs of trans life – from fun weekend get-aways to devastating divorces to heartfelt late-night chats. Some people are critical of social media (and deservedly so), but the internet has had an extraordinary impact on my life, and it has introduced me to some simply amazing people from all over the world. None more special to me than Mellissa. More recently, it was in the LA club scene that I met Taryn Murray. For the past 4 years – and throughout the composition of this dissertation – Taryn has been my rock. But, what a soft, sweet, and generous rock she is. Having her in my life has meant so much to me. She is a very special friend -- my roommate, my trans sister, and my co-cat mom to our beloved Maisie J. I'm not going to go so far as to say that Taryn saved my life during my dark depression of 2020, but let's just say she came pretty close. Thank you for everything, Taryn-misu.

I was fortunate in that, when I left L.A. to move to Santa Barbara, I met a whole new family of friends through the Santa Barbara Transgender Advocacy Network (SBTAN) and Lisa's Place, our adult transgender support and social group. I will be forever indebted to the SB-TAN crew for making me feel so welcome in my adopted town. This includes the loving parents who founded SBTAN, the board members, and the Lisa's Place chat attendees from whom I learned so much. I would particularly like to call out my co-facilitator during those years: Erica Tyre – who is my sister forever and was

my key support person through those often difficult times. If I were ever to say that I left my heart in Santa Barbara, you would find it at SBTAN.

Finally, I want to mention two of my best friends from my early days in the trans community, and two of the people who have had perhaps the greatest impact on my trans life, Nicci Tristan and Tricia Love. They have both passed away now, far too young, and each one broke my heart in her own way when she died. When a dear friend dies in the trans community, it is like losing a family member, and you never fully recover from that. I should also note that – while not directly mentioned – the echoes and memories from Nicci and Tricia's memorials have influenced my work here. In many ways, this work for me is not about identities or death or marginalized communities, it is about my friends. This dissertation is dedicated to all of them.

Abstract

A Qualitative Examination of Discrimination After Death: The Distortion and Erasure of Transgender and Other Marginalized Post-Mortem Identities

by

Stephenson Brooks Whitestone

This dissertation is comprised of three qualitative studies that examine the phenomenon of post-mortem discrimination (PMD). Using an innovative application of the communication theory of identity, this line of research is particularly focused on the process through which agents of the dominant culture become empowered to enact the identities of marginalized individuals after they die. The first two studies explore the persistent practice of families who de-transition their transgender or gender diverse (TGD) family members after they die. Communicative actions associated with this practice were examined through interviews with older (Study 1, aged 40 y. o. and above) and younger (Study 2, ages 18 to 30 y. o.) TGD adults. Findings showed that most TGD individuals had not engaged in end-of-life conversations (EOL) that could help them to preserve their identity after death, nor did they intend to engage in the near future. Other findings revealed a TGD community that is, for the most part, optimistic that their gender identity will be authentically expressed by their family after they die, but concerned regarding the post-mortem expressions of others. Far from a monolith, the communities' wishes for the enactment of their own gender identity after death proved as varied as their enactment of that identity before death. The third study investigates the articulation of

human value as expressed in memorial messages posted by loved ones to the Hart Island Project website. These postings could be seen as an attempt to re-humanize the impoverished, disenfranchised, and unclaimed individuals buried in New York City's potter's field. The study particularly highlights the post-mortem negotiation that occurs between CTI's relational and communal layers of identity – without the participation of the subject. Examined and analyzed through the lens of the CTI, and informed by elements of queer theory, social identity theory, and the writings of Judith Butler on grievability and ungrievability, the data from these three studies reveals an ongoing, oppressive tradition of both interpersonal and systemic acts of post-mortem discrimination that work to reinforce the vulnerability of marginalized individuals and communities. This work suggests that, when the deceased is a member of a marginalized or vulnerable population and the empowered others are associated with the dominant culture, problematic enactments that distort, disrespect, and/or disappear the identity of the deceased can and do occur. Implications of each study and of the entire line of research are identified and discussed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CIEBO	Communicated identity enacted by others
CDA	Critical discourse analysis
CTI	Communication theory of identity
EOL	End of life (communication)
HIP	Hart Island Project (website: hartisland.net)
PMD	Post-mortem discrimination
SIT	Social identity theory
TGD	Transgender and gender-diverse (individuals)

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

"…the struggle to mourn and/or grieve is often blocked, occluded, prohibited, even struck down and put to death; for although perhaps not readily apparent, there is quite a lot at stake ethno-politically in the morbid "undertaking" of attending to the dead and their desires" (Hoag, 2014, p. 2).

In Western culture, one's final resting place serves as a public and permanent expression of the life led, the status achieved, and the degree to which one was accepted and respected in one's community. Gravesites commonly communicate a "degree of public character" (Dunn, 2016), and each gravestone tells a story. Even within the brevity of the typical epitaph, characteristics of the deceased are expressed (Abel, 2009). Obituaries and funerals tell us even more. As Hoy (2020) suggests, "funeral rituals help consolidate the legacy of the dead" (p. 2). Yet, typically, only a certain percentage of memorial expressions are composed by, or prepared by, the deceased. A study by the National Funeral Directors Association's (NFDA) found that only 21.4% of U.S. consumers had communicated their funeral wishes to the their family members (Giffey, 2020). Clearly then, external agents play a critical role in the post-mortem articulation of the identity of the deceased.

These articulations – made public (and perhaps made eternal) in obituaries, funeral services, gravestones, cemeteries, and online remembrances – have a profound impact on the way an individual's post-mortem identity becomes permanently fixed. They contribute to a lasting interpretation of an individual's uniqueness and individuality

as a human being. Unfortunately, in a culture where all individuals and communities are not held with the same esteem, constructed post-mortem identities often perpetuate discriminatory beliefs and biases against individuals from marginalized communities. As Wojcik (2000) states, “Hate and fear do not die simply because the target of discrimination has passed on; as long as those who discriminate continue living, so too does the potential for acts of prejudice” (p. 390).

Through the lens of the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI, Hecht, 1993; Hecht et al., 2003; Hecht & Phillips, 2022), this dissertation examines the processes by which agents associated with the dominant culture become empowered to enact the identities of marginalized individuals after they die. The first two studies focus on the phenomenon wherein families or family members produce inaccurate obituaries, grave markers, and funeral services for the purpose of de-transitioning a transgender family member. These two studies highlight the ability of individuals (agents of CTI’s relational layer of identity) to assign gender identity to the deceased. The third study explores the manner in which friends and family members respond (through an online forum) to the de-humanizing burial and memorial process undergone by loved ones buried in New York City’s potter’s field on Hart Island. This study explores the process through which individuals associated with the relational identity enter into a post-mortem identity negotiation with agents associated with the communal layer of identity (the city, the cemetery administration, the mortuary industry) in a negotiation over the assignment of identity among New York City’s dispossessed, impoverished, unhoused, and unclaimed.

This paper will also provide commentary and insight on the significance of these acts of post-mortem discrimination (PMD), the implications for the loved ones and

community members who witness such acts, and the broader themes at work in a society that allows its most marginalized individuals to be intentionally diminished and sometimes erased for the purposes of perpetuating existing social hierarchies and reinforcing the perceived superiority of the dominant culture. Metcalf and Huntington (1991) claim that, "Life becomes transparent against the background of death, and fundamental social and cultural issues are revealed' (p. 25). This study maintains that discrimination and inequity represent one aspect of the nation's "fundamental social and cultural issues" – and that truths regarding the relationship between entities associated with the dominant culture and marginalized communities are indeed brought into sharp relief "against the background of death."

Of particular importance to this work is the introduction of gender-affirming end-of-life conversations, and to begin work towards its normalization. Gender-affirming EOL dialogues specifically address one's gender identity in the hopes of preserving and protecting that identity after death. The gender-affirming EOL provides also opportunities for TGD individuals to re-affirm their identities and update others on their personal progress (their accomplishments and challenges) while making clear their wishes for the treatment of their identity after death.

Finally, this dissertation represents the initial steps towards the formulation of a theory that acknowledges the lack of agency that many individuals and populations experience (pre-mortem and post-mortem) with regard to their own identity. In the social sciences, across multiple theories, the concept and study of identity begins with "I" or "me" or the "self." But this study represents the early-stage explorations into identity as enacted by others. Highlighted here are two very vulnerable populations in the U.S.,

gender-nonconforming people and the society's dispossessed. But, importantly for both intergroup and intercultural communication research, instances of individuals who do not feel safe enough or powerful enough to express their authentic identity are abundant throughout history. From a socio-political standpoint, a theory that examines communicated identity enacted by others (CIEBO, *see-bo*) deserves consideration and further study within the communication discipline.

In the introduction that follows, important terms such as post-mortem discrimination, communicated identity, gender-diverse identity, and identity after death will be defined; public memorial expressions will be identified and discussed; and a case will be made for a qualitative examination of this subject area. In particular, the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) will be introduced as the theoretical foundation for this work, while other important and influential theories and writings that have proven beneficial to this study will also be discussed. Among these are Social Identity Theory, queer studies, necropolitics, end-of-life communication, and the concepts of grievability and ungrievability.

Defining discrimination after death (or post-mortem discrimination, PMD)

Camara and Orbe (2010), paraphrasing Hecht (1998), suggest that "discrimination is the overt and covert actions used to distance some, and not others, through the use of unfair practices based on demographic characteristics" (p. 83). Leets and Giles (1999) define harmful speech as "utterances that are both intended to cause and/or, irrespective of intent, perceived by their receivers to result in damage (p. 95). This study explores situations in which discriminatory actions and harmful speech target marginalized or vulnerable individuals, but focuses on the actions and utterances articulated after the

target has died.

While discrimination after death, like all forms of discrimination, has existed since the dawn of civilization, academic interest in the field in the United States seems to have emerged in the 1970's as examples of discrimination after death were explored as the women's empowerment movement inspired investigation into many forms of sex discrimination (Kastenbaum et al., 1977). The concept garnered more attention in the devastating AIDS era as writers and theorists noted the mistreatment of both the identities and the bodies of AIDS victims due to fears associated with the once-mysterious virus as well as with rampant societal homophobia (Crimp, 1989; Wojcik, 2000).

Other examples of discrimination after death have also received attention, although the terms, "discrimination after death" or "post-mortem discrimination" were not always used. The cemeteries of Black people have been frequently built upon or allowed to fall into disrepair (Johnson, 2020). The bodies of perhaps ten-thousand non-white individuals – primarily of Chinese descent – now rest (unmarked) beneath a golf course in San Francisco (Lee, 2021). The bodies of many Black people or other impoverished individuals were often subject to institutionally-condoned grave-robbing for use in medical schools (Meier, 2018). Jewish cemeteries are often the target of anti-Semitic or neo-Nazi vandalism (Salam, 2021; Vandoorne & Crouin, 2019).

Examinations of acts of post-mortem discrimination (PMD) are rare in the communication discipline, despite the fact that discriminatory acts are communicative acts and the technologies used for these acts of discrimination are typically common memorial expressions such as funerals, obituaries, gravestones, and cemeteries. The study of public memorial expressions – with or without regard to acts of discrimination – is

also fairly rare in the communication canon.

It is not argued here that acts of discrimination after death should be considered of similar significance with acts that discriminate against those who are still living. Yet the unique circumstances surrounding these post-mortem acts, including the fact that the harmed party (the deceased) is incapable of defending their identity or their dignity, and that few, if any laws, respect or defend the rights of the dead[1], urge a more thorough investigation. Wojcik (2000) states that it is considered a primary duty of the living to see that the dead are properly buried. Wojcik mentions this duty in association with attempts to reclaim American soldiers listed as "missing in action," but presumed dead. A strong motivation exists among family members and the federal government to see that the fallen soldier receives a proper burial. The same motivation does not exist for society's outcasts. For queer people or others who have strayed from social convention and family narratives, the term "proper" can take on different meanings. All too often, a "proper" burial communicates a motivation to erase or hide the deceased individual's non-conformist (perceived as improper) identity.

It is hoped that this project will bring more attention to acts and articulations of post-mortem discrimination and to the implications and repercussions associated with such acts. But it is also hoped that this study brings more attention to examining the uses and misuses of public memorial expressions. In coming years, as the nature of both public memorial expressions and methods of body disposition continue to evolve, methods for communicating about the dead will require an evolution of their own.

Communicated identity

The history of identity is a comparatively brief one. According to Gleason (1983),

it was refined in the time of Freud and Nazism, and did not come into common usage in the social sciences until the 1950's. The term originally comes from the Latin root, *idem*, meaning the "same," and as far back as 1690, Locke was referring to identity in terms of sameness: "Identity consists in nothing but a participation of the *same* considered Life" (as quoted in Gleason, 1983, italics are the author's). That sense of sameness and consistency seems particularly significant when applied to a population segment, such as the transgender population, whose public persona infers a transition from one "identity" to another.

Gleason credits Erikson (who coined the phrase, *identity crisis*) with bringing the term, identity, into mass circulation. But even Erikson had difficulty describing it. Gleason's interpretation of Erikson is as follows:

> Identity involves an interaction between the interior development of the individual personality… and the growth of a sense of selfhood that arises from participating in society, internalizing its cultural norms, acquiring different statuses, and playing different roles (p. 914).

Because of the broad range of definitions and understandings of identity, this study will focus specifically on communicated (or enacted) identity. Brooks and Pitts (2016) based their study of communicated identity on Goffman's work on performance and identity management (1959, 1963) in combination with Hecht's communication theory of identity (Hecht, 1993; Hecht et al., 2003; Hecht & Phillips, 2022) and CTI's two key assumptions: That identity is a communicative act and that identities are layered. Brooks and Pitt saw CTI as a means of understanding the manner in which individuals use communication to position themselves relative to others. This dissertation explores

similar territory, but with two key differences. First, this study acknowledges the critical role that societal power dynamics play in those communicative interactions. As Hecht theorized, individuals use communication to enact their identity with other individuals as well as with the groups and organizations to which they do or do not belong. It is through these communicative interactions that individuals manage their identity through ongoing negotiations. Hecht et al. (2005) state that:

> Negotiation is an important metaphor to describe the process of identity recognition, relational coordination, and value exchange via interaction. It suggests that identities are not simply conceded while communicating; rather, there is an attempt to hold onto aspects that define who one is (p. 35)

For many in marginalized communities, these negotiations take on added significance due to the societal power structures at work and the dominant culture's desire to keep marginalized communities at the margins and relatively powerless (Dovidio et al., 2010; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). Consequently, marginalized individuals are often forced into a near-constant need to either defend their nonconforming identity, hide it, or suppress it.

The second factor unique to this particular study is the fact that the subject is dead. Death, in this context, represents a completely vulnerable and powerless state of being. While unequal societal positions due to privileged and unprivileged states of being add significance and urgency to identity negotiations while the subject is still alive, those inequities become absolute after the subject's death. It is at the moment of death when the individual becomes unable to engage in further identity management, including any form of negotiation. It is at this point that external entities become empowered to enact the

identity of the subject with no further contributions from the subject. These entities are typically supported by powerful, like-minded individuals and institutions, and are unfettered by laws that do not protect post-mortem identities. Predictably, when the enacting agents are associated with the dominant culture (and the deceased subject is not), the post-mortem assignment of identity often works to reinforce and solidify existing social hierarchies, to perpetuate demeaning stereotypes of inferiority and immorality, and to strengthen the already-powerful nature of the dominant culture and its members.

While alive, marginalized individuals have relatively little power as they attempt to negotiate their authentic identities with dominant individuals and institutions. But after death, unless an ally steps forward, the identity negotiation is over, and the identity of the vulnerable individual is no longer defended. Sadly, these enactments and re-framings of vulnerable identities are often rendered permanent – if not eternal – when expressed through public memorial expressions such as obituaries, funerals, cemeteries, and gravestones.

This study will bring greater awareness to the implications and significance of publicly- presented, inaccurate post-mortem identities including, (1) the falsification of the public record, (2) the devastating impact of PMD on the surviving communities, and (3) the contribution that PMD has made to the ongoing inaccurate composition of the American narrative. Examinations of incidents of PMD also bring to light the precariousness of all marginalized identities. Butler (2004a) states that her book, *Precarious Life,* is based on an understanding of "how easily human life is annulled" (xvii). This paper attempts to bring new understanding to the ways in which marginalized

identities are also easily and intentionally annulled – often for socio-political purposes.

Transgender or gender-diverse identity

Any attempt to define transgender identity will face considerable challenges. The label, transgender, has been introduced and then reconceived several times since the early 1900's. Gherovici (2010) maintained, that transgender is a "contested umbrella term" (p. xiii). Indeed, Valentine (2007) produced an ethnography not of the transgender community, but of the transgender category. Valentine (2006) had earlier maintained that "the power of the [transgender] category is that it is actively seen as a collective term to gather in all non-normative expressions of gender" (p. 409). For the purposes of this paper, the term, transgender will be employed to encompass "several identities and subgroups, including gender dysphoric individuals who seek medical intervention to alter their bodies, non-binary individuals, genderqueers, two-spirits, drag queens, drag kings, and transvestites, among others (Ciszek and Rodriguez, 2020). The abbreviation, TGD (transgender/gender-diverse), will also be used to represent all who do not identify as cisgender.

The transgender identity is a universally contested identity. Well over half of American adults believe that gender is determined by sex at birth (60%), and that statistic represents an increase since 2017 when 54% of American adults believed that gender is determined by sex (Parker et al., 2022). If, as most America adults say, gender is determined by sex at birth, then most Americans question the authenticity of the transgender identity – which is commonly considered to consist of claiming a gender that is <u>not</u> determined by one's sex assigned at birth. The contested nature of the TGD identity and the perceived inauthenticity of that identity almost certainly contribute to the

identity's precariousness.

Identity after death

The concept of identity after death is well-supported in the literature. Nearly sixty years ago, Goffman (1963) discussed the existence of communicated identities, or co-authored identities, that originate before we are born and continue after we die. Goffman maintained that, because our relationships with others actually start before we are born and persist after we die, our identity also persists.

> Social and personal identity are part, first of all, of other persons' concerns and definitions regarding the individual whose identity is in question. In the case of personal identity, these concerns and definitions can arise even before he is born and continue after he has been buried, existing, then, at times when the individual himself can have no feelings at all, let alone feelings of identity (p. 105-106).

Other theorists also affirm the existence of identity after death. Masterton et al. (2010), citing narrative theory, observed that since co-authored personal narratives continue after death, then identity "does not end with death" (p. 343). Masterton summarizes Ricouer, who maintains that co-authored identities "need not completely disappear on death" (p. 341).

It is important to acknowledge that, in cases of discrimination after death, the deceased are not aware, and to the best of our knowledge will never become aware, of the manner in which their identity is treated after their death. Nor can we assume that they will experience pain, insult, or injury in the afterlife due to any misrepresentation. The issue has been discussed somewhat in interdisciplinary death literature. Partridge (1981) questions whether one can be harmed after death. Damage can be done to one's

reputation or legacy. But he questions whether that damage actually causes injury or pain to a person who can no longer (as far as we know) experience either of those sensations.

> Can dead persons be harmed? Can they be said to have interests? Can any justification be made for the claim that the reputations or wills of the dead should be respected? Plausible, well-considered arguments can be presented to support either affirmative or negative answers to these questions (p. 243).

A few years later, Pitcher (1984) posed the same question, and answered in the affirmative: "The question is this: is it possible for something to happen after a person's death that harms the living person he was before he died? I want to urge that it is possible" (p. 184). Pitcher maintains that while the dust that humans inevitably become cannot be harmed, the individual that once was can suffer harm or misfortune when an event occurs that is "contrary to one or more of his more important desires or interests" (p. 184). The distortion or erasure of one's identity would fit Pitcher's description of harm.

Masterton et al. (2010) contends that harm or injury can only be experienced by the living, however they write that there are "some actions which are *prima facie* wrong and, with a lingering posthumous subject, it is possible that there can be posthumous wronging" (p. 342). Brennan-Moran (2020) concurs in her writing regarding, "the claim that the dead have on us" (p. iii). She states that this claim demands "a memorial ethics" (p. iii). To intentionally distort the identity of a deceased individual seems inarguably disrespectful, inarguably unethical. To do so for self-serving reasons (whether the "self" involved is an individual or an institution) seems even more contemptable.

Due to the oft-stated desire to "not speak ill of the dead" or to hold respect for the

dead, it might be assumed that the identities of deceased individuals are respected and that they are assigned in a manner that would best reflect what the deceased might wish. But evidence shows that, particularly with regard to the identities of marginalized or vulnerable individuals, this is not true. Respect is not always shown, and members of the dominant culture often "speak ill" by assigning identities that the deceased would neither recognize nor embrace. Derrida (Brault & Naas, 2001) maintains that memorials should not be self-serving, but he (and we) know that this is often not the case. Regarding expressions of memorial, Derrida states:

> The worst ones – or the worst in each of them – are either base or derisory, and yet so common: still to maneuver, to speculate, to try to profit or derive some benefit, to denounce or insult them [the deceased] more or less directly, to authorize and legitimate oneself (p. 51)

It is theorized here that the act of detransitioning a transgender individual after they have died is indeed an intentional maneuver that may, from the perspective of the living, provide some benefit to the memorial's author. It could also be argued that New York City perceives some benefit in the act of "disappearing" the city's disenfranchised and unclaimed dead to a barren, unvisitable island.

Discussion of transgender identities assigned after death is perhaps best begun with a brief examination of the more familiar concept of "sex assigned at birth." In her discussion of transgender terms and concepts, Stryker (2008/2017) includes the phrases, "assigned male at birth" and "assigned female at birth" (known conversationally as *AMAB* and *AFAB*). While these terms have entered into everyday language, they have also been challenged by many TGD individuals who find them insulting. Stryker points

out that these terms represent a time in a trans person's life when "somebody else tells us who they think we are" (p. 12). Family members, medical professionals, and others "look at our bodies and say what they think our bodies mean to them. They determine our sex and assign us a gender" (p. 12).

The current research suggests that trans people undergo a similar labeling experience after they die. For as they die, as when they are born, others (family members, medical professionals, law enforcement personnel, and morticians) look at their bodies and assign a gender. In both instances, the transperson is incapacitated -- by death or, earlier in life, by an inability to either understand or articulate one's gender identity. As shown in Figure 1 (in Appendix C), the lives of trans people are bookended by time periods in which they are incapable of naming, managing, negotiating, and/or defending their gender identity. It is only during the time period between these bookends that the transgender individual has the agency and the cognitive ability to negotiate their own identity and to, in a sense, wrest the control of their identity from others.

Communication theory of identity (CTI)

According to Hecht et al. (2005), the modern study of identity was "scientific inquiry turned in on itself," an attempt to locate a "correct means to represent the true self" (p. 259). The communication theory of identity emerged from trends in social knowledge. Those trends focused on self and identity but CTI brought into the discussion the notion of cultural variance. In a sense, CTI brings together the group-based identities and categorization from social identity theory with the social roles from identity theory.

CTI also, to a degree, addresses the "messiness" of identity study. Gleason (1983) referred to the term "identity" as both "elusive and ubiquitous" (p. 910) while others have

referred to identities as ‘fragmented, ambiguous, and… constantly changing” (Jung & Lee, 2004). Keblusek et al. (2018) suggests that identity group status is “messy and complex” For Hecht et al., (2005), CTI moves the study of identity “beyond the individual and society to performance and relationship” (p. 273) – thereby providing a counterpoint to previous identity theories. It is those two elements (“performance” and “relationship”) that contribute significantly to the proposed study, and help to create a more complete context for the study and investigation of transgender identity development and management.

Per Hecht (1993), the idea of multiple locations of identity could best be understood in the creation of four layers of identity: *personal, enacted, relational,* and *communal*. These four layers represent different aspects of the individual’s identity, but they exist both in harmony and contradiction. In the personal layer, identity is stored as self-concept, self-image, self-cognitions, and a spiritual sense of self-being. In short, the personal layer provides an understanding of how “individuals define themselves” (p. 79). In the enacted layer, the self is seen through messages and performance. In the relational layer, the individual composes their identity “in terms of other people through social interaction” (Hecht et al., 2005, p. 263). Identity development also occurs in groups. Group membership is a key to the communal layer, where identity is based upon common characteristics, beliefs, and history.

The fifth element of CTI, along with these four layers, is the interpenetrational aspect of those four layers. The layers can be analyzed and assessed independently for research or experimental purposes, but they actually function together. Faulkner and Hecht (2010) suggest that, “at any one time all four frames are present and, in a sense, a

part of one another (p. 831). For Hecht et al. (2005), it is this interpenetrational nature that suggests that analyses are most effective when more than one layer is considered at a time. It is also the interpenetration of layers that provides the foundation of much of the CTI research in transgender identity management and negotiation

CTI scholars have also identified identity gaps between the four layers (Jung & Hecht, 2004; Wagner et al., 2016). These gaps can be seen as the inconsistencies and contradictions inherent in the interpenetration of various layers of identity. Identity negotiation takes place when self-concepts and declared identities conflict with the perceptions and understandings of others. In the family context, identity gaps have been explored as antecedents to turbulent relationships (e.g., Kennedy-Lightsey, et al., 2015). When applied specifically to the transgender population, Nuru (2014) found that these identity gaps produced negative outcomes consistent with findings in other studies.

Of course, CTI does have limitations. Hecht and Phillips (2022) acknowledge that CTI has testability issues in that consistent measures have never been developed for the four identity frames. They add that CTI is unable "to fit into one box" – and therefore is difficult to evaluate (p. 228). However, they also state that the overall goal of CTI is to capture the complex, fluid, and multilayered nature of identity by articulating a "layered" perspective of identity in which communication is conceptualized as identity enactment or performance rather than merely a cause or result/effect of communication.

Hecht and Phillips also state that CTI has been used to examine identities and interactions in a wide variety of populations, including refugees, adopted children, polyamorous couples, immigrants, Arab women, Japanese women, first-generation college students, grandparents, substance abusers, and Jewish-Americans. They state that,

"Researchers are continuing to push CTI in new directions, and it continues to be a source of theoretical inspiration" (p. 229).

Soliz and Warner Colaner (2018) indicated that applying CTI to personal experience "can be murky at best" (p. 83). They suggest that because all of the layers identified by CTI interpenetrate with one another, it is "difficult to understand a single layer in isolation" (p. 83). They also state that only a few of the many identity gaps introduced by the theory have been examined: *personal-relational, personal-enacted, relational-enacted.* They accurately report that few have examined interactions involving the communal layer, although the communal layer plays a significant role in this paper's exploration of the Hart Island Project memorial messaging.

For the purposes of the current study, the multi-layered framework that CTI provides allows for an exploration of the manner in which post-mortem identity is enacted by others. In marginalized communities, identity becomes particularly salient at the moment of death. For it is at that moment that the individual can no longer defend or negotiate their identity. As Butler (2015) suggests, expressions of grief are "highly regulated by regimes of power and sometimes subject to explicit censorship" (para. 7). As members of a community lacking in power, TGD individuals are susceptible to having their identities altered and/or censored. The impoverished and disenfranchised buried on Hart Island are similarly susceptible. In both cases, examination through the lens of CTI illuminates the interactive processes at work in these mis-enactments.

CTI and the transgender identity

CTI has been utilized effectively in explorations of transgender identity by communication scholars (e.g., Faulkner & Hecht, 2011; Nuru, 2014; and Wagner et al.,

2016). Nuru (2014) specifically sought to explore trans people's "unique processes of gender-identity negotiation" (p. 282) distinct from other queer identities. Wagner and colleagues were driven by a desire to add to the dearth of published reports on queer identity using CTI and the "alarmingly light body of mainstream communication research focusing on trans identity" (p. 268). In addition to illuminating the mechanisms of trans identity negotiation, they also hoped their study would further validate CTI as a uniquely qualified framework that can effectively examine complex identity elements. Wagner et al. state that:

> CTI is a valuable theoretical lens for examining trans identity, in that it neither fully endorses nor eschews essentialist or hyper-postmodern notions of identity. Instead, CTI proposes that identity is located in four (interconnected) frames: personal, enacted, relational, and communal" (p. 254).

In the course of their lives, transgender people invest a considerable amount of time, effort and emotion in the negotiation of their non-conforming identities. Both Wagner et al. and Nuru contend that trans individuals' self-presentation and internal identity may often be confused, misjudged, or falsely assumed, presenting them with the unique challenge of near-constant identity layer contradictions and negotiations. Nuru (2014) explains that trans people have negotiated "conflicting aspects of their identities through social interactions that both created understandings of self and allowed expressions of self to be enacted" (p. 292). Nuru draws on CTI's multi-layered approach to inform her analysis of gender-identity negotiations. Of course, at the moment of death, opportunities cease for the trans person to engage in that near-constant negotiation or to create understandings and expressions of the self. Yet the deceased's co-authored identity

persists.

The number of trans people who are out and attempting to live "ordinary" lives is greatly increasing (Cavalcante, 2018). According to the Pew Research Center, in 2021, 42% of American adults claim to personally know a trans person. That percentage has increased from 37% in 2017 (Minkin & Brown, 2021). However, these statistics indicate that well over half of American adults still have not yet personally met a trans person. Consequently, the need for greater understanding of the communicative strategies that might assist trans people in avoiding harmful and demeaning situations where misinformation places trans people at both emotional and physical risk.

The universality of the four layers of CTI, the interpenetrational aspect of the layers, and the discursive strategies employed to navigate identity gaps could be employed in the study of any population. Faulkner and Hecht (2011) suggest as much in their closing comments, but they also acknowledge that identity gap tension is heightened for some communities in ways that do not necessarily impact members of non-stigmatized communities. Furthermore, dramatic shifts in the trans population challenge the accuracy of Faulkner and Hecht's classification of trans people as a "concealable" or "closetable" identity. Many trans people do go "stealth" to hide their trans-ness. But most trans people do not have cisgender passing privilege. The growing number of trans people who are "out" today greatly increases the number of trans people who are at risk, from insults and ostracization to assaults and murder. As trans activist Miss Major warned on the occasion of the 2019 Trans Day of Visibility, "Our visibility is getting us killed" (Griffin-Gracy, 2019).

CTI's *enacted layer* will be central to this research inquiry. As part of the author's

ongoing line of research, this dissertation will investigate the manner in which identities (particularly those of marginalized individuals) are enacted after death. The enacted layer of identity is particularly salient in the lives of transgender individuals for it is when the trans person begins to express their authentic identity that they often find themselves at odds with their friends and loved ones (*relational layer*) and with societal norms and institutional conventions associated with group and community memberships (*communal layer*).

According to CTI, the enacted layer of identity considers social behavior as more than communicative, but as an aspect of the self (e.g., Wadsworth et al., 2008; Hecht et al., 2005). Here, the self is defined and redefined in social interactions through negotiation. The process of identity negotiation is particularly critical in vulnerable communities where individuals must continually negotiate their identity against the more powerful dominant culture. Hecht (2014) maintains that "people with less power often suppress an expression of their identity" (p. 181). Trans people (who are certainly examples of "people with less power") have found the determination and courage necessary to express their nonconforming identity, but it is others (those with considerably more power) who become empowered to suppress transgender identities after death.

Through the lens of CTI, this paper will explore the manner in which individuals and institutions representing the dominant culture step in to *enact* the identity of the marginalized deceased. Figure 2 (in Appendix C) depicts the pattern of influence through which the individual's participation in the enactment of their own identity ceases after death while agents associated with both the relational and communal layers of identity

continue to contribute to the subjects' enacted identity.

Other pertinent theories and writings:

While this research involves a direct application of the communication theory of identity, it is also informed by social identity theory, queer death studies, end-of-life communication, Butler's writings on grievability and ungrievability, and Mbembe's writing on necropolitics.

Social identity theory (SIT)

Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel and Turner, 1979) provides a provocative lens through which to explore the relational connections and power dynamics that exist between society's conformists and nonconformists, between the grievable and the ungrievable, and perhaps even between the living and the dead. Social identity theory is based on the human desire for (and pursuit of) positive self-esteem. Tajfel (1978) suggests that we receive positive reinforcement for the person that we are from our social groups. Further, not only does it appear paramount for individuals to admire their in-group, but group members also feel the need to demonize out-groups who provide a cultural counterpoint to their in-group. Tajfel states:

> … in order for the members of an ingroup to be able to hate or dislike an outgroup, or to discriminate against it, they must first have acquired a sense of belonging to a group which is clearly distinct from the one they hate, dislike, or discriminate against. (p. 66)

Tajfel and Turner (1979) maintain that a significant part of one's social identity, or self-conception, is derived from the social categories to which one belongs. For Hogg (2016), the act of categorization within a group nearly immediately leads to strong

affiliation with that group's ideals and standards. Families with a transgender member may perceive their family as no longer living up to community standards. For the disenfranchised laid to rest on Hart Island, they may have been perceived as living for many years outside of established group standards.

In instance of post-mortem discrimination, the inaccurate memorialization of marginalized (out-group) identities can be seen as an example of the dominant in-group working to maintain a favorable position while contributing to the disempowerment of the out-group. Consider recent news stories that expose thousands of unmarked graves of indigenous children at Indian schools in Canada (Austin, 2021), or of the unmarked, unmapped locations of the bodies of the victims of the Tulsa Race Massacre over 100 years ago (Mendoza, 2021). In each case, the unmarked graves have contributed to erasing the behaviors (perhaps murderous behaviors) committed by the dominant culture. Certainly, these acts would reflect poorly on the dominant in-group so there would have been strong motivation to erase the evidence of the crimes (as well as the evidence of the individual's lives and bodies).

Hogg et al. (1995) suggest that while "self-perception and conduct become in-group stereotypical and normative, perceptions of relevant out-group members become out-group stereotypical" (p. 260). This dynamic can work to produce intergroup interactions and behaviors that are competitive and discriminatory. Group members often become "strongly motivated to adopt behavioral strategies for achieving or maintaining in-group/out-group comparisons that favor the in-group and thus of course the self" (p. 260).

In Barvosa's (2008) discussion of the dissonance felt by a Jamaican woman

pressured to deny her Blackness, Barvosa suggests that there are identities that we are "allowed to claim without objection from those around [us]" (p. 81). One can see how this would have a dramatic impact on family relations when a family member comes out as trans. Conceivably, the trans or TGD young person would feel the pain of their family's non-acceptance of their multiple identities as a loving child, as an engaged family member, and as a TGD individual. In many ways, their relational identity may be reduced to what they are "allowed to claim."

It is important to note here that the loved ones' complicity with the trans person's deviant behavior might very well be mediated by the level of control and influence the individual is perceived to hold over the trans person. In other words, in the instance of the nuclear family, when the trans person is an adult, their actions, expressions, and claimed identity may be perceived to be outside of the control of the rest of the family. However, during the early stages of a TGD individual's life (childhood and teen years) and as the trans person ages (the elder years), the family may be perceived as having more control, and therefore seen as more complicit in their family member's gender deviance. After death, of course, the family would be perceived to have total control over the TGD family member's identity and expression. Likewise, the emergence of a new pre-natal tradition – the gender reveal party – reveals a family in full control of the identity of another, and quickly attempting to establish the coming child's identity in terms of the conventional (and rigid) male or female gender binary (Giesler, 2018). Giesler states:

> [The gender reveal party] allows adults to recuperate what they have learned from their own gendered constructions, reinscribing expectations and assumptions on the unwritten body of the unborn and propelling these ideals into the digital,

social, public world (p. 661).

For all involved, the death of the trans individual has the potential to bring an end to the disruption of the collective group identity norms. In an intolerant community, the honoring of the trans person's gender non-conformity may serve to perpetuate the stain upon the family. Sadly, the production and publication of respectful obituaries, headstones, and funeral rituals may serve to reinforce among the extended family and the broader community that the family members who produced those memorials were (and are) complicit in the trans person's deviance from group norms.

Erasure, on the other hand, makes it all go away. The gender-nonconforming person is now deceased, invisible to the eye and silenced from ever proclaiming or defending their non-conformity. In instances of the de-transitioning of transgender individuals, it can be argued that the deceased's transgender identity, now inaccurately reframed as cisgender, relieves the family of the stigma associated transness and queerness while protecting the family's normative, cis-hetero standing in their mainstream in-group. But the act also strips the deceased of their authentic identity. Social identity theory identifies several strategies employed by determined members of marginalized out-groups to manage or remedy feelings of alienation and/or low self-esteem (Hogg, 2016). Unfortunately, no such strategies can be employed by the dead.

End-of-life communication

As far as we know, and as Davis and Crane (2020) suggest, humans are "the only creatures with a foreknowledge of our death" (p. 8). The unique and powerful implications of that foreknowledge would seem to suggest a significant opportunity – in preparation of that inevitability -- to engage in discussions of our lives, our

accomplishments, our regrets, and our joys. Yet we find, time and time again, an inability or an unwillingness to engage in such conversations using our own mortality as an entry point. Many acknowledge that we are a death-denying or death-avoidant society (Aries, 1974; Chen, 2018; Giles et al., 2014; Zimmerman, 2007). Giles et al. (2014) refer to a "phenomenon of silence" (p. 411). But in perpetuating this communal trope, this silence, we may be missing out on one of life's most critical moments: the opportunity to review our lives and to potentially relive, remember, and reconsider that life; to forgive others, to forgive ourselves, to heal old wounds and to, hopefully, acknowledge the positive impact that we have had on others (Foster & Keeley, 2015).

Giles, Thai, and Prestin (2014) maintain that there are two forms of end-of-life (EOL) communication. One occurring specifically *at* the end of life and the other *about* the end of life. Clearly, a study like this one, that focuses on public memorial expressions, does not fit comfortably into either category, and yet – as the final articulation made by individuals before or as they leave the earthly realm – there is a critical significance to these articulations. The composition of public memorial expressions – whether composed by the deceased or by others -- serves as a sub-category of the second form of EOL: regarding the planning, negotiating, and anxiety incumbent in thinking about one's death. But the expressions also serve as enduring statements of identity, of assigned status, and of human value.

In examining public memorial expressions, we are often not examining an explicit conversation between two parties. Often, these public memorial expressions are composed, constructed, and produced after the deceased has passed. Consequently, their participation in the composition of these memorials is dramatically reduced, if not

entirely negated. Instead, the EOL interactions here can be seen as continuations of the identity negotiations that have taken place earlier in life between the deceased and other individuals, between the deceased and their family, between the deceased and their communities, and between the deceased and various corporate or governmental institutions.

Foster and Keeley (2015) contend that stories told in EOL interactions serve to help us "make sense and meaning out of our lives" (p. 110). They further argue that life reviews common in EOL conversations "have the potential for tremendous positive benefits such as confirming that the dying person's life had meaning" (p. 111). However, as noted by Pecchioni and White (2015), "when different family members have different understandings or prioritize different goals, conflict is like to arise: (p. 128). But sadly, for many marginalized individuals, and particularly for TGD individuals, within these conflicts stands the potential for negative outcomes. Consider the dying trans person who knows that their true story will never be told and that their authentic identity will be either misrepresented or erased. In these situations like, the dying individual is undoubtedly confronted with anxieties and self-doubts, rather than the self-affirming peace and comfort that are the goals of most end-of-life conversations.

