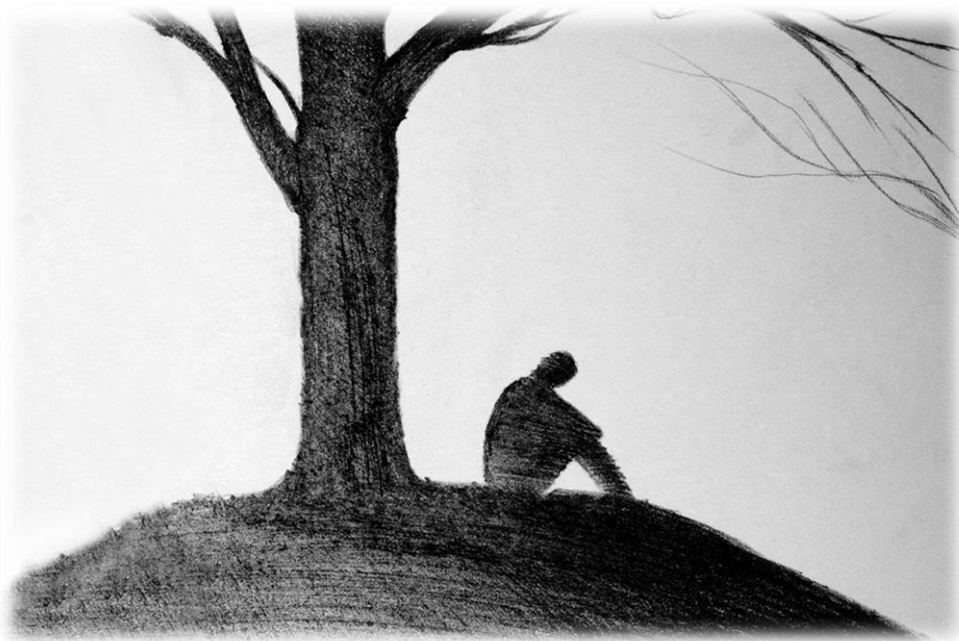


The mourning after: how bereaved in the Netherlands find a place for their loss.

The ways in which people in the Netherlands cope with bereavement to improve their wellbeing and the role of meaningful places therein.



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I'd like to tell you it gets easier. it doesn't. If there's any... comfort, it's... getting used to the pain, I suppose. I got some good news and I got some bad news. Bad news is you're never gonna be the same.

Now the good news is, as soon as you accept that and you let yourself suffer... you allow yourself to visit them in your mind, and you'll remember all the love they gave you, all the joy they knew."

Point is, you can't steer from the pain. If you do, you'll rob yourself... You'll rob yourself of every memory of them. Just take the pain, Martin. You hear me? You take it. It's the only way you'll keep them with you.

Cory Lambert in the movie Wind River (Sheridan, 2017, 0:45:14).

Abstract

Many studies have shown that grief is associated with increased emotional distress, physical disease and mortality. In this study, the ways in which people in the Netherlands cope with the loss of a significant other to restore their wellbeing were examined through qualitative research methods. Given little research has been done on the role of attachment to meaningful places and linking objects after bereavement, the second aim of this study was to seek the role of these meanings in the grieving process, which was performed through photo-elicitation coupled with follow-up in-depth interviews as well. Data analysis was performed in times of COVID-19 using constructivist grounded theory, which yielded an inductive and hermeneutical model indicating various aspects of coping with bereavement. As for my research group, it was found that people in the Netherlands coped with the loss of a close one in their own personal way and by consoling fellow bereaved. Also, the grieving process did not necessarily result in detachment from or letting go of the deceased, but rather in maintaining or transforming the bond through attachment to meaningful places and linking objects; these alleviate distress. It is recommended for the bereaved to alter their environments to cherish and keep the deceased and associated meaningful memories close-by, which can aid in reconstructing the meaning of their loss to attenuate their grief and restore wellbeing. Future longitudinal research is deemed valuable for examining the transformation of continuing bonds and changing place meanings through time.