Davis and Crane (2020) remind us that we "come to our end as individuals and members of all sorts of tight-knit cultural collectives and large, more loosely affiliated masses" (p. 7). This study will consider the impact on the treatment of the deceased when those "cultural collectives" and "affiliated masses" represent marginalized communities: communities that may be at odds with social conventions, family narratives, and may be seen to threaten existing social hierarchies.

Grievability and ungrievability

Butler (2004a) suggests that societal power structures "produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human" (p. xiv–xv). It is the normatively human who are the considered grievable –as opposed to those who are not considered normatively human (and are therefore, ungrievable.) In asking whose lives are considered grievable, Butler is in effect asking whose lives have value. As individuals and as societies, we mourn and memorialize in very different ways for those who are grievable and for those who are ungrievable, and in those different articulations, perceptions of human value are assigned.

The concepts of grievability and ungrievability were illustrated in the years immediately following America's Civil War. Faust (2009) reports that Union officials who were intent on finding and identifying the scattered remains of the Northern dead observed "total neglect" and "wanton desecration" of Union graves by the Southern population. Edwin Whitman, who led that effort, was quoted as saying that, among the Southern people, their "hatred of the dead" seemed to exceed their earlier "abhorrence of the living" (p. 193). An estimated $4 million was spent to properly honor and inter the Union dead. However that reburial program did not extend to the Confederate dead. Instead, it was up to privately-funded programs to locate, identify, and sometimes transfer the bodies of the Southern dead. Often led by women's groups, such as the Hollywood Memorial Association of the Ladies of Richmond (VA), the post-Confederate effort buried or reburied tens of thousands of Confederate soldiers.

In the cases of both the Union and Confederate soldiers, those who had fought for "our" side were deemed worthy of honor and respect (and were therefore, grievable),

while those who had fought for the enemy (those who were considered ungrievable) were not only unworthy of respect, but often treated with stunning post-mortem violence and callousness. Their bodies were sometimes left to rot on the spot where they had fallen. Similar situations have been reported one-hundred-and-sixty years later in the Ukraine where the unrecovered bodies of dead Russian soldiers have been found. A Moshchun resident who came upon one such body said, “I don’t feel anything but disgust for him. I don’t care what happens to his body. The best thing it can do is enrich our soil” (Kakissis et al., 2022)

Butler (2004a) identifies those whose lives are more precarious and those whose lives are rendered vulnerable due to injury, violence, and displacement. Or as she later summarized, lives that are at risk because they are not considered to qualify “as a subject of recognition” (2009, p. iii). The current study applies Butler’s arguments on precarious lives to the concept of precarious identities. A precarious identity, like a precarious life, is characterized by vulnerability and an at-risk status based on unfavorable power dynamics.

According to Doka (1999), a stigmatized death can lead to disenfranchised grief—a sense of grief complicated by the nature of the death itself or by the identity of the deceased. Hall (2014) maintains that the one characteristic, among several, that remains salient to grief theory is the extent and nature of the bereaved’s attachment to the deceased. This attachment dynamic is pertinent to both the transgender de-transition scenario and to the impoverished, unclaimed deceased of Hart Island. In both cases the family members may feel a sense of distance or detachment from their loved one – impacting both their ability to grieve as well as the depth of their sense of mourning.

Interestingly, the friends and family of trans people often report experiencing a sense of loss long before their loved one passes away. Norwood (2012) suggests that friends and family members often experience the gender transition of their loved one as a living death—a state wherein the trans person is believed to be both present and absent, both alive and dead. One participant in the Norwood study reported that they had held a funeral for the "death" of their still-living loved one. Butler has suggested that certain lives become "impossible to grieve or mourn because they are not first recognized as living" (McNeilly, 2016). These perceptions of detachment or ungrievability may contribute to families' motivation to de-transition their trans loved ones.

Family members who never accepted or embraced their trans loved one may have difficulty publicly grieving for their lost loved one or publicly acknowledging the sorrow they now feel in bereavement. Bringing the trans deceased back into accordance with traditional social norms and traditional family narratives—and thereby re-enfranchising their disenfranchised loved one —may facilitate the family's ability and willingness to participate in public expressions of bereavement. The families of individuals who are buried on Hart Island may experience similar feelings of detachment until they have reframed the individual's identity through memorial messaging on the Hart Island Project website.

Queer death studies and necropolitics

This study's investigation of the de-transitioning of trans people after their deaths will be primarily analyzed through the principles of CTI, but that analysis will be significantly informed by writings associated with the interdisciplinary field of queer death studies. According to Radomska, *queer death studies* refers to ongoing attempts to

"reconceptualize death, dying and mourning in relentlessly norm-critical ways" (MacCormack et al., 2020, p. 82). To "queer" death and mourning is to confront and dismantle systems, policies, and social conventions that prevent or inhibit access to respectful treatment throughout the processes of death, memorial rituals, and disposition of the body (Alasuutari et al., 2021).

Crimp (1989) alludes to Freud's view on mourning as a gradual process (bit by bit) that ultimately requires a deference for reality and a return to some sort of normalcy. But, as Crimp is quick to point out, noted literary critic, Michael Moon states that, "Freud's view of mourning presents a difficulty for gay people, insofar as it promises a return to a normalcy that we were never granted in the first place" (p. 6). Queer death studies encourages us to deconstruct the traditions and conventions associated with death and mourning to illuminate the many ways in which our society privileges cis-hetero bodies and lives. Queered understandings of mourning and body disposition may create potential benefits for TGD people and their families through the process of reconsidering end-of-life rituals and end-of-life communication (EOL).

Queer death studies provides a critical lens through which to consider the power dynamics at work in the enactment of identity after death. In their landmark work regarding necropolitics, Mbembe and Meintjes (2003) maintain that sovereignty resides in "the power and capacity to dictate who may live and who must die" (p. 11). This dissertation, while informed by Mbembe's writing, approaches the dominant-vulnerable relationship from a slightly different perspective. While Mbembe is concerned with 'the material destruction of human bodies and populations" (p. 14), the work of this study begins after that "material destruction" has occurred. This study suggests that inaccurate,

diminished, or erased identities can constitute a second destruction. While, as Mbembe states, sovereignty lies in the power to decide who shall live and who shall die, it is theorized here that great power also resides in the ability to assign and label the identities of others. Who, this research project asks, is empowered to name, categorize, and articulate the identities of others? Or more directly for the dead, who is it that gets to say who you once were and what value you once had as a human being?

While those in the cisgender mainstream may avoid discussing death, trans people may be doubly motivated to avoid end-of-life conversations. The discussion of one's identity after death is not a common conversation in cis-hetero society, but, for the most part, cis-hetero people die with the same name, gender, and gender expression with which they were born. Typical changes to a cisgender individual's identity, such as a cisgender woman taking on a married name, have long been considered in the planning and execution of funerals and obituaries. Therefore, there is little reason for most in the cis-hetero mainstream to discuss identity expression in memorializations. The nature of identity in those memorializations is assumed and widely agreed upon within one's various communities (and by the deceased as well). But no such assumptions can be made by families with a transgender member. Consequently, new approaches to end-of-life communication unforeseen by previous generations now must be considered and enacted.

In his thoughtful discussion of cemeteries and queerness, Dunn (2016) maintains that, "By being buried in the community cemetery among others, not only is the deceased individual incorporated into the ethos of that community; at the same time, by this simple act of inclusion, the deceased is presumed to be heterosexual" (p. 139). One

could broaden Dunn's comment to include a presumption of being cisgender. But, in either case, the existence of any presumption indicates a need for reconsidering (or queering) the nature of our memorial expressions and end-of-life activities – including end-of-life conversations.

A qualitative research approach

According to Scharrer and Ramasubramanian (2021), the emphasis of qualitative research is on in-depth knowledge, rich descriptions, and "sense-making of the complex social world around us" (p. 5). Yin (2016) contends that, among other attributes, qualitative research provides an inductive, "bottom up" approach to scholarly explorations that is particularly effective in association with populations or subject areas that have remained largely under-examined.

Qualitative research has often been used to explore social issues (Banks, 2006). Yin (2016) highlights the frequent use of qualitative research to examine issues that affect marginalized or underrepresented communities, as with feminist research, Black studies, disability theories, and queer research. It has been suggested that queer theory in qualitative research can create space for potential political action (Carlson, 1998) while providing a reflection on sociocultural norms (Wozolek, 2019). As Spindler and Spindler (1982) once stated, qualitative research has a strong history of making the familiar strange and the strange familiar. With regard to marginalized individuals, Yin (2016) states, and is particularly pertinent to this dissertation, "The relevant question remains whether people with these cultural and social characteristics have been treated fairly or unfairly under existing, real-world circumstances" (p. 7).

Two advantages of qualitative research apply to the transgender de-transitioning studies (Study 1 and Study 2) included here. First, it would be difficult (although certainly not impossible) to recruit an adequate sample of respondents or receive a satisfactory response rate among either the older or young TGD populations targeted in these studies (Yin, 2016). Second, and perhaps more importantly to this researcher, qualitative research prioritizes the views and perspectives of the participants involved (Yin, 2016). It seems particularly important in these examinations of a contested identity that individuals who claim that contested identity are given a platform to speak for themselves and share their own stories and opinions. Anderson (2010) reminds us that, in qualitative data, the outlier and outlying data are not ignored. Quite the opposite, contradictory evidence and deviant cases should be "sought out, examined, and accounted for" (p. 2).

A quantitative study might be able to ascertain the number of deceased TGD individuals who were de-transitioned by their families in the U.S. last year. But whether that number was determined to be two or two-thousand, the social situations and interpersonal relationships that facilitate the stripping of one's identity demand investigation. As does the impact that such an act of symbolic violence have on the surviving community. Ilona Turner, Legal Director of the Transgender Law Center once stated: "[Post-mortem de-transitioning] sends a message, really a pretty strong signal to the rest of the community, that your wishes around your gender, your identity… can be completely erased once you're not here to stand up for yourself' (Levin, 2014).

Scharrer and Ramasubramanian (2021) suggest that while quantitative research focuses on categorizing and enumerative patterns observed in texts, qualitative textual

analysis focuses on understanding how specific texts are used within specific cultures, contexts, people, places, and times. The online messages posted to the Hart Island Project website (HIP) create a very specific context and were analyzed in keeping with the principles of critical discourse analysis (CDA).

According to Fairclough et al. (2011), CDA differs slightly from traditional discourse analysis due to a keen interest "in the semiotic dimensions of power, injustice, abuse, and political-economic change in society" (p. 357). Janks (2006) suggests four key questions that relate discourse to relations of power: "How is the text positioned or positioning? Whose interests are served by this positioning? Whose interests are negated? What are the consequences of this positioning?" (p. 329). Of chief interest to this study is the second question. If we examine whose interests are best served by stigmatizing the impoverished and the unclaimed, if we explore who interests are best served by disappearing the disenfranchised dead and by preventing families to participate in normative burial rituals and gravesite visitations, it is certainly never the deceased nor their loved ones who are best served. Instead, these are the people who interests, as Janks asks in her third question, are negated.

The fact that that discourse is characterized by great discrepancies in Fairclough's "dimensions of power," it is necessary to factor those discrepancies into the consideration of the data. Consequently, a methodology that utilizes CDA is indicated.

Public memorial expressions

This dissertation investigates the phenomenon of post-mortem discrimination as articulated through memorial expressions. Memorial expressions are the public expressions of death, mourning, and remembrance used commonly throughout the U.S.

Among the most frequently used and most familiar are funerals, obituaries, gravestones, cemeteries, and online posts. These articulations are typically positive in tone. Fowler (2005) states that the most commonly used form of obituary, the *traditional positive* obituary, is characterized by "an unambiguous celebration of its protagonist… a commemorative homage" (p. 64-65). Much the same could be said of all memorial expressions. Positivity in descriptions of the dead are common in Western culture where it is considered socially inappropriate to speak ill of the dead (based on the Latin, *de mortuis nihil nisi bonum*, or "of the dead, say nothing but good" or on the advice of Chion of Sparta: "Never speak ill of dead men," Alfano et al., 2018).

However, this tradition is clearly not upheld for all men, or women, or for those outside the gender binary. In the midst of the AIDS crisis, Crimp (1989) wrote of his queer community:

> Through the turmoil imposed by illness and death, the rest of society offers little support or even acknowledgement. On the contrary, we are blamed, belittled, excluded, derided. We are discriminated against, lose our housing and jobs, and are denied medical and life insurance. The dominant media still pictures us only as wasting deathbed victims; we have therefore had to wage a war of representation, too (p. 15-16).

This study explores the many ways in which representations produced on commonplace, public memorial expressions become weaponized by agents associated with the dominant culture in order to reinforce the oppression of marginalized individuals. Far from creating Fowler's "commemorative homage," intentionally inaccurate public expressions often represent an attempt to diminish, disrespect, distort,

and/or disappear the identities of America's most powerless. An overview of public memorial expressions follows.

Funerals

Traditionally, funerals (and other memorial practices) have existed for two reasons: (1) To appease the deceased while ensuring their safe passage to the next plane of existence and (2) as rituals or services intended to comfort the surviving friends and family (Hoy, 2020). But this approach assumes a high degree of conformity and acceptance among participants (including both the bereaved and the deceased). Often, despite motivations to "appease" the deceased, little consideration is paid to the "comfort" of the deceased with regard to the manner in which their identity is expressed post-mortem. Much of the literature surrounding funerals focuses on the positive effects and outcomes for the bereaved (O'Rourke et al., 2011; Woodthorpe, 2017). But these works do not consider the ways in which these ceremonies might communicate inaccuracies (often intentionally) in their re-construction of the deceased's identity. Consequently, the manner in which verbal and visual statements made during a funeral might distort the deceased's identity, and in so doing cause discomfort rather than comfort among the deceased's surviving community, is largely unconsidered.

Significantly but not surprisingly, studies regarding funerals (and the effectiveness of funerals) have focused on the perspective of the surviving loved ones and family members. Rarely in the literature is the perspective of the deceased considered. Doka (1989) studied participation in funeral arrangements on the part of the bereaved, but never mentions participation by the deceased themselves, nor significant considerations

of whether the deceased would have been satisfied with the ritual. O'Rourke et al. (2011) cover similar territory.

O'Rourke et al. quote Hecht – but once again from the perspective of the bereaved. "If ''funerals are for the living,'' it follows that a well-designed funeral service should be a relatively satisfying experience for those attending. This does not imply the service would necessarily be enjoyable, but that the relatively positive expectations of participants would be fulfilled (Hecht, 1978). In contrast, the current study, uniquely, considers memorial expressions from the perspective of the dead.

Woodthorpe (2017) maintains that, "In the determination of funeral content, participation in the funeral performance, and the commercial choice(s) made, family acts as a frame of reference and is being actively being negotiated, (re)affirmed, and displayed to others, concealed, or rejected" (p. 599). This content is expressed in the telling of stories in eulogies and often through photo or video presentations. But there is no guarantee that the feelings of the deceased are considered in the production of these consolidated legacies. Woodthorpe and Rumble (2016) remind us that the deceased do not always have the freedom or agency to decide who organizes and conducts the funeral. They maintain that funerals are conceptualized "according to normative cultural assumptions" (p. 245).

In many ways. the societal and communal significance of funerals concentrates on preserving convention and either suppressing or erasing difference. Fulton (1994) observes that funerals serve as "an important vehicle of cultural transmission" (p. 309). It is unsurprising then that qualities that mark the deceased as non-conforming or perhaps even immoral would not be mentioned in eulogies, nor is it surprising that families might

de-transition a TGD loved one in order to avoid "transmitting" a characteristic that challenges cultural conventions. Typically, qualities that mark the deceased as an outsider or a nonconformist, as unconventional or immoral, are not mentioned.

Hoy (2013) suggests that "Every death introduces some sense of social upheaval; the deliberate cadence of ritual helps to restore balance, reminding all concerned that order will prevail" (p. 11). Families who decide to honor the claimed gender identity of a trans person might then be seen as contributing to "social upheaval" rather than to the "balance" or "order" that their community might expect. If funerals are seen to help survivors to reconcile attempts to continue one's personal relationship with the dead while physically separating from the body (Malinowski, 1946), that personal relationship may be constructed upon falsehoods. In the case of a family who has rejected the identity of the deceased, the continuing relationship would constitute a false connection between the family and a family-constructed avatar that represents not the person who was, but the person who the family wished them to be.

Obituaries

For Moses and Marelli (2003), obituaries "give us a glimpse into the shape and cultural interpretation of life and death" (p. 123). Perhaps because of that cultural interpretation, the obituary has never been associated with fairness, even-handedness, or equity. Bytheway and Johnson (2010) suggest that the traditional obituary page tells us whose lives we value. They note that obituaries are populated primarily by members of the dominant class and other individuals of distinction. They summate that obituary pages were largely oriented towards men: written by men about men and men's achievements. They note that, historically, a variety of socio-economic barriers prevented women and

members of marginalized groups from achieving the distinction necessary for them to be seen as worthy of an obituary.

In the 1970's, Kastenbaum et al., (1977) revealed that an examination of one month of obituaries in *The Globe* were heavily skewed towards men. Death notices[2] during the month indicated that more women than men had died that month (1007 women/981 men) – a near 50/50% break down. Yet, published obituaries in *The Globe* skewed dramatically towards men, with 163 obituaries for the men, and only 38 for the women. This amounts to a balance of 81/19% in favor of the men. Twenty years later, Moremen and Cradduck (1999) conducted a similar study and found that little had changed. They concluded that men still received more obituaries, that their obituaries were longer, and that their obituaries were accompanied more often by photographs.

Fowler (2005) calls obituaries a "secular rite de passage" (p. 61) primarily intended – as with most memorial expressions – to comfort the bereaved. But she also notes that, in many ways, an obituary is also an expression of judgment, "it is also a verdict about the worth of the dead person's contributions" (p. 61). Consequently, for those whose obituaries are never written or published, the presumption is that their lives (and their contributions) were deemed to be of insufficient value. For those whose obituaries intentionally misidentify them, it can be presumed that their authentic identity was deemed not worthy of remembrance but worthy instead of concealment.

Connections to blood relatives are also particularly important in traditional obituaries. Moses and Marelli (2003) observed that no obituaries in their study failed to mention family and/or survivors. Unfortunately, if the deceased is either physically or emotionally estranged from their blood relatives, the manner in which they are

memorialized may be affected. The two populations of deceased individuals investigated in this dissertation – people of transgender experience and New York City's disenfranchised – often fall into the category of being disconnected from family.

Gravestones and cemeteries

Unlike funeral services or obituaries, gravestones typically have little room for the telling of stories or the recounting of memories. Yet, despite the brevity of the traditional epitaph, there remains ample space for disrespecting, diminishing, or for labeling in a manner that perpetuates damaging stereotypes. Clark et al., (2020) describe the gravestone as "a rhetorical device that reflects social and economic values of a particular era within the community" (p. 1839). For instance, in death, as is often the case in life, "women are the 'second sex,' their names often appearing… second, to that of their husbands, or below that of their husbands" (p. 1844).

Abel (2008) found that, historically, women were far more likely to be identified on gravestones in terms of familial relationships. However, both Abel and Clark observed that these practices are evolving, and that more recently, obituaries that identify women in terms of familial relationships (such as "wife of") in an epitaph have become far less common. Still, the role that public memorial expressions such as headstones have played in reinforcing social hierarchies is evident. Class distinctions are also easily observed in the size, placement, and type of stone used in gravestones (Clark, et al., 2020). Stokes (1991) reminds that in folk graveyards of the U.S. south (the final resting places for Blacks and poor Whites) wooden grave markers were the norm. Compared to gravestones of granite, these markers were more susceptible to decay, deterioration, and disappearance over time.

Cemeteries are widely known as sacred ground. Torday (2017) stated that, “The opposite of desecration is consecration: the act of making something sacred. It is a thing we do ourselves. We choose to give holiness and sanctity to our dead. In making their resting places sacred we lend them meaning.” However, from family plots to ornate gardens, from potter’s fields to landscaped parks, cemeteries are also subject to the influences of class and of assigned human value. Dunn (2016) maintains, “cemeteries and graveyards speak not of what an individual might wish to say, but rather they render community sentiments about death (and life) visible” (p. 133). Dunn further suggests that cemeteries, “instruct visitors and passersby about death and how one should live in relation to it” (p. 133). From that perspective, graves that do not contain the correct name of the deceased (as in the case of transgender individuals) and graves that contain no individual markers (as in the case of those laid to rest in many potter’s fields) articulate a community sentiment that instructs visitors that the true identities of these deceased were not of a high value -- and perhaps worthy of disdain.

In addition to class and gender, attributes such as race, ethnicity, and religion have also played a role in expressing the status of an individual in cemeteries. In Jasper, Texas (where 1998 lynching victim, James Byrd Jr., was buried), town officials alluded to the fact that the local cemetery had always been segregated by race. “We don’t mix the White and the Black graves,” said a White member of the cemetery’s board of directors. “They’re separate. Put a Black up here? No, no, we wouldn’t do that. That would be… against our way of doing things” (Fernandez, 2012). Burial locations are inextricably associated with value judgements and hierarchical positioning statements regarding the relative human value of the deceased. U.S. courts decided long ago that separate facilities

are “inherently unequal,” (*Brown v. Board of Education,* 1954). In cemeteries, that inequality, if unchallenged, becomes effectively permanent.

Online remembrances

It is important to acknowledge newer digital means of mourning and remembering, as well as to acknowledge emerging, innovative means of body disposition (to be discussed later in this paper). These new directions in the death and grief processes will bring many changes to the manner in which the deceased’s memory and identity are communicated. This paper will concern itself with posts made to an online website/forum (HartIslandProject.com), but that forum represents a very specific instance of an online memorial. For many, the idea of an online memorial relates to a preserved social media page, and/or to the concept of digital persistence (Savin-Baden and Burden, 2019).

Degroot (2012) found that online posts written to deceased individuals serve to continue bonds, or uphold relational continuity, with the deceased. One Facebook user who visits a page to memorialize her deceased brother remarked, “To be haunted virtually is just another way to stay connected” (Bollmer, 2013, p. 145). An interviewee in Acker and Brubaker’s (2014) exploration of memorialization and social media suggested that reading and re-reading the comments left on social media after his adult daughter’s death provided a sense of joy when reminiscing about his daughter’s life, “I know from experience how some memories slip away. And it’s good to put them somewhere. It’s sort of a digital scrapbook in this particular case” (p. 13). Acker and Brubaker suggest that Facebook is now playing the role of an “unanticipated, long-term” (p. 14) personal archive.

In these instances, Maddrell (2012) observes that virtual memorials allow family

members, mourners, and other online posters to continue to "work on" the narrative of the deceased's life and identity. But obviously, the deceased is afforded no such opportunities. Typically, if a living person does not agree or respect a comment made on their social media page, they can delete it or respond to it. But that cannot happen after death. Acker and Brubaker maintain that the persistence of social media accounts after the user has died presents issues for the deceased's surviving community of friends and family – a valid concern. However, this dissertation specifically focuses on how these issues impact the expression of the deceased's identity.

Researcher reflexivity

The author is cognizant of their own influence as researcher in both the acquisition of data for this study and in the interpretation of that data. In particular, the author acknowledges the possession of a great deal of privilege not afforded to many others in the transgender community nor to buried on Hart Island. In the acknowledging of this privilege, the author also recognizes that even in studies that investigate acts and articulations of discrimination for the purpose of better understanding the power dynamics at work in communicative interactions, discrimination and bias can, and do, still exist. The awareness of these inequities has guided – to the best of the author's ability – both the execution and the reporting involved in this project.

Notes on Chapter One

[1]At the moment of death, most laws no longer consider the individual as a person or "subject of rights" (Ducor, 1995, p. 198). In some cases, laws are written in a way that assigns the deceased to the category of property. Ducor suggests that, "Generally, legal systems classify dead bodies as objects rather than subjects of rights" (p. 212).

[2]The death notice (DN) is a single paragraph of basic information. It consists of a highly standardized format, usually set in small type and included in an alphabetical listing of recent deaths. Also, importantly, the DN is typically submitted by the funeral director, rather than the family. The obituary, on the other hand, is much more variable in length and somewhat more variable in style. The DN usually includes a headline and often includes a photograph of the deceased (Kastenbaum, 1977).

CHAPTER TWO

TRANSGENDER IDENTITY AFTER DEATH (Study 1 and Study 2)

In this chapter, the phenomenon of de-transitioning transgender individuals after their deaths is examined in two studies that featured (1) older (40 y. o. and older) and (2) younger (18 to 30 y. o.) TGD adults. Using a qualitative interview methodology, the studies allow TGD individuals in both cohorts to share their experiences and attitudes towards nonconsensual detransitioning. But it also gave the participants the opportunity to articulate their own expectations for the enactment of their own identity after death as well as for their emotions surrounding their thoughts and expectations. Interview respondents were asked to confront very intimate topics such as their gender identity and the nature of their close relationships in the context of discussing realities associated with their own mortality.

It was not the goal of this study to discuss the broader experiences associated with living in the U.S. as a TGD individual. It is not the goal of this study to directly address feelings associated with being beaten and bullied, being ostracized and criticized, being disbelieved and demonized. Nor is it the goal here to address transphobic societal attitudes that are freely and cruelly articulated (often incessantly) on social media. At the same time, these studies will also not address the extraordinary moments of joy and pride associated with finding acceptance, finding community, and finding a sense of fulfillment derived from intentionally moving towards a more authentic understanding of, and expression of, one's self. But it should be assumed that many of the participants in both of these studies have experienced some or all of these feelings, and that these experiences undoubtedly impact their attitudes and responses.

It is important to note that Study 1 is an updated version of a study published in 2020 (Whitestone, et al., 2020). The article was published in a sociological journal. This reconsidered version allows me to examine and analyze the collected data through the lens of the communication discipline, and specifically to apply the foundational elements of the communication theory of identity to that data. It should also be noted that while these two groups of TGD folks (older and younger) would be considered a generation apart, they all existed in (and were interviewed in) a very specific time in U.S. transgender history. As with the more personal experiences detailed above, the events of these times – the positive and the negative, the progress made and the repercussions endured – have also had an impact on these participants' lives and on their feelings towards their own trans-ness.

While the decade of the 2010's should be remembered as a time of great growth in TGD confidence, awareness, and visibility, it will also be remembered for the cruel political and social backlash (Berberick, 2018) launched in response to the transgender community's progress. Four years ago, when the original interviews were conducted with older trans people, the backlash against the trans lives and trans rights had already begun. Bathroom bills – designed to prevent trans and non-binary students from using public restrooms in which they would feel most comfortable – were proposed and debated in several states (Kazyak et al., 2021). In the summer of 2017, then-president Donald Trump issued a proclamation (via Twitter) that he intended to bar trans people from serving in the military (Jones, 2017**)**. It was during this time that TGD individuals found themselves specifically targeted by conservative media and news sources, as well as by conservative and white supremacist groups. In 2019, The Southern Poverty Law Center suggested that

trans people had become targets of white nationalists and neo-Nazis. The SPLC reported that hate groups were "ramping up their efforts to demonize the transgender community, going as far as calling for the deaths of trans people" (Miller, 2019). By 2021, there were over 100 legislative bills introduced in 33 different states with the goal of in some way obstructing or denying rights to transgender people (Krishnakumar, 2021).

On a more positive note, for the first time in U.S. history trans and other gender-nonconforming individuals (such as Danica Roem, Andrea Jenkins, and Sarah McBride) were elected to governmental positions, and in 2021, Rachel Levine became the first openly-transgender governmental official appointed to an office that required Senate confirmation (Schmidt et al., 2021).

Some of the greatest progress for trans visibility has occurred in the fields of entertainment and mass media – where the representations of trans people were once characterized by insultingly negative characterizations (Gazolla and Morrison, 2014; Serano, 2007, 2016**)**. In the 2010's, trans people on television were treated with more respect on television shows such as *Glee, The Fosters, Sense8,* and *Transparent*. *Orange is the New Black* debuted in 2013 and catapulted actress Laverne Cox into stardom, where she earned a place on the cover of Time magazine in 2014 along with the headline, "The Transgender Tipping Point." (Steinmetz, 2014). In the spring of 2022, as this second round of interviews took place, Michaela Jaé Rodriguez, lead actress on *Pose*, became the first out transgender woman to win a Golden Globe Award (Treisman, 2022). Rodriguez won the award for Best Actress – Television Series Drama. Around the same time, Amy Schneider, an engineering manager, became the holder of the second-longest winning streak on the popular television game show, *Jeopardy* (Acuna, 2022).

Unfortunately, trans representation in film over this same time period tells a very different story. Incredibly, according to GLAAD, there have been no speaking roles for trans people in films released by the eight major Hollywood movie studios (under their banners and/or imprints) over the past four years (GLAAD, 2021). The news media has also not proven to be a helpful ally. While 2021 marked the deadliest year on record in the U.S. for anti-trans violence, the total coverage by television corporate news networks amounted to only 43 minutes (Paterson, 2022). Most of those minutes were recorded on MSNBC. Despite the fact that 57 trans people were killed in violent acts in the U.S. last year, the remaining stations that were reviewed (ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN and Fox) spent only 5 minutes each on the topic over the course of the entire year. (Paterson, 2022). Anti-trans violence has particularly hit the Black trans community. The American Medical Association has called the situation an "epidemic of violence against the transgender community, especially the amplified physical dangers face by transgender people of color" (Ennis, 2019).

While none of these events, tragedies, and achievements are directly addressed in this study, the influence of these contradictory messages – of hateful and violent outrage, media neglect, and of long-awaited acceptance and support – provide a dizzying emotional arena for TGD adults as they attempt to negotiate their identities with friends, partners, family members, and the rest of society. Because of traditions, laws, and policies associated with death and "disposition of the body" in the U.S., these studies written up here are primarily concerned with TGD individuals' relationships with their family members and close relatives, but it is unrealistic to think that both the trans

individuals and their family members have not been influenced by the religious, cultural, and political reactions to the growth of transgender visibility in America.

In 2022, the Human Rights Campaign estimated that there have been 300 anti-LGBTQ+ bills introduced in the U.S., 130 of those specifically target TGD individuals. **(**Berg-Brousseau, 2022). Notably, many of these bill specifically target TGD youth. It is against this backdrop that these interviews were conducted. Once again, this study does not specifically address the actions promoted in those bills. It does not address access to public restrooms, access to participation in amateur athletics, or access to medically-approved healthcare, and yet it does address questions concerning the perceived authenticity of the transgender identity, the respect (or lack thereof) for the transgender identity in American society, and the challenges faced by TGD individuals as they attempt to secure and defend their identities in a society that has never truly made space for them.

STUDY 1

Introduction

Nobel (2015) recounts the story of a Southern California reverend who presided over the funeral of a trans woman. The woman sang in the church's choir and was known to all in the congregation as a woman. But the grieving family insisted on memorializing and burying their loved one as a man. The reverend respected their wishes, but could not help mentioning the trans woman's authentic identity in their remarks during the funeral. To the reverend, the remark seemed to be fairly harmless, but at least one member of the family was furious and "practically had a meltdown" right after the service (Nobel, 2015).

In life, the deceased woman clearly did not accommodate to the cultural and communicative norms of mainstream, cisgender society. For many trans people, repeated failures to accommodate to societal norms and expressions in order to attain acceptance render the "accommodative chase" too costly to pursue (Keblusek, Giles, and Maass, 2017, p. 8). But in death, the trans woman was no longer able to defend herself or her identity. Her family took advantage of her incapacity and, without her consent and without consultation with her friends, accommodated on her behalf. In life, the woman had done what was required to be seen as her authentic self, but she had not protected her identity after death.

According to the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, 40% of transgender respondents indicated that their families were "neutral or not supportive" of their gender expression. (James et al., 2016). Trans and other gender-nonconforming individuals, through their unconventionality, compel families, communities, and institutions to revisit not only their notions of gender and identity, but the many traditional rituals, events, and customs impacted by the presence of differently-gendered friends and loved ones. Using the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) as a lens to guide our analysis and discussion, it is argued here that memorial expressions are significant and enduring reflections of identity.

Communication theory of identity and trans people

CTI has been utilized effectively in explorations of transgender identity by communication scholars (e.g., Faulkner & Hecht, 2011; Nuru, 2014; Wagner, et al., 2016). According to CTI, identity is "inherently a communication process and must be understood as a transaction in which messages and values are exchanged" (Hecht, et al,

2003, p. 230). Both Wagner, et al. and Nuru contend that trans individuals' self-presentation and internal identity may often be confused, misjudged, or falsely assumed, presenting the trans person with the unique challenge of near-constant identity layer contradictions and negotiations. The current study suggests that those challenges do not necessarily end at the time of death.

CTI identifies four layers of identity (personal, enactment, relational, and communal), suggesting that although one layer may at times be more salient than another, the other are never static or irrelevant. In the personal layer, the individual is the focus of identity in which feelings about the self and self-cognitions shape how one identifies. In the enacted layer, identity is expressed as performance, portrayed through verbal and nonverbal messages. In the relational layer, identity is co-created through a process of interaction with others. In the communal layer, group membership is the focus of identity (e.g., Wadsworth, Hecht, & Jung, 2008).

For most trans people, it is when they begin to express their gender-nonconforming identity (enacted identity) that problems arise within their relationships with loved ones (relational identity). But it is also often their close relationships with friends, family members, and coworkers that are foremost in their minds as they weigh enactment decisions. Therefore, the interpenetrations of the following identity frames become most relevant to this discussion: relational-personal and relational-enacted, and provide context for our exploration:

> **RQ 1: In terms of their gender identity, how do transgender people hope to be memorialized by agents associated with their relational identity (primarily family members) after they have passed away?**

RQ 2: How well do trans people believe their family will accommodate their wishes? How do they feel about their identity being treated in the manner they anticipate?

Relational identity and stigma

Current estimates place the U.S. transgender population at 1.6 million adults or about 0.6% of individuals aged 13 and older (Herman, Flores, O'Neill, 2022). Compared to the same study conducted in 2016-2017, the percentage of adults who identify as transgender has remained steady over time. But in 2017, the 1.6% estimate was considered twice the estimate of five years previous. The growing visibility of trans people can be observed in many facets of U.S. society. Time called 2014 the "Transgender Tipping Point" while Vogue dubbed 2015 as the "Year of Trans Visibility (Berberick, 2018). Supreme Court cases involving access to public restrooms and employment rights have been won. Trans politicians, such as Andrea Jenkins, Danica Roem, and Sarah McBride, have been elected. On television, in early 2022, actress MJ Rodriguez received a Golden Globe Award and Amy Schneider became a well-known (and very successful) *Jeopardy* champion.

Yet, despite significant gains in visibility, the stigma against trans individuals persists. A negative backlash has surfaced in response to increased trans visibility (Berberick, 2018), Propaganda by far-right conservatives and *trans-exclusionary radical feminists* (sometimes called TERFs or "gender critical" feminists) has sought to build animus toward trans people, portraying them as predators and accusing them of "recruiting" or "grooming children." (Burns, 2020). Trans individuals are frequently stereotyped as deviants and are often the targets of discriminatory attitudes and actions

because of their nonconformity with binary gender systems (Grossman and D'Augelli, 2006). Participants in Gazzola and Morrison's (2014) study of transgender stereotypes, described TGD individuals as "odd," "weird," "different," and "gross," who "stuck out like a sore thumb" (p. 81).

It should be acknowledged that trans people are not the only ones to suffer the effects of transphobic beliefs. Friends, partners and family members of trans people are also likely to experience stigma (Whitley, 2013). Under such social pressure, conflict can arise between romantic partners, between family members, and between friends, coworkers, and/or other community members. Often, the conflict does not end with the death of the gender-nonconforming individual. The conflict, and the resulting tensions and hard feelings, persist in memories and, particularly for the purposes of the current study, in the creation of the memorial expressions associated with death: obituaries, gravestones, funeral services, and online memorials.

A relational identity assumes and requires identity negotiation. As an individual ages or becomes incapacitated, they are often forced to negotiate their identity from a position of vulnerability. Consequently, their identity is often forced upon them by others (e.g., Louw-Potgieter & Giles, 1987). Problematically, family members and loved ones may take control of the trans person's identity as the trans person grows older, becomes less independent, experiences poor health, and ultimately dies. Among the trans deceased, families take control of the disposition of the deceased's body, and enact that person's identity for them in memorial expressions – often in a manner that diverges from the TGD individual's preferred gender expression.

Toomey et al. (2013) identify various assumptions with regard to bicultural

identity formation and, in particular, the way in which bicultural individuals react to being simultaneously a part of an ingroup and a part of an outgroup. TGD people typically come from the same ethnic background and culture as their family and loved ones. Yet, it could be argued that trans people, because of their nontraditional gender identities, experience the inhabitance of two worlds or cultures: the cisgender world of their family and the gender-nonconforming world into which they have transitioned. Effective identity negotiation can lead to satisfactory outcomes associated with "the feeling of being understood, the feeling of being respected, and the feeling of being affirmatively valued" (Toomey et al., p. 228). Gudykunst (2005) suggests that those who can navigate both sides of their cultures flexibly and find similar values can experience reduced uncertainties and reduced anxiety in their interactions.

But what of the families who have no desire to bridge society's gender gap and meet their transgender loved ones halfway? Faulkner and Hecht (2011) maintain that stigma, along with prejudice and discrimination, can cause stress, expectations of rejection, and a desire or need to conceal one's identity. Such feelings can be exacerbated by the prospect of the absolute vulnerability and incapacity associated with death. According to Witten (2014), when faced with the prospect of death, gender-expansive individuals who were still closeted feared having their secrets (and nontraditional attire) revealed. Other trans people feared becoming disabled or developing dementia and becoming unable to advocate for themselves. One of the Witten study participants hated the prospect of being called a "freak" when their body is inevitably examined after death (even though they will no longer be able to hear the painful comments).

For a trans individual, the way in which one behaves, dresses, and "performs" can

be at odds with the family's perception of the role the trans person *should* be playing. The family may insist that the offending behavior or expression cease (Nuru, 2014). These contradictory attitudes towards the family member's gender-nonconformity become particularly salient when memorial expressions are addressed. As opposed to other identity negotiations that a TGD individual might engage in, there is a finality to memorial expressions that seals an individual's identity permanently, or at lease, for the foreseeable future. To disrespect a trans person's gender identity is to negate their authenticity. Yet, in a culture where transgenderism continues to carry a profound stigma (Whitley, 2013), to accept and respect the trans person's gender identity can be thought to bring shame or embarrassment to the family. In a study published by Witten in 2009, a respondent remarked, "I don't want to visit my father's grave and see a woman's name on the headstone. I can't deal with that..." (p. 41).

As a counterpoint to that individual's perception, consider a Vietnam war veteran who has become a passionate anti-war activist in their elder years. Would it not be considered appropriate for the veteran to ask that no indication of their military service appear on their gravestone? Consider as well an individual who converts from one religion to another. Would it not be appropriate for that individual to request to only be memorialized in terms of their current, chosen religion? In both cases, the immediate family may not agree with the deceased's choices. The family may take great pride in the veteran's military service. They also may experience a sense of family cohesion held together by certain religious beliefs, practices, and congregational memberships.

Throughout Western culture, the purpose of funerals (and other memorial expressions) is acknowledged as a means to comfort the bereaved (Hoy, 2020; O'Rourke

et al., 2011) To memorialize the deceased in a manner that their family members find disturbing or offensive would certainly not facilitate feelings of comfort among the surviving loved ones. Yet, it also seems true that the deceased's claimed identity should also be honored.

End-of-life communication and memorial expressions

Giles, Thai, and Prestin (2014) maintain that there are two forms of end-of-life (EOL) communication. One occurring specifically *at* the end of life and the other *about* the end of life. This study focuses on the second form: regarding the planning, negotiating, and anxiety incumbent in thinking about and planning for one's death. Previous discussions about this form of end-of-life communication focused on terminal illnesses and indications of hope for the patient; indeed, there is virtually no research in communication literature regarding death and dying in the trans community.

Unfortunately, EOL conversations do not often occur. Chen (2018) reports that communication avoidance is consistent before, during, and after the end of life. According to The Pew Research Center (as cited in Chen, 2018), one-third of married couples avoid end-of-life conversations with their partner. Theories in terror management suggest it is the certainty that our futures will involve death that elicits fears and anxieties about aging (Nelson, 2005). In the U. S., it is extremely uncommon for a family to talk about death or dying. We are, in many ways, a death-denying society (Aries, 1974; Zimmerman, 2007). Giles et al. (2014) believe that people's inability to discuss death can "challenge their management of it" (p. 406). The trans community suffers significantly from this reticence. In a recent study, 22.9% of trans or gender expansive respondents stated that they had *definitely not* talked with someone about their own death while

approximately 56% stated that they had only ‘‘kind of tried.’’ Less than 5% of the respondents stated that they had completed a will or living will (Witten, 2014, p. 27).

Unfortunately, when individuals avoid discussions about death, they may be depriving themselves and their loved ones of a unique opportunity. These conversations can help friends and family members accept the coming loss and may have beneficial effects after the loved one has passed and can help some families resolve unfinished business (Metzger & Gray, 2008). The discussion of, if not the resolution of, “unfinished business” could be particularly important for trans individuals who may be at odds with, or estranged from, their families due to their gender transition. Giles, et al. (2022) suggest that the impending separation associated with death can remove many of the barriers that prevent declarations of love and intimacy, and can “create the opportunity for people to re-examine, re-affirm, and adjust their own self-esteem, self-image, and identity” (p. 112). These discussions can result in positive psychological consequences for the dying individual. Conversely, one could imagine that a conversation that denies or hints at erasing a trans person’s gender identity might have emotionally devastating consequences for the trans person.

While those in the cisgender mainstream may avoid discussing death, TGD individuals may be doubly motivated to avoid end-of-life conversations. For not only are trans people likely to feel uncomfortable discussing issues related to their death or funeral arrangements, they may also be reluctant to discuss issues related to their gender-nonconformity (Gagne, Tewksbury, & McGaughey, 1997). Because they are faced with very strong motivations to avoid discussing both death and gender, we propose the following research question regarding gender-related end-of-life conversations.

RQ 3: To what extent have trans people engaged in end-of-life conversations, and, if they have not, do they anticipate doing so in the future?

To the category of end-of-life communication, we add the associated sub-category of memorial expressions. Although typically much less an interaction and more a pronouncement, memorial expressions take many forms, including ritual (funeral ceremonies and wakes), print and digital media (obituaries and preserved social media pages), and granite (grave markers and headstones). These expressions often constitute the final communication made by an individual, or on behalf of an individual, as they pass from this world. Memorial expressions constitute an under-represented and under-investigated category in the communication literature and there is little research done on the question of funeral satisfaction (O'Rourke et al., 2011; Woodthorpe, 2017).

The O'Rourke et al. study explores the elements that contribute to a successful, satisfying funeral. But never in the study is the question asked as to whether the funeral – or by extension, the complex of memorial expressions – would meet the wishes of the deceased and therefore, be satisfying for the deceased. On the other hand, in her investigation of funerals from a relational perspective, Woodthorpe (2017) does allude to the deceased's wishes:

> The extent to which a funeral is considered successful depends on the degree to which the organizers are able to marry their own (and the deceased's) belief systems with the ceremony content and, I would add, accurately reflect their relationship(s) (p. 595).

For many, the tone and content of memorial expressions are a matter of control. While some individuals claim not to care what happens to them after they pass away,

others go to great lengths to plan and manage their own funerals and, more broadly, their continuing legacy. Giles et al. (2013) see future funeral management as a means of coping with the uncertainty and inevitability of death. It is a way of confronting the unknown: "It makes perfect sense to be the Master of Ceremonies of this last event" (p. 116). However, because the deceased's wishes are often de-emphasized in memorial expressions, it is essential that those from marginalized communities or those with unpopular or unconventional attributes or attitudes make their memorialization wishes known in advance.

RQ 4: To what extent have trans people made their wishes known with regard to memorial expressions such as funeral rituals, obituaries, and grave markers?

Legal considerations

There is a legal aspect to issues related to personal identity and to the disposition of the body upon death. For instance, in 2014, the state of California passed the "Respect After Death" law (AB 1577) to help ensure that transgender people have their gender identity reflected on their death certificates (CA Governor Signs, 2014). Similar laws have since been passed in New Jersey and Washington, D.C. (Allen, February 4, 2019). However, for the most part, these laws apply only to death certificates (which remain largely unseen by the general public) and do not impact the public memorial expressions that have much great visibility. It is also assumed, thanks in part to living in a death-denying culture, that most of the participants in this study will be unaware of these "Respect after Death" laws, and in general, with any laws, traditions, and policies regarding the creation of post-mortem memorials and with the responsibilities regarding

the disposition of the body after death.

Method

Participants

Our study allows participants to label themselves as they wish to be identified. But all of the participants, to some degree, express their gender in a manner that conflicts with the social norms associated with their gender as it was assigned at birth. Free from the forced choice/multiple choice template of quantitative surveys that often allow no more options than "male," "female," or "other," the 32 participants in our study used 17 unique labels to describe their identity. Table 1 in Appendix B shows a summary of the participants' age, ethnicity, and gender identity.

Recruitment

Recruitment efforts emphasized attracting participants with a range of gender identities. A concentrated effort was made to seek out a variety of transgender identities, ethnicities, and, although every participant was over the age of 40, diversity in age was also sought. Recruitment was confined to those 40 years old or above because those individuals were perceived to be most likely to have considered making preparations for their memorials, for the disposition of their bodies (for instance, burial vs. cremation), and for the disbursement of their material assets. Participants were recruited from various LGBT organizations, online transgender community groups, and through the first author's personal contacts. A snowball recruitment process ensued after initial contacts with the hopes of securing a more diverse participant pool.

The participants need not to have undergone any medical procedure in association with a gender transition, nor must they present as gender-nonconforming a certain

percentage of the time in order to qualify for inclusion (Valentine, 2007). Furthermore, participants did not need to describe themselves as "out" in order to participate. The broader trans umbrella encompasses a myriad of expressions and levels of "outness." Participants for this study were not paid for their participation.

Interviews and analysis

The interviews were conducted by the author who identifies as non-binary, trans femme, in the expectation of engendering trust among the participants. Interviews, ranging from 22:48 to 1:05:54 minutes (between January and May 2018), were conducted in two ways. The first set involved online webcam, Skype, or Facebook Messenger video chat interactions, with the medium depending on the participant's access to these devices. In order to promote confidentiality and also to assist the less confident and less comfortable to feel safe, only the audio portion of the interview was recorded. The interviews were transcribed by trained undergraduate research assistants and the participants' names (birth or otherwise) were never made known to the transcribers; only the pseudonyms were used in this report. A second set of interviews was conducted face-to-face in a large Midwest city in January 2018. Eight interviews were conducted in a private hotel room during a get-together of a transfeminine social group. These conversations were recorded by an audio device.

Interview protocol was semi-structured with the interviewer adapting to the flow of each conversation; efforts were made to insure that all ultimately answered the same key questions (See Appendix A: Study 1). The central questions for the interviews were as follows: How do you hope to be memorialized upon your death – particularly with respect to your gender identity? How do you believe your loved ones will memorialize

your gender identity? Have you had any conversations with loved ones regarding these matters?

If attempting to define or describe identity is often described as messy, then so quite often is the process of qualitative data analysis. Many have attempted to, as McAllum et al. (2019) state, "shine light on some of the messy behind-the-scenes work that goes into analysing data" (p. 358). Interview data was recorded (audio only), transcribed verbatim by trained undergraduate research assistants, coded for common patterns and themes, and then scrutinized through a thematic content analysis. Data was then analyzed through an inductive, iterative process – alternating between emergent reading of the data and the use of existing models and theories (Tracy, 2013). Data interpretation was informed by previous research on the subject, by the researcher's personal knowledge and experience (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019) and by an openness to the discovery of unintended themes (Schmitt, 2005).

Limits to understanding must be acknowledged. McAllum et al. (2019) suggest that, "Because the signs and symbols that the knower(s) [researchers and participants] select represent only part of the complexity of the known, this act of sense-making will always be partial and generative of multiple interpretations" (p. 360). In this study, the interview/data collection/data interpretation process was approached with strong sense of interviewer reflexivity and an awareness of the control the interviewer maintains over the discourse. It was also conducted with a sense of what McAllum et al. refer to as a "fidelity to multiple commitments," including fidelity to our participants, fidelity to ourselves (as researchers), and fidelity to our readers. (p. 371). Consequently, in both the

interview stage and in the later interpretations of the data, a strong motivation to accurately report the participants' responses and intentions remained paramount.

Findings and discussion

The primary focus of this study was to explore (1) whether or not trans people have been conducting critical end-of-life conversations to protect their identity after death and (2) to discover the manner in which trans people wish to have their identity memorialized. With regard to end-of-life conversations, only 10 of the 32 interviewees (31%) indicated that they had to some degree made their wishes regarding memorial expressions known to one of their loved ones. This includes 25% of those in their 40's, 40% of those in their 50's, and 30% of those 60 years old and older. Comparatively, 37.5% had made out a will to provide for the disbursement of their material assets.

Most who had not had important conversations with regard to their gender identity also had no plans to do so in the future. Some, like Akio (a 72 year-old cross dresser from the Bay Area), had discussed their home and other shared property, as well as where they would like their ashes scattered. But they did not anticipate a discussion of gender identity after death. Many others suggested that they had never given this aspect of the death process much consideration. As Felicia, a 43-year-old trans woman stated, "I have never really thought about it."

Interestingly, at least for one participant, having the conversation with a loved one implies a responsibility -- a burden that they did not wish to bestow: "I don't want to put the burden of burying me and the financial costs on anyone. Like maybe, if it wouldn't set someone back a year, I'd talk to them about it. But I can't talk to my 26-year-old daughter who's got two kids and going to college and working in a hospital about paying

for my funeral." Effie, a 43-year-old trans woman from the Midwest, said that, rather than taking on such costs and responsibilities, she'd rather that her family leave her body unclaimed. "That's what I told [my daughter]. If they find me dead and I'm in a morgue, don't claim me."

Perhaps not surprisingly (and rather encouragingly), some participants felt motivated to perhaps engage in an end-of-life conversation sometime in the future due to the experience of taking part in this study. Beryl, a 68-year-old trans woman from the Midwest said:

> I think our conversation now has kind of re-motivated me to take steps to address these things. I do think it's important that we have this conversation, the three of us: myself and my two kids. At least to make my issues known.

These conversations obviously remain difficult to initiate. Responses among this older cohort often supported the assumption that when a new gender enactment is expressed (*enacted identity*), relationships with close friends and family members (*relational layer*) changed. As Felicia described:

> When I came out to everybody that's when I lost my family, my mother and all my aunts and uncles. I wasn't included in holidays or anything. My mom... she was so embarrassed of me that, say for Christmas, she would come pick up my daughter and she would go to the family Christmas as grandma with her granddaughter, yet not including me. Because I embarrassed her.

Felicia's heartbreaking description of her family situation illustrates one of the many possible repercussions that can occur when an individual alters their enacted identity in a manner that family members perceive as a significant shift away from the

identity that they co-created with the subject in CTI's relational layer. In many cases, gender identity (now perceived as problematic) becomes yet another topic of conversation that family members wish to avoid.

Attitudes toward nonconsensual detransitioning after death

Most of the participants were aware of the problem of post-mortem de-transitioning and several had heard of specific cases, but very few indicated that they had given the matter much thought when it came to their *own* identity after death. All of those who were specifically asked (12 out of 12 interviewees) reacted negatively to the practice of nonconsensual de-transitioning of a trans person after death. Dylan, 52, a Southern Californian who identifies as intersex/trans masculine, suggested that such an act has an negative impact on the transgender community, "It sends a dehumanizing message to the trans people who are still living…" As one 59-year-old crossdresser from Los Angeles stated, "It's sad. Because that's the way they [the TGD person] wanted to live, they've been through the struggles, they've been through the pain of doing it." To many, it seems that the level of precariousness of the trans identity is inappropriate in relation to the amount of emotional labor necessary to claim it.

At the thought of their own identity being de-transitioned after death, Nikki, a 42-year old Canadian trans woman now living in the U.S. actually threatened violence, "That would be terrible. I would get out of my coffin and kill every one of those motherfuckers. I will lose my shit on [the family]." Jessica, a 43-year old transsexual with intersex characteristics from a large city in the Midwest, suggested a ghostly form of violence, "Well, if someone did that to me, I'd have to come back and haunt them for the rest of their life."

There are many potential motivations for the anger and passion apparent in these reactions to nonconsensual de-transitioning. But much of the anger regarding distortion or erasure of gender-nonconforming identities seems rooted in the struggle that so many TGD individuals go through to claim that identity in the first place.

Willingness to participate in end-of-life conversations and expectations for enactments of identity after death

Despite the fact that many of the respondents stated that they would be angry or disappointed if their family de-transitioned them after death, many also expressed a difficulty in initiating important conversations that might prevent a nonconsensual detransitioning from happening to them. Alexa, 57, from the north Midwest, admitted to having difficulty talking to her son about her trans-ness, "He still struggles with me being trans. He's okay but he doesn't want to talk about it." Becca, 43, Midwest, did not think anyone in their largely unaccepting family truly cared. Her comment highlights the ostracism and the cutting of close ties that many trans people experience: "No, like if I felt if somebody really loved me, then maybe I'd talk to them about it."

On the other hand, Nikki was concerned that any conversation on the topic of death might make her loved ones expect the worst.

> I think that if I told my mother, 'Hey, I want to talk to you about my obituary and shit,' that all of a sudden she's going to want to get me marked up somewhere 'cause she thinks I'm going to kill myself, you know what I mean?"

Still, despite not wishing to engage in an EOL conversation, 17 of the 32 interviewees (53%) expected a memorial representation that they would be happy with. Zander, a 54-year-old from New Jersey who identifies as transgender stated that they had

never had any conversations about death or memorials with their family, but they trust that their brother will honor their identity, “He’s a very thoughtful person. He’s been very supportive of me and my gender identity, and I have no doubt that he would support my wishes. He just that type of person.”

Others (28%) expressed uncertainty as to how their loved ones would enact their identity. Kelly, a married 56-year-old trans person from the Midwest was unsure how her wife would handle it, “I just don't know what she would do, you know?” The other six participants (19%), did not expect a positive outcome. Nick, 45, a Southerner who identifies as trans masculine, had lost touch with his family and feared the worst. “I mean they don’t even know that I’m transgender. I’ve been estranged from them since I started hormone replacement so they… they don’t know a thing about me. So it would… it wouldn’t be well.”

Because of her wife’s lack of acceptance, Evie, 55 and assigned male at birth, relays how she sees her memorialization playing out:

Researcher: If you had a gravestone, what would the name be?

Participant: I would rather it be feminine.

Research: You'd rather it be, but you think it'll be--?

Participant: It'd be male. It'd be male.

Evie’s response indicates the marked difference that often exists between trans people’s wishes and their expectations when it comes to their anticipated expressed identity after death. Evie would prefer to be memorialized as a woman, but is certain that her wife would erase all trace of her feminine side:

She would burn all my clothes or take them to donation, get rid of everything, as

quick as possible so the kids wouldn't go through it. She would basically clean it up, so she wouldn't have to deal with it. ‘Cause like I said, for her, it is more of an embarrassment.

In cases such as this, it is clear that, for the surviving spouse, preserving the deceased’s authentic identity is not a priority, or even a consideration. Realistically, in Evie’s case (and in other cases like this), it is possible that even if the participant engaged in an end-of-life conversation with a family member and made their post-mortem wishes clear, the family member still might not honor those wishes.

Preferred post-mortem enactment

To break down the respondents wishes for the enactment of their post-mortem identity, the participants’ identities will be described in two ways: (a) the identity they were assigned at birth and (b) their lived identity. The lived identity may refer to their identity post-transition, or for those who have not transitioned, the lived identity refers to the individual’s transgender or gender-nonconforming identity. Responses were grouped into four categories (see Tables 3.1 and 3.2 in Appendix B): Group 1 included those who wanted to be remembered only by their lived, or trans identity. Group 2 was made up of those who wanted to be remembered only by their identity assigned at birth. Group 3 included those who wished to have both aspects (identity assigned at birth and lived identity) remembered and memorialized, while those in Group 4 did not care how their gender was represented after death.

While the author made no predictions as to how respondents might react to this question, when one considers the amount of emotional capital trans people expend to express and defend a non-normative gender expression, the results were somewhat

surprising. Only 8 of the 32 (25%) wanted to be memorialized as their lived experience identity alone with no mention of the pre-transition identity. Two wanted to be remembered by their identity-assigned-at-birth alone. Nearly half of the respondents (14 or 45%) wanted their entire lives (and both their pre-transition and post-transition identities) memorialized. This was the most common response among the participants. Most surprising was the fact that 25% (8 participants) of respondents claimed not to care how they were remembered. This was unexpected, particularly when one considers the group's strong negative feelings regarding the unauthorized de-transitioning of others.

GROUP 1 – Lived experience only

Participants in this group usually did not want any mention of their birth name (commonly known in the trans community as their "dead name"), their gender-assigned-at-birth, or, in most cases, any of the accomplishments and experiences they experienced before they transitioned. In this cohort, it appears that the interpenetration between the respondent's personal and enacted identity frames are most salient, with less significance placed on relational identity. The thoughts and feelings of loved ones that play such a key role in the construction of relational identities did not seem highly valued in this group. Suzanne, a 65-year-old trans woman from a large Midwest city had very strong feelings about her masculine birth identity:

> I don't want people to remember him. I want people to remember me. It's kinda like… [exhales] You're an actor and people remember you for the roles you play. I don't want to be remembered for that role. That guy was sometimes an asshole.

Nick explained how he would feel if his family didn't memorialize his lived identity, "If they were to memorialize someone other than me as I am now, then they

wouldn't even be, you know, memorializing me. They would be memorializing a person that they thought they knew." Even those participants who were rather ambivalent about their treatment after death remained specific about the name by which they wanted to be remembered. Paulina, a 70-year-old woman from Southern California, was much more concerned about the treatment of her name than the treatment of her body.

I would probably say that if they wanted to do a little memorial, that's fine, I would just assume that I'd be put in an oven, turned to ashes, thrown in a jar, and be done. [But] I would prefer they call me by not my given name but my acquired name.

Paulina's comment emphasizes the importance of identity for this sample, and in keeping with the purposes of this study, the authenticity of that identity. While many in this older cohort mentioned their wishes for the disposition of their body (coffin burial vs. cremation), their concern regarding the use of the name that they considered most authentic was evident.

GROUP 2 – Identity as assigned at birth only

In this group, the relational identity frame was clearly salient as the decision to *no*t "come out" to their friends and family in life, and to continue to keep that identity secret in the after-life was, in each case, attributed to an expectation of non-acceptance by close friends and community members. Jim, a married 47-year-old from Southern California, who considers himself genderfluid or bi-gender, said that if he died next week, he assumed he would be buried and memorialized as his birth (or male) identity, and that that eventuality probably would not change were he to pass away at some point in the future:

This week, it's Jim. In the future, it'll probably be Jim as well. I think at this point

> if I were to die tomorrow, I think that the people who know [about his gender-nonconformity] now are the people that I'm okay with knowing. I would regret not having some particular people know, but at this point it's not that important.

Jim considers that if he were to progress further in his transgender identity, then his thoughts on his identity after death might change. But at the time he was interviewed, he was comfortable being memorialized in his birth identity alone. Jim's thoughts suggest that quite often, the way in which wishes and expectations for the enactment of one's identity after death are dependent on one's understanding of one's personal identity at the time that post-mortem decision-making occurs. But his comments also indicate the critical role that relationships play in that decision-making.

Close relationships – both positive and negative – were often shown to influence the interviewees' response. Relational and cultural considerations played a significant role in end-of-life decision-making for William, 59, a Southern Californian who identifies as male despite often expressing in a feminine manner. For William, the desire to be memorialized as his identity-assigned-at-birth was directly attributable to his Japanese heritage, and to his desire not to bring shame to his wife or his family. He has an agreement with his wife that he can dress in a feminine manner when he attends transgender or cross-dresser events but, in accordance with their agreement, he is barred from coming out to close friends or family members:

> I feel really fortunate that she is letting me do as much as humanly possible, 'cause she's a very conservative Japanese. Japanese… they're certain Japanese people that, you do not go crazy wild, you don't want to disgrace your family. And the Japanese community, especially the Japanese-American community, is

very small, very tight in California. So you know, people talk shit, and people talk, and it just... boom, it just goes like wildfire. So she would not want that to happen at all.

For individuals like William, concerns regarding one's partner or one's culture take precedent over his gender identity. His response also illustrates just one example of how the enactment of one's nonconforming-gender identity in public among those in this older age group is often negotiated with close friends, family members, and partners. His allusion to his cultural heritage suggests the important role that group membership (as denoted in CTI's communal layer), when salient, also plays an important role in pre- and post-mortem public identity enactments.

GROUP 3 – Both lived identity and as assigned at birth

When asked if they preferred their identity to be portrayed in a certain way, 14 out of 32 participants (44%) stated that they would like their *whole* life to be memorialized. This was the largest response cohort by far, and their preferred memorial expression would include the times when they enacted their gender as a trans or gender-nonconforming person as well as when they enacted their gender as it was assigned at birth. They felt that all of their experiences – regardless of their expression – were a part of who they are and who they have always been. Monica, a 43-year-old who identifies as trans states, "I think it would be good because, reality is, it's all me from when I was little all the way up until now."

When specifically asked if they had had a conversation about their funeral arrangements, 11 out of 14 participants in this cohort stated that they had not. This is an interesting finding considering the fact that this category of participants has the most to

be memorialized. Sabrina, a married 69-year old gender fluid individual, seemed rather tickled that those from her past and those from her current life might be able to see photos expressing her different identities, "I think that would be nice because the people who knew me before would go wow, and the people who knew me now would go [with more emphasis] wow!" Yui, a single 49-year-old Japanese-American woman, also reacted positively to the idea of different aspects of one's identity being publicly expressed:

> I don't mind having pictures showing who I was in the past… because the truth is that whenever I go to a funeral for [a] friend from the community, you see those photos, and you realize that, 'wow, there's a whole other side of this person's life you've never even known. It's like seeing a diamond, you turn it the other side, and you see all these other facets. You know, they're not necessarily the same, they don't shine the same, they're not polished the same, but it's still intriguing. So, yeah, I wouldn't mind people seeing that side.

Eric, a single 56-year-old Southern Californian, was particularly proud of his pre-transition accomplishments and did not want them to be erased. His thoughts on his post-mortem expression reveal a seamless interpenetration of his birth identity and his current identity. His thoughts on his identity seem removed from any relationship or relational identity and emphasized instead constancy of his personal identity despite his evolving enacted identity.

> You know I'm pretty open about that. Being an artist I had a very, a large career that started in the 80's… I'm a feminist and it's very important that people don't take that away from me. I transitioned and I'm a trans man, you know, I'm

> transsexual. I'm all that but I'm still the feminist artist that I was for all of those years. Yes I would say that [showing both sides] is very important to me."

For other trans people, despite their desire to memorialize both their birth and lived identities, there is dissonance between their desires and their perception of the reality in which they live. Robert, 64, from the Southeastern U.S., identifies as male but often expresses in a feminine manner. He daydreams about his friends and family finding out about his gender fluidity after he has died, but he finds the idea too risky to seriously entertain while he is still alive.

> I think given where I live. And knowing the people I know… I'm also just very deferential to the people around me. And the effect it would have on them. I just don't think it's good process for me. The downside way outweighs the upside.

Robert wants only one name, his given name, to appear on his headstone. He has another name he uses when he expresses his feminine identity – a name that is rather well-known in the transgender/cross dresser community. But in his eyes, "If I total everything up in my life, I don't think [my feminine name] is something that merits being on my tombstone." Yet, when he describes his desired funeral, he compares it to a wedding – where the church is divided into the bride's side and the groom's side. Robert imagines his funeral has also having two sides: one side for those who were friends with his male side, and one side for those who are friends with his more feminine side. Robert's varied thoughts on the way his identity is expressed on different forms of memorial expressions illustrates the often contractor manner in which many gender-nonconforming individuals both imagine and intellectualize their gender identity and their gender identity after death.

All of the participants in this cohort wanted both expressions of their identity memorialized, but as illustrated by Lesley, 51, a divorced trans woman from Southern California, several made it clear that they hoped that the primary focus would remain on their lived experience, “Since I don’t really shy away from my past and my journey, part of who I am is who I was. So, you know, none of that matters as long as, in death, I am remembered as a woman.” In a way, Lesley’s preferences echo the comments made by Paulina in regard to the disposition of her body. For both of these individuals, it is proper naming seems most important to them when they imagine post-mortem expressions of their identity.

GROUP 4 – Those who did not care how their identity was memorialized

These participants were, by average, the oldest cohort of the four. The average age in this group was 61.0 years, considerably older than the average ages of the other three cohorts (Groups 1-3: 52.1, 55.5 & 53.1, respectively). Perhaps not surprisingly, because this cohort does not care how they are memorialized, only 2 out of 8 participants had had any end-of-life conversations regarding their memorial expressions. Sarah, a 77-year-old Canadian, who identifies as transgender/cross dresser, was particularly adamant that, in her mind, funerals did not matter at all, “I think the whole thing is bullshit, frankly… I don’t care what happens to me once I’m dead. Throw my ashes down the toilet I could care less. I won’t be around.” Others took a rather fatalistic approach to life itself. Candice, 61, a Midwesterner who has been married twice and divorced twice, did not care who was in charge of her memorial or how her identity was enacted, “To me, it doesn’t matter who does it because I’m going to be dead and gone. I don’t care. I won’t know what happened… I mean… you know, you’re gone, you’re gone.”

For Dylan, it is the closeness of his family relationships (specifically, the closeness of the relationship he feels with his daughter) that led him to diminish the importance of this own identity expression after death:

> We've been through enough… that we know that the grief work belongs to the people who are still alive. Whatever [my daughter's] wishes were, that would be what I want to happen. But I have absolutely no attachment to what they say, what name they use, if they call me her mother, her father, her both. I just really don't have any investment in that.

In a sense, Dylan's response echoes Robert's earlier response that he is "very deferential to the people around me." These expressions of concern challenge stereotypical thinking that paint trans people as selfish and singularly self-focused, particularly during their transition (Fraser, 2009; Stuart, 1991).

Summarizing enactment wishes and expectations

The findings detailed here suggest that the wishes of TGD people regarding their identity after death are varied, difficult to predict, and dependent on the nature of their close personal relationships. Clearly, it is not always the lived or gender-nonconforming identity that should be emphasized in order to be considered authentic. For instance, Alexa told the story of how when a local cross dresser died suddenly in their Midwestern community, several members of the gender-nonconforming community hurried to her apartment to clean out all traces of the deceased's femme life. Apparently, the deceased had never come out to her family, and they did not want the family to discover her secret posthumously. While they will always remember the deceased as feminine, the actions of this group of TGD individuals were guided by a desire to support the reality of their

friend's life experience, and their friend's life experience, at that point, was a closeted one.

Limits and future research

Limitations to the study include the relatively small number of participants (in comparison to a typical quantitative study). The study's concentration on older trans people was intentional, but also may have been limiting. A younger demographic might be more attached to their TGD identities and therefore more adamant about emphasizing their lived identity in memorial expressions. (Study 2, created in response to this limitation, is included in this dissertation.) Associated studies might include focusing on the families who have recently buried their trans loved ones, and their decision-making processes. It is hoped that the results of this study will be used to encourage TGD individuals of all ages to take the steps necessary to protect their identity after death. It also hoped that the results of this study will be shared with those in the death/mortuary industry. It is critical that mortuary, hospice, and geriatric institutions are made aware of the unique concerns, hopes, and fears that TGD individuals have regarding the end of life.

Study 1 conclusion

The transgender population is difficult to define and locate, is constructed in a myriad of labels and expressions, and is in no way monolithic. All of these characteristics are evident in their attitudes and expectations regarding the enactment of their identities after death. While any population would map to the four frames of identity presented by CTI, the contested and stigmatized nature of the transgender identity has the potential to bring each frame into acute focus while simultaneously accentuating the compelling

interpenetrations that exist between the four. These interviews revealed a sample cohort that had not, for the most part, engaged in end-of-life communication specific to their gender identity (from here on, gender-affirming EOL), and yet most were confident that they would be satisfied with the manner in which they expected their loved ones to memorialize their gender identity. Similarly, most did not anticipate engaging in a gender-affirming EOL in the near future, although a few participants did say that the process of participating in this study had inspired them to consider doing so.

From the various ways the participants stated that they currently identify to the many ways in which they hope to be memorialized, responses suggest a strong sense of individuality, influenced, as CTI might predict, by relationships, communities, and culture, but resolutely individual.

The call for authentic representation after death conjures one of our most basic human and ethical impulses: to treat others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Our study shows a variety of preferred outcomes with few, if any, predictive correlations. It is, therefore, incumbent upon both parties, the TGD individual and their loved ones, to engage in end-of-life interactions with one another and to also become aware of appropriate state laws regarding designated agents and disposition of the body.

By exploring transgender identity after death and the associated end-of-life conversations, the current study contributes to the literature concerning identity, relational identity, and identity negotiation. It calls attention to the under-investigated category of public memorial expressions and amplifies the significance of what are, for many, the final communicative acts made before one leaves this world.

Study 2

Study 2 represents a follow-up or bookend to Study 1. After concluding the research on the older sample of TGD individuals in Study 1, the natural impulse is to then talk to young or emerging adult TGD individuals. Study 2, the product of that impulse is a qualitative study of younger transgender individuals using a slightly amended and updated version of the interview protocol used in Study 1. The interviews for Study 1 were conducted in Winter and Spring of 2018. The interviews for Study 2 were conducted in Winter and Spring of 2020. So there is a four-year gap between the periods of data collection. That time gap could realistically be considered significant in a rapidly growing community like the TGD community.

In addition, Study 2 more formally introduces the concept of *gender-affirming end-of-life communication*. Gender-affirming EOL broadly refers to conversations and other forms of communication in which the post-mortem gender identity (and the enactment of that identity) are discussed with individuals who are likely to become empowered to enact the subject's identity after death. Together with the coming-out dialogues, the gender-affirming EOL dialogue has the potential to be one of the most important conversations a TGD individual has with their loved ones as it provides opportunities for participants to engage more deeply with the TGD individual and with the issues associated with their trans-ness.

Introduction

In the last few years there has been a societal shift regarding gender – and, in particular, regarding young people and their gender identities. According to a survey commissioned by GLAAD, 20% of millennials identify as something other than strictly

straight and cisgender. This statistic is nearly three times the percentage of baby boomers who identify in the same way (7%). GLAAD suggests that these young people may reject the notion that they have a gender at all. This shift could be attributed to increased cultural acceptance and media visibility that allows for an earlier and more sophisticated understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity as spectrums.

The GLAAD study showed that even among heterosexual-cisgender millennials, there is a heightened sense of sophistication and an increase in those who report having friends or acquaintances who identify beyond the traditional binaries of "gay" and "straight" and/or "man" and "woman." Additionally, with respect to the societal gender generation gap, the GLAAD study showed that older Americans were more likely than younger Americans to indicate they were uncomfortable with those who "do not conform to traditional ideas about gender." It is into this evolving cultural shift that the younger TGD adults have come to their understandings of gender, of their own gender identity, and of their place in that culture.

The motivation behind Study 2

The purposes of this second examination of transgender identity after death are two-fold. First, the original study concentrated on older individuals (over 40 y. o.). This study, by recruiting younger trans people between the ages of 18 and 30 years old, hopes to reflect a more complete documentation of the attitudes and opinions of TGD individuals. Second, while every community is subject to its own gaps in generational attitudes and beliefs, the experiences of contemporary young trans people and older trans people, marked as they are by significant social changes, seem particularly positioned for a comparative study. This study will help to address questions raised in the first study

regarding how younger trans people might respond to similar lines of questioning.

Comparing the attitudes and beliefs of individuals from different age groups can always be instructive, but the TGD generation gap is particularly distinctive. In a recent online study (Puckett et al., 2021), it was found that younger generations of trans people were much quicker to live in their affirmed identity. Older trans people (*boomers*) reported an average of 24 years between the time they started to identify as trans and the point in time when they started living in that identity. The cohort of TGD individuals interviewed for the Study 1 are similar in age to the baby boomers. In contrast, Gen Z TGD individuals took only two years, and millennials took only three years to cross that same divide from awareness to lived experience. This data provides ample incentive to investigate how these very different lived experiences might translate into different views for younger trans people towards their gender-nonconforming identity, towards the expression of that identity after death, and, more generally, towards the subject of transgender identity after death.

Research questions

Study 2 expands on an examination of transgender individuals' reactions to the various issues associated with the assignment of transgender identity after death. This study discusses similar issues through a nearly identical protocol (See Appendix A: Study 2). The interview protocol was updated to encourage more clarity regarding specific memorial expressions as well as to explore topics that were not addressed in the original study but that were mentioned by respondents in the first study. Among these are questions asking about expressions of identity used in specific public memorial expressions, such as grave markers, obituaries, and funeral photo/video displays. (The

question was previously asked in a more generalized manner.)

This protocol also emphasizes perceptions on the part of the subject as to the potential influence that the religious beliefs, cultural experiences, and political affiliations of their family members might have on their decision-making process with regard to identity enactments after death. This study also more deeply probes the subjects' motivations behind their hesitation or reluctance to initiate end-of-life conversations with family members in the near future. Still, the primary goals of the study – and the attendant research questions remain largely the same as in the first study:

RQ 1a: Has the subject made their wishes known regarding their gender identity (as it would be expressed through memorial expressions, such as funeral rituals, obituaries, and grave markers)?

RQ 1b: If so, what specific details were discussed, particularly with regard to gender identity and gender expression?

If no conversations have taken place and the subject has no plans to initiate such a conversation in the near future, the subject will be asked why they are reluctant or hesitant to do so. For those who have indicated that the manner in which their identity is enacted is important to them, the response to this question is particularly significant.

RQ 2: If no conversations have taken place, why does the subject feel hesitant or reluctant to initiate that conversation? What obstacles are perceived to be preventing the initiation of such a conversation?

It is anticipated that, due to their younger age, this cohort is probably much less likely than their older counterparts to have initiated or participated in an EOL conversation.

This study also seeks to document both the wishes and expectations of young adult trans people may have in light of the stigmatization and challenging lived experiences that many in the TGD community have faced. It is important to note that, due to the lack of agency one has over the enactment of one's identity after death, the manner in which one *wishes* to be memorialized may differ dramatically from the manner in which one *expects* to be memorialized.

In an effort to clearly distinguish between EOL conversations that could include a variety of topics and EOL conversations that specifically address the preservation of one's gender identity after death, the author will refer to EOL conversations that deal with one's gender identity as as *gender-affirming end-of-life conversations* (or gender affirming EOL).

RQ 3a: Whether or not the subject has engaged in gender-affirming end-of-life conversations, what are their *wishes* regarding the manner in which their gender identity is expressed after death?

RQ 3b: Whether or not the subject has engaged in gender affirming end-of-life conversations, what are their *expectations* regarding the manner in which their gender identity is expressed after death?

And then, although we believe we can predict primarily negative responses, we hope to document trans individuals' reactions to the act of nonconsensual de-transitioning after death.

RQ 4: What is the extent of the participants' familiarity with the practice of TGD individuals being de-transitioned by their families after death? What are their thoughts and feelings in reaction to that practice?

Religion, culture, and politics

In the initial study of older transgender individuals, concerns regarding initiating gender-affirming conversations arose with some frequency over the course of several of the interviews. Of particular note were the topics of religiosity and political affiliation. In many cases, the participants' perceptions of the impact that these social influences would have on one's loved ones became deterrents to the open discussion of one's gender identity.

With regard to politics, in the first study, a 42-year-old gender fluid individual living on the West Coast discussed going back to the East Coast to visit their family, and perhaps discussing their evolving gender identity. For them, it was not just a family member's political conservatism, but more specifically their *Trump-ism*, that was perceived as transphobic.

> I think my brother and sister, the oldest ones are going to be fine. And then I think the one that's the uber-Trump supporter is going to be weirded out. She's made comments to me and, like, I've gotten in a big fight with her over Christmas over political stuff. So she's going to be a tough one.

This concern regarding Trump's influence was (and is) shared among many in the trans community who perceive the Trump administration as, "claiming publicly to support trans people, whilst attacking them via policy retractions" (Jones, 2018, p. 481). Jones' work chronicles the anti-transgender backlash that has coincided with Trump's rise to power, including the removal of protections and safeguards instituted under the previous Obama Administration.

With regard to religion, comments like these from the older participants guided more direct questioning in the second phase of the survey. One 43-year-old trans woman from Detroit stated, "I grew up Catholic and I still idolize the Catholicism, but I know they hate me, so I'm just not in it." Another Midwesterner (50 y. o., transgender) stated that if she was memorialized as a trans person, many in her family would not attend her funeral due to their religious beliefs: "Like on my dad's side, [they are] pretty devout Catholics, and… I don't think a lot [of them] would show up." She predicts that it would really "mess" with their heads, if some of the more religious family members did attend her funeral and found her dressed in a feminine way. It is important to note that, despite these stated perceptions and expectations, previous research (Benson et al., 2018; Yarhouse & Carrs, 2012) has reported both positive and negative experiences for transgender people in religious communities and congregations.

Cultural experiences (and the impact of those experiences on attitudes towards trans-ness) are often intertwined. With regard to cultural experiences, in Study 1, a 59-year-old crossdresser who remains somewhat in the closet, indicated that the Japanese heritage she shares with her wife has had an impact on their decision-making regarding her gender-nonconforming visibility.

> I feel really fortunate that she is letting me do as much as humanly possible, because she's a very conservative Japanese. There are certain Japanese people that, you do not go crazy wild, you don't want to disgrace your family. And the Japanese community, especially the Japanese-American community is very tight in California, [everyone] knows somebody, so you know, people talk shit. People

talk, and it just... boom, it just goes like wildfire. So she would not want that [public visibility] to happen at all.

Consequently, in order to appease both her wife and the culture in which they were both raised, the subject represses her trans-ness and often refrains from the conversations attending to that trans-ness.

Based on these comments and others like them, the protocol for Study 2 was amended to include direct questions about the perceived influence of family members' religiosity, political affiliations, and cultural experiences with regard to the participants' gender identity and to their expectations for the accurate representation of that identity after death.

RQ 5: How do the participant's perceptions of the *religious beliefs* and *cultural experiences* of agents associated with one's family members impact the participant's expectations for authentic identity expression after death?

RQ 6: How do the participant's perceptions of the *political affiliations* of agents associated with one's family members impact the participant's expectations for authentic identity expression after death?

Method

Participants

As with Study 1, Study 2 allowed participants to label themselves as they wish to be identified. But all of the participants express their gender in a manner that conflicts with the social norms associated with their gender as it was assigned at birth. Free from the forced choice/multiple choice template of quantitative surveys that often allow no more options than "male," "female," or "other," a variety of terms is anticipated.

Procedure

As with Study 1, recruitment efforts attempted to attract participants with a range of gender identities. A concentrated effort was made to seek out a variety of transgender identities and ethnicities, and although every participant was between the ages of 18 and 30 y. o., diversity in age was also sought. Recruitment in the first study was confined to those 40 years old or above because those individuals were perceived to be most likely to have considered making preparations for their memorials, for the disposition of their bodies (for instance, burial vs. cremation), and for the disbursement of their material assets. Recruitment for this study targeted a much younger population who, thanks to various developments in societal acceptance and visibility with regard to TGD people over the past twenty years, have accrued different life experiences and may have developed vastly different opinions with regard to their own identity and to their identity after death.

For this study, twenty participants were recruited from various LGBT organizations, online transgender community groups, and through the research team's personal contacts. A snowball recruitment process ensued after initial contacts in order to secure a more diverse participant pool.

Interviews and analysis

The interviews were conducted by the author who identifies as non-binary trans femme. Interviews, ranging from 23:09 to 81:08 in length, were conducted between April and May 2022 via Zoom – a technology application with which many in this cohort have become quite familiar due to its widespread use in school classrooms during the Covid-19 quarantine. One participant asked to be interviewed by cell phone instead.

The Zoom format not only allows researchers to interview people from all over the country without having to travel, it also effectively recreates the face-to-face interaction typical in an interview setting. For these and other reasons, Tracy (2013) calls mediated interviews, "a valuable vehicle for interviewing" (p. 163). In order to promote confidentiality and also to help the less confident feel safe, only the audio portion of the interview was recorded. The interviews were transcribed by trained undergraduate research assistants, and the participants' names (birth or otherwise) were never made known to the transcribers. Only pseudonyms of the subjects and any other persons named in the interviews are used in this paper. The interview protocol was semi-structured with the interviewer adapting to the flow of each conversation.

At the completion of the interview process, data was analyzed through an iterative process – alternating between an emergent reading of the data and the use of existing models and theories (Tracy, 2013). In Study 2 however, the process was a bit more deductive than purely inductive due to the data collected and categorized in Study 1. But once again, the interview/interpretation process was approached with a keen sense of interviewer awareness of the control the interviewer maintains over the discourse. The author acknowledges their own bias as a TGD researcher examining their own community. Therefore, in both the interview and in the later interpretation of the data, a strong emphasis on McAllum et al.'s "fidelity to multiple commitments" (2019, p. 371) remained as the primary motivation, including our best attempt to accurately report the participants' responses and intentions.

Changes to the protocol

The interview protocol from Study 1 was amended to remove or alter questions

that did not seem to produce noteworthy responses while altering or adding questions that, after analyzing the data from the Study 1, seemed worthy of further investigation in Study 2. In the previous study, a question regarding wishes for identity expression was posed in a more general way. The revised protocol asked about expressions of identity with regard to specific memorial expressions.

2a. What name or names would you like to appear on your grave marker?

2b. What name or names would you like to appear in your obituaries?

2c. In any video montage or photo display at your funeral, would you want pre-transition photos, such as childhood pictures, shown?

Also, all of the Study 2 participants were directly asked about the phenomenon of de-transitioning TGD individuals after their deaths. Only 12 of the 32 participants in Study 1 had been asked this question. (When the original protocol was conceived, the focus was on personal wishes and expectations. Still, the omission of direct questioning about the broader phenomenon was a regrettable omission.)

7. Have you heard about families who de-transition their trans family members after they die? What do you think of that? Has it happened to anyone close to you?

Lastly, based on responses received to Study 1, the influence of the participant's family's religious beliefs and political affiliations were mentioned several times. However, those topics were never directly addressed in the protocol. The new protocol was written to ask the participants specifically about these family influencers. The following question was added to the section of the protocol that focused on the participant's expectations for post-mortem identity enactment by their family members.

9. How might your family's religious feelings affect their behavior, if at all? How might your family's political affiliations affect their behavior, if at all?

During the course of this study, it became clear that a third influencer, cultural experience, also played a role in the construction of the participant's expectations. Quite often, cultural experience was interwoven with the family's religious beliefs, but at other times, it could be considered a separate factor. In future studies, a direct question regarding cultural influence should be added.

Findings and discussion

Responses indicated an expected reluctance to engage in gender-affirming EOL conversations. Between the anxiety associated with discussions of death and the anxiety associated with discussions of one's gender identity (particularly if the household has been less than accepting of that gender identity), reluctance to engage in gender-affirming EOL conversations was to be expected. The participant's family's religious and political affiliations were also seen to have an effect on the participant's willingness to initiate such a conversation, but that influence was not entirely negative. Young adults often saw their family's religion and/or political leaning as both accepting and supportive of gender-nonconforming individuals.

The participants reacted quite negatively to the phenomenon of the nonconsensual de-transitioning of TGD individuals after they die. A few of the respondents had not heard of the phenomenon, but were not surprised that a family would do such a thing. Interestingly though, while the participants reacted quite angrily when discussing the broader phenomenon or when they were asked to imagine one of their friends being de-transitioned, when it came to envisioning their own gender identity being altered or

erased by their family, several participants responded – quite unexpectedly -- with patience, empathy, and understanding towards their parents.

Gender and sexuality

The study's 20 participants used 11 different terms to describe their gender identity, while they employed 6 different terms or sets of terms to describe their sexual orientation. With regard to gender identity, most of the participants identified as trans masculine, nonbinary, or gender fluid/gender queer (see Table 2 in Appendix B). With regard to sexual orientation, the majority identified as queer, bisexual, and pansexual. One participant listed all three of those terms. Some participants used descriptors that probably remain unfamiliar to the broader (and older) U.S. population, including agender, homoromantic, and demisexual. These statements of self-categorization – many of them considered unconventional until quite recently -- are in agreement with recent GLAAD survey results mentioned earlier.

Gender-affirming end-of-life conversations

Interview responses indicated significant avoidance with regard to initiating a gender-affirming EOL conversation. Only 2 out of the 20 participants stated that they had already engaged in an EOL discussion with their family members, but in both of those cases, the outcome was considered less than satisfactory. (Four others had discussed the physical disposition of their body or the tone of their memorials only.) Of the two who had discussed their gender identity, one conversation was initiated by their mother (after a recent family funeral). At that time the participant, Tali (21 y. o., non-binary/gender fluid), clearly indicated that they did <u>not</u> want to be buried as a woman (their gender assigned at birth), but the parent did not respond favorably:

> Um, so yeah we did have that conversation. I did make some of my wishes known which were essentially, like, my only wish was I do not want to be buried as a woman, and it didn't go too great. That was essentially where it ended.

The other participant who had engaged in gender-affirming EOL, Dakota, a 23-year-old non-binary/trans woman, stated that they do bring up the topic from time to time with their mother, but their mother is not at all receptive:

> I've talked to my mom a little bit, about such things, but she really does not want to talk about it. Which I understand! She doesn't want to think about her child dying before her. It is something that I do sort of bring up sometimes, but never in great detail. Usually only enough for her to want to change the subject.

Additionally, only 35% (7 out of the 20) of the participants indicated a desire to initiate or engage in gender-affirming EOL in the near future. Nine of those interviewed, or nearly half of the sample, said that they were not expecting to engage in such a conversation in the near future.

Regarding the communicative target for these conversations, eleven of the twenty participants assumed that the person in charge of producing their memorial expressions would be their parent, and most specifically, their mother. (The individual expected to enact one's post-mortem identity would be the most likely and most appropriate EOL conversation partner.) Other participants mentioned blood relatives from an older generation such as aunts and grandmothers. Significantly, feminine descriptors were used to identify nearly all of the expected post-mortem identity enactors, including mother, aunt, grandmother, and sister. One individual mentioned their father (the only masculine descriptor used). A few participants mentioned partners or best friends. But feminine

descriptors were used 14 out of 17 times when describing an individual (rather than a pair or a group) expected to take charge of one's public memorials. Feminine descriptors were also used in all three pairings mentioned.

The heavily-skewed emphasis on feminine individuals as anticipated EOL partners was not considered when the study began. But it does call forth a critical element with regard to both EOL conversations and to the de-transitioning of TGD individuals after their deaths. Often times, in the media and in research studies like this one, the "family," as a group, is held responsible for the enactment of the deceased's gender identity. But each family is made up of a variety of individuals, each with different opinions, and each with different levels of power and influence over the opinions and actions of the others. Future studies of post-mortem de-transitioning should dig further into the family members' discussions and interactions as the decision was made to misidentify their TGD loved one.

Themes

Four themes emerged from the study that highlight the complexity of young trans adults' attitudes and emotions regarding their identity and the expression of their identity after death. The first theme addresses the participants' feelings about their own expression after death with regard to both the expression that they wish for and the expression that they expect will be enacted by their family members. The second theme examines the feelings that these emerging TGD adults have for the act of de-transitioning trans people after death and their perceptions of those who might engage in such acts. The third theme explores the role that the individual's community of friends plays in their wishes and expectations for expression after death.

The fourth theme investigates obstacles that exist or are perceived to exist that prevent young trans adults from engaging in critical end-of-life dialogues with family members. These gender-affirming EOL conversations could conceivably work to preserve the trans individual's identity after death. It is within the discussion of this fourth theme that the influences of the participant's family's religious beliefs and political affiliations are analyzed.

Other motivations for topic avoidance included the typical aversion to discussing death, worrying their family members unnecessarily, and making death seem more real. One unanticipated factor in participants' reluctance to engage in a gender-affirming EOL was financial insecurity. A few of these young adults articulated a fear that, should they bring up the topic of their gender identity too often or too forcefully, it might lead to increased tension with their parents, and that might lead to a withholding or removal of the financial support on which they are still dependent.

A. Wishes and expectations for the enactment of gender identity after death

Individuals were asked about the name (or names) they would like to appear on their gravestone and in their obituary. They were also asked if they would want pre-transition photos of themselves displayed at their funeral or perhaps displayed in a memorial video montage. They were then asked how they expected their family would memorialize them. Although few of the participants had engaged their family members in discussions regarding the expression of their identity after death, like the majority in Study 1, the majority of these emerging adults indicated that they expected their families to respect their wishes. Positive responses to the probability of their family following their wishes included phrases such as: "completely," "very closely," and

"pretty close."

Several individuals who stated that they do not believe their family members respect their gender identity still believe that their family will honor their wishes. Manu (21 y. o.), who identifies as gender-nonconforming, described their situation with their mother as follows:

> I think she'll follow [my wishes] as I want her to, especially if I told her how I wanted to do it. She's very much the planner of our family, very much in charge of our family. But I do think she does try to respect people's wishes, especially after death, even if she doesn't agree with them.

Manu made it clear that their mother did not agree with their gender identity, but would still accommodate their wishes. However, there were a few interviewees who did not expect an accepting, empathetic expression. Their responses included short phrases such as, "not at all" and "I don't think so." Jin-soo (21 y. o., trans-nonbinary) believes their parent will not follow their wishes, "I think my mom would want everything to be done and over with quickly." Some participants assumed that their families would not respect their identity due, at least in part, to religious or cultural factors. Those cases are discussed later in this paper.

Among those who anticipated a post-mortem identity representation that they would consider acceptable, one key factor was the length of time that had passed since they had started expressing. On average, those who expected a more favorable enactment of their identity had been expressing their gender identity in public longer than those who expected to be disrespected (see Table 5 in Appendix B). Aaron, a 27-year-old nonbinary individual who started expressing their gender-nonconforming identity around age 8,

states that they have not engaged in any EOL conversations. But they feel that, after all this time, their parents would honor their identity:

> I think they would guess correctly, because um… I really realize that they know me better than I thought they did, especially through this process of being more open about me being nonbinary. They get it. More than I thought they would. So even though my dad is maybe a bit more resistant, I think especially if I were to pass, he would understand and respect my wishes.

A few of those who did not expect their family/parents to closely follow their wishes also noted that the time of their coming out to their families played a role in their expectations. One individual said that they did not expect their family to respect their identity because they had only recently come out to them (9). A second individual, James (21 y. o., trans masculine), said that if they had been asked this question a year ago, the answer would have been "not at all," but they expect their mother to be "a bit more receptive" today. The respondent indicated that, over time, their mother has become "a bit more understanding… realizing it's not just a phase." They also indicated that their mother had started doing her own research on the topic of trans-ness.

These responses reveal the ongoing identity negotiation that takes place between trans people and their close family members in association with the trans person's relational layer of identity. While these negotiations take place from birth between family members, they take on a different significance and a heightened sense of purpose when an individual strays from the family narrative. While there is a sense of hope articulated here, these responses demonstrate that it takes some time for many parents and other family members to grow accustomed to the idea of a TGD family member.

Names, as expressed on graves

Names are important to everyone, but they can be particularly important in the trans population where naming oneself often takes a great deal of forethought and courage. Those who are addressed by an incorrect or outdated name can suffer psychological or emotional distress (Finger, 2010; Grant et al., 2011). Consequently, the name that will appear in memorial expressions carries great deal of weight. Interestingly, it was those who were less certain that their families would respectfully enact their identity after death who seemed most adamant about using their chosen name (and their chosen name alone). In fact, all eight of the emerging adults who did not expect their identity to be unconditionally respected in public memorial expressions indicated that they would prefer that the name on their gravestone and in their obituary to be something other than the name given to them at birth (see Table 6 in Appendix B).

The gravestone and the obituary are two different text-based memorial expressions. The traditional grave marker leaves little room for any discussion or explanation of an individual's life or death, while the obituary offers more space for life details and the telling of narratives. Yet, all of the study's participants indicated that they wanted the same name (or names) on both memorials. Most wanted their grave marker and obituary to use only their chosen name, but a few said they would prefer using the name given at birth. Two individuals said they would accept both names being used. (NOTE: Within the TGD community, if an individual decides to no longer use the name that they were given at birth, that name is referred to as one's *dead name*.)

Dani, a 21-year-old non-binary participant indicated that they had just started the legal process towards changing their name and that was how they wanted to be

remembered, “I wouldn't want my dead name on my gravestone. I would prefer to have my preferred, and soon to be legal, name on there.” Noah (22 y. o.), who identifies as transmasculine/nonbinary, had not yet changed their name legally, but still wished to be remembered by that name and that name alone: “The name that I chose four years ago. Which hopefully by the time I die, will be the legal one.” (2)

Although this feeling was only expressed by a few, some individuals articulated a comfortability or attachment with their given name. Manu, a 20-year-old queer, gender-nonconforming individual, said:

> I think I have maybe a more unique experience than a lot of trans folks, where, like, I always felt very connected to my [given] name. And for me, it's not as much a marker of gender identity, because I’ve always felt connected to it, and I’ve always felt like it fits me. So for me, my gender is expression is separate from my name. I can embrace my gender identity and still like my name, which is different for a lot of folks.

Two individuals said that they would be most comfortable with both their given name and their chosen name memorialized. Aaron, a 27-year-old nonbinary individual who has been expressing publicly for many years, stated: “All of my names hold special meaning to me for different reasons. And, even though I don’t always like to use my birth name, I still like it, and it still is meaningful for me.”

Some participants were uncertain as to whether they even wanted a grave marker. Finn, an 18 year old, non-binary university student said that while they liked the idea of people having a place to visit them, the concept of a permanent resting place was not important:

> Say I died next week and in a hundred years' time someone ripped up my gravestone, I would not be offended in my own little afterlife world. I'd be like "Alright. My people have left and gone with me. So that's someone else's spot now."

The evolving nature of memorial expressions will be discussed later in this paper, but it is important to point out that, at any time, an individual – for a variety of reasons – can choose to "opt out" of participating in traditional rituals. Nava, a 29-year-old, divorced, trans female who did not want a grave, said that she would prefer to have her ashes dispersed. To her, an earthen burial was associated with a claustrophobic sense of being trapped, "I know that [having a gravesite to visit] gives comfort to some people. But I think I would rather be dispersed because I think the feeling of being trapped is a little bit more terrifying."

Names, as expressed in obituaries

As previously stated, the participants all wanted to be memorialized in the same way on both their grave markers and in their obituaries. However, because obituaries tell much more of a narrative than headstones, Jin-soo (21 y. o.), who identifies as trans/non-binary, was afraid that feminine descriptors and pronouns might be used. Their preference was for neutral descriptors:

> I really don't want them to use feminine terms to refer to me. Like, if I were married to somebody I don't want to be referred to as a wife. If I was a parent to somebody I don't necessarily want to be referred to as a mother. I don't necessarily want to be referred to as a daughter or a granddaughter. I just want to be referred to as, you know, a child, a grandchild, a parent, a partner.

Jin-soo's comments are indicative of a feeling among non-binary individuals who are open to a number of labels and descriptors with regard to their identity, but who express a strong aversion to their gender identity-assigned-at-birth. Mia, a 30-year-old gender-fluid, pansexual participant from suburban L.A. preferred the idea of a less-specific and more gender-neutral approach to the text of their obituary. For them, the less emphasis on gender, the better, "For something like an obituary, I wouldn't really care for it to go too descriptive. [Instead] let's hear that person was [the] friendliest person, nicest person ever. I'll be OK with that being my generic, typical description."

On the other hand, Satya, a 25-year-old trans masculine individual who now lives in Canada, "definitely" wanted their chosen name on their gravestone, but because an obituary allows for more room for information, they allowed that they would be okay with their birth name used in a "formerly known as" context: "Actually, I would probably want both names. Just because I feel like a lot of extended family and other people who don't even know my current name would read this." He did however, clearly state that he wanted the emphasis in the obituary to be on the masculine identity he claims today.

For one participant, the main focus was on who might write the obituary – something that no one else mentioned. Tali, a non-binary/gender-fluid 21-year-old indicated that they would not trust a cis person to honor their validity as a trans person.

> I don't trust cis people to like write about the nuances of being one person then being another, right? In some ideal world, if I could have a trans person write my obituary, I would trust them to handle it correctly.

Tali was the only participant to allude to the actual writing process in responding to questions about the creation of public memorial expressions.

The diversity of responses to questions regarding the name that participants would want placed on their gravestone or in their obituary suggests a broad belief among those in the TGD community when it comes to names and identity. As Sinclair-Palm and Chokly (2022) state, “Recognizing the complexity of young trans people’s relations to their names and the many worlds they travel highlights the immense diversity of trans identities” (p. 16). They conclude that it is critical to respect the name that young people ask to be called, “even if that name changes multiple times” (p. 16). The current study suggests that same respect is warranted after death.

Photographs and other visual displays

Regarding funerals, one of the key questions for young people has to do with visual representation, and with the framed photos or video montages that are traditionally displayed. Most stated that they would allow pre-transition photos to be shown, but, for a variety of reasons, a few of our participants were not comfortable with that.

Noah, a 22-year-old from Southern California, pointed out that, for this age group, without childhood photos, there might not be many photos to show: “That’s like my life story. Childhood is most of my life at this point [laughs]. With regard to their teen years, Satya, the 22-year-old now living in Canada, stated that, “I still have good memories and friends from that time. If there was a photo montage of my life, like, that's an important part. Even if it looked different. It's still part of my life.”

For some, the fact that their appearance had not changed dramatically removed most of their concerns associated with pre-transition photographs or videos. Jayden, a 20-year-old self-described “trans guy” from the Midwest, stated, “I’ve been the same person, I really look pretty much the same, so it doesn’t matter too much to me.”

While many of the participants were referring to their appearance when they indicated that they had not changed all that much, several of the comments regarding photo displays referred as much to identity as they did to physical expressions. Finn, at 18-years-old the youngest of our participants, said: “I would be one-hundred-percent fine with [showing photos from their youth]. I still feel pretty comfortable with who I was before. I still feel [like] the same person.” Comments such as these, “It’s all part of my life” and “I still feel [like] the same person,” indicate a consistency of identity (and a comfortability with that consistency) that challenges the rigid adherence to a pre- and post-transition dichotomy often described by many TGD adults.

However, other individuals indicated that the emotions associated with that pre- and post- transition remain very strong. Some indicated that they would not mind pre-transition photos shown, but they specified conditions that those photos should meet. For instance, James, a 21-year-old from Las Vegas who identifies as trans masculine, said that it was important to them to show only “masculine-presenting photos”:

> I’m really particular about the [photos] that I show. I only do the ones where I’m dressed in a way that I would want to be dressed. So I only show pictures of me in my overalls, [or] something like that, so it would only be those masculine-presenting photos.

Sadly, a few of those who hoped their families would be circumspect in selecting the photos for display pointed to issues associated with long-term depression, sadness, or other emotional issues that have been shown to be statistically prevalent among trans youth (Becerra-Culqui et al., 2018; Connolly et al., 2016; Reisner et al., 2015). Tali stated that:

> I struggled really hard with an eating disorder. I look really sick and I look really unhappy and those ones are really hard for me to, like, look at. I don't think that they honor the fullness of my life.

Tali's comments hint at some of the challenges faced by young people who grow up TGD. Fergusson et al. (1999) found that LGBT youth are twice as likely to experience anxiety and depression compared with heterosexual youth. (In the Fergusson study, TGD youth were not separated from the broader LGBT category.) Chen et al. (2020) state that, "It is well- documented that TNB [trans and non-binary] youth experience disproportionally high rates of depression, anxiety, suicidality, and non-suicidal self-injury (p. 1105). Although these health factors were not directly addressed in this study, emotional issues can play a significant role in the way that emerging TGD adults express currently themselves and in the manner in which they hope to be memorialized after their deaths

B. De-transitioning of trans people after death

Many of our participants (7 out of 20, 35%) were unfamiliar with the practice of families who de-transition transgender or non-binary people after their deaths. But those who were unfamiliar often indicated that they were not surprised to hear about the practice. As one subject stated, "I haven't personally read anything about that but I wouldn't be surprised that that would happen." Dani (21 y. o., nonbinary), had also not heard of the practice, but stated it made sense that families might do that: "I know that trans people aren't always honored but I hadn't thought about your family cutting your hair and putting you in a suit… and changing your name back. That's very distressing." Angel, a 26-year-old who identifies as agender, agreed, "I think when you detransition

your child after death that takes away part of their legacy that they worked really, really hard for."

For those who had heard of the practice, the response to non-consensual detransitioning was unanimously negative, and often angry. Interviewees used specific terms like "mad," "pissed," "cruel," and "sucks" to describe their emotional response. Many stated or insinuated the act as indicative of a lack of respect. Matteo, (22 y. o., trans man) stated that the practice communicates a degree of selfishness on the part of the family members:

> Unless that was the wish of the deceased and unless they made that explicitly clear before their passing, I think it's disrespectful. I think that they [the parents] are taking their [own]wishes and imposing them onto someone to the detriment of that person's memory. I don't think that it should be happening. I don't think the family should take the authority to do that to the person.

Angel, who is 26-years-old and agender, simply believes that many parents have trouble letting go of the expectations they formed for their child early in the child's life:

> I think it's really, really hard for a lot of parents to let go of the idea that maybe there are parts of their child that, like, they don't know about and they haven't figured out yet. And so for a child to come home one day and like bring forth a new part of their identity that isn't in line with what their parent has been dreaming or expecting of them their whole life, is something that I think is really shocking and difficult for a lot of parents. Whether it's getting a new tattoo, or changing careers, or realizing that you're not heterosexual or cisgender, or doing something outside of the life that they envisioned would fit you perfectly.

Others framed the parents' attitudes and actions as blatantly self-serving. Some went so far as to suggest that all parents – not just the parents of TGD children -- often treat their children as one would treat a pet or property, and that the co-opting of a trans family member's identity after death is symptomatic of that attitude. Jin-soo stated that they noticed this phenomenon outside of the trans arena:

> I was a lifeguard but I also worked with children very often. And the way that a lot of parents – [they] don't treat their children like people, they treat their children like pets... things that they own. Which makes them feel like they have the autonomy to do whatever they want with their child.

Dakota, a 23-year-old non-binary, trans woman from the San Francisco Bay Area, perceives the act of detransitioning as a declaration of dominance and control.

> I find it so abhorrent… I find it to be one of the worst things you can do to a person. And it sickens me to my core every time I read another story about it. Every time I hear about it, it strikes me as just the ultimate… reassertion of control, the ultimate dominance, the ultimate re-capture. Even in death can they not be free? Even in death can they not be themselves?

Jin-soo and Dakota's comments are striking in their focus on the power dynamic that exists not only between parents and their children, but between TGD individuals and the broader, largely-cisgender society. The interviewees' reactions became even more impassioned when the conversation moved from general incidents of nonconsensual de-transitioning to instances where one of the participant's friends was imagined to be de-transitioned after death. Nava, a 29-year-old trans female from the Pacific Northwest, said:

> Honestly? I'm not even kidding. I would probably throw-up at first just because it is almost just as despicable as killing someone in my opinion. It is the final nail in the coffin of someone's celebration of life and not respecting that would be just a slight against everything that they stood for.

Javier, a 21-year old trans man, was quite adamant. His response, while obviously fueled by anger, suggests similar thinking to others in the sample who would look to create alternate memorializations to confront the intentional inaccuracy of a more formal, family-led memorial:

> I would go absolutely berserk. I would definitely fight and be loud, be very much against what's happening. I would be their advocate even after death. That's where it comes into that selfishness of a memorial because if they're doing that then it just clearly shows that [they, the family] aren't remembering the person as they were. And that's just a disgrace and it's disrespectful. If that were to happen and I was there, I would definitely stand up for that and if it continued to happen I would honestly just hold another [memorial event] to honor them in the way that they wanted to be honored.

Dakota, the nonbinary trans woman from the Bay Area, who spoke so passionately about family power dynamics, articulated a need for alternate memorials in these cases and also outlined a plan of action for doing so.

> But I think maybe what I would do would sort of dedicate a large part of my time to making sure that they are remembered as they were, as I knew them. That could be just disseminating information about them, maybe online, maybe posters, graphics. I would want to put sort of indicators of who they actually were.

> Maybe later, maybe a few months later, I would go back to their grave and put their real name on it. Maybe I put some flowers or some things that I that I had of theirs.

In these reactions, a second identity negotiation is suggested. First, there is the family's attempt to assign identity after death, and then there is the friends' or community members' counter-attempts to assign identity after death. One could argue which enactment might be the more authentic to the deceased's lived experience or to their desires for post-mortem expression. But in both cases, identity assignment occurs without active input from the deceased – and is therefore subject to the biases and prejudices of all agents associated with the relational identity.

Hecht and Phillips (2022) described identity gaps that occur *within* layers of identity as one of the newer developments in the application of CTI. They allude to Colaner and colleagues' study (2014) of the relationship between an adoptee's birth family and adoptive family as a *communal-communal* identity gap. The situations described above might present a similar identity gap, a post-mortem *relational-relational* gap involving the deceased's closest friends and their family members, as two opposing post-mortem relational identities enter into negotiation.

Post-mortem de-transitioning and the issue of suicide

Fortunately, none of the participants reported that a nonconsensual detransitioning had happened to a friend of theirs. (A few indicated that they had never been to a funeral.) Yet several mentioned (without prompting) a familiarity with the story of 17-year-old Leelah Alcorn that made headlines in 2014. Leelah committed suicide and posted her suicide note online (McCormick, 2014). Her note indicated that her parents'

transphobic intolerance caused her to hate herself. In her note, posted to Tumblr, Leelah wrote that when she first told her mother, her mother reacted very negatively:

> She reacted extremely negatively, telling me that it was a phase, that I would never truly be a girl, that God doesn't make mistakes, that I am wrong. If you are reading this, parents, please don't tell this to your kids.

Despite her claim that she was trans and in great emotional pain due to her parents' non-acceptance, Leelah's parents memorialized her as a masculine person. The name, Leelah, now known to millions, did not appear in her official obituary. The average age of participants who mentioned Leelah was 21-years-old. That means that these participants were only about 13-years-old at the time Leelah took her own life. For some, that was before they had even come to an understanding of their own gender identity. Yet the fact that Leelah's family refused to memorialize her in accordance with her wishes had resonance for these participants. Responding directly to the Alcorn story, Noah, who is 22-years-old and nonbinary-trans masculine, said:

> It made me really sad. Maybe it's projecting, but it feels like a lack of respect of like… your child knows who they are and, at a certain point you have to trust that your kid knows more about themselves than you do...

Because none of our participants knew anyone personally who had been non-consensually de-transitioned after death, Leelah Alcorn's story provided some with a more personal reference point.[1] Their comments regarding Leelah and her parents suggest that negotiations involving parents, children, and a TGD identity require additional effort, and should not be minimized nor delayed.

The topic of suicide was very "top of the mind" among many of the emerging adults who participated in this study. Without mentioning Leelah Alcorn or her suicide, Satya, a 25-year-old trans man, stated that, since most of their friends are young, a probable cause for death among their peers would unfortunately be suicide – a statement for which there is, sadly, considerable evidentiary support (Johns et al., 2019; Toomey et al., 2018). Satya suggested that that would make the post-mortem expression of their identity even more critical.

> If a friend of mine died, it would probably be by suicide, because like, we're just that age. And like, honestly, if it was a trans friend, I would think, 'Oh, like this is part of the transphobia that caused him to die.' And just like I'd be really, really upset.

Satya's statement emphasizes the sometimes deadly impact of transphobia on young trans people – particularly when transphobic actions and attitudes come from parents or other family members. In the majority of the comments received regarding nonconsensual de-transitioning in this study, when negativity and anger were communicated, they were most often targeted towards parents. Participant comments regarding parental control and/or selfishness with regard to the child's gender identity were also prevalent. Yet, when the participants were asked about their own parents and their parents' anticipated enactment of their identity after death, the tone of many of the answers shifted towards the positive.

Post-mortem de-transitioning and family relations

Interestingly, and perhaps counter-intuitively, when the participants were talking about their expectations of the treatment their own identity might receive from one of

their family members, their responses were, in many cases, notably empathetic. These reactions indicated an attempt to understand the emotions and motivations of their parents – an attempt that was rarely, if ever, extended to the parents and families involved when discussing the detransitioning of a friend or of post-mortem detransitioning in general. Manu – who previously stated that while his parents do not agree with his expression of his gender identity, expected them to honor that identity after death – said:

> I don't know if my parents understand me or if they ever will. And sometimes I feel like they have the right to remember me how they want to, because, like, they've given me so much. They've raised me, and made me who I am, that like if they don't understand this one aspect of me, that's okay, because they show me every day that they love me. And I'm sure they'll continue doing that after I die. So I care about my parents' opinion, but I think they have the right to remember me how they would like to.

Angel assumed that their mother would be respectful for the most part, but acknowledged that she might slip a "formerly known as…" statement into their obituary. Rather than react with anger or negativity, Angel indicated that that insertion would "bug me a little. Not like a huge amount."

Of course, not everyone was so charitable when it came to discussing their family's anticipated treatment of their identity. Nava, a 29-year-old trans female, said: "It would definitely hurt me if I knew that they didn't respect [my] identity. I would haunt them for sure." Adding to the sense of hurt was a sense of disregard for the emotional labor that several participants alluded to in their discussion of gender identity negotiations. Max, a 20-year-old transgender male from California, said:

> I'd be very angry because I have put so much effort into being who I am today. I feel like a lot of people can't say that, but I have probably put in more effort than many cis people have. So it's kind of like, all that effort was for naught.

Max clearly indicates that, in his eyes, it is harder – or it at least involves more emotional labor – for a TGD individual to negotiate and defend their identity than for most cis-people to do the same. If it is of dubious morality to alter the post-mortem identity of any individual, Max (and others who share his view) would probably suggest that it is even more odious to do so to someone who claims a more vulnerable identity -- and who has probably expended a great deal of energy and emotional capital in defending that identity.

C. Importance of, and influence of, community

A second emergent subtheme regarding post-mortem de-transitioning was the influence of their friends and community members on the participants' expectations for post-mortem satisfaction. Many respondents placed a lesser or reduced significance on official or formal memorials. Most of these young adults were also unfamiliar with the laws and policies that favor blood relations in matters associated with the enactment of their identity after death. What seemed to matter most to many of these young adults is that their friends would remember them – formally or informally – in an authentic manner. Jayden indicated that they did not really care how they were remembered formally because they felt that those who mattered most would know: "I don't really care because… I won't be here. But the people who matter know who I am."

Some interviewees downplayed the importance of a formal memorial expression in favor of the respect and affection they feel they would receive from their community

of friends. Tali said:

> Even if my obituary and my gravestone didn't have the name that was my name on it, I would trust there to be some sort of thing, whether it be like online or something. Some sort of thing that honored my life and its fullness because I just really trust the people [who] do care about me and want to know me as I am and not me as they want me to be.

These responses speak to a broader understanding of the nature of relationships associated with one's relational identity. It would be difficult to categorize a group as "the people who matter" or "the people who want to know me as I am." The group these respondents seem to be referring to are those who accept and embrace the subject's trans-ness. These group members are not necessarily blood relatives (but they could be) and they are not necessarily friends (but they could be). The complex and often contradictory nature of the transgender experience in America allows for the possibility (and the probability) of having close family members or close friends who do not accept or embrace one's trans-ness. Conversely, acquaintances who are not considered "close" might be totally accepting. In response to this complexity, several of these interviewees seem to have constructed a community of individual relations defined not by blood relations or even by a shared affection for one another, but instead by the relations' attitudes towards gender identity.

Some respondents expressed that they expected their friends to step up to create an alternate memorial event – or perhaps some kind of protest – in their honor. Jayden, expanding on an earlier comment, said, "I'm sure my friends would be very upset if it wasn't my chosen name. And they would rally against whoever, I'm sure." As has been

stated earlier, other participants suggested that they would be sure to create such an event if a non-consensual post-mortem de-transitioning happened to a friend of theirs. Angel said:

> If it happened to someone that I knew I would probably organize with the people who were affirming to that person and, like, hold our own little memorial for them, and just set up something in addition so that they could be remembered in a way that they would want to be.

In these responses, the importance of friends and community members (and their perceptions of the subject's gender) seems to supersede the significance of both the natal family's wishes and the societal expectation to mourn or be mourned through traditional memorial expressions. Seen through the lens of queering memorial expressions, these responses serve as an announcement, in a sense, that traditional memorial expressions and body disposition processes that prevailed in the past, no longer work effectively for this younger, less cis and less hetero, generation of emerging adults. This is not necessarily an outright rejection of those memorials, but the data collected here does seem to call for thoughtful reconsideration

D. Emerging TGD adults and end-of-life conversations

With regard to the key questions regarding end-of-life conversations, nearly all of the participants indicated that they had not engaged in such a conversation with a parent or family member. In addition, most said that they had no intentions of doing so in the near future either. (Apparently, the act of participating in a 45- to 60- minute interview about the significance of identity after death and the precarity of the transgender identity did little to sway their intentions towards engaging in such a discourse.)

Obstacles to engaging or considering EOL conversations with family members

The prospect of initiating a conversation that would involve two conversational taboos t– death and gender identity – was seen as daunting to most of the participants. Findings in this area have been categorized according to (1) discourse about death, (2) discourse about gender identity, and (3) discourse about the subject's gender identity after death.

Discourse regarding death

For many throughout Western culture, there are strong negative connotations associated with discussions of death. Among the majority of these gender-nonconforming emerging adults, the negative vibes associated with EOL or other death-related conversations outweighed any perceived benefits from such a conversation. Participants used words and phrases such as "awkward," "weird," and "harsh" to describe their feelings towards the idea of participating in an EOL conversation.

Aaron, a 27-year-old, non-binary individual living on the West Coast, not only found the idea of such a conversation "like, weird," they also claimed that they would not know how to start such a conversation. This was a repeated sentiment. In fact, several specifically used the term, "out of the blue," when describing their struggle to imagine how such a conversation might begin:

> I don't know how to talk about it. And because, you know, I'm not sick or anything, it might just feel like overkill. I'm in good health and everything, so it seems almost, like, weird to talk about, out of the blue.

It should be noted that simply because the subjects did not feel comfortable articulating their thoughts on death, that does not mean that they had not thought about

death and its implications or repercussions. Max, a 20-year-old transmasculine participant said they would like to talk about their death and about who they would give their possessions to, "but I've never correctly articulated it. I've had thoughts about what I'd like to do, but definitely nothing written or verbalized." Here, the influence of living in a death-avoidant society is apparent. These emerging adults have had little exposure to, and even less practice engaging in, EOL dialogues.

Discourse regarding gender identity

Whitestone et al. (2020) never directly addressed the topic of difficult conversations. Yet the topic arose with some frequency. Of particular intrigue were the family's religious beliefs, political affiliation, and cultural experience. In many cases, perceptions of the impact that these influences would have on one's family members – and on the family members' attitudes toward trans-ness – became deterrents to the open discussion of one's gender identity. Importantly, while these three factors were most often mentioned in association with a negative influence, several individuals did report positive expected outcomes based on their family's religion, culture, and political beliefs.

The influence of their family's religion on gender identity and end-of-life communication

James, a 21-year-old biracial, trans man from Las Vegas, indicated that his family's religious beliefs create a rigid barrier to discussions regarding his gender identity.

> Umm, so my family, a good chunk of them identify as right-wing Christians and because of that they have those core beliefs that, you know, you can't change your gender or your identity. You are what you are when you are born, and gender is

binary and stuff like that. [To them], it's a sin to alter yourself because you are desecrating the temple of God. So they definitely would not respect me whatsoever. I wouldn't even bring up the conversation.

Christians were not the only religious individuals who were perceived to be transphobically intolerant. A few Muslim participants described similar experiences with their families. Alea, a 25-year-old trans woman of Middle Eastern descent, feels that their gender identity represents a form of heresy that makes it unacceptable within the Muslim faith, "I don't think that they [the parents] would be able to do the traditional way [ritualistic preparation of the body] because the religion doesn't acknowledge that and it's heresy basically."

The influence of their family's culture on gender identity and end-of-life communication

A family's culture and religion together create a strong influence on the lives of young people who are gender-nonconforming. For instance, Tali, a twenty-one-year-old nonbinary/genderfluid individual, grew up in an Orthodox Muslim household in what they described as a tight-knit Muslim community. They report that when they first came out to their mother, they were warned not to legally change their name and not to undergo any medical procedures as those acts would disqualify them from their Muslim burial rites. Their body could not be washed – as is traditionally done – nor could they be buried in a Muslim cemetery. Consequently, they are confident that, after death, their genderfluid identity will be erased.

Furthermore, Tali predicts that in the future, if they make significant steps towards surgical transition or a legal name change, they will no longer be considered a

part of the family:

> At that point, they will not claim me as their family. So… like if at that point they are the people that are like legally responsible for making sure my body gets buried, they're not going to do it in the same traditional way.

Tali does not believe they would receive a traditional burial, because in their parents' eyes, they would no longer be deserving of those burial rites. For Tali, being denied access to traditional burial rights feels like a rejection from their entire community, a community that retains considerable significance to them.

In another instance, it was language that became the key cultural focus. Dani spoke to the impact of Latinx culture, with its heavily-gendered language, on a non-binary identity:

> They're Hispanic [the parents], everything is gendered in the language and in the words that we use. I have friends who are trans and Latina and they've talked about how it's harder to come out to Spanish-speaking family members because of how gendered Spanish is. I think our culture in general is that my parents and our family is super binary-gender-enforcing all the time. It's very hard to not be a binary gender. I think that aspect makes it harder for [the parents] to accept and understand. So I think they would be more accepting if I were a trans woman or a trans man rather than somewhere in between or something that fluctuates.

The influence of their family's political affiliations on gender identity and end-of-life communication

By 2021, over 100 laws and policies have been proposed in order to limit the rights of trans people and/or to limit their free access to public space (Krishnakumar,

2021). Most, if not all, of these motions have been brought forward by political conservatives. Clearly, each family's attitudes towards TGD individuals may be influenced by their affiliations on one side or the other of the current political divide. Dani, the Latinx individual who spoke earlier about the challenges associated with a gendered-language and culture, described their perception of their family members' feelings:

> They are very conservative people, I think, definitely, their reluctancy to accept me has to do with the fact that they're conservative. Like, if they were like super liberal or something it would have been a little easier to come out to them. I think nowadays people's political affiliations [are] very connected to people's values, and people who people are conservative definitely have less queer-accepting values.

Dani went on to say that their parents only know "maybe like 2 gay people." They suggest that perhaps if their parents knew more LGBTQ people, then queerness might become more normalized to them. But as the situation now stands, due to their parents religious and political feelings, Dani would not expect their public memorials to respect their gender identity if they died in the near future.

Research supports Dani's thoughts on knowing a TGD person. Nearly half of left-leaning Americans (48%) claim to know a trans or gender-nonconforming person. But only 35% of right-leaning Americans claim to know a TGD individual (Minkin & Brown, 2021). This year, Brown (2022) found that while 59% of left-leaning American adults think that great acceptance of transgender people is "very good" or "somewhat good" for society, only 15% of right-leaning American adults say the same.

The import of these statistics is reflected in Nava's thoughts on her parents' views. While most of the response to political, cultural, and religious factors concentrated on negative attitudes towards TGD lives and issues, several participants did describe positive experiences associated with these three factors. Nava, the 29-year-old trans female from the Pacific Northwest describes their parents as "hippies" and "very LGBT friendly." The parents still had some issues, but apparently only briefly, when she first came out to them. For Nava, her parents' liberal leaning helps her to feel more confident that her parent will be, "motivated to empower me, even in death."

However, as another participant suggests, the espousing of a liberal philosophy is not always a guarantee of true acceptance or of authentic memorialization. Noah, the 22-year-old trans masculine/non-binary individual from the Bay Area, states:

> It's interesting because I have some friends who their parents consider themselves very liberal. And they're like, 'oh, I'm definitely ok with the trans community,' but then when it's their kid, they're like not ok with it. It's this weird disconnect.

Noah's comment reminds us that one's political or religious viewpoint is not necessarily an indicator of someone's acceptance of, or intolerance towards, transgender people or of the transgender identity.

Positive influences and allies

James, who stated that a "good chunk of [their family} identify as right-wing Christians" and stated that, for that reason, they "wouldn't even bring up the conversation," singled out their mother as being quite different: "I feel like the only person I could talk to about it is my mom, and I feel like she'd be very receptive." When pressed to describe why they think their mother would act so differently – particularly in

light of the fact that their mother grew up in the same religion and culture as the rest of the family, James said this:

> Umm, she chose that she loves me more than she does her religion. At one point she did risk losing me and she decided that she couldn't afford to lose me and stuff like that. Because I'm only - I'm only one of two children that she has and, so she chose me over her religion, which [the rest of] my family didn't.

James's statement not only illustrates the importance of support from loved ones, but also reveals the manner in which transphobic thinking on the part of certain groups can be transferred to family members who claim membership in those groups. Without conversations to clarify or refute such beliefs, a TGD family member is likely to assign the group's intolerance to their friends and relatives.

Discourse regarding both death and trans-ness

The troubling association between trans-ness and death was acknowledged by the study's participants, and judging from their responses, the trans-death association has been acknowledged by their family members as well. For some, the association was made during the moment the participant first came out. Matteo, a 22-year-old Latino trans man explained it this way: "When I came out to her, one of her barriers was, she was afraid of something like that happening -- where I would pass at a very young age."

Others suggested that any kind of conversation about death would "raise red flags" for their parents (several used that precise phrasing). They believe that their parents would assume that the participant was contemplating suicide – an all too common occurrence in the trans community. The Trevor Project found that more than half of transgender and nonbinary youth and serious considered attempting suicide in the past

year (Facts about LGBTQ Youth Suicide, 2021). A few of our participants further acknowledged that, due to previous incidents, their parents had sufficient reason to be concerned. Noah imagined that an EOL conversation with their parents might go something like this:

> I think right now if I was like, "Hey I want to talk to you about how I'll be remembered when I die," they'll be like, "Red flag! We need to talk about that, real quick." I think, in their minds, it would be a suicide risk. That is something I've historically struggled with.

Mia, a 30-year-old, fluid, bigender individual, stated that:

> I've had problems with my mental health in the past, so if I were to bring up talking about planning my memorial to my parents, that would be like, a really big red flag of 'We need to watch out for this person, because we don't want them to harm themselves.' So I feel like my reluctance of bringing that up to them is that, like, they would... likely be very concerned about what my well-being is like.

In these cases, the stigma associated with suicidality or mental health issues contributed to the participants' reluctance and hesitancy to pursue more open conversations. But these comments also bring attention to the persistent associations between death, emotional well-being, and trans life – a perception that seems to endure in U. S. society despite recent, observable steps towards progress in trans empowerment and trans visibility. The comments also show attempts by the emerging trans adults to engage in "mutually protective emotional buffering" (Zhang and Siminoff, 2003). Throughout these interviews, participants repeatedly, and with some consistency, stated a clear intention to shield their family from distressing topics.

Discourse regarding financial insecurity

An issue that was never raised among the older participants of Study 1, was the problem of financial insecurity and/or financial dependence. With an average age of approximately 23 years of age, many of the younger adults interviewed for this study still rely on their parents and other family members for significant financial support. Several times, participants mentioned that fear of losing their parents' financial support inhibited the participant from initiating any conversations regarding their gender identity. Dani (21 y. o., nonbinary) stated that "My parents help me out with rent and gas money so I'm worried if I tell them too much about myself, they could become upset and I'll lose that financial support."

Manu (21 y. o., gender-nonconforming) actually went so far as to state that because of their parents' financial investment in them, their parents had a right to enact their post-mortem identity as they wish:

> I do consider myself as an adult, but they are still paying my bills, so I still have a lot that I feel like it's owed to them, and I think sometimes the way that they see me is okay, because I feel like they've given me so much. But there might become a time when I don't need the money, and I do want them to see me for who I am.

As with conversations that might be influenced by politics or religion, gender-affirming EOL among emerging adults can also be influenced by financial issues. Here again, for families who seek to have open and honest conversations with their TGD family member, it is critical that cisgender family members (especially parents) make it clear that the young person's life decisions regarding gender identity or gender

expression will have no bearing on the availability and/or continuation of financial support.

Notes on Study 2

[1]Schares (2019) argues that the extensive public and political discourse that surrounded the Alcorn suicide note and death-by-suicide is instructive when compared to the relative lack of attention afforded the ongoing epidemic of murders of trans women of color. Schares attributes the rhetoric of Alcorn's death as an American tragedy to "repeated deployments of whiteness-derived innocence" (p. 1). The Schares article serves as an important reminder that race and ethnicity always play a role in the treatment of TGD and other queer people – and that that issue is too often overlooked in both academia and in the public discourse.

Comparative conclusion regarding Study 1 and Study 2

The following is a discussion of Study 1 and Study 2 - the two studies that focused on TGD identities, TGD identities after death, and the phenomenon of non-consensually de-transitioning TGD individuals after death. While marked differences in both attitudes and expectations were anticipated in the two age groups investigated in Study 1 and Study 2, those differences were largely absent from the data collected. Due to the broad gaps in age, age of coming out, shifting cultural norms, and access to information regarding a gender expansive life, different views on both TGD identities and TGD identities after death were expected. However, for the most part, that proved not to be the case. In response to key areas of questioning, individuals from both groups indicated that:

1. They had avoided gender-affirming EOL conversations.
2. They did not anticipate having a gender-affirming EOL conversation in the near future.
3. They believed they would receive a port-mortem enactment of their gender identity with which they would be satisfied.
4. Their wishes for their own post-mortem enactment were extremely varied – in keeping with the diverse expressions employed by TGD individuals during their lives.
5. They were extremely unhappy, if not enraged, that families would feel empowered to alter the gender identity of a TGD family member.

Findings regarding aversion to speaking of (or even thinking about) death were not unexpected in either cohort. Western culture is infamously death-denying. When topics associated with gender-nonconformity are added to the conversation, the motivation to engage in avoidance behavior is understandably high.

The idea that most of our participants expected a favorable expression of their post-mortem identity seems a bit naïve, particularly in light of the fact that these participants were, by their own admission, unlikely to communicate their wishes to their loved ones. The reasons behind this seemingly unwarranted optimism are worthy of future study. Possible explanations could range from simple wishful thinking to an abiding trust in their family members (despite stated experiences of family disagreement over gender identity).

However, there is also the possibility that the sense of selflessness articulated by many in both the older and younger cohorts is significant here. Several of the younger participants seemed quite willing to defer to their parents' wishes while 25% of the older folks indicated that they did not really care how they were memorialized. Generally, the older cohort felt that they had lived their lives their way. It did not matter to them how their identity would be rendered after they are gone.

These responses are, to a degree, not surprising in a sample that believes, as most people believe, that the main purpose of memorial expressions is to comfort the survivors. When participants in both studies were asked whether the true purpose of funeral ceremonies and other memorial expressions was to honor the deceased or to comfort the bereaved, only 6 of the 50 respondents who answered that question (12%) thought the emphasis should be solely on honoring the deceased. More than half (52%,

26 out of 50) said that the main focus should be on providing comfort to the grieving families and loved ones. Eighteen participants (36%) said the emphasis should be split between both groups. But of those 18, five indicated that between the two motivations, more emphasis should be devoted to comforting the bereaved (See Table 7 in Appendix B).

Perhaps the desire to comfort those who keep on living after the subject is gone – even if they were intolerant of the subject's gender identity – is a stronger motivation for many TGD individuals than the desire to have their nonconforming identity affirmed.

Still, in both studies, the participants were unanimous in their denouncing of the act of nonconsensual de-transitioning after death. Notably, only one of the 52 TGD participants interviewed had experienced the de-transitioning of someone close to them. But the mere thought of the act conjured great emotion. Words and phrases used to describe the act ranged from "sad" and "selfish" to "abhorrent" and "dehumanizing." On a more humorous note, one individual from each study specifically threatened to come back and haunt anyone who would dare to do that to them. (Although, admittedly, the humor in those responses was tinged with anger.)

Participants in both studies were particularly distressed by the idea of de-transitioning an individual who, based on their own TGD experiences, had probably gone to great lengths to claim, negotiate, defend, and perhaps even fight and die for, an identity that, according to much of the rest of society, is not worthy of respect and is often not acknowledged as authentic.

Regarding ways in which the two cohorts differed includes the many more mentions of friends and of community among the younger cohort with regard to both

providing or creating alternative funerals or memorials if the more formal, family-led memorials were perceived to be disrespectful of the deceased identity. Several members of the younger group placed less emphasis on formal memorials because their friends and community members knew who they were—regardless of what it says on their gravestone or in their official obituary. Jayden expressed that sentiment this way:

> **Interviewer:** Do you care how you're remembered? How important is that to you?
>
> **Participant:** You see, the people who matter, I know will respect my decisions after. So I don't really care because I know it won't really be a problem. And like I said, I won't be here. But the people who matter know who I am.
>
> **Interviewer:** Now when you say the people who matter, does that include your parents?
>
> **Participant:** Not particularly.

Manu was also confident that his identity would be respected and remembered by those that mattered to him:

> With strangers and things like that, I don't care how they remember me, if they see me as a girl, then fine, because I know who I am. So as long as my close friends still remember me the way that I've told them I am, the way that they see me… I would feel really good.

The two groups also differed significantly with regard to their wishes for the way their gender identity would be enacted after death. For the older cohort (n = 32), most were comfortable with both their pre- and post-transition identities used in memorializations (14/32, 44%). Eight of the 32 (25%) wanted to be memorialized

according to their lived identity alone and only 2 (6%) wanted to be memorialized according to their gender assigned at birth. Another eight (25%) stated that they did not care how they were memorialized.

But in the younger group (n = 20), the great majority (12/20, 60%) would want to be memorialized according to their lived identity only. Four of the twenty (20%) would be comfortable being memorialized using both identities, and three of the twenty (15%) would prefer to memorialized according to their gender assigned at birth only (See Tables 4.1 and 4.2 in Appendix B). (None stated that they did not care, although one individual did not want to be memorialized in a traditional way.)

It is perhaps not surprising that the older cohort – most of whom lived much longer (willingly or unwillingly) in their identity assigned at birth would be drawn to a post-mortem enactment that would honor both their pre- and post-transition identities. On the other hand, the younger cohort have much less invested in that pre-transition time – a time that many of them see as a period in which their gender identity and gender expression were controlled by others. As Alea (25 y. o., trans woman) stated, "Since it is my funeral... I would love them to remember the person that I actually am, not the person that other people forced me to be."

Evidence that challenges the trans selfishness stereotype

A persistent and damaging stereotype perpetuated with regard to TGD individuals is that they are selfish, and that they can become narrowly focused on their gender and on their gender journey (Stuart, 1991). Fraser (2009) suggests that the period of transition is "a very self-focused time and can look selfish to others" (p. 134). In 1986, in a child custody case (Daly v. Daly, 1986), a Nevada district court used this perception of

selfishness as an argument against a transgender parent. The parent was found to be "a selfish person whose own needs, desires and wishes were paramount and were indulged without regard to their impact on the life and psyche of the daughter." Using masculine pronouns to describe a feminine person, the court further stated that the trans person's "selfishness… and his lifestyle adversely affect his ability to be a parent."

However, according to the two studies chronicled here, many of the TGD respondents in both age groups showed a keen sensitivity to their family members and to the impact that their transition and their trans-ness might have on others. Many were understanding that their families may have a difficult time dealing with their identity after death, and many of the young adult respondents appeared quite understanding with regard to their parents' lack of familiarity with trans-ness. They also often showed a desire to shield their parents from difficult conversations and the strong emotions that accompany those conversations.

These responses challenge the idea that TGD individuals selfishly initiate or enact their transition without concern for feelings of others. To the contrary, the respondents in this study consistently expressed sympathy and concern for their friends and family members, and, among the younger cohort, for their parents in particular. The process of transition is undoubtedly a very personal one that requires a certain amount of introspection, attention, commitment, and self-care. But the belief that trans people often focus solely on themselves or that, as the Nevada court record above states, do so "without regard to the impact" on others is not supported here, and appears to be a gross over-generalization.

Perceptions of transgender inauthenticity

Much of the discourse surrounding the nonconsensual de-transitioning of TGD individuals after their deaths, suggests a significant lack of understanding about trans individuals, their trans-ness, and, particularly, of their trans or TGD identity. Because TGD identities are considered contested and often times, invalid, it almost seems as though trans-deniers and other transphobes feel entitled to voice their opposition to a population that they appear not to know or to know very little about.

As stated earlier, a recent study shows that over half of American adults continue to believe that gender is determined by sex at birth (56%, Parker et al., 2022). That statistic actually represents a slight percentage increase since 2017 when 54% of American adults believed that gender is determined by sex. If, as most American adults say, gender is determined by sex at birth, then most Americans still question the authenticity of the transgender identity – which is commonly considered to consist of claiming a gender that is not determined by one's sex assigned at birth.

Anti-transgender legislation, for instance, seems based on the recurring and persistent perception of the trans identity as inauthentic. There are still those in U.S. society who believe that trans people, in enacting their gender nonconformity, are "mentally ill" or "confused," and/or crying out for attention – as reported by Gazzola and Morrison (2014) nearly ten years ago. It is assumed that these perceptions play a significant role in the de-transitioning of trans people upon their deaths. Consider for a moment how unthinkable it would be to dress a cisgender male as a female in his coffin. Or how absurd to eulogize a cisgender little girl as a little boy in obituaries and memorials. It is only with trans people that this phenomenon occurs with any degree of frequency, indicating a widespread understanding that the transgender identity is both

inauthentic and invalid.

A recent example of this understanding of trans-ness as inauthentic occurred when the Russians invaded Ukraine and martial law was declared, “all able-bodied men, ages 18-60, were required to stay.” Women were allowed to leave the country, but many transgender women were blocked from escaping (Berjikian, 2022; Lee, 2022). Many of these women resorted to crossing at unofficial border points, including escaping over mountains, through forests, or swimming across the Danube. But the motivation behind their threatened detainment had already been made clear. In the eyes of the Ukrainian government, or at least in the eyes of the Ukrainian border guards, transgender women were considered men.

This belief has been made publicly apparent among the supporters of the anti-transgender policies introduced in states and school systems around the country over the past few years: “No men in women’s restrooms!” (Ciszek & Rodriquez, 2020, p. 5205) “No men in women’s sports!” (Bois, N. D.). Notably, these rallying calls do not mention transgender women, they mention “men” – confirming a disbelief in the authenticity of the transgender identity and, often specifically, of the process of transition.

In 2014, a newspaper article about the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance (a law that was perceived to protect trans people’s rights to use public restrooms consistent with their gender identity), Texas Governor Greg Abbott reiterated that disbelief, “It’s a matter of not having men in women’s restrooms.” (Ciszek & Rodriguez, 2020, p. 5206). Ron Vogel, a GOP candidate for Congress in Pennsylvania (and a masculine individual), stated in a newspaper op-ed that, “To most people here in Pennsylvania’s Sixth District, allowing me to compete against women in women’s sport is absurd, and they’re right.”

He further stated that, “girls’ college and high school athletes are at risk of becoming a league dominated by men.” (Vogel, 2022). In both passages, the trans women at the center of these public controversies were not referred to as trans women, they were referred to as men**.**

While there are undoubtedly many motivations behind anti-transgender hate and policy-making (including post-mortem de-transitions), these examples suggest that the perceived inauthenticity of the transgender identity is at the forefront of that transphobia. Wuest (2019) maintains that opponents of transgender rights simply do not believe that transgender people exist. She states that the authors and supporters of transphobic policies have put forth:

> …discriminatory laws and administrative policies barring access to public restrooms on the bases that transgender persons simply do not “exist,” that trans identity is the product of liberal myths and faulty science, and that civil rights law and constitutional protections regarding sex ought to be based on a narrow genitals- or chromosomal-based conception of sex” (p. 338).

That “narrow genitals- or chromosomal-based conception of sex” negates the transgender identity and renders it invalid. Episodes of trans people being de-transitioned after death seems to support the observation that the trans identity is considered false and therefore vulnerable to “correction” once the inhabitant and defender of that identity has passed away. With regard to the actions and motivations of family members who de-transition their loved ones after death, the degree to which the impact of a perceived inauthenticity of the trans identity remains to be examined. But the prevalence of the inability of American adults to accept the trans identity as a valid identity is certainly a

factor, and probably a significant one.

Final thoughts of Study 1 and Study 2

In both cohorts, it is the relationships that impact CTI's relational layer of identity that become salient in discussions associated with the enactment of gender identity after death. Whether it is the parents, partners, and other family members or friends and community members, the participants looked to these relationships as sources of either identity preservation or identity distortion. The findings here suggest that CTI is applicable to enactments of identity after death – even when the individual will no longer be capable of participating in any further identity negotiations. This work also contributes to our understandings of the processes and entities that work to either defend or erase the gender identities of TGD individuals after they have entered the state of complete vulnerability and mental incapacity associated with death.

It is further suggested here that the family's religious, cultural, and political affiliations play a significant role in TGD individuals' expectations for either a respectful or disrespectful treatment of their gender identity after death. The persistence of a long-standing social stigma associated with trans people is also assumed to have an impact, as are questions regarding the authenticity and validity of the transgender identity. In a society that routinely wishes the dearly departed a chance to, "rest in peace," the concept of peace, as it relates to an authentic, post-mortem memorialization is often denied to those in the TGD community – with little if any repercussions for the perpetrators. As Study 2 participant, Dakota, stated, "Even in death can they not be free? Even in death can they not be themselves?"

CHAPTER THREE

OTHER MARGINALIZED POST-MORTEM IDENTITIES

The main focus of this dissertation, and of this entire line of research, has been to investigate the precariousness of the transgender and gender-diverse (TGD) identities, as well as to illuminate the processes through which TGD identities are distorted after death. The entry points for this inquiry have been through a unique application of the communication theory of identity (CTI) and an examination of the ways in which public memorial expressions (such funerals, gravestones, and obituaries) have been weaponized to disrespect and further marginalize TGD individuals. In the course of conducting this research, it became clear that this unique utilization of CTI could (and should) be applied to other examples of discrimination after death. The following study is not connected to the work associated with the TGD community, but it does provide support for the use of CTI to explain the manner in which identity after death is enacted by others – often without any contribution or participation from the deceased.

What follows is an examination of manner in which the bodies of New York City's impoverished, disenfranchised, and unclaimed are treated by the city's post-mortem processes. These enactments of body disposition articulate a lesser human value. This study deconstructs the manner in which this lesser human value is at first assigned, but then refuted by loved ones of the deceased.

In the course of conducting this research, three categories of public memorial text manipulation emerged. These include attempts to (1) distort, (2) diminish/disrespect, or (3) erase the identities of the marginalized deceased. For many family members and other loved ones, a Hart Island burial articulated a lesser human value. Therefore it falls under

the category of a "diminished/disrespected" post-mortem identity. In an observation of nearly 100 memorial postings, significant evidence emerged of mourners who (a) acknowledged the stigma associated with a Hart Island burial and (b) articulated a counter-argument to the island's dehumanizing treatment of its deceased.

Study 3 – Hart Island

> "Individuals have an interest in seeing the right [to a decent burial] respected because a decent burial is part of our collective self-expression of values, of feelings, of affections, of individual dignity, and of human worth" (Wojcik, p. 394).

Introduction

A cemetery is a statement. Dunn (2016) suggests that each cemetery has meaning "reliant on the chorus of individual voices that constitute the cemetery" (p. 133). Each burial ground bestows upon its inhabitants a sense of respect or disrespect, a sense of elevated status or social diminishment. In a society where personal characteristics are often used to determine one's relative human value, each individual's final resting place works to cement that value; a value that conceivably persists into eternity. Consequently, in a communicative sense, burial grounds and cemeteries matter. They matter because the manner in which identities are evaluated and dead bodies are processed serves to reinforce attitudes and beliefs about the deceased and about the communities from whence they came.

Like any other statement, a cemetery's declaration is dependent on context (Dunn, 2016). Each culture has its own standards and conventions when it comes to the rites and rituals associated with death, mourning, and burials. As with other social conventions, to

stray from the normative is to risk inclusion, status, and acceptance. Consequently, if the norm for burials in mainstream American culture includes formal funeral rituals, graveside ceremonies, pastoral cemetery settings, carved grave markers, and occasional visitation from loved ones and relations, then anything less – unless specifically requested -- communicates a sense of inferiority, of otherness, of a lower-valued human existence.

Discrimination after death (Kastenbaum et al., 1976-77; Maybury, 1995-96; Wojcik, 2000) is an emerging area of interdisciplinary study that, within the discipline of communication, can be considered under the umbrella of end-of-life communication. Memorial expressions of mourning and public remembrance are, after all, communicative acts, as are acts of discrimination. In the U.S., the disposition and disposal of the deceased's body is both communicative and categorizing. It becomes a representation of the deceased's station within society. This study highlights the significance of memorial expressions and the harmful and often devastating impact of enacted expressions that intentionally diminish the identity of the deceased.

While many theories assume the legitimacy of an identity after death, few studies – particularly in the discipline of communication – explore the nature of that identity. This study brings together principles associated with communication theory, identity negotiation, and the concept of discrimination after death in order to explore the manner in which post-mortem identities are constructed – often with harmful consequences. Through a novel application of the communication theory of identity, I observe instances in which agents and institutions of the *relational* layer of identity (close friends, family) and the *communal* layer of identity (cities, municipal departments, religious institutions)

become empowered to *enact* the identity of the deceased.

Perhaps predictably, when the deceased is associated with a marginalized or vulnerable community, agents representing the dominant culture consistently and intentionally work to distort, disparage, or even erase that identity. My analysis of online memorials posted in remembrance of loved ones laid to rest on New York City's Hart Island examines how burial in a stigmatized potter's field works to diminish and dehumanize the identity of the departed. But also observed was evidence of loved ones – even loved ones long estranged from the deceased – who used the same forum to dignify and re-humanize the institutionally dehumanized identities of the departed.

Specifically, this study will explore the concepts of *identity after death* and *discrimination after death* through a unique post-mortem application of the communication theory of identity (CTI). The four layers of CTI (*personal, enacted, relational, communal*, described previously in this dissertation) provide key points of investigation. In particular, CTI's two co-authored layers of identity (the *relational* and the *communal* layers) provide locations of interpenetration that emphasize the critical contribution of identity negotiation to our understanding of those same co-authored identities after the subject has expired.

Most importantly for the purposes of this study, it is in CTI's *enacted* layer where it is understood that symbols, messages, and actions -- including the burial and the final resting place of the subject -- represent expressions of the subject's identity. After death, the subject is no longer able to contribute to their own identity enactment. Instead, representatives of the *relational layer* (family members, loved ones) and/or *communal layer* (social and civic institutions) step in to *enact* the subject's identity for them, often

with harmful results.

Hart Island, off the coast of the Bronx in New York City, is the city's acknowledged potter's field. The Hart Island Project is a website created by a social and political activist to allow the friends and family of Hart Island's deceased to locate and then memorialize their departed loved ones. This examination of the obituary- or eulogy-like "stories" posted to the Hart Island Project's website reveals a sense of shame and regret associated with a stigmatized potter's field burial. But these stories also reveal attempts by relations to challenge negative emotions and impressions associated with stigma and disgrace. As considered through the lens of CTI, it is observed how the deceased's de-humanized *communal* identity can be refuted by a re-humanizing expression of their *relational* identity.

Discrimination and bias associated with cemeteries and burials

For centuries, the American dead have been separated in cemeteries according to, quite bluntly, lives that matter and lives that do not. Or as Butler describes, the grievable and the ungrievable (2004a, 2004b, 2009). A desire to separate those perceived as ingroup members from outgroup members (strangers from non-strangers) in burial grounds has been a part of American civilization since before the colonies became America. As one might expect, race and class played a large role in who was fit for a proper burial and who was not. For instance, the minutes from a 1766 governmental meeting in the Germantown section of Philadelphia state:

> It was unanimously Resolved by the said Inhabitants: That as a separate lot of land of sufficient largeness… has several years ago by the whole Germantown Inhabitants been purchased on purpose for and as a separate and distinct Burying

> ground for all Strangers, and negroes and mulattoes as die in any part of Germantown; "That therefore henceforth no Negro or Mulattoes shall be buried or suffered to be buried in the said upper Germantown Burying Ground."
>
> (Stackhouse, 2003)

It is perhaps not all that surprising that, in a society that continues to struggle with great racial, ethnic, and class divides, the society's dead would also remain segregated.

The Hart Island potter's field

The term "potter's field" originated in the Bible.[1] Over time, potter's fields (also known as pauper's fields) have been characterized by mass burials and, quite often, unmarked graves. Historically, potter's fields are home to a community's impoverished, homeless, and undesirables. Denyer Willis (2018) suggests that potter's fields have often served as a final resting place for victims of "lynching, hanging, and racialized violence" (p. 539). In Long Island Sound, off the coast of the Bronx, Hart Island is recognized as New York City's potter's field, the location for its city burials. Hart Island is considered the largest public cemetery in the country (Kilgannon, 2021), and may be the world's largest cemetery for AIDS victims (Kilgannon, 2018).

Until a recent change in policy, Hart Island was operated by the New York City Department of Corrections. Burials were conducted by inmates. In 2019, Mayor Bill de Blasio signed into law the transfer of control over Hart Island from the Department of Corrections to the Department of Parks. At the signing, De Blasio commented on the island's resident population, "…if they ended up in a situation where their final resting place was Hart Island, that is not a comment on who they were… it is a comment on the inequalities of our society" (CBS New York, 2019). His comment, along with the actions

of island improvement activists, points optimistically to more humane and positive burial experiences in Hart Island's future. But, simultaneously, the mayor's comment confirms the perception of a Hart Island burial as a stigmatized experience. Burials there were "shrouded in shame… partly because of the burial methods – bodies stacked by the hundreds in long muddy trenches" (Kilgannon, 2021). It is important to note that data collection for this study predates the transition of the cemetery from one department's hands to the other.

Interpreting Butler, De Fina (2011) maintains that identity is associated with actions and behaviors. In this context then, the performative act of laying a body to rest becomes a significant expression of identity. In a society that prioritizes identifiable individual grave markers, the opportunity to attend burial ceremonies, and the ability to visit gravesites as often as one wishes, the Hart Island burial experience communicates an othered identity – an identity not worthy of the affectionate actions and normative activities of mourning. As a practice, Hart Island does not mark each grave, it does not erect gravestones, and it does not provide easy access to visitors. Decorative memorial expressions are non-existent. In a society where individuals from all classes and cultures aspire to a death with dignity, Hart Island provides the opposite.

The Hart Island Project

In reaction to the poor communication and poor access to visitation associated with Hart Island, artist and photographer Melinda Hunt launched the Hart Island Project (HIP) in 1991.[2] HIP is a user-friendly online database that provides access to information about Hart Island burials but also provides a forum for personal remembrances (See https://www.hartisland.net). This study concentrates on the website's forum, named The

Traveling Cloud Museum. The online museum is the portion of the Hart Island Project website that allows individuals (*mourner-authors*) to locate their deceased loved ones on the site's considerable database and then post "stories" (memorials and remembrances) about the deceased. To explore this rich vein of memorial data, our research team conducted a critical discourse analysis of these messages of longing, love, grief, and gratitude. Many thanked the HIP (and Melinda Hunt specifically) for helping them to find their lost loved ones. But several of the memorial stories analyzed also contained words of frustration and anger directed at Hart Island's dehumanizing system of interment.

Literature review

The communication theory of identity and identity after death

The communication theory of identity (CTI) maintains that identity is "inherently a communication process and must be understood as a transaction in which messages and values are exchanged" (Hecht et al., 2003, p. 230). In short, "communication not only causes and is caused by identity, but is identity itself" (Hecht & Lu, 2014, p. 2). CTI identifies four layers of identity (*personal, enactment, relational,* and *communal*), and suggests that although one layer may at times be more salient than another, the others are never static or irrelevant (Hecht, 1993; Hecht et al., 2003; Hecht et al., 2005). In the *personal layer*, the individual is the focus of identity in which feelings about the self-concept or self-image shape are emphasized. This layer involves how we see and feel about ourselves. In the *enacted layer*, identity is portrayed through communication. It is formed through social interactions and the exchange of symbolic meanings. In the *relational layer*, identity is co-created through a process of interaction with others. Individuals gain a sense of self through relationships with others. In the *communal layer*,

group membership is the focus of identity. (Hecht, 1993; Hecht et al., 2003; Hecht et al., 2005; Nuru, 2014). The communal layer can be understood as "society's ascription of an identity." (Hecht and Lu, 2014, p. 3)

Faulkner and Hecht (2011) suggest that, "at any one time all four frames are present and, in a sense, a part of one another" (p. 831). The theory also identifies identity gaps between these four layers. These gaps can be seen as the inconsistencies and contradictions inherent in the interpenetration of various layers of identity. Identity negotiation takes place when self-concepts and enacted identities conflict with the perceptions and understandings of others (Hecht, 1993; Hecht et al., 2003; Hecht et al., 2004; Nuru, 2014, Wadsworth et al., 2008). In the family context, identity gaps have been explored as origination points for turbulent relationships (Kennedy-Lightsey et al., 2015). Similar gaps can occur in community contexts, and this paper maintains that the relational turbulence does not always recede at the time of death.

CTI assumes that there are distinct differences between the way we see our own identity and the way we openly express that identity (*personal-enacted*). The gap between those two understandings of identity creates tension or anxiety. Of particular importance in an interpersonal or intergroup interaction are the gaps between how we see our own identity and how we co-create our identity with our friends and loved ones (*personal-relational*) or with the identity we co-create within the groups and communities (*personal-communal*) to which we belong (Hecht et al., 2004, Hecht & Lu, 2014, Nuru, 2014).

In these interactions, an ongoing identity negotiation occurs between the individual and their loved ones and between the individual and their groups. The study of

identity after death considers the moment when those identity negotiations end. This is the moment when an individual becomes incapacitated and can no longer participate in the negotiation of their own identity. Yet that identity continues to exist and it continues to be enacted. But it is now enacted by the subject's co-authors alone.

The incapacitated individual's relational identity is expressed by their relations: typically close friends and family members. Their communal identity is now enacted by the community (or its institutions). Consequently, the incapacitated individual – in this case, the deceased – is rendered powerless in the continued enactment of their own identity. Our study suggests that evidence of these interactions might be found in the memorial expressions (called "stories") posted to the Hart Island Project website.

RQ1a. How do the memorial expressions posted to the HIP website inform our understanding of identity after death?

RQ1b. How do the memorial expressions posted to the HIP website inform our understanding of post-mortem relational and communal identities?

In the U.S., only a small percentage of individuals arrange specific details with regard to the disposition of their body and their identity before they die. For instance, according to the National Funeral Directors Association, only 21% of American adults report that they have pre-arranged their own funeral (Giffey, 2020). Therefore, the phenomenon of agents who step in to enact the identity of the deceased is quite common. But when the deceased is a member of a marginalized community or maintains a socially unconventional identity, the distortion of the deceased's identity often directly targets the identity (or identity attribute) that is the specific site of the individual's marginalization. For instance, in these studies, it is the trans individuals' trans-ness and the homeless

individuals' homelessness that become the targeted identity areas. Attempts to "reframe" a nonconforming identity to align with societal norms and reinforce existing social hierarchies become both evident and political.

Butler (2004b) maintains that "Certain humans are recognized as less than human, and that form of qualified recognition does not lead to a viable life" (p. 2). In this study, it is proposed that a perception of "less than human-ness" is often marked and cemented in post-mortem memorials, thereby perpetuating perceptions of an inferior human value that the deceased can never challenge or refute.

RQ2a. How do mourner-authors on the HIP website articulate positive or negative perceptions of Hart Island as a final resting place for their loved one?

RQ2b: How do mourner-authors on the HIP website articulate perceptions of their deceased -- and often estranged or long-lost – loved one?

With regard to this application of CTI, Orbe (2004) once asked, "How would CTI scholars explain interactions where a person has less/no control over when a certain aspect of their identity is enacted within interactions by others?" (p. 145). It is proposed here that "identity after death" is just such an instance. After death, the identity of the dead continues to be enacted. However, it is now enacted by co-authors representing the relational and the communal frames of identity (or both) without input or participation from the deceased.

RQ 3. How do the memorial stories posted to the HIP website acknowledge or suggest attempts by external agents (relational or communal) to frame the identity of the deceased?

Method

The research team began by reviewing memorial "stories" posted to specific gravesites on the Hart Island Project website. Before continuing with this discussion, what follows is a brief discussion of the stories and the manner in which they are submitted to the website. First, if one is an individual seeking a specific "lost loved one," one simply uses the site's search function to discover any record of that individual's possible burial on Hart Island. For those who do locate a loved, instructions for future activity are quite minimalist. The site merely suggests, " Add a story." Then the site directs text message posters (those referred to in this study as *mourner-authors*) to "Write or copy/paste your story in the input field." It is important to note that the site does not pose specific questions to the participants, nor does the site recommend potential story topics. The content of each story is at the discretion of each *mourner-author*.

In contrast, with regard to this study, my research assistants and I were hoping to engage with a large number of stories that had already been posted. To accomplish this, one must select a plot from the website's Hart Island map. A new column appears that lists all of the individuals buried in that plot. (There are often over 100 individuals in each plot.) At the top of this list are two indicators: STORY and ALL. If one clicks on ALL, then the entire list of individuals buried in the plot are revealed. However, if the user clicks on STORY, then only those individuals who have had a story posted to their profile will be revealed. Using this convenient method, the deceased in each plot who have received a story are quickly revealed.

However, not every story is useable for the purposes of this research. For a variety of unknown reasons, many people go onto the Hart Island Project website and post

demographic information that they have researched. This often includes census-style data that indicates, among other attributes, birthplace, marital history, and history of military service. (It is assumed that these postings are made by individuals hoping to assist the deceased's actual loved ones to locate the dead or perhaps to distinguish between individuals with similar names.) The following is an example of a story deemed non-intimate (name/identity redacted): "NAME was born about 1911 in New York. He was married to NAME and in 1940 he lived in the Bronx. Source: 1940 United States Federal Census." Clearly, these types of postings are not helpful to a study of assigned identity and were therefore excluded. Other individuals sometimes posted a prayer or a newspaper clipping, but did not post anything of a personal nature. Those postings were excluded as well. In short, if no indication of a personal relationship was expressed, the postings were not included in the analysis.

My research team and I only analyzed postings that indicated a personal connection to the deceased. These were the posts that, for the purposes of the study, were deemed "intimate." Intimacy was exhibited by telling stories, adding anecdotes, expressing emotion over "finding" a lost loved one or "sorrow" over losing a loved one. The following is an example of a story that would be deemed by the research team to be intimate (name/identity redacted):

> NAME is my great-uncle, brother to my maternal grandfather. NAME was born in Belfast, Northern Ireland on 5 July 1903. He was one of nine children. He left home in 1919 following the death of his mother and was naturalized in New York in 1923. He spent many years travelling while working on ships. Although I'm saddened to find that NAME is buried at Hart Island, I am also very glad to have

found his final resting [place] and I pray that although he obviously didn't have much, that he had a happy life. I hope, one day, to be able to travel to the US to visit Hart Island and pay my respects in person to my great-uncle who, although I didn't have the fortune to meet, I have much love and affection for. He was never forgotten and never will be. May you rest in peace, Uncle NAME.

This example is instructive for two reasons. First, although the mourner-author indicates that they had never met the deceased, this posted story is still considered intimate because of clear allusions to a personal relationship. The post is also instructive in that it articulates a negative impression of a Hart Island burial. This will be discussed in more detail later in the paper, but it affirms the author's belief that burial in the Hart Island potter's field was understood to be marked by stigma.

After initial searching and analysis, it became clear that many gravesites had no stories posted. Of the entries that did contain stories, only a small percentage of the stories were deemed "intimate" by the research. The team began with a focus on gravesites that were marked as AIDS victims and identified 3296 such graves (as identified on the HIP website). From that sample, only 26 intimate stories were found. Because of the small size of that sample, the study expanded with a goal of analyzing 100 purposefully-selected intimate stories. The sample was chosen by purposefully selecting burial plots from different locations around the island. In total, the team reviewed 68 plots from across the island and identified 5878 graves (in addition to the 3296 graves of AIDS victims). This set resulted in the discovery of 68 additional intimate stories bringing the total to 94 intimate stories from across the cemetery. These numbers indicate that only approximately 1% of the deceased individuals examined had received story

posts.

Upon review of the stories, the lead investigator identified three directions for the sentiments expressed. In distinct yet overlapping ways, the HIP mourner-authors directed their expressions of emotion and remembrance towards (1) themselves, (2) the deceased, and (3) external entities. The first group was marked by sentiments as to how the experience of locating a deceased family member affected the mourner-author. The second set, in the tradition of obituaries, included memories of the deceased, stories from their past, and expressions of love, mourning, disconnection and reconnection. The external entities, targets of the third category, included comments made regarding individuals and institutions such as Hart Island, the Hart Island Project (and Melinda Hunt, its founder), the city, the hospital where their loved one died, as well as towards other factors such as AIDs, substance abuse, and addiction.

Four research assistants assisted the authors in transcribing the stories from the website. (Any names mentioned in the stories were altered to promote privacy.) The RA's were undergraduate students in the Communication discipline trained by the lead author and tested in the coding of the emotions observed in the stories and were then assigned two tasks: To identify emotions exhibited by the mourner-authors towards themselves, towards the deceased, and towards external entities, and to simply count the appearance of certain key words and phrases.

The analytical approach was inductive. The study was, in sense, a search for common themes to see where those themes might lead. Three categories of story posts emerged: (1) comments about the mourner-authors themselves, (2) comments about the deceased, and (3) comments about external forces and institutions. The category 3

comments alluded to war, religion, substance abuse, hospitals, NYC, the cemetery, and the Hart Island Project. It was not uncommon to find comments in the stories that fit all three categories.

Within those categories, the author and the RA's would look at the data independently and assign themes (open-ended). For instance, a key theme in the first category was achieving closure. A key theme in the second category was a desire to construct a more three-dimensional image of the deceased and to perhaps rehumanize that individual. Some of the comments were very clear-eyed with regard to the issues that haunted the deceased (mental health issues, substance abuse), but still attempted to elevate the individual above the stigmatize stereotype of individuals who end up in a potter's field. The key themes in the third category often dealt with a sense of unhappiness at the final resting place, the dehumanizing process of unmarked mass graves, the inability of the "system" to properly contact next of kin, and the inability of the system to provide opportunities for visitation. (Some expressed gratitude to the Hart Island Project – and to Melinda Hunt specifically – for creating the website that allowed them to finally find their lost loved ones. This was a service – humane and caring -- that the city had never provided.)

Data analysis

In keeping with the motivations behind critical discourse analysis (CDA), the HIP study was designed to explore how "power relationships are exercised and negotiated" in the discourse that takes place between the surviving mourners, the deceased, and external entities (such as the city of New York and the cemetery administration). This included a text analysis of the stories posted to the Hart Island website. These involved statements

about the poster, the deceased, and the external forces involved in bringing the deceased to Hart Island in the first place. A process analysis guided the interpretation of those texts with a keen understanding of not only how these posts came to exist, but also an understanding of the socio-economic and socio-political factors that contributed to the city's decision to bring the deceased's bodies to Hart Island in the first place. Finally, a social analysis of the dynamics at work between those associated with the city's dominant culture and the unclaimed, disenfranchised deceased (among the city's most powerless and vulnerable) worked to explain the significance of these texts/stories from a socio-historic perspective.

For Van Dijk (1995), a cognitive analysis performed in conjunction with both a social analysis and a discourse analysis moves the analysis into the area of *sociocognition*. According to van Dijk, intergroup dynamic are "often articulated along Us versus Them dimensions, in which speakers of one group will generally tend to present themselves or their own group in positive terms, and other groups in negative terms" (p. 22). On Hart Island, the city's institutions and its mainstream society are repeatedly expressed in positive terms while their treatment of the dispossessed persistently articulates a sense of inferiority expressed in negative terms and dehumanizing actions.

Coding was conducted in accordance with Saldana's suggestion that coding should summarize or condense data, rather than simply reducing it (2014). Sipe and Ghiso (2004) suggest that coding is a judgment call. Our team proceeded with the overarching goal to condense and categorize our interpretations of this qualitative date so as to, to the best of our ability, avoid altering the meaning of the mourner-author's intent.

Cross-checking between the five different observers enabled us to feel a high degree of confidence with regard to our categorizations. As Saldana observed, "Ultimately, team members must coordinate and insure that their sometimes individual coding efforts harmonize…" (p. 27).

The assistants were not given a selection of possible emotions upon which to base their reactions, consequently, a wide variety of terms and expressions were identified and then listed. The lead authors grouped synonymic terms into categories, and only those categories were coded. In other words, terms such as *happiness* and *joy* were grouped together, as were terms such as *missing* and *longing*, or *anger* and *frustration*.

With the most common categories identified, the lead author conducted a discourse analysis in keeping with the principles of critical discourse analysis (CDA). According to Fairclough et al. (2011), this approach differs slightly from traditional discourse analysis due to a keen interest "in the semiotic dimensions of power, injustice, abuse, and political-economic change in society" (p. 357). In keeping with the motivations behind CDA, our study was designed to explore how "power relationships are exercised and negotiated" in the discourse that takes place between the mourner-authors, the deceased, and external entities (such as the city of New York, itself). The three key entities involved in the discourse can be seen to constitute the relationships and interactions associated with the relational layer (the mourner-author) and with the communal layer (for the most part, the city of New York). Both were then considered as they engaged in and interacted with the deceased's enactment layer of identity.

Findings

It is important to remember that this study is a review and analysis of memorials and remembrances (called "stories") posted online to a public website. The overarching interest is in memorial expressions (funerals, obituaries, cemeteries, gravestones, and online remembrances) as a sub-category of end-of-life communication. As such, interviews were not conducted nor was any attempt made to contact any of the mourner-authors. (An excellent study conducted by Brouwer and Morris (2021) examines "Loneliness in a Beautiful Place" – a five-part web series that does include stories about, and interviews with, surviving loved ones of those laid to rest on Hart Island.) Our focus was solely on the public statements made in the posted memorials. Additionally, the Hart Island Project database does not contain information regarding race, ethnicity or socio-economic status (SES), nor do we know the race, ethnicity or SES of the mourner-authors. Therefore it would have been impossible for us to try to make any kind of comparative analysis between deceased members of different ethnicities or social classes.

However, the well-documented nature of the homeless population of New York City along with the socio-economic status (SES) of the city's inhabitants suggest a majority representation in the cemetery among people of color: "The bodies of the potter's field…are deeply marked by race" (Denyer Willis, p. 539). The Coalition for the Homeless (Simone, 2022) reports that 56% of New York City shelter residents are African American while 32% are Latino (p. 21). The Poverty Tracker Report states that, in 2018, 57% of Black New Yorkers and 65% of Latino New Yorkers had experienced at least one form of disadvantage, including poverty, material hardship, and/or health problems (Collyer et al., p. 32). That same study reports that the poverty rate for Black New Yorkers is over 80% higher than the rate for White New Yorkers while the rate for

Hispanic New Yorkers is over 100% higher (p. 13). These factors are consistent with characteristics known to contribute to one's likelihood of experiencing a potter's field burial (Bernstein, 2016).

During the execution of this study, the HIP website's mourner-authors were never asked direct questions about potter's field burials, Hart Island, the Hart Island Project, or the circumstances surrounding the deceased's journey to Hart Island. Readers should also be aware that, on the HIP website, the mourner-authors were never asked direct questions about potter's field burials, Hart Island, the Hart Island Project, or the circumstances surrounding the deceased's journey to Hart Island. The Hart Island Project website simply directs registered members (it is free to register) to "Add a story." The site directs members to choose to add: an audio message, an epitaph, an image, or a text message. (See https://www.hartisland.net). This study only examined existing text messages. For text messaging, mourner-authors were directed to "Write or copy/paste your story in the input field." The site does not pose specific questions to the participants, nor does the site recommend potential story topics.

Our analysis focuses on those who did choose, without prompting, to discuss such topics. For the purposes of data interpretation, we have categorized our findings according to relational identity enactments, communal identity enactments, and communal-relational and communal-communal enactments.

Relational identity enactments

The stories posted to the HIP website are similar to obituaries. However, because the HIP stories are often written several years after the death of the deceased, and because, for the mourners, there existed a sense of uncertainty with regard to the death

and the life of the "lost" loved one, an HIP story differs from a traditional obituary. Still, these two types of messages are quite similar. Evidence suggests that many HIP stories closely fit the descriptions of obituary categories described by Fowler (2005) as the *traditional positive* and the *tragic* obituaries.

The *traditional positive* obituary is characterized by "an unambiguous celebration of its protagonist" (Fowler, p. 64). This obit form recalls a post-mortem convention popular throughout Western culture where it is considered socially inappropriate to speak ill of the dead (based on the Latin, *de mortuis nihil nisi bonum*, or "of the dead, say nothing but good" (Alfano et al., 2018). On the HIP forum, one mourner-author wrote of an old friend, "No better friend ever; no more splendid person ever existed." Another wrote, "Jimmy was, and continues to be, a very much loved son, father, brother, grandfather and friend."

Only in rare instances did the mourner-authors provide evidence as to the circumstances that led the deceased to be buried on Hart Island. Instead, the mourner-authors were more concerned with recollections from the subject's earlier life and character. In the following story, a significant turn in life is insinuated, but never described:

> Brett was my first cousin. He had a loving father and mother and a brother and sister. He attended college. He had a wife and 4 children. He owned his own successful business. This is not where any of us nor Brett himself would have imagined he would finally rest. Brett was a kind, considerate, loving person who met an unfortunate end.

The author describes an "unfortunate end." But all of the other details of Brett's

life (as posted) seem to align with the conventions of a normative, middle-class existence. Consistent with traditional, positive obituary style, the author seems to have little desire to dwell on any negative aspects of Brett's life or death (or little desire to do so on a public forum).

In the *tragic obituary*, the subject is seen as a figure of misfortune; an object of sympathy (Fowler, p. 65). Many mourner-authors employed this approach in their HIP stories, as if to shift blame for whatever indiscretions or bad decisions may have led the deceased to a Hart Island burial. Among the most common negative influences were drug and alcohol abuse. As one mourner wrote, "Lenny was gifted mechanically and his hands could accomplish almost anything. [But] his decision making was clouded by his abuse of both alcohol and drugs." A second author wrote of a loved one's struggles with addiction after returning home from Viet Nam, with the 'horrific effects" of war also characterized as a contributing factor :

> He was a good man. A son, brother, Dad, husband. He… joined the military at the age of 18 and fought in the Nam war. He died as a homeless, lonely man when he gave way to his addictions after being exposed to the horrific effects of the war. Seen, smelled, felt and lived through death.

Family members who composed memorial stories only rarely assigned the deceased an identity consistent with a lower value, station, or morality. However, when they did do, their honest assessments were still usually laced with a sense of warmth and fondness:

> This is my father… He had AIDS and was a heroin addict so it was best he stayed out my life, I assume. His addiction led to him stealing and robbing which also

led to a lengthy criminal record. Although he's made bad choices I know deep down he had a desire to be the father he never was to his son (me). I guess in his eyes the damage was done and thought maybe I was better off without him.

In both the traditional positive and the tragic style of memorial writing, we observe mourner-authors framing the deceased's identity in a manner consistent with CTI's relational layer. The deceased is no longer able to contribute to the construction of the relational identity, but the relation (typically, but not always a family member) embraces that responsibility and produces a public memorial characterized by decidedly positive valuations. HIP stories written in the style of the *traditional positive* obituary emphasize the better aspects of the deceased's life while ignoring any negative attributes or experiences. Mourner-authors writing in the *tragic* style of obituary do not attempt to ignore the negative aspects of the deceased's life, but often attempt to attribute those more unfavorable aspects and experiences to either external forces or to the deceased's misfortune.

AIDS victims. This study began with an interest in the victims of AIDS who were buried on Hart Island. However, due to a relatively limited number of intimate stories, the scope of the study was expanded to encompass the entire island. Interestingly considering the reputation of the island cemetery as the largest cemetery of AIDS victims in the world, only 5 stories reviewed by the research team mentioned "AIDS" and no stories mentioned the words, "gay," or "homosexual." In terms of relational identity enactment, it is possible that these omissions represent a sense of denial on the parts of the mourner-authors, or, perhaps, a reluctance to mention their loved ones' sexuality on a public forum. In keeping with the study's investigation of relational post-mortem

identities constructed without the participation of the deceased, it is possible to interpret these posts as attempts to suppress the deceased's authentic identity in order to create and perpetuate a distorted post-mortem identity that is perceived to be in closer conformance with social and family standards.

Communal identity enactments

The deceased of Hart Island are primarily former citizens of New York. As such they are group members of the municipality (albeit among millions of group members). But their membership in that group is clear. New York mayor Bill de Blasio stated:

> The folks who have been buried on Hart Island over generations… they are New Yorkers… and I think it is a reminder to us all that there are people who built this city, who made this city great, whose names we will never know…these are people who are part of the fabric of this city. (CBS New York, 2019)

Unfortunately, while these individuals were certainly "part of the fabric of the city," in the eyes of that city and many of its citizens and institutions, these New Yorkers did not live up to the normative standards of citizenship. Their final resting place has become a symbol of that inability to conform. The reputation of Hart Island as a potter's field suggests that it is the final resting place for New York City's outcasts – the destitute, unclaimed, and unwanted. Several of the comments left by the Hart Island Project's mourner-authors acknowledge the stigma associated with a Hart Island burial. These posts suggest that interment in the island cemetery articulated a lower value of human-ness. Almost all of the mourner-authors who spoke to the character of the island expressed regret or disappointment that their loved one ended up there. One mourner-author posted, "[I am] so sad that he ended up on Hart Island. He deserved better than to

end his life like this." Some wrote of their frustration as if speaking directly to the deceased (in the second person), "I hate that this is where your body was laid to rest."

Notably, some mourner-authors chose to reframe Hart Island rather than reframing their loved one. The reframing still creates a more positive identity for the deceased by constructing a more positive image of their final resting place.

> It is with deep sadness that I reflect on the short Life of my Brother, who had the ability to make the same choices as I. He lived the way he wanted and died the way he chose. I often thought of his burial on Hart Island and even though I have the resources to remove and re-bury his Body, I respect his choices and know that he is Happy among his own people of his choosing.

In this example, the mourner-author acknowledges the stigma associated with Hart Island – they state that they have considered moving their brother's body. But instead, they seem to see a Hart Island burial as perhaps a natural and fitting progression of the life their brother chose to lead. The mourner-author further stated, "He sacrificed much to Live his own way. But I respect his choices and mourn the years without him." Again, as is often the case, no details related to the deceased's nonconformity are mentioned. Instead, a euphemism is employed: "He sacrificed much to Live his own way."

The general positivity contained within most of the HIP stories is consistent with societal norms for public memorial expressions. But the deceased's communal identity, as expressed through the actions of various governmental departments of New York City, articulates a far less positive appraisal. Unless a family has the means to move the body to a different cemetery, the deceased will remain in this stigmatized resting place –

trapped, as it were, in the message itself with no hope of re-negotiating their identity.

For some, it is not just the city or the cemetery to blame for dehumanizing their loved one post-mortem. There is an entire process involved, often beginning with the hospital where the individual died or to which their corpse was moved after death:

> He shouldn't be buried here. He wasn't homeless nor unclaimed. The hospital didn't go through the means of finding someone to claim him which is unfortunate. My family couldn't afford a lawsuit so we had to settle as Hart Island as his resting place. I hope he's in a better place though.

A few HIP mourner-authors not only took offense at the island resting place – a space created by the city and then selected by the city for the deceased's burial – but also at the manner in which the cemetery was managed.

> I was taken aback and very sad to hear that you, my dear cousin, have passed. The hardest part for me was finding out that they laid you to rest in Potters Field & no one in the family knew of your whereabouts. You chose to stay away and do you, and I'm ok with that, but your loving sister was a point of contact in case of an emergency and no one contacted her although her contact information was something you always had. I don't know what happened and what went wrong, but here it is five years after you're gone that we found out.

These responses portray both the deceased and the surviving family as victims of a city-wide system who have little power or ability to alter the fate of their loved one's body or to challenge the powerful system that processed and buried the deceased in such a callous manner.

In regard to that system, some mourner-authors indicated disappointment at not

being allowed to conduct a ceremony or visit the grave site (visitation to Hart Island is strictly regulated), as well as a sense of hopelessness with regard to countering the city's actions. In traditional Western culture, formal funerals, burial ceremonies, and regular visits to grave sites have become hegemonic norms. But none of these conventions have been part of a Hart Island interment. As one mourner-author stated in a story that addressed the departed, "I really wish I was able to lay some flowers on your grave, had you a tombstone for you and just be able to visit closely. Unfortunately this is all I'm able to do."

In this case, the mourner-author describes the manner in which the identity of the deceased has been diminished, but also notes the traditions from which the survivors and mourners have been deprived. As expressed by the Hart Island Project's mourner-authors, the emotional content of a formal funeral is a societal expectation, and therefore greatly missed in its absence.

> I wish we knew you was sick so we could have been there with you, to hug you and to hold your hand. But we are here now and we will be there as soon as we're allowed to visit Hart Island. Your mom is happy we found you and that we're planning to visit with you. She wants you to have the formal family ceremony which will include prayers, eulogies and tears.

If a burial service and grave visitation bestow a sense of dignity and connectedness upon the deceased, then Hart Island burials, up until now, have denied access to that bestowal. The absence of even the simplest ceremony or ritual implicitly categorizes the subject as a person of lower consideration. In this case, the agents associated with the deceased's communal identity (for instance, the city, here represented

by the Department of Corrections) have determined that the deceased is an individual not worthy of receiving their mother's "prayers, eulogies, and tears." But they have also determined that the deceased's friends and family members are undeserving of the traditions and rituals through which people in Western culture typically grieve, mourn, and attempt to achieve closure.

Communal-relational and communal-communal enactments

Until now, this paper has presented stories posted to the HIP website as a means to understanding enactments of the deceased's identity by agents associated with CTI's relational and communal layers. But it is also important to examine the ways in which these two forms of enactment interact with one another, or the manner in which two competing identity enactments engage *within* a single layer, either relational or communal.

In the HIP stories, loved ones attempted to create a more favorable representation of the deceased in a direct response to the social stigma assigned by a Hart Island burial. If the post-mortem treatment of these New York City citizens is understood as dehumanizing to the deceased, then many of the stories posted to the HIP website seem to have been written with the goal of restoring dignity to their de-humanized loved one. Some mourner-authors attempted to reframe their loved one as heroic. For instance, military service and veteran status were mentioned several times: "Donte is my uncle. He was amazing! He was a veteran, and loved to cook. He made the best home fries. He was a kind soul, barely slept, and watched over his mom and older brother."

Many preferred to emphasize the individual's early life – presumably before the onset of the incidents or afflictions that led the loved one to separate from their family or

from mainstream society (or from both):

> He was a naturally bright, perceptive, introspective person who struggled during his youth but retained a youthful cheerfulness; he had an abundance of potential, not deserving of the sad and dejected period that marked the end of his precious life.

In this case, this mourner-author did not know the subject all that well (they stated that they had served in the military together). Yet the mourner-author still felt they knew the deceased well enough to characterize the circumstances of their later life as undeserved. In these instances, a post mortem relational-communal identity gap is formed between the family and friends' enactment of the deceased's identity (positive, bright, heroic) in counter-articulation to the city's enactment of the deceased's identity (unclaimed, unwanted, of little value).

Narrative HIP stories

Particularly effective in this transformative category of HIP stories were the posts that told personal stories. These brief, but oftentimes moving, personal narratives painted vivid pictures of lives once lived interconnected with others, and seemingly enjoyed.

> Back in the days you would be able to find him hanging out in the schoolyard park on a rooftop or on someone's stoop. Nearby would be one of the brothers "chilling out" and a group of "homeboys" with him basically hanging out smoking a cigarette (Newports) and having a good time… I heard he had past but I did not want to believe it, until now his death has been confirmed. I will always remember your beautiful smile and some of the good times we shared.

These narratives produce a re-animation of the dead – as if the mourner-author did not want the austere cemetery (and the city that created it) to have the last word in generating their loved ones' identity. A second mourner-author wrote:

> Donnie was the best big brother -- always spending time with my sister and I, cooking interesting meals, taking us to the movies or roller skating, or just making us laugh and feel safe and loved. Donnie loved listening to Jimmy Hendrix, Grand Funk Railroad, and Buddy Miles. He loved his family and his family loved him.

Here the details are critical: "Newports," "roller skating," and "Buddy Miles." These details stand in stark contrast to the lack of details and personal remembrances permitted in a typical Hart Island burial: No kind words said over the gravesite. No gathering of old friends. No pouring out of a favorite beer. But in details posted by the mourner-authors, each individual's life is re-constructed as unique, vibrant, and yes, memorable. In contrast, the absence of personal details, characteristic of the city's enactment through burial, renders the deceased anonymous, perhaps unloved, and performatively non-human.

HIP stories that comment on the city

Because of the unsettling anonymity that shrouded the whereabouts and existence of the often-estranged deceased, many mourner-authors used the Traveling Cloud Museum story platform to express their gratitude to those responsible for locating, and, in a sense, re-humanizing their loved ones. One family posted, "Janie, you are no longer missing. Through determination, luck and the efforts of the Traveling Cloud Museum we found you in Hart Island, Potter's Field." Others specifically thanked the HIP's founder, "I would like to thank Ms. Melinda Hunt for creating this site. It has not only helped us

find our loved one, Donnie, but has allowed us some much needed closure. Donnie is no longer anonymous!"

The joy and relief in these posts is palpable. But the posts also reveal instances in which the efforts of one institution (The Hart Island Project) worked to contest the hurt and pain caused by other institutions (the city and its various departments). Through the lens of CTI, this interaction can be understood as creating a *communal-communal* identity gap or "within-layer gap" (Colaner et al., 2014; Hecht & Phillips, 2022). In these instances, the subject is a member of two communities in which the enactment of the deceased's identity is differently understood and negotiated. While the city's treatment of the dead has been consistently uncaring and institutionally dispassionate, the efforts of Melinda Hunt and her social media creation, the Hart Island Project website, have restored both a name and a sense of dignity to those who were once lost and unnamed.

Discussion

The theoretical concept of a co-authored identity that continues after death is not a new concept. As stated earlier in this dissertation, narrative theory suggests that if selfhood can be achieved through the telling of stories, then "identity in this sense need not completely disappear on death" (Masterton et al., 2010, p. 341). Goffman (1963) maintained that, because our relationships with others actually start before we are born and persist after we die, our identity also persists.

With regard to the process of mourning, Butler (2004a) suggests that the ties between us "compose us" and "constitute what we are" (p. 22). She states:

> At another level, perhaps what I have lost "in" you, that for which I have no ready vocabulary, is a relationality that is composed neither exclusively of myself nor

you, but is to be conceived as *the tie*, by which those terms are differentiated and related. (p. 22)

This study examined two such ties: the tie between the deceased and their loved ones and the tie between the deceased and their community. The communication theory of identity provided a framework through which the nature of, and the enactment of, identity after death could be discussed. Analysis of memorial expressions ("stories") posted to the Hart Island Project's Traveling Cloud Museum provides insight into identity negotiations that continued after death and after the subject became unable to participate.

With regard to identity enactment through communal layer of identity, this study presented an uninviting, stigma-ridden burial place where human lives are not celebrated. On Hart Island, the dignity of human life is barely acknowledged. Additionally, as a burial ground, there is a sense of finality imposed upon the identities assigned. The communal identity as enacted by the city persists, if not into eternity then at least into the foreseeable future. Some might argue that a city that looked away from these disenfranchised individuals when they were alive, continued to act in a manner that was both dismissive and dehumanizing after they died. In a sense, the low esteem the city holds for these citizens is articulated in the cemetery that the city built and allocated to them to serve as their final home.

The reputation of the island as a potter's field or pauper's field caused concern, dismay, and shame among many of the mourner-authors in our study. We observed many attempts by the mourner-authors to counter the city's communication of a lesser human value with their own enactment of an opposing relational identity. While the island itself conferred upon its dead a lack of human-ness and human dignity, many of the stories

posted by friends and relatives worked to do just the opposite. While these relatives could not erect grave markers or visit the gravesites, after the Traveling Cloud Museum was created, grieving parties could publicly name their loved ones. They could express their affection and admiration, and they could recall their humanity. While the city considered and labeled the Hart Island dead as "unwanted" or "unclaimed," HIP's mourner-authors expressed – often quite adamantly – that the deceased were not forgotten and they were certainly not unloved.

With regard to this unique application of CTI, the theory and its principles have been applied to the post-mortem processes of mourning, burial, and remembrance. It was proposed that CTI's two co-authored identities (*relational* and *communal*) persist after the death of the subject. Findings here support the hypothesis that "identity after death" can be understood as an instance wherein co-authored identities can be – and often are – constructed by external agents without input or participation from the deceased.

Finally, the findings and implications of this study support the contention that the communicative category of memorial expressions (obituaries, gravestones, cemeteries, funerals, online remembrances) has been considerably under-studied within the communication discipline. This work expands understandings of end-of-life communication, and specifically explores instances in which the post-mortem identity of marginalized or vulnerable individuals are often re-negotiated, re-assigned, and re-enacted by agents or institutions associated with the dominant culture – often in a manner that the deceased subjects would neither recognize or embrace.

Limitations

Many of the limitations associated with Study 3 have already been mentioned

above. Chief among these is the lack of demographic data reported by the Hart Island Project website with regard to both the deceased and the mourner-authors. Also, as stated earlier, only a very small percentage of the lives archived on the website have received stories or posts from loved ones. Perhaps, over time, increased publicity with regard to the website and with regard to the changes currently being made to the operation of island cemetery might improve the frequency of story postings.

That said, it cannot be assumed that all people and families seek to locate friends and family members who have apparently strayed far from the norms associated social convention and family narratives. Many survivors might not want to locate these individuals from their past. For instance, a parent who could not accept their adult child was homosexual and contracted AIDS, and would not visit them in the hospital, and would not claim the body once the individual passed, would probably not be a likely candidate to search the database to "find" their lost child.

Future studies

The focus of this study was on posted public memorial messages. Certainly, there is opportunity to explore much more on this island, including interviews with the mourner-authors and case studies of certain deceased individuals or categories of deceased individuals. At the time of this writing (2022), the island has become home to great numbers of bodies associated New York City's Covid-19-related deaths. How might the experiences of the Covid families differ from the experiences of the grieving families of the past? Or even more specifically, how might the experiences of the victims of these two modern pandemics, AIDS and Covid, differ? Also, how will the transfer of cemetery management from the Department of Corrections to the Department of Parks

impact the experience for both the deceased and for the mourner-authors?

The application of the identity layers of CTI to the interactions that produce a distorted or diminished identity after death has possibilities in many instances. Sadly, discrimination *after* death seems nearly as widespread as discrimination *before* death. Around the U.S., Jewish cemeteries are routinely vandalized. Down south, memorials constructed in tribute to deceased Black icons such as Emmett Till and James Byrd, Jr. have been both vandalized and shot full of bullet holes. The graves of the Black victims of both the Tulsa Race Massacre (1921) and the Hamburg, SC Massacre (1876) have remained unmarked and, to a certain degree, unlocated. All of these incidents – some already examined through different theoretical lenses – provide opportunities to expand our understandings of identity enactment after death.

Lastly, while this study and the transgender study that preceded it both focused on the identities of the dead, that need not be the only application of this work. Many in world, far too many perhaps, feel unable or unsafe to enact their authentic identity during their lives. Attributes that restrict one's free and open identity enactment can include religious affiliations, political ideology, socio-economic status, gender and sexuality, ability, and even age. It is not necessary for an individual to be dead or incapacitated to become unable to freely enact their own identity, or to be helplessly subjected to identity enactment by more powerful external agents.

Future studies of different communities and incidents could bring new understandings to the phenomenon of identity-enacted-by-others, and to the utility and applicability of CTI. Future innovative applications of the theory would enable communication scholars to more closely examine the inequitable identity negotiations

that occur continually between marginalized individuals and representatives of the dominant culture.

Notes on Study 3

[1]The term potter's field refers to the a field purchased with Judas' blood money for use as a burial ground "for strangers" (King James Bible Online, 1769/2022).

> And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day (Book of Matthew, 27:6 – 27:8).

[2]Melinda Hunt has been a primary force behind the battle to remove Hart Island from the control of the prison system and place it under the control of the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation. That battle was won in 2019, when Mayor DeBlasio signed the proposal into law. The hope is that under the parks department, the island may become more "friendly" to mourning friends and family members as well as becoming more physically accessible. (Schulz, 2015).

CHAPTER FOUR:

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF ALL STUDIES

Summary of Findings

Studies that explore the nature of identity after death as well as the nature of the interpersonal and intercultural interactions that lead to public memorial expressions have the potential to contribute to greater understandings of the concepts of relational, communal, and social identities.

Certainly, one could dismiss motivations to correct or prevent inaccurate memorializations of marginalized people. One could argue (correctly) that the problems associated with discriminatory acts visited upon the living are far more consequential than those visited upon the dead. One could also argue that for many in marginalized communities, the accurate depiction of one's identity after death is of little concern in comparison to the daily struggle to attain access to housing, employment, heath care, and both physical and emotional safety. In short, many marginalized people could very well be too worried about trying to stay alive and safe to be worried about what happens to their identities after they die. Additionally, the actual frequency of acts of nonconsensual de-transitioning is not known, and that number would be difficult to estimate.

Yet there is a far-reaching significance associated with the concept of identity after death, and particularly, with its accurate representation. While this study has primarily concentrated on the transgender community, the effects and repercussions of inaccurate memorializations of individuals from marginalized communities (as with the impoverished and ostracized on Hart Island) deserve further attention.

In addition to findings that directly address interpersonal relationships among families with transgender members, this dissertation seeks to bring attention to two significant ways in which inaccurate or absent memorials have impacted U.S. society and U.S. history. First, we must acknowledge the impact of demeaning or inaccurate memorializations on marginalized communities. Upon witnessing acts of post-mortem disrespect, members of the marginalized community from whence the deceased came are reminded of (1) the precarity of their own identities and (2) the low esteem with which their identity is held by society at large.

As one of the respondents to Study 1 suggested, nonconsensual de-transitioning of trans people after death "sends a dehumanizing message to the trans people who are still living..." In keeping with the ingroup/outgroup power dynamics at the center of social identity theory, it is certainly within reason to view intentionally demeaning treatments of the marginalized dead as conscious attempts by the dominant culture to continue the suppression, the disempowerment, the dispiriting, and perhaps even the disappearance of certain marginalized individuals and certain marginalized communities.

Second, inaccurate memorializations constitute a falsification of the public record (Weaver, 2018), while simultaneously contributing to our nation's history. Others have shown how different media and texts (such as the mass media, popular culture, and history textbooks) work to "deny, dispute, and even erase" (Griffin, 2020, p. 11) the histories and contributions of marginalized individuals and communities. Dunn (2016) suggests that, "when the disempowered and the marginalized put their faith in history, they often only affirm the powerful and become complicit in their own marginalization" (p. 6).

In the introductory essay to the New York Times' "1619 Project," Nikole Hannah-Jones (2019) contends that the U.S. is a nation "founded on both an ideal and a lie" (p. 16). In reaction to the January 6th insurrection at the U.S. Capital, NPR correspondent Sam Sanders (2020) states that, "We are a country built on fabrication, nostalgia and euphemism." This dissertation asserts that erroneous public memorializations of marginalized individuals contribute to these fabrications and falsehoods. Referring to cis-hetero funeral traditions, noted mortician Caitlin Doughty (2021) stated, "So many queer and trans ancestors stories have been hidden and lost to us because of these exact indignities."

As we, as a nation, work to reconsider our history and our motivations in retelling that history, it is critical that we acknowledge the manner in which distorted, disrespectful, and disappeared memorial expressions have contributed to the ongoing inaccurate composition of the American narrative.

Overarching observations

In the course of conducting these three studies, as themes and patterns emerged, five overarching observations were made with regard to the practice of altering or erasing the identity of a marginalized individual after death.

1. Public memorial expressions are sometimes utilized for the purposes of identity misrepresentation.

2. These acts of identity misrepresentation are intentional.

3. In cases of that involve the inaccurate representation of marginalized individuals, these inaccuracies (or erasures) perpetuate an articulation of a lesser human value and of outcast or outgroup status.

4. These post-mortem misrepresentations reinforce social hierarchies and power dynamics – through assignments of cultural, personal, or moral inferiority.

5. Enactors resist actions that would fully or partially remedy these inequities.

It is important to acknowledge and understand that these post-mortem identity misrepresentations are intentionally created. To bury a body is an intentional act. To erect a gravestone is an intentional act. To etch an epitaph on that gravestone is also intentional. Therefore, to etch an inaccurate name or identity onto that gravestone must also be considered intentional, although the motivations behind that misrepresentation are open to interpretation.

In a society that has long normalized the erecting of grave markers and the conducting of burial ceremonies, to not do so – as in the cases of the hundreds of indigenous children recently discovered in unmarked graves in Canada, or in the case of the dead associated with the racially motivated massacre in Tulsa one-hundred years ago – represent intentionally disrespectful acts of erasure. But, in addition, for those aware of such acts, the impulse to refuse to publicly acknowledge any wrongdoing and to hesitate to take steps to remedy the situation constitute a continuation of the disrespect and dehumanization visited upon the deceased individuals, their families, and their communities.

The observations listed above call for more awareness for all involved in the death process on personal, institutional, and commercial levels. Progressive mortician Caitlin Doughty states, “As a funeral director I’ve never worked with a family who wanted me to misgender their son or daughter, but if that ever happened, I would likely tell them that they would be better served by another funeral home” (Nobel, 2015). But

how many funeral directors and other death and memorial professionals would answer in that same fashion? In a society that has long prioritized the living over the dead, the wishes of the dead are routinely dismissed. But as the above observations show, misrepresentations of the identities of the dead can have far-reaching and dispiriting consequences for members of marginalized communities and for their entire communities as well.

Identity self-preservation (on behalf of family members and loved ones)

While the members of many family groups typically claim identical marginalized identities (as with regard to race or religion), this is not always true. At times, particularly in the cases of queer individuals, the other members of the family may not see themselves as marginalized or stigmatized. Or they may perceive themselves as being less marginalized than their queer relatives due to their own adherence to a cis-heteronormative existence. In these cases, the family members may wish to distance their own identities from a close association with the identity of the deceased when the deceased's identity is considered *more* marginalized.

Conceivably, the friends and family members who become mourner-authors on the Hart Island Project website (HIP) might be motivated, to some degree, by a desire to distance themselves from the life experiences and life choices associated with their loved one once they moved away from familial or societal conformity.

In other words, the individuals associated with the relational identity in both the transgender and Hart Island Project studies could be perceived as acting on a sense of self-preservation. In the case of trans families, by altering or erasing the deceased's TGD identity and resurrecting their gender identity assigned at birth, the family members can

be seen as shielding their family from the stigma associated with trans-ness. By symbolically moving the deceased from a state of ungrievability to grievability, the families who post to the Hart Island Project website may be attempting to remove what they see as a dark stain on the family's reputation. Clearly, in these cases, the preservation of the authentic identity of the deceased is considered secondary to the welfare of the family, and more so, to the well-being of the family's (and the individual's) position in society.

The actions of the mourner-authors on the Hart Island Project website could be perceived as attempts to re-humanize their friends or family members in opposition to the de-humanizing experience of a Hart Island burial. But those same mourner-authors could also be seen as working to distance their family from the stigma associated with a potter's field burial, or perhaps from the behaviors and identities that often lead to such a burial.

Through the lens of CTI, we see that individuals associated with the relational layer of identity often become empowered to enact the identities of the marginalized family members after they die. These family members may be seen as embarrassments to the family or as detractors from a family's good name. By attempting to, from their perspective, "redeem" the wayward family member, the identity-enactor may be, to some degree, selfishly looking after their own best interests – rather than thinking of affirming the deceased's identity.

Our Hart Island Project data collection revealed few direct references to either AIDS or homosexuality, despite the fact that we looked at over 3000 graves that the Hart Island Project website indicated held AIDS victims and we know the disease had decimated queer communities in the New York area. The unwillingness or inability to

honor (or even mention) the deceased's queer identity could be seen as an attempt to deny that identity, or to distance that identity from the deceased, and therefore from the family.

Future investigations in both areas of study (the trans community and the Hart Island Project website) will ultimately require the investigation of the motives behind the memorial expressions produced by surviving friends or family members.

Working towards potential remedies

According to Peñaranda et al., (2013) social justice research is committed to improving unjust conditions:

> The production of disciplinary knowledge is… valued not only for its explanatory capacity but also for its capacity to generate reflection, self-criticism, and the inclusion of questions regarding social justice. This will all finally lead to further scrutiny and to the proposal of strategies that modify the *status quo* and lead to injustices being overcome (p. 51).

It therefore seems incumbent on social justice researchers to provide some insight into potential solutions or remedies for the issues and inequities discussed. One certainly does not set out to solve questions of discrimination, poverty, or transphobia in America. But solutions, particularly solutions based on the specifics of the issues described herein, seem warranted.

Thanks in large part to the efforts of Melinda Hunt, the administration and operation of Hart Island has now been placed under the control of the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation. That battle was won in 2019, when Mayor DeBlasio signed the proposal into law. The hope is that under the parks department, the island may become

more “friendly” to mourning friends and family members as well as becoming more physically accessible. Hunt states, “Graveside commemoration is freedom of speech and is important to history and art. I am committed to defending the rights of anyone to visit a grave, especially on public land” (Schulz, 2015).

With regard to de-transitioning of TGD individuals after death, the surest path to remedy is through the growing sense of acceptance of TGD people in America. This growth is not without its personal, religious, or cultural complexities or its political backlash. But evidence does show growth in trans acceptance in the U. S., although the level of acceptance is divided along political party lines (Brown, 2022). A second remedy concerns the legal system – which is also not likely to change in the near future. In the case of TGD individuals, it is possible to use legal means to plan ahead and appoint a *designated agent* to manage the disposition of their body and affairs. Unfortunately, most trans people do not have access to information about end-of-life decision-making, nor do they have access to legal counsel. Consequently, the fate of the identities of TGD people after death lies most often with their loved ones and family members – who have proven themselves, time and again, to be less than supportive to their TGD family members. Sadly, as long legal authorities fail to recognize queer interpersonal bonds and chosen families, and insist on prioritizing blood relationships transgender identity after death will remain precarious.

But here are two communicative approaches to remedy that may have a more immediate impact: (1) The normalization of gender-affirming EOL conversations and (2) creating gender-affirming advance directives.

1. Normalizing gender-affirming end-of-life conversations

For the populations of both Study 1 and Study 2, more identity-focused communication (not less and certainly not none) would provide opportunities for each individual to engage more often and more deeply with family members, friends, associates, and other members of society. The coming-out conversation has been culturally instituted as a critical milestone in the lives of queer people (Floyd and Bakeman, 2006; Floyd and Stein, 2002). But gender-affirming end-of-life communication also deserves scholarly examination within the communication discipline. Gender-affirming end-of-life conversations, which continue the communicative identity management process begun with the coming-out conversation, have the potential to facilitate the preservation of a TGD person's identity after death.

Although their study excluded TGD individuals, Denes and Afifi's (2014) study on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and queer (GLBQ) people who came out twice to loved ones is instructive. Denes and Afifi conclude that there were three key reasons for initiating a second coming out conversation with one's parents. All three of these reasons could be seen as applicable to gender-affirming EOL conversations: (1) to reinforce their sexual orientation, or with TGD folks, this would be to reinforce their nonconforming gender identity, (2) to clarify aspects of their identity, and (3) to share more information about their queer lifestyle. The gender-affirming EOL conversation could accomplish similar goals while also initiating the process of post-mortem identity preservation.

While there is no simple or single solution to the issue of nonconsensual de-transitioning of TGD individuals after their deaths, the normalization of gender-affirming end-of-life conversations (and its promotion through both family members and transgender service providers) would not only increase the frequency of these important

dialogues, but would also bring visibility to questions of identity that persist in the TGD community. Gender-affirming EOL conversations would enable TGD individuals to discuss their own wishes for the expression of their identity after death, while also providing the opportunity for the subject and their family members to share additional information about the TGD person's progress and challenges as they attempt to navigate life as a gender-nonconforming member of both their society and their family.

2. Creating gender-affirming advance directives

In an online seminar entitled, RadDeathReads, organized by The Collective for Radical Death Studies, Clinical Nurse Specialist for Palliative Care at UCLA Health, Jeannette Meyer discussed her work to provide advanced directive resources to unhoused people in Southern California. Meyer presented UCLA's Easy Read version of the California Advance Health Care Directive (CAHCD). (The "Easy Read" version is intended to simplify the document and make it more accessible and user-friendly.) The motivation behind the form is to provide homeless/houseless individuals with the opportunity to take control over any death or near-death events they may experience. In the seminar, Meyer stated that she believes that everyone over 18 should complete an advanced care directive.

Later, Meyer stated that their organization had discussed the possibility of using the CAHCD "as a pathway to insure that the patient is allowed to be buried as their authentic self" (J. Meyer, personal communication, May 12, 2022). She further stated that the final question of Part 2 of the form could be used to for that purpose. The final question of Part 2 on page 12 of the form (see Appendix D) reads, "What else should your medical providers and medical decision maker know about you and your choices for

medical care?" It is certainly possible that, if this form can be shown to work effectively with the homeless/houseless of Los Angeles, perhaps a similar form (distributed through transgender support programs and organizations) could be used to help TGD individuals (over age 18) to preserve their identities as well. Rather than a protracted or expensive legal process, the CAHCD form, as executed by Palliative Care at UCLA Health, requires only verification by a notary public.

Limitations

Findings in Study 1 and Study 2 are limited by the small data sets and by the lack of representation of people of color, particularly Black people. The samples were also characterized by individuals who were relatively well-educated. Still, research regarding enactments of identity after death and specifically of the nonconsensual de-transitioning of TGD individuals is in its infancy. It is hoped that future studies will delve deeper into the topics and issues raised here, while simultaneously broadening the pool of participants.

It is also acknowledged here that with regard to Studies 1 and 2, only TGD individuals – the potential victims of de-transitioning were interviewed. Future studies should also explore the attitudes and feelings of family members and health and hospice officials who could very well have very different opinions, and raise issues that were not considered here.

Emphasis on traditional public memorials

Examples and incidents of discrimination after death are wide-ranging and multi-faceted. This study does not make any attempt to examine or comment upon archeological digs, statues of famous figures, grave robberies for the use of cadavers, or

biographies (whether printed, filmed, or televised). Each of these areas are worthy of study through a critical lens, but the motivations behind those acts range from the advancement of science to making a political statement to conducting a potentially profit-making endeavor. The purpose of a traditional public memorial is ostensibly to memorialize the life and, hopefully, the identity of the deceased. This communicative act is certainly complicated by other motivations and emotions. But the starting point with public memorials is with the very human acts and desires to publicly grieve and remember a particular individual. The fact that these seemingly pure motivations are corrupted for other purposes forms the heart of this line of research.

The evolving nature of body disposition and public memorials

The significance of public memorials and questions of their accuracy or inaccuracy are completely dependent on the significance of public memorials within American society. Should society experience a lesser valuation of the importance of long-standing traditions of marking lives and identities through gravestones, cemeteries, obituaries, and funerals – and there is evidence to suggest that this is happening – then the observations and analyses delineated here must also be updated and allowed to evolve.

Heller (2022) reports that cremation is not only more popular than traditional casket burials, but is also twice as common as it was twenty years ago. The article suggests many possible factors: the reduction of individuals who belong to organized religions, the cost of funerals and burials, and the relative convenience of cremation. The disbursement of the American family is also often a factor. It is difficult to schedule a time when the deceased's friends and family can all gather at one place at one time.

The barriers to traveling and gathering in the 21st century are somewhat refuted by comments made Warren Harrison, an African-American embalmer, in the early 20th century:

> We went home for a funeral. No questions. Nobody worried about what it cost or what we were doing with jobs or whatever. When somebody died – and I don't care how you were related—if you were family, you went back home where you were supposed to be. With our family. (Holloway, 2003, p. 29)

Marsh (2021) reports that 54% of Americans are now open to "green end-of-life rituals" – that percentage would include individuals who would consider opting out of both casket burials and cremation as both of those practices are considered environmentally harmful. Marsh notes that it is still unknown as to how many of that percentage would actually follow through with an alternative disposition of their body. Particularly intriguing to those seeking environmentally friendly body disposition are alkaline hydrolysis and body composting. Alkaline hydrolysis breaks down the body into its chemical components, but uses one-quarter the energy associated with cremation and produces less pollutants. Body composting or natural organic reduction (NOR) allows microbes to decompose the body which then may become (if legally permitted) to be used as fertilizer to spur new growth. In Study 2, Matteo (22 y. o., trans man) stated that he wanted to be buried:

> …in such a way that I sort of decomposed relatively quickly. And sort of return the nutrients to the earth. So like not under a plot of grass where like, it's just grass like it's mowed once a week [as in a traditional cemetery]. But like near a tree or a marsh. Throw me into a bog. (2)

Whether these innovative methods or some future derivative will supplant traditional casket burials or cremations remains to be seen. For Angel (26 y. o., agender), their wish for a non-traditional disposition of the body, speaks to the disbursement of the American family and the American population:

> I just feel like having a marker, like, confines me to one space. And like, the marker serves for like someone to connect with you after death. Part of the reason why I wanted to be put in the ocean is that then, my ashes would go everywhere, and it would be kind of a way for the people who love me to connect with me, everywhere. So I would like to, when I pass, to not have one designated spot of like where someone can connect with me.

Changing traditions and practices with regard to memorial expressions will not render useless or obsolete the topics and observations discussed here. Quite the opposite. Changing mores with respect to both memorialization, mourning, and body disposition will invite interesting new factors into the discussion and (probably) reflect American society's evolving relationship with death. Of particular interest to studies that build off of this paper, are new options available to marginalized individuals, the financial accessibility of those options, and a willingness to confront power structures that seek to diminish, erase, or demean – regardless of the nature of the memorialization.

Discussion of future studies and applications

The potential for future studies was included in the discussion of each individual study, but four that stand out as particularly significant are these: (1) More in-depth studies of TGD identities from the communication perspective. As the TGD community progresses, achieves more visibility and faces down more challenges, the enactment of

TGD identity is itself evolving and worthy of continued and more intense investigation. (2) Broader exploration of discrimination after death in other countries, cultures, and subcultures where views on death, queerness, disenfranchisement and other vulnerabilities may differ widely from the views commonly held in the U.S. mainstream. (3) Increased examination of discrimination after death from the perspective of the perpetrators. It is one thing to predict or imagine what might motivate an individual or an institution to distort or erase the identity of a deceased individual. But more focused examinations that specifically target the personal and environmental factors that influence enactors of inaccurate identities is warranted. (4) More research into many topics that could be explored through research involving public memorial expressions. These expressions – cemeteries, gravestones, obituaries, funerals, and online remembrances – have been understudied in the communication discipline. More attention must be paid to these expressions that represent the last communicative act we make on Earth (or that is made on our behalf) -- before we leave this world and can no longer actively contribute to any discourse.

Finally, it has been fascinating, and sometimes disturbing, to consider identity enactment and/or construction in which the subject is not allowed or completely unable to contribute. There is, to my knowledge, no identity theory that is not, to some degree, based on a sense of self. But perhaps, with an eye to the social, political, religious, and interpersonal environments that create such a situation, the formulation of a communication theory that centers identity enactment by others is worthy of contemplation.

Towards the formulation of a theory of communicated identity as enacted by others (CIEBO)

Neither the process of executing the research reported here nor the process of writing this dissertation were entered into with the goal of formulating a new theory. The goal was to observe and explore real world phenomena (incidents of discrimination after death) and to attempt to better understand that phenomena through the lens of the communication theory of identity. Of particular significance was the attempt to understand facets of our communicated identity during times in our lifespan when we are incapable of contributing to the construction of our own enacted identity.

Nearly 50 years ago, when Michael Hecht (1993) first published his "research odyssey" toward the development of the communication theory of identity, he stated that he was seeking a means by which to describe identity through a layering of theory and beyond the "terms of the dialectic between the individual and society" (p. 76). At that time, he wrote that CTI "contains so many unanswered theoretical and methodological questions that it is proposed more as a direction for theoretical development than as a completed theory" (p. 77). It is in that same spirit that theory of communicated identity enacted by others (CIEBO, pronounced see-bo) is modestly, and perhaps prematurely, presented. At this time, CIEBO is merely a series of observations, untested, that when considered in both breadth and in context, present at the very least a direction for, or a movement toward, a communication theory that centers identity enactment, but that, uniquely, does not include the subject's sense of self.

Jung and Hecht (2004) state:

Enacted identity is an individual's performed or expressed identity. People enact

their identities and exchange the enacted identities in communication. In CTI, enactments are not mere expressions of identity but are considered identity itself (p. 266).

However, as Orbe (2004) once asked, "How would CTI scholars explain interactions where a person has less/no control over when a certain aspect of their identity is enacted within interactions by others?" (p. 145). It is proposed here that "identity after death" is just such an instance, as are other life experiences when an individual is incapacitated or feels unsafe to enact their identity. In the post-mortem identity example, the identity of the dead continues to be enacted after death. However, it is now enacted by co-authors representing the relational and the communal frames of identity (or both) without input or participation from the deceased.

What follows is a brief summary of early observations and foundational thinking with regard to a potential theory.

Basic premise (CIEBO)

Agents associated with the dominant culture become empowered to enact the identities of marginalized individuals after they die. These agents are associated with either or both the relational layer and the communal layer of identity according to CTI.

Key assumptions:

1. Identity can be, and often is, enacted by others – with little or no participation on the part of the subject.

2. Individuals who are incapacitated or extremely vulnerable (including both the unborn and the dead) are unable to participate in identity negotiations with others. In these

moments, agents associated with the dominant culture become empowered to enact the individual's communicated identity for them.

a. The agents of the dominant culture may be individuals, families, communities, institutions, and/or the state.

b. Those who are extremely vulnerable, but not completely incapacitated, may continue to engage in identity negotiations but do so from a position of severe helplessness.

3. Communication technologies, including public memorial expressions, such as cemeteries, gravestones, obituaries, funerals, and online remembrances, are used by agents of the dominant culture for the purposes of identity misrepresentation. Consequently, evidence of these acts can be observed in the study of these technologies, or of similar forms of media and technology used for the purposes of memorialization and mourning.

4. The identities of marginalized individuals can be intentionally distorted, diminished, disrespected, or disappeared in order to perpetuate negative stereotypes, articulate a lesser human value, and/or to reinforce existing social hierarchies and power dynamics.

5. Agents of the dominant culture have been shown to be resistant to either initiating or participating in actions that would fully or partially remedy any harm done by these misrepresentations.

While this dissertation focuses on discrimination after death as it impacts the transgender or TGD community and the impoverished, disenfranchised, and houseless of New York City. Other instances of an inability to contribute to one's own enacted identity abound among diverse populations characterized by immigrations status, race,

ethnicity, SES, ability, age (both the aged and the young), gender, and sexuality. But others may also feel at-risk in their home country or local community due to their religious beliefs, political beliefs, and cultural traditions.

Further research and extensive testing is required to determine the validity of CIEBO as a potentially workable and usable theory, but it is hoped that the work of this dissertation has made clear the harm and damage done by agents of the dominant culture when they become empowered to enact the identities of marginalized individual without input or contribution from that individual. It is also hoped that this work has made clear the role that communication and communicated messages have had on creating and reinforcing bias and inequities, as well as the potential that communicated messages hold to remedy these inequities.

References

Acuna, K. (2022, June 1). *Coming out helped 'Jeopardy' champion Amy Schneider become herself in more ways than she expected.* Insider. https://www.insider.com/jeopardy-champion-amy-schneider-coming-out-2022-6

Abel, E. L. (2009). Changes in gender discrimination after death: Evidence from a cemetery. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying*, *58*(2), 147-152. https://doi.org/10.2190/OM.58.2.d

Acker, A., & Brubaker, J. R. (2014). Death, memorialization, and social media: A platform perspective for personal archives. *Archivaria*, *77*(2), 1-23. https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13469

Alasuutari, V., Whitestone, S. B., Goret Hanson, L., Jaworski, K., Doletskaya, O., Zubillaga-Pow, J. (2021). What do we talk about when we talk about queer death? LGBTQ+ necropolitics. *Whatever: Transdisciplinary Journal of Queer Theory and Studies, 4*(2021). 599-630. https://doi.org/10.13131/2611-657X.whatever.v4i1.148

Alfano, M., Higgins, A., & Levernier, J. (2018). Identifying virtues and values through obituary data-mining. *Journal of Value Inquiry, 52*(2), 59–79.https://doi.org/10.1007/s10790-017-9602-0

Allen, S. (2018). This Arizona bill ensures the correct gender is listed on transgender death certificates. https://www.thedailybeast.com/this-arizona-bill-ensures-the-correct-gender-is-listed-on-transgender-death-certificates

Anderson, C. (2010). Presenting and evaluating qualitative research. *American journal of pharmaceutical education*, *74*(8), 1-7. https://doi.org/10.5688/aj7408141

Aries, P. (1974). *Western attitudes toward death: From the Middle Ages to the present*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Austin, I. (2021, August 17). *How thousands of indigenous children vanished in Canada*. New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/07/world/canada/mass-graves-residential-schools.html

Banks, J. A. (2006). Researching race, culture, and difference: Epistemological challenges and possibilities. In J. L. Green , G. Camilla, & P. B. Elmore (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research* (3rd ed., pp. 773-793). American Educational Research Association.

Barvosa, E. (2008). *Wealth of selves*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press.

Becerra-Culqui, T. A., Liu, Y., Nash, R., et al. (2018). Mental health of transgender and gender nonconforming youth compared with their peers. *Pediatrics, 141*(5), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2017-3845

Benson, K., Westerfield, E., & van Eeden-Moorefield, B. (2018). *Sexual and Relationship Therapy, 33*(4), 395-420. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681994.2018.1472375

Berberick, S. N. (2018). The paradox of trans visibility: Interrogating the "Year of Trans Visibility". *Journal of Media Critiques*, *4*(13), 123-144. https://doi: 10.17349/jmc118107

Berg-Brousseau, H. (2022, March 24). ICYMI: As lawmakers escalate attacks on transgender youth across the country, some GOP leaders stand up for transgender youth. HRC. https://www.hrc.org/press-releases/icymi-as-lawmakers-escalate-

attacks-on-transgender-youth-across-the-country-some-gop-leaders-stand-up-for-transgender-youth

Berjikian, K. (2022, March 22). *"Lawful transphobia" stopping Ukraine's trans community from fleeing.* EuroNews. https://www.euronews.com/2022/03/22/lawful-transphobia-stopping- ukraine-s-trans-community-from-fleeing

Bernstein, N., (2016, May 15). *Unearthing the secrets of New York's mass graves*. New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/05/15/nyregion/new-york-mass-graves-hart-island.html?mtrref=undefined&gwh=31ADFC9ECFBC4D70EBBCA0481203AA38&gwt=pay&assetType=PAYWALL

Bois, P. (N. D.). Conservative ad highlights madness of 'men in women's sport.' *Good Word News.* https://goodwordnews.com/conservative-ad-highlights-madness-of-men-in-womens-sport/

Bollmer, G. D. (2013). Millions now living will never die: Cultural anxieties about the afterlife of information. *The Information Society: An International Journal*, *29*(3), 142-151. https://doi.org/10.1080/01972243.2013.777297

Brault, P. A., Naas, M. (2001). *Jacques Derrida: The work of mourning.* The University of Chicago Press.

Brennan-Moran, E. (2020). *Naming the dead: An ethics of memory and metonymy* (Publication No. 27963086) [Doctoral dissertation. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Brooks, C. F., & Pitts, M. J. (2015). Communication and identity management in a globally-connected classroom: An online international and intercultural learning

experience. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, *9*(1), 52-68. https://doi.org/10.1080/17513057.2016.1120849

Brouwer, D. C., & Morris III, C. E. (2021). Decentering whiteness in AIDS memory: Indigent rhetorical criticism and the dead of Hart Island. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *107*(2), 160-184. https://doi.org/10.1080/00335630.2021.1905868

Brown v. Board of Education, 98 F. Supp. 797, 798 (D. Kan. 1951), rev'd, 347 U.S. 483 (1954). Brown, A. (2022, February 11). *Deep partisan divide on whether greater acceptance of transgender people is good for society.* Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/02/11/deep-partisan-divide-on-whether-greater-acceptance-of-transgender-people-is-good-for-society/

Burns, K. (2020, October 2) Nine questions about trans issues you were too embarrassed to ask. VOX. https://www.vox.com/identities/21332685/trans-rights-pronouns-bathrooms-sports

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble*. Routledge.

Butler, J. (2004a). *Precarious life: The powers of mourning and violence*. Verso.

Butler, J. (2004b). *Undoing gender.* Routledge.

Butler, J. (2009, February 4). Frames of war: The politics of ungrievable life. *Humanities and Arts Research Centre of Royal Holloway, the School of Psychosocial Studies (Birkbeck), and the Birkbeck Institute for Social Research.*

Butler, J. (2015). Judith Butler: Precariousness and grievability – When is life grievable? https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2339-judith-butler-precariousness-and-grievability-when-is-life-grievable

Bytheway, B., & Johnson, J. (2010). An ageing population and apocalyptic demography. *Radical Statistics*, *100*, 4-10.

CA Governor Signs Respect After Death Act. (September 26, 2014). *Transgender Law Center.* https://transgenderlawcenter.org/archives/11140

Camara, S. K., & Orbe, M. P. (2010). Analyzing strategic responses to discriminatory acts: A co-cultural communicative investigation. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, *3*(2), 83-113, https://doi.org/10.1080/17513051003611602

Carlson, D. (1998). Who am I? Gay identity and a democratic politics of the self. In W. F. Pinar (Ed.), *Queer theory in education* (pp. 107–119). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Cavalcante, A. (2018). *Struggling for ordinary: Media and transgender belong ing in everyday life.* New York University Press.

CBS New York (2019, December 4). Hart Island transferred to parks department. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgLBLHVfU5E&t=1030s

Chen, C. (2018) Death and dying: An intergroup approach. In H. Giles & J. Harwood (Eds.), *The Oxford encyclopedia of intergroup communication* (Vol. 1., pp. 278-294). Oxford University Press.

Chen, D., Abrams, M., Clark, L., et al., (2021). Psychosocial characteristics of transgender youth seeking gender-affirming medical treatment: Baseline findings from the trans youth care study. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *68*(6), 1104-1111. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2020.07.033

Children in adult prison. (n. d.). Equal Justice Initiative. https://eji.org/issues/children-in-prison/

Ciszek, E., & Rodriguez, N. S. (2020). Articulating transgender subjectivity: How discursive formations perpetuate regimes of power. *International Journal of Communication*, *14*(2020). 5199-5217. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/13713/3243

Clark, A., Johnson, A., & Mathews, D. (2020). The gendered language of gravestones: a comparative study of central and northern Appalachian cemeteries. *Handbook of the Changing World Language Map*, *97*, 1839-1851. https://link.springer.com/content/ pdf/10.1007/978-3-030-02438-3_20.pdf

Colaner, C. W., Halliwell, D., & Guignon, P. (2014). "What do you say to your mother when your mother's standing beside you?" Birth and adoptive family contributions to adoptive identity via relational identity and relational–relational identity gaps. *Communication Monographs, 81*(4) 469–494. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03637751.2014.955808

Collyer, S., Maury, M., Bushman-Copp, L., Garfinkel, I., Kennedy, L., Neckerman, K., Teitler, J., Waldfogel, J., & Wimer, C. (2020, February). *The state of poverty and disadvantagein New York City.* RobinHood.org. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/610831a16c95260dbd68934a/t/6112964bbf4a2d29d8c4ba54/1628608077740/NYC+Poverty+Tracker_Annual+2021.pdf

Connolly, C. M. (2006). A process of change: The intersection of the GLBT individual and his or her family of origin. In J. J. Bigner (Ed.), *An introduction to GLBT family studies* (pp. 5– 21). Haworth Press.

Connolly, M. D., Zervos, M. J., Barone, C. J. 2nd, et al. (2016). The mental health of transgender youth: Advances in understanding. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *59*(5), 489-495. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2016.06.012

Crimp, D. (1989). Mourning and militancy. *October, 51*(Winter), 3–18.

Daly v. Daly. (1986). 715 P.2d 56. Justia. https://law.justia.com/cases/nevada/supreme-court/1986/15423-1.html

Davis, C. S., & Crane J. L., (2020). *End of life communication: Stories from the dead zone.* Routledge.

De Fina, A. (2011). Discourse and identity. In T. A. Van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse Studies* (pp. 263-282). Sage.

DeGroot, J. M. (2014). "For whom the bell tolls": Emotional rubbernecking in Facebook memorial groups," *Death Studies 38*(2): 79-84. https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2012.725450

Denes, A., & Afifi, T. D. (2014). Coming out again: Exploring GLBQ individuals' communication with their parents after the first coming out. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, *10*(3), 298-325. https://doi.org/10.1080/1550428X.2013.838150

Denyer Willis, G. (2018). The potter's field. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *60*(3), 539-568. https://doi.org/10.1017/S001041751800018X

Doka, K. (1989). *Disenfranchised grief: Recognizing hidden sorrow***.** Lexington Books.

Dovidio, J. F., Hewstone, M., Glick, P., & Esses, V. M. (2010). Theoretical and empirical overview. In J. F. Dovidio, M. Hewstone, P. Glick, & V. M. Esses (Eds.) *The SAGE handbook of prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination* (pp. 3–28). Thousand Oaks.

Doughty, C. (2021, September 14). A ministry of presence: A queer history or community death care. GoodReads. https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/7802044.Caitlin_Doughty/blog?page=3

Ducor, P. (1995). The legal status of human materials. *Drake Law Review*, *44*, 195-231. https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/drklr44&div=17&id=&page=

Dunn, T. R. (2016). *Queerly remembered: Rhetorics for representing the GLBTQ past*. The University of South Carolina Press.

Ennis, D. (2019, June 15). *American Medical Association responds to 'epidemic' of violence against transgender community.* Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/dawnstaceyennis/2019/06/15/ american-medical-association-responds-to-epidemic-of-violence-against-transgender-community/?sh=3c423c0510b4

Facts about LGBTQ Suicide. (2021, December 15). *The Trevor Project*. https://www.thetrevorproject.org/ resources/article/facts-about-lgbtq-youth-suicide/

Fairclough, N., Mulderrig, J., & Wodak, R. (2011). Critical discourse analysis. In T. A. Van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse Studies* (pp. 357-378). Sage.

Faulkner, S. L., & Hecht, M. L. (2010). The negotiation of closetable identities: A narrative analysis of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered queer Jewish identity. *Journal of Socialand Personal Relationships*, *28*(6), 829–847. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407510391338

Faust, D. G. (2009). *This republic is suffering: Death and the American Civil War.* Random House.

Fergusson, D. M., Horwood, L. J., & Beautrais, A. L. (1999) Is sexual orientation related to mental health problems and suicidality in young people? *Archives of General Psychiatry, 56*(10), 876–880. https://doi.org/10.1001/archpsyc.56.10.876

Fernandez, M. (2012, June 21). *Racial tensions flare anew in Texas town.* New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/22/us/in-jasper-texas-racial-tensions-flare-again.html

Finger, E. F. (2010). *Beyond the binary: Serving the transgender student, improving the college experience* (UMI No. 3445367) [Doctoral dissertation. Washington State University]. ProQuest Dissertation.

Floyd, F. J., & Bakeman, R. (2006). Coming-out across the life course: Implications of age and historical context. *Archives of sexual behavior*, *35*(3), 287-296. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-006-9022-x

Floyd, F. J., & Stein, T. S. (2002). Sexual orientation identity formation among gay, lesbian, and bisexual youths: Multiple patterns of milestone experiences. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, *12*(2), 167-191. https://doi.org/10.1111/1532-7795.00030

Foster, E., & Keeley, M. P. (2015). Conversations at the end of life. In J. F. Nussbaum, Giles, H., & Worthington A. K. (Eds.), *Communication at the end of life* (pp. 105–120). Peter Lang.

Fowler, B. (2005). Collective memory and forgetting: Components for a study of obituaries. *Theory, Culture, and Society, 22*(6), 53-72. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780203844540-9/collective-memory-forgetting-components-study-obituaries-bridget-fowler

Fraser, L. (2009) Depth psychotherapy with transgender people. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy, 24*(2), 126-142. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681990903003878

Fulton, R. (1994). The funeral in contemporary society. *Death and identity*, *3*, 288-312.

Gaertner, S. L., & Dovidio, J. F. (2000). *Reducing intergroup bias: The common ingroup identity model.* Psychology Press.

Gagné, P., Tewksbury, R., & McGaughey, D. (1997). Coming out and crossing over: Identity formation and proclamation in a transgender community. *Gender & Society*, *11*(4), 478–508. https://doi.org/10.1177/089124397011004006

Gazzola, S. B., & Morrison, M.A., (2014). Cultural and personally endorsed stereotypes of transgender men and transgender women: notable correspondence or disjunction? *International Journal of Transgenderism*, *15*(2), 76-99, https://doi.org/10.1080/15532739.2014.937041

Geisler, C. (2018). Gender-reveal parties: performing community identity in pink and blue, *Journal of Gender Studies*, *27*(6), 661-671. https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2017.1287066

Gherovici, P. (2010). *Please select your gender: From the invention of hysteria to the democratizing of transgenderism.* Routledge.

Giffey, T. (2020, March 4). *Americans' approach to funerals is changing, and planning ahead can be key*. VolumeOne. https://volumeone.org/sites/deathandtaxes/articles/2020/03/04/209288-americans-approach-to-funerals-is-changing-and#:~:text=of%20Pennsylvania%20doctor.,21%25,the%20National%20Funeral%20Directors%20Association

Giles, H., Davis, S., Gasiorek, J., and Giles, J. (2013). *Successful aging: A*

*communication guide to empowerme*nt. Editorial Aresta.

Giles, H., Thai, C. L., & Prestin, A. (2014). End-of-life interactions. In J. F. Nussbaum (Ed.), *The handbook of lifespan communication* (pp. 405–423). Peter Lang.

Giles, H., Gasiorek, J., Gasiorek, J., & Giles, J. (2022). *Communication and successful aging: Empowering individuals across the lifespan*. Routledge.

GLAAD. (2017). *Accelerating acceptance 2017: A Harris Poll survey of Americans' acceptance of LGBTQ people.* GLAAD. https://www.glaad.org/publications/accelerating-acceptance-2017

GLAAD. (2021). *GLAAD 2021 studio responsibility index.* GLAAD. https://www.glaad.org/sites/default/files/GLAAD%20-%202021%20STUDIO%20RESPONSIBILITY%20INDEX_0.pdf

Gleason, P. (1983). Identifying identity: A semantic history. *The Journal of American History*, *69*(4), 910-931. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1901196

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Anchor.

Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma.* Penguin.

Grant, J. M., Mottet, L. A., Tanis, J., Harrison, J., Herman, J. L., & Keisling, M. (2011). *Injustice at every turn: A report of the national transgender discrimination survey.* National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/resources/NTDS_Report.pdf

Griffin, C. L. (2020). *Beyond gender binaries: An intersectional orientation to communication and identities.* University of California Press.

Griffin-Gracy, M. (Miss Major). (2019, March 27). *Miss Major on Trans Day of*

Visibility 2019. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zGZ5a9a0Lo

Grossman, A. H., & D'Augelli, A. R. (2006). Transgender youth: Invisible and vulnerable. *Journal of Homosexuality 51*(1), 111-128. https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v51n01_06

Gudykunst, W. B. (2005). An anxiety/uncertainty management (AUM) theory of effective communication: Making the mesh of the net finer. In W.B. Gudykunst (Ed.), *Theorizing about intercultural communication* (pp. 281–322). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hall, C. (Director) (2014). Bereavement theory: recent developments in our understanding of grief and bereavement, *Bereavement Care 33*(1), 7-12. https://doi.org/10.1080/02682621.2014.902610

Hannah-Jones, N., (2019, August 14). *The 1619 project*. *The New York Times Magazine*. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/black-history-american-democracy.html

Hecht, M. L. (1993). 2002: A research odyssey toward the development of a communication theory of identity. *Communication Monographs*, *60*(1), 76–82. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637759309376297

Hecht, M. L. (1998). Introduction. In M. L. Hecht (Ed.), *Communicating prejudice.* (pp. 3 – 23). Sage.

Hecht, M. L. (2014). Communication theory of identity: Understanding the multilayered nature of identity. In D. O. Braithwaite & P. Schrodt (Eds.), *Engaging theories in interpersonal communication: Multiple perspectives* (pp. 175-188). Routledge.

Hecht, M. L., Jackson, R. L., II, & Pitt, M. J. (2005). Culture: Intersections of intergroup

and identity theories. In J. Harwood & H. Giles (Eds.). *Intergroup communication: Multiple perspectives (language as social action) (*pp. 21-42). Peter Lang.

Hecht, M. L., Jackson, R. L., II, & Ribeau, S. (2003). *African American communication: Exploring identity and culture* (2nd ed.). Lawrence Erlbaum.

Hecht, M. L., & Lu, Y. (2014). Communication theory of identity. In T. L. Thompson (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of health communication* (pp. 225-227). Sage.

Hecht, M. L., & Phillips, K. E. (2022). Communication theory of identity: Understanding the multilayered nature of identity. In D. O. Braithwaite & P. Schrodt (Eds.), *Engaging theories in interpersonal communication: Multiple perspectives* (3rd ed.. pp. 221-232). Routledge.

Hecht, M. L., Warren, J. R., Jung, E., & Krieger, J. L. (2005). The communication theory of identity. In W. B. Gudykunst (Ed.), *Theorizing about intercultural communication* (pp. 257-278). Sage.

Heller, K. (2022, April 19). *The stunning rise of cremation reveals America's* changing idea of death. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/ 2022/04/18/cremation-death-funeral/

Herman, J. L., Flores, A. R., & O'Neill, K. K. (2022, June). How many adults and youth identify as transgender in the United States? UCLA School of Law Williams Institute. https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/ trans-adults-united-states/

Hoag, T. (2014). Ghosts of memory: Mournful performance and the rhetorical event of haunting. *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies*, *10*(3/4), 1- 22.

http://liminalities.net/10-3/ghosts.pdf

Hogg, M. A. (2016). Social identity theory. In S. McKeown, R. Haji, & N. Ferguson (Eds.), *Understanding peace and conflict through social identity theory: Contemporary global perspectives* (pp. 3-18). Springer.

Hogg, M. A., Terry, D., & White, K. (1995). A tale of two theories: A critical comparison of identity theory with social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 58*(4), 255-269. https://doi.org/10.2307/2787127

Holloway, K. F. C. (2003). *Passed on: African American mourning stories, a memorial.* Duke University Press.

Hoy, W. G. (2013). *Do funerals Matter? The purposes of practices of death rituals in global perspective*. Routledge.

Hoy, W. G. (2020). Funerals and memorial practices. In D. Gu & M. E. Dupre (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Gerontology and Population Aging*. [pp. 1-5]. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-69892-2_1009-1

James, S. E., Herman, J. L., Rankin, S., Keisling, M., Mottet, L., & Anafi, M. (2016). The report of the 2015 U.S. transgender survey. *National Center for Transgender Equality*. http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11990/1299

Janks, H. (1997). Critical discourse analysis as a research tool. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *18*(3), 329-342. https://doi.org/10.1080/0159630970180302

Johns, M.M., Lowry, R., Andrzejewski, J., Barrios, L., et al. (2019). Transgender identity and experiences of violence victimization, substance use, suicide risk, and sexual risk behaviors among high school students - 19 states and large urban school

districts, 2017. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), 68*(3), 67-71. https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6803a3.

Johnson, K. (2020, October 15). *A counter to Confederate monuments: Black cemeteries tell a fuller story of the South.* New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/ 2020/09/ 30/us/black-cemeteries-restoration.html

Jones, T. (2018). Trump, trans students and transnational progress, *Sex Education, 18*(4), 479-494. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2017.1409620

Jung, E., & Hecht, M. L. (2004). Elaborating the communication theory of identity: Identity gaps and communication outcomes, *Communication Quarterly*, *52*(3), 265-283. https://doi.org/10.1080/01463370409370197

Jung, E., & Lee, C. (2004). Social construction of cultural identity: An ethnographic study of Korean American students. *Atlantic Journal of Communication, 12*(3), 146-162.https://doi.org/10.1207/s15456889ajc1203_2

Kakissis, J., Matviyishyn, I., & Harbage, C. (2022). Ukrainians' discovery of a dead Russian soldier left for weeks stirs anguish and anger. NPR. https://www.npr.org/ 2022/06/14/1104881712/ukraine-russia-war-dead-russian-body-moshchun-kyiv-region

Kastenbaum, R., Peyton, S., & Kastenbaum, B. (1977). Sex discrimination after death. *Omega*, *7*(4), 351-359. https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1977-29224-001

Kazyak, E., Burke, K., Kichler, R., & McGraw, L. (2021, January). "Pee in peace" or "Make everyone uncomfortable": Public perceptions of transgender rights. *Socius*, *7*(1). 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231211055541

Keblusek, L., Giles, H., & Maass, A. (2017). Communication and group life: How

language and symbols shape intergroup relations. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*, *20*(5), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430217708864

Kennedy-Lightsey, C. D., Martin, M. M., LaBelle, S., & Weber, K. (2015). Attachment, identity gaps, and communication and relational outcomes in marital couples' public performances. *Journal of Family Communication*, *15*(3), 232–248. https://doi.org/10.1080/15267431.2015.1043430

Kilgannon, C. (2018, July 3) *Dead of AIDS and forgotten in potter's field.* New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/03/nyregion/hart-island-aids-new-york.htm.

Kilgannon, C. (2021, January 28). How a potter's field became a civil rights leader's resting place. New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/28/nyregion/scott-green-hart-island.html

King James Bible Online. (1769/2022). Book of Matthew (27:6 – 27:10). https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Matthew-27-6/

Krishnakumar, P. (2021, April 15). *This record-breaking year for anti-transgender legislation would affect minors the most. CNN*. https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/15/politics/anti-transgender-legislation-2021/index.html

Lee, A. (2021, May 27). *The untold story of a Chinese cemetery in San Francisco*. KTVU Fox 2. https://www.ktvu.com/news/the-untold-story-of-a-chinese-cemetery-in-san-francisco Lee, J. (2022, April 8). *"Danger everywhere": War and transphobia create perfect storm for trans Ukrainians.* NBC News. https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/out-news/danger-everywhere-war-transphobia-create-perfect-storm-trans-ukrainian-rcna23567

Leets, L., & Giles, H. (1999). Harmful speech in intergroup encounters: An organizational framework for communication research. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, *22*(1), 91-137. https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.1999.11678960

Levin, M. (2014, April 18). *Male in life, female in death: The story of Christopher Lee's death certificate. Radio KQED*. https://www.kqed.org/stateofhealth/18741/male-in-life-female- in-death-the-story-of-christopher-lees-death-certificate

MacCormack, P., Radomska, M., Lykke, N., Hillerup-Hansen, I., Olson, P. R., Manganas, N. 2021. What do we talk about when we talk about queer death? Theories and definitions. *Whatever: Transdisciplinary Journal of Queer Theory and Studies, 4*(2021). 573-598. https://doi.org/10.13131/2611-657X.whatever.v4i1.147

Maddrell, A. (2012) Online memorials: The virtual as the new vernacular. *Bereavement Care*, *31*(2), 46-54. https://doi.org/10.1080/02682621.2012.710491

Malinowski, B. (2014). *Magic, science and religion and other essays*. Read Books Ltd.

Marsh, H. M. (2021). The green new death: A legislative framework to promote and legalize green funerary alternatives. *The George Washington Journal of Energy and Environmental Law, 12*(2), 124. https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/gwjeel12&div=17&id=&page=

Masterton, M., Hansson, M. G., & Höglund, A. T., (2010). In search of the missing subject: Narrative identity and posthumous wronging. *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, *41*, 340–346. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1369848610000725?casa_toke

n=2RMV5oypneQAAAAA:5h_RvSHkog1j1Ihh_cVch4SCdpdoCXk4Fz9V3HfAwhei1aywUo9Owpt2MjL-F8gHfIwNcUAM1w

Maybury, K. K. (1995-96). Invisible lives: Women, men and obituaries. *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying*, *32*(1), 27-37. https://doi.org/10.2190/RAPG-H4B2-2QH8-3PCG

Mbembe, J., & Meintjes, L. (2003). Necropolitics. *Public Culture, 15*(1), 11-40. https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-15-1-11

McAllum, K., Fox, S., Simpson, M., & Unson, C. (2019). A comparative tale of two methods: How thematic and narrative analyses author the data story differently. *Communication Research and Practice, 5*(4), 358-375. https://doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2019.1677068

McCormick, J. (2014, December 30). Trans teen publishes heartbreaking suicide note: "This life isn't worth living." https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2014/12/30/trans-teen-publishes-heartbreaking-suicide-note-this-life-isnt-worth-living/

McNeilly, K. (2016). Livability: Notes on the thought of Judith Butler. *Critical Legal Thinking*, *26*. http://criticallegalthinking.com/2016/05/26/livability-judith-butler/#fn-21494-5

Meier, A. C. (2018, August 24). *Grave robbing, Black cemeteries, and the American medical school.* JSTOR Daily. https://daily.jstor.org/grave-robbing-black-cemeteries-and-the-american-medical-school/

Mendoza, J. (2021, June 27). *Researchers find skeletal remains of children, man with gunshot wounds at unmarked graves near Tulsa Race Massacre site*. *USA Today.* https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2021/06/27/tulsa-race-massacre-

site-graveyards-remains-researchers/5365073001/

Metcalf, P., & Huntington, R. (1991). *Celebrations of death: The anthropology of mortuary ritual*. Cambridge University Press.

Metzger, P.L., & Gray, M.L. (2008). End-of-life communication and adjustment: Pre-loss communication as a predictor of bereavement-related outcomes. *Journal of Death Studies*, *32*(4), 301-325. https://doi.org/10.1080/07481180801928923

Meyer, J. (2022, May 8). *Too poor to die well. Exploring the invisibility of indigent death* [Online conference presentation]. RadDeathReads. Sponsored by The Collective for Radical Death Studies (CRDS) and the National End-of-Life Doula Alliance (NEDA).

Miller, C. (2019, June 26). *White nationalist threats against transgender people are escalating.* Southern Poverty Law Center. https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2019/06/26/white-nationalist-threats-against-transgender-people-are-escalating

Minkin, R., & Brown, A. (2021, July 27). *Rising shares of U.S. adults know someone who is transgender or goes by gender-neutral pronouns.* Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/07/27/rising-shares-of-u-s-adults-know-someone-who-is-transgender-or-goes-by-gender-neutral-pronouns/

Moremen, R. D., & Cradduck, C. (1999). "How will you be remembered after you die?" Gender discrimination after death twenty years later. *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying*, *38*(4), 241-254. https://doi.org/10.2190/0KY0-P54V-KFDB-9VCR

Moses, R. A., & Marelli, G. D. (2003, April). Obituaries and the discursive construction of dying and living. In *Proceedings of the Eleventh Annual Symposium about Language and Society—Austin April* (pp. 11-13). https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/

viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.471.4508&rep=rep1&type=pdf

Nobel, J., (2015, December 19). *The transgender funeral struggle – A report from the frontier of sexual identity and death.* FuneralWise. https://www.funeralwise.com/2016/06/27/transgender-funeral-struggle/

Norwood, K. (2012*).* Transitioning meanings? Family members' communicative struggles surrounding transgender identity. *Journal of Family Communication, 12*(1), 75-92. https://doi.org/10.1080/15267431.2010.509283

Nuru, A. K. (2014). Between layers: Understanding the communicative negotiation of conflicting identities by transgender individuals. *Communication Studies*, *65*(3), 281-297. https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2013.833527

O'Rourke, T., Spitzberg, B. H., & Hannawa, A. F. (2011). The good funeral: Toward an understanding of funeral participation and satisfaction. *Death Studies*, *35*(8), 729-750.https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2011.553309

Orbe, M. P. (2004). Negotiating multiple identities within multiple frames: An analysis of first-generation college students, *Communication Education*, *53*(2), 131-149. https://doi.org/10.1080/0363452040100016824O1

Parker, K., Horowitz, J. M., & Brown, A. (2022, June 28). *Americans' complex views on gender identity and transgender issues.* Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2022/06/28/americans-complex-views-on-gender-identity-and-transgender-issues/

Partridge, E. (1981). Posthumous interests and posthumous respect. *Ethics, 91*(2), 243-264. https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/292226

Paterson, A. (2022, May 17). *Despite a surge in brutality, broadcast and cable TV news*

spent just 43 minutes covering anti-trans violence in 2021. Media Matters for America. https://www.mediamatters.org/justice-civil-liberties/despite-surge-brutality-broadcast-and-cable-tv-news-spent-just-43-minutes

Pecchioni, L. L., & White, R. C. (2015). Family decision-making and care at the end of life. In J. F. Nussbaum, H. Giles, & A. Worthington (Eds.), *Communication at the end of life* (pp. 121-137). Peter Lang.

Peñaranda, F., & Vélez-Zapata, C. (2013, May). Research from a social justice perspective: The systemization of an experience. *International Review of Qualitative Research, 6*(1), 37-56. https://doi.org/10.1525/irqr.2013.6.1.37

Pitcher, G. (1984). The misfortunes of the dead. *American Philosophical Quarterly, 21* (2), 183-188. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20014044

Puckett, J. A., Tornello, S., Mustanski, B., & Newcomb, M. E. (2021). Gender variations, generational effects, and mental health of transgender people in relation to timing and status of gender identity milestones. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity.* Advance online: https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000391

Reisner, S. L., Vetters, R., Leclerc, M., et al. (2015). Mental health of transgender youth in care at an adolescent urban community health center: A matched retrospective cohort study. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *56*(3), 274-279. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2014.10.264

Salam, Y. (2021, January 11). *Jewish cemetery near Auschwitz vandalized with Nazi symbols.* NBC Universal. https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/jewish-cemetery-near-auschwitz-vandalized-nazi-symbols-n1253689

Saldaña, J. (2014). Coding and analysis strategies. In P. Leavy, P. (Ed.), *The Oxford*

Handbook of Qualitative Research (1st. ed.). Oxford University Press.

Savin-Baden, M., Burden, D. (2019). Digital immortality and virtual humans. *Postdigital Science and Education, 1*(1)**,** 87–103. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-018-0007-6

Sanders, S. (2021, January 10). *The lies we tell ourselves about race. NPR.* https://www.npr.org/2021/01/10/955392813/the-lies-we-tell-ourselves-about-race

Schares, E. M. (2019, Spring). The suicide of Leelah Alcorn: Whiteness in the cultural wake of dying queers. *QED: A Journal of GLBTQ Worldmaking, 6*(1), 1-25. https://doi.org/10.14321/qed.6.1.0001

Scharrer, E., & Ramasubramanian, S. (2021). *Quantitative research methods in communication: The power of numbers for social justice.* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003091653

Schmidt, S., Wagner, J., & Armus, T. (2021, January 19). *Biden selects transgender doctor Rachel Levine as assistant health secretary.* The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/ health/2021/01/19/rachel-levine-transgender-biden-hhs-pick/

Schmitt, Rudolph (2005). Systematic metaphor analysis as a method of qualitative research. The Qualitative Report, 10(2), 358-394. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2005.1854

Schulz, D. (2015, March 23). *Interview: Melinda Hunt memorializes the unclaimed New Yorkers buried on Hart Island*. 6sqft. https://www.6sqft.com/interview-melinda-hunt-memorializes-the-unclaimed-new-yorkers-buried-on-hart-island/

Seelman, K. L. (2016). Transgender adults' access to college bathrooms and housing and the relationship to suicidality. *Journal of Homosexuality, 63*(10), 1378–1399.

https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2016.1157998

Serano, J. (2007/2016). Whipping girl: A transsexual woman on sexism and the scapegoating of femininity. Seal.

Simone, J. (2022). *State of the homeless 2022*. Coalition for the Homeless. https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/state-of-the-homeless-2022/

Sinclair-Palm, J., & Chokly, K. (2022). 'It's a giant faux pas': Exploring young trans people's beliefs about deadnaming and the term deadname. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2022.2076182

Sipe, L., & Ghiso, M. P. (2004). Developing conceptual categories in classroom descriptive research: Some problems and possibilities. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 35, 472-485. https://doi.org/10.1525/aeq.2004.35.4.472

Soliz, J., & Warner Colaner, C. (2018). Communication accommodation theory and communication theory of identity: Theories of communication and identity. In D. O. Braithwaite, E. A. Suter, & K. Floyd (Eds.), *Engaging theories in family communication: Multiple perspectives* (2nd ed., pp. 75-86). Routledge.

Spindler, G., & Spindler, L. (1982). Do anthropologists need learning theory? *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, *13*(2), 109-124. https://doi.org/10.1525/aeq.1982.13.2.05x1828h

Stackhouse, E. G. (2003). Germantown's potter's field. *Germantown Crier, 53*(1), 25-27.

Steinmetz, K. (2014, May, 29). *The transgender tipping point.* Time. https://time.com/135480/transgender-tipping-point/

Stokes, S. (1991, October). Gone but not forgotten: Wakulla County's folk graveyards. *The Florida Historical Quarterly, 70*(2), pp. 177-191.https://www.jstor.org/stable/30140549

Stryker, S. (2008, 2017). *Transgender history.* Seal Press.

Stuart, K. E. (1991). The uninvited dilemma: A question of gender. Metamorphous Press.

Tajfel, H. (1978). Social categorization, social identity and social comparison. In H. Tajfel (Ed.), *Differentiation between social groups: studies in the social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 61-76). Academic Press

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of social conflict. In W. Austin and S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33-47). Brooks/Cole.

Toomey, A., Dorjee, T., & Ting-Toomey, S. (2013). Bicultural identity negotiation, conflicts, and intergroup communication strategies. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, *42*(2), 112-134. https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2013.785973

Toomey, R. B., Syvertsen, A. K., Shramko, M. (2018). Transgender adolescent suicide behavior. *Pediatrics, 142*(4), 1-8. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2017-4218

Torday, D. (2017, March 16). *Searching for meaning after a Jewish cemetery is desecrated.* NPR. https://www.npr.org/2017/03/16/520253950/searching-for-meaning-after-a-jewish-cemetery-is-desecrated

Tracy, S. J. (2013). Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact. Wiley-Blackwell.

Treisman, R. (2022, January 10). *Michaela Jaé Rodriguez from 'Pose' is the 1st trans actress to win a Golden Globe.* NPR. https://www.npr.org/2022/01/10 /1071828269/michaela-jae-rodriguez-golden-globes-pose

Vaismoradi, M., & Snelgrove, S. (2019). Theme in Qualitative Content Analysis and Thematic Analysis. Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung /Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 20(3). https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-20.3.3376

Valentine, D. (2006). 'I went to bed with my own kind once': The erasure of desire in the name of identity. In S. Stryker and S. Whittle (eds.), *The Transgender Studies Reader* (pp. 397-409). Routledge.

Valentine, D. (2007). *Imagining transgender: An ethnography of a category.* Duke University Press.

van Dijk, T.A. (1995). Discourse analysis as ideology analysis. In C. Schaffner and A. L. Wenden (eds.). *Language and Peace*. (pp.17-33). Aldershot.

Vandoorne, S., & Crouin, A. (2019, December 5). *Swastikas sprayed on more than 100 graves in Jewish cemetery in France.* CNN. https://www.cnn.com/2019/12/04/ europe/france- jewish-cemetery-swastikas-intl/index.html

Vogel, R. (2022). *Op-ed: Transgender athletes have no business participating in te women's sports.* Daily Local News. https://www.dailylocal.com/2022/02/28/op-ed-transgender-athletes-have-no-business-competing-in-womens-sports/

Wadsworth, B. C., Hecht, M. L., & Jung, E. (2008). The role of identity gaps, discrimination, and acculturation in international students' education satisfaction in American classrooms. *Communication Education, 57*(1), 64-87. https://doi.org/10.1080/03634520701668407

Wagner, P. E., Kunkel, A., & Compton, B. L. (2016). (Trans)lating identity: Exploring discursive strategies for navigating the tensions of identity gaps. *Communication Quarterly, 64*(3), 251–272. https://doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2015.1103286

Weaver, K. K. (2018). Paying your respects: Transgender women and detransitioning after death. *Death Studies, 44*(1), 58–64. https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2018.1521886

Whitestone, S. B., Giles, H., & Linz, D. (2020). Overcoming ungrievability: Transgender expectations for authentic expression after death. *Sociological Inquiry, 9*(2), 316-338. https://doi.org/10.1111/soin.12357

Whitley, C. (2013). Trans-kin: Undoing and redoing gender negotiating relational identity among friends and family of transgender persons. *Sociological Perspectives, 56*(4), 597-621. https://doi.org/10.1525/sop.2013.56.4.597

Witten, T. M. (2014). It's not all darkness: Robustness, resilience, and successful t transgender aging. *LGBT Health*, *1*(1), 24-33. https://doi.org/10.1089/lgbt.2013.0017

Wojcik, M. E. (2000). *Discrimination After Death*, 53 OKLA L. REV. 389. https://digitalcommons.law.ou.edu/olr/vol53/iss3/3

Woodthorpe, K. (2017) Family and funerals: Taking a relational perspective. *Death Studies*, *41*(9), 592-601. https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2017.1325419

Woodthorpe, K., & Rumble, H. (2016). Funerals and families: locating death as a relational issue. *The British Journal of Sociology*, *67*(2), 242-259. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468- 4446.12190

Wozolek, B. (2019). Implications of queer theory for qualitative research. *Oxford*

Research Encyclopedia of Education. https://doi.org/10.1093/ACREFORE/9780190264093.013.735

Wuest, J. (2019). The scientific gaze in American transgender policies: Contesting the meanings of sex, gender, and gender identity in the bathroom rights cases. *Politics & Gender, 15*(2), 336-360. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X18000338 P

Yarhouse, M. A., & Carrs, T. L. (2012). MTF transgender Christians' experiences: A qualitative study, *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 6(1), 18-33. https://doi.org/10.1080/15538605.2012.649405

Yin, R. K. (2016). *Qualitative research from start to finish* (2nd ed.). The Guilford Press.

Zhang, A. Y., & Siminoff, L. A. (2003). Silence and cancer: Why do families and patients fail to communicate? *Health Communication*, *15*(4), 415-429. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327027HC1504_03

Zimmerman, C. (2007). Death denial and palliative care discourse and practice. *Sociology of Health & Illness, 29(*2), 297–314. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9566.2007.00495.x

Appendix A: Protocols

Study 1 Interview Protocol

Demographics:

AGE:
How old are you?

ETHNICITY:
What is your ethnic background?

SEXUAL ORIENTATION:
What term do you use to describe your sexual orientation?

PARTNERSHIP/FAMILY STATUS

1.Are you married? Single? Partnered? Cohabitating? Widowed?
2.Are you a parent? How many children do you have?

EDUCATIONAL STATUS:
What is the highest level of education that you have achieved?

EMPLOYMENT STATUS:
What is your employment status? Full time, part-time, unemployed? retired?

RELIGION
Do you consider yourself to be a religious or spiritual person? If so, is there an organized religion to which you belong?

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION:

1. In what state do you live in?

GENDER EXPRESSION:
1. Identity – what term do you prefer to use to describe your gender expression?
2. At what age did you first become aware of this identity?
3. At what age did you first begin to act on that identity?
4. At what age, if you have done so, did you begin any medical procedures regarding your identity?
5. As of today, would you say that most of your close friends and family do know or do not know about your gender-expansive identity?

Study 1 Interview Protocol

Identity after death:

1. In the unhappy event that you were to die next week, who do you assume would take the lead in making your funeral arrangements?
2. Have you made your wishes known to this person - verbally or in writing - regarding specific details for your funeral, your gravestone or your obituary? Have you made your wishes known to anyone else?
    a. What name or names would you like to appear on your grave marker?
    b. What name or names would you like to appear in your obituaries?
    c. In any video montage or photo display at your funeral, would you want pre-transition photos, such as childhood pictures, shown?

    a. How closely do you think the person you've named will follow your directives?
    b. If you have <u>not</u> communicated your wishes to this person, how accurately do you think they will guess at, and then fulfill, your wishes?
3. Aside of laws and traditions, who do you wish was in charge of your memorials?
4. Do you believe the motivation behind memorial expressions is more to honor the deceased or to provide comfort for the bereaved?
5. Most families have a difficult time discussing death. Would you say your family is more comfortable than most… or less comfortable than most? Why or why not?
6. Do you care how you are remembered? Is it very important to you?
7. Have you heard about families de-transitioning their trans family members after they die? What do you think of that?
8. If you were to die next week, how do you think your family would treat your gender identity? Would it hurt you to know that they might not respect that identity?
9. How might your family's religious feelings affect their behavior, if at all? How might your family's political affiliations affect their behavior, if at all?
10. Do you expect to have a discussion regarding memorial expressions with a loved one in the near future? Why or why not? What is preventing you or making you hesitant in having that discussion?
11. Have you made out a will or advance directive? Wills typically concentrate on property and finances. Have you thought about appointing a designated individual to handle your memorial expressions?
12. Do you believe in life after death? If so, do you believe that gender exists in the afterlife?
13. Do you have any other thoughts you wish to add regarding memorial expressions made in your honor?

FOR CALIFORNIA RESIDENTS ONLY

14. Are you aware that a law exists in California that protects trans identity after death (AB 1577)? Have you ever discussed this law with a friend or loved one?

Appendix A: Protocols

Study 2 Interview Protocol

Demographics:

AGE:
How old are you?

ETHNICITY:
What is your ethnic background?

SEXUAL ORIENTATION:
What term do you use to describe your sexual orientation?

PARTNERSHIP/FAMILY STATUS

1. Are you married? Single? Partnered? Cohabitating?
2. Are you a parent? How many children do you have?

EDUCATIONAL STATUS:
What is the highest level of education that you have achieved?

EMPLOYMENT STATUS:
What is your employment status? Full time, part-time, retired?

RELIGION
Do you consider yourself to be a religious or spiritual person? If so, is there an organized religion to which you belong?

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION:

1. In what geographic region of the country do you live?
2. What is your community setting? Large city? Small city? Suburbs? Rural? Urban?

GENDER IDENTITY:
1. Identity – what term do you prefer to describe your gender identity?
2. At what age did you first become aware of this identity?
3. At what age did you first begin to act on that identity?
4. At what age, if you have done so, did you begin any medical procedures regarding your identity?
5. As of today, would you say that most of your close friends and family do know or do not know about your gender expansive identity?

Study 2 Interview Protocol

Identity after death

1. In the unhappy event that you were to die next week, who do you assume would take the lead in making your funeral arrangements?

2. Have you made your wishes known to this person - verbally or in writing - regarding specific details for your funeral, your gravestone or your obituary? Have you made your wishes known to anyone else?

a. What name or names would you like to appear on your grave marker?
b. What name or names would you like to appear in your obituaries?
c. In any video montage or photo display at your funeral, would you want pre-transition photos, such as childhood pictures, shown?
d. How closely do you think the person you've named will follow your directives?
e. If you have <u>not</u> communicated your wishes to this person, how accurately do you think they will guess at, and then fulfill, your wishes?

3. Without considering laws or traditions, who do you wish was in charge of your memorials?

4. Do you believe the motivation behind memorial expressions is more to honor the deceased or to provide comfort for the bereaved?

5. Most families have a difficult time discussing death. Would you say your family is more comfortable than most… or less comfortable than most? Why or why not?

6. Do you care how you are remembered? How important is that to you?

7. Have you heard about families who de-transition their trans family members after they die? What do you think of that? Has it happened to anyone close to you?

8. If you were to die next week, how do you think your family would treat your gender identity? Would it hurt you to know that they might not respect that identity?

9. How might your family's religious feelings affect their behavior, if at all? How might your family's political affiliations affect their behavior, if at all?

10. Do you expect to have a discussion regarding memorial expressions with a loved one in the near future? Why or why not? (If negative response: What is preventing you from having that discussion.. or what might prevent you from having that discussion in the future?)

11. Have you made out a will or advance directive? Wills typically concentrate on property and finances. Have you thought about appointing a designated individual to handle your memorial expressions?

12. Do you believe in life after death? If so, do you believe that gender exists in the afterlife?

13. Do you have any other thoughts you wish to add regarding memorial expressions made in your honor?

FOR CALIFORNIA RESIDENTS ONLY:

14. Are you aware that a law exists in California that protects trans identity after death (AB 1577)? Have you ever discussed this law with a friend or loved one?

Appendix B: Tables

Table 1. Self-identified gender and ethnic identity, and age of participants (Study 1)

Quantity in the category	**Self-Identified Gender identity**	**Self-Identified Ethnicity**	**Age**
4	Female	Asian	41
	Female	Native American/Irish	45
	Female	Asian	49
	Female	Caucasian	54
2	Gender fluid	Caucasian	42
	Gender fluid	Caucasian	69
1	Gender fluid/Transgender	Caucasian	47
1	Intersex/Trans Masculine	Caucasian	52
2	Male	Caucasian	64
	Male	Japanese American	72
1	Male presenting, gender fluid trans femme	Caucasian	61
1	Male presenting, likes being female sometimes	Caucasian	50
1	Male; most of the time, sometimes female	Asian	59
1	Man	Caucasian	54
5	Trans woman	Caucasian	51
	Trans woman	Mexican/Japanese	51
	Trans woman	Caucasian	57
	Trans woman	Caucasian	65
	Trans woman	Caucasian	68
5	Transgender	Mexican/Polish	42
	Transgender	Chinese	49
	Transgender	Caucasian	56
	Transgender	Caucasian	64
	Transgender	Caucasian	77
1	Transgender female	Caucasian	42
2	Transmasculine	Caucasian	45
	Transmasculine	Caucasian	46
1	Transsexual with intersex characteristics	Caucasian, part Native American	43
1	Transsexual	Caucasian	56
1	Transwoman, but identifies heavily with both male and female sides	Caucasian	43
2	Woman	Asian	69
	Woman	Caucasian	77

Appendix B: Tables

Table 2. Self-identified gender and ethnic identity, and age of participants (Study 2)

Quantity in the Category	**Self-Identified Gender identity**	**Self-Identified Sexual Orientation**	**Self-Identified Ethnicity**	**Age**
1	Agender	Bisexual	Latino/White	26
1	Fluid/bigender	Pansexual	Chinese/Japanese	30
1	Gender-nonconforming	Queer	Latino	21
1	Male	Pansexual	White	24
3	Non-binary	Bisexual	White	18
		Bisexual	White	21
		Queer	Black/White	27
1	Non-binary, genderfluid	Bisexual/ Pansexual/ Queer	Egyptian/Middle Eastern	21
1	Non-binary, trans woman	Bisexual	Jewish/White	23
7	Trans man/masculine	Homoromantic	White	20
		Pansexual	White/ Irish/English	20
		Demisexual/ Polysexual	Creole/Irish	21
		Queer	Latino	21
		Queer	Filipino/White	22
		Queer	Latino	22
		Queer	White/South Asian	25
1	Trans masculine/ non-binary	Queer	White	22
1	Trans/non-binary	Queer	Korean	21
2	Trans woman	Heterosexual	White/Middle Eastern	25
		Pansexual	White/Jewish	29

Appendix B: Tables

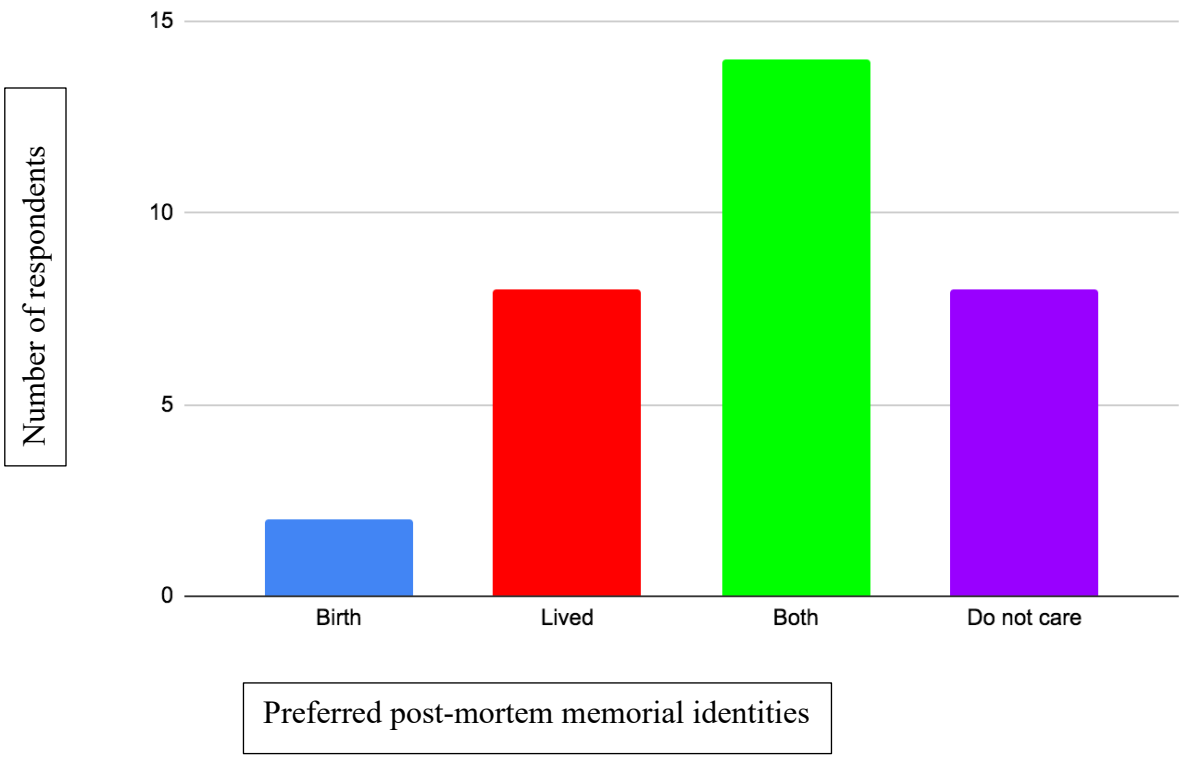
Tables 3.1 and 3.2. Transgender identity memorialization (Study 1)

The wishes of TGD individuals regarding their own identity as memorialized after death. All participants were over the age of 40 (*n*=32).

3.1.

Preferred post-mortem identity enactment	Amount	Percentage	Average Age
Lived identity only	8	25%	52.1
Birth identity only	2	6%	55.5
Both identities	14	44%	53.1
Do not care	8	25%	61.0
N/A	0	0%	-
Total	32	100%	

3.2.



Appendix B: Tables

Tables 4.1 & 4.2. Transgender identity memorialization (Study 2)

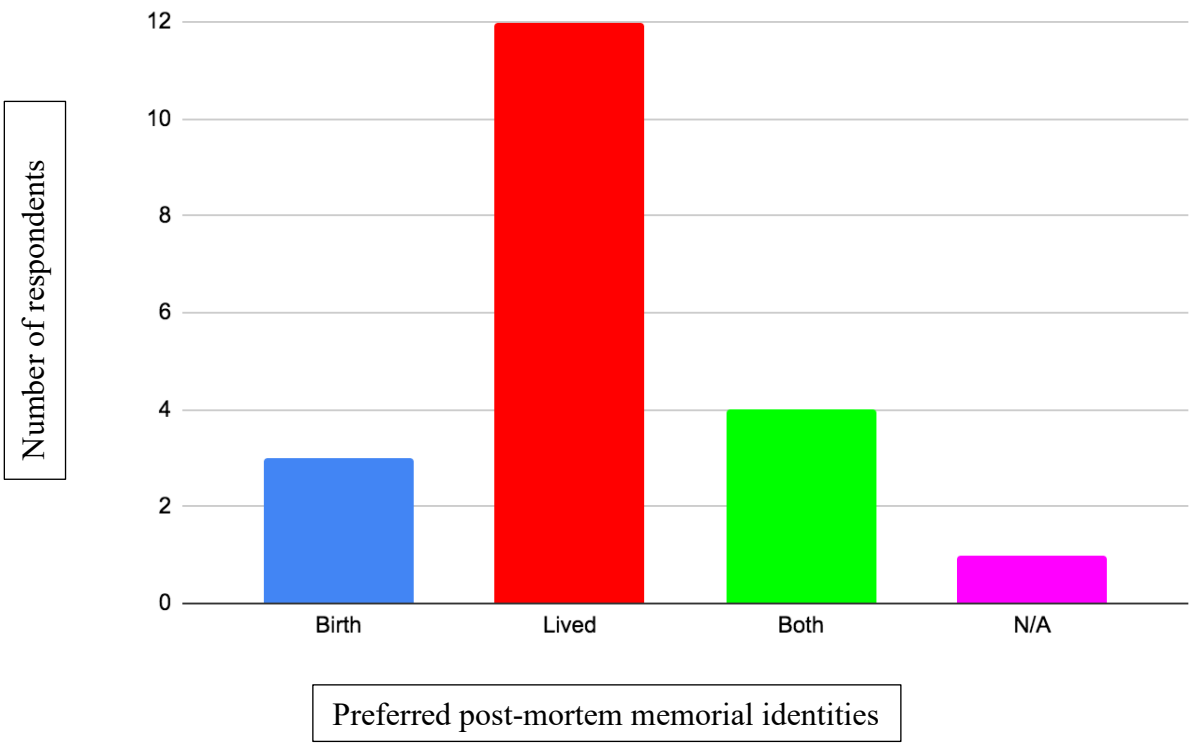
The wishes of TGD individuals regarding their own identity as memorialized after death.

Participants were between the ages of 18 and 30 years old (*n*=20).

4.1.

Preferred identity enactment	Amount	Percentage	Average Age
Lived identity only	12	30%	22.8
Birth identity only	3	15%	23.0
Both identities	4	20%	24.0
Do not care	0	0%	-
N/A	1	5%	20.0
Total	20	100%	

4.2.



Appendix B: Tables

Table 5. Expectations for the nature of one's identity enactment based on participant's age and length of time expressing as transgender or gender-diverse (TGD).

Expected identity enactment	Number of participants	Average age today	Average length of time expressing as TGD
Respectful	12	23.83	9.0
Respectful (conditional)	4	23.25	4.0
Disrespectful	4	21.00	2.5

Appendix B: Tables

Table 6. Participants' preferred name on post-mortem memorials based on their expectations for the nature of their identity enactment.

Expected identity enactment	Number of participants	Lived or chosen name	Both/many names	Name assigned at birth	Other
Respectful	12	7	2	3	0
Respectful (conditional)	4	4	0	0	0
Disrespectful	4	3	0	0	1
Totals	20	14	2	3	1

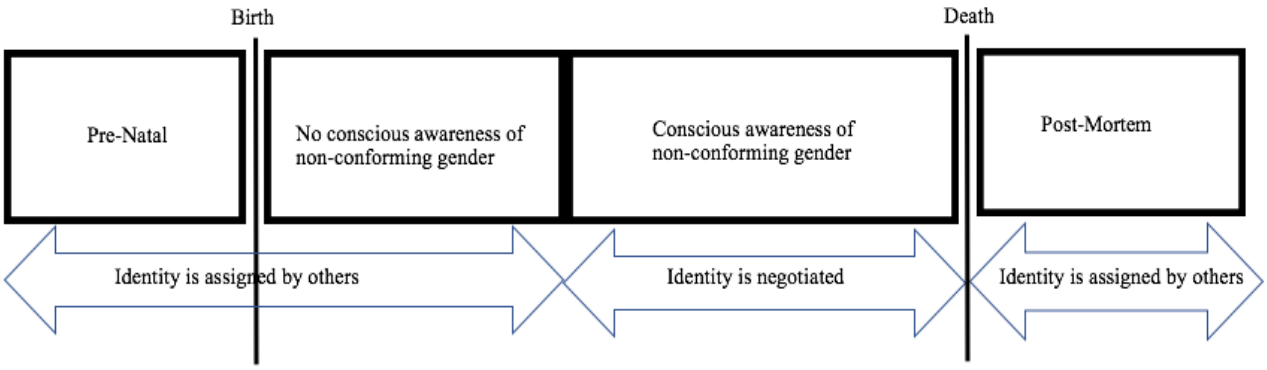
Appendix B: Tables

Table 7. Attitudes towards the main motivation behind funerals and other memorial expressions.

Priority	Young Adults (Study 2)	%	Older Adults (Study 1)	%	Both Sets ›in	%
Honor the deceased	2	10%	4	13%	6	12%
Comfort the bereaved	12	60%	14	47%	26	52%
Both	6	30%	12	40%	18	36%
N/A	0	0%	2	N/A	2	N/A
Totals	20	100%	32	100%	52	100%

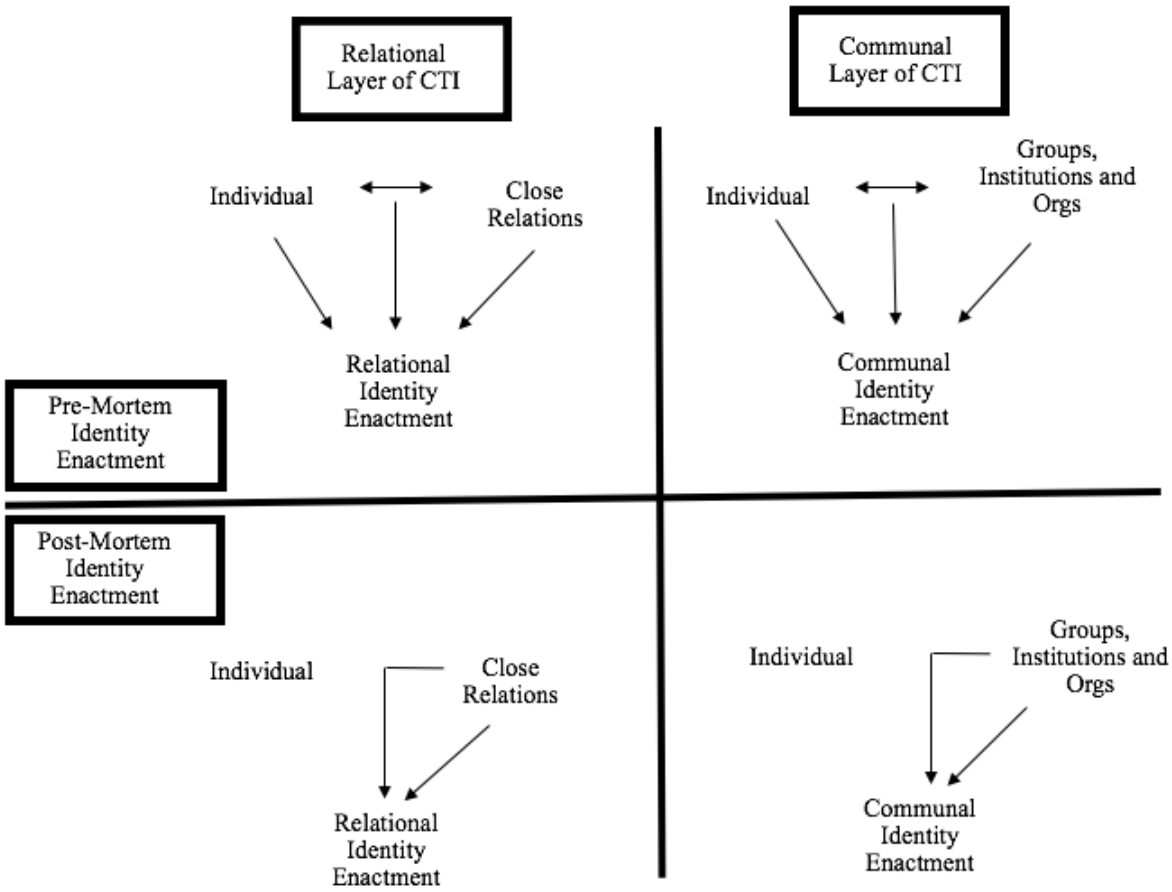
Appendix C: Figures

Figure 1. Gender identity across time (TGD individuals)



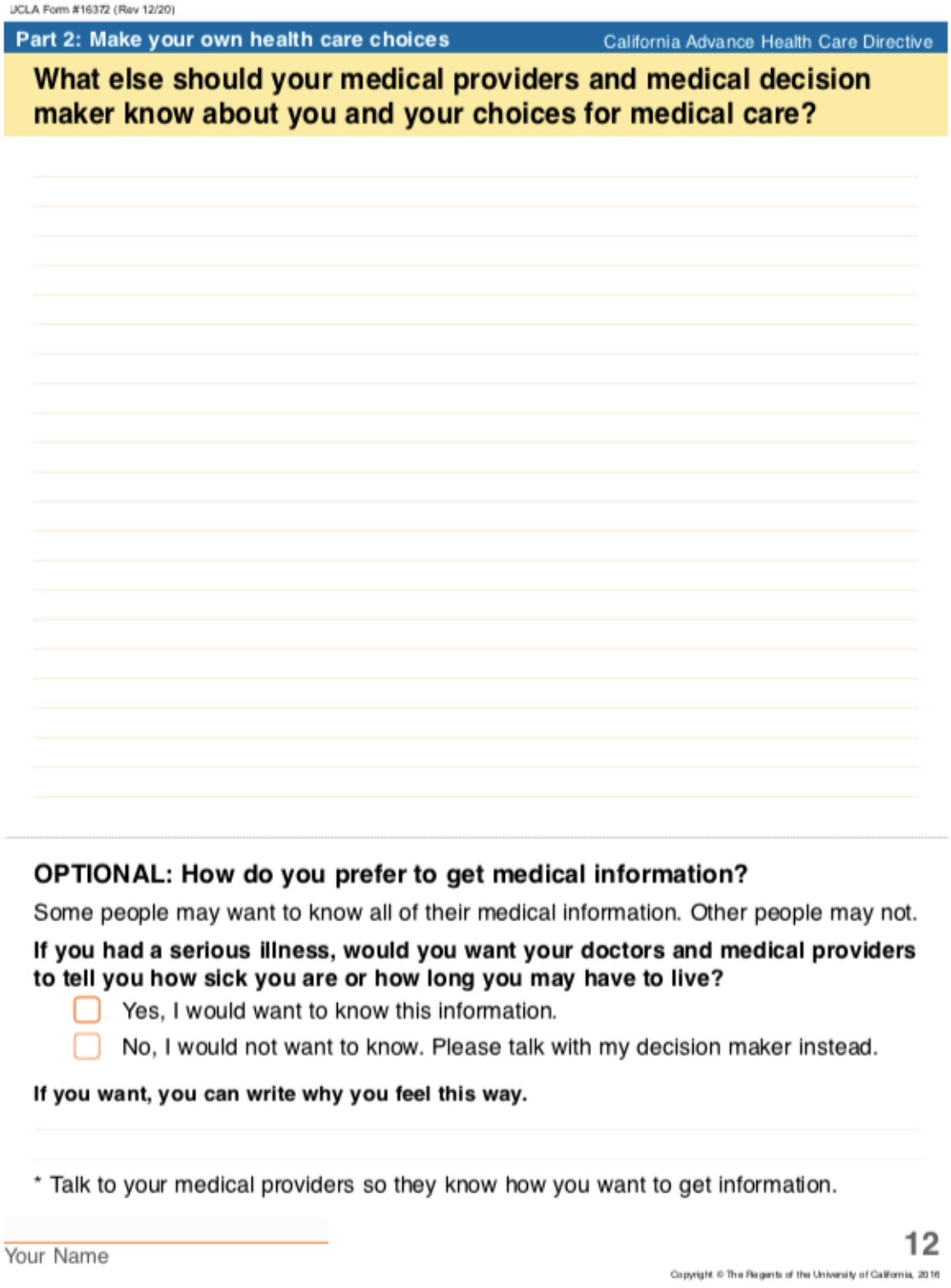
Appendix C: Figures

Figure 2. Patterns of influence for the communication theory of identity's enactment layer of identity: Individuals before and after death.



Appendix D.

California Advance Health Care Directive (page 12 only).



UCLA Form #16372 (Rev 12/20)

Part 2: Make your own health care choices California Advance Health Care Directive

What else should your medical providers and medical decision maker know about you and your choices for medical care?

OPTIONAL: How do you prefer to get medical information?

Some people may want to know all of their medical information. Other people may not.

If you had a serious illness, would you want your doctors and medical providers to tell you how sick you are or how long you may have to live?

- ☐ Yes, I would want to know this information.
- ☐ No, I would not want to know. Please talk with my decision maker instead.

If you want, you can write why you feel this way.

* Talk to your medical providers so they know how you want to get information.

Your Name

12