Keywords: bereavement, place-meaning, wellbeing, place-attachment, continuing bond, grieving process, coping strategy

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Table of figures.....	vi
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Theoretical framework.....	3
2.1. Perspectives on bereavement and main developments in practice.....	3
2.2. Loss and its implications for the wellbeing of the bereaved.....	4
2.3. Place attachment after bereavement.....	5
2.4. Wellbeing and place.....	7
2.5. Conceptual framing.....	8
2.6. Expectations.....	9
3. Methodology.....	10
3.1. Participant recruitment.....	10
3.2. Study population and context.....	11
3.3. Data collection methods.....	12
3.3.1. Semi-structured in-depth interviews.....	12
3.3.2. Photo elicitation.....	14
3.4. Ethical considerations.....	14
3.5. Positionality of the researcher and reflexivity in the study.....	15
3.6. Data analysis.....	17
3.6.1. Analytical approach.....	17
3.6.2. Data transcription.....	18
3.6.3. Coding process.....	18
4. Findings.....	20
4.1. Pre-loss, anticipatory grief.....	20
4.2. Realization and acceptance of loss and its implications: loss-oriented grief.....	22

4.3. Balancing during the grieving process.....	24
4.4. Adjusting to & finding benefit from the loss: restoration-oriented grief.....	28
4.5. Outcomes of the grieving process.....	30
Maintaining a bond with the deceased.....	30
Attached to meaningful places.....	31
4.6.	34
Discussion.....	35
Acceptance and realization (sense-making) and finding meaning (benefit-finding).....	35
Maintaining an enduring bond or detach from deceased?	36
The role of meaningful places in the grieving process	37
Strengths and limitations.....	38
Conclusion	39
Recommendations.....	39
References.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Appendices.....	50
Appendix A: Codebook	50
Appendix B: The interview guide including operationalized concepts	54
Appendix C: Photo elicitation guide.....	58
Appendix D: Informed consent form.....	59
Appendix E: Recruitment Flyer	60
Appendix F: Inductive model of remaining attached to a deceased person through linking objects	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Table of figures

FIGURE 1: THE DUAL PROCESS MODEL–REVISED (DPM-R), WHICH INTEGRATES LOSS-ORIENTED AND RESTORATION-ORIENTED TASKS AT BOTH THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE FAMILY LEVEL (STROEBE & SCHUT, 2015, P.875).	3
FIGURE 2: THE TRIPARTITE MODEL OF PLACE ATTACHMENT (SCANNELL & GIFFORD, 2010, P.2).	6
FIGURE 3: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK BASED ON THE LITERATURE REVIEW.	9
FIGURE 4: FRANK'S DECEASED BROTHER'S BILLIARD CUE AND CASING, POSITIONED NEXT TO HIS FRONT DOOR.	27
FIGURE 5: ROSEY, THE CAT OF ROOS' DECEASED MOTHER.	28
FIGURE 6: VIOLET'S BASEMENT COLLECTION OF HER AND HER DECEASED DAD'S KLM ATTRIBUTES.	31
FIGURE 7: ALTAR OF REMEMBRANCE OF DECEASED FAMILY MEMBERS IN LINN'S LIVING ROOM.	33
FIGURE 8: INDUCTIVE MODEL WITH MAIN THEMES AND CODE-CATEGORIES	35

1. Introduction

With the coming of modern secular society we seem to live with death being increasingly sequestered, tabooed, made invisible, forbidden and moved to the outskirts of society, where the funeral services are confined to the immediate family (Jacobsen & Petersen, 2020; Maes, 2012; Wouters, 2002; Sparling, 2017). The mental distance from the dead seems to have become greater, as the control over the care of the dead body and the funeral were handed over to professionals and experts, making that it has become rather fixed, expropriated and uniform (Walter, 1996; Wouters, 2002). Death became a stranger, and the prevalent attitude towards death was that of alienation. Most often death is not anticipated so keenly and when it occurs, many bereaved loved ones experience an emptiness inside that cannot be filled, despite having many family members close. ‘An emptiness that is still being fed due to the bereaved’ social environment hushing, muting and making invisible of the deceased, as if he or she was never there’ (Maes, 2012, p.13). Particularly in modern times, death by most is experienced as a marginal situation and when it occurs it is akin to a crisis (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Maes, 2012). At the threshold of the 21st century, the topic of death again began to attract more attention, becoming part of a revived death attitude (Jacobsen & Petersen, 2020).

The loss of a loved one can be stressful and can affect one’s wellbeing in different ways. For example, grief can affect one emotionally, mentally, behaviorally, spiritually and physically, and affects individuals’ wellbeing in different ways (Stroebe & Schut, 2015). Despite grief being a natural part of life, many studies have shown that grief is associated with increased emotional distress, physical disease and mortality (Prior et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2013; Stroebe et al., 2007). The circumstances surrounding sudden losses oftentimes present an obstacle to moving forward in the process of bereavement and affects their future wellbeing (Mayer et al., 2013). A number of prescriptive models of the grieving process have been proposed, from which stage models of grieving, albeit without any credible evidence base, have been routinely taught as part of the curriculum in medical schools and nursing programs (Downe-Wambolt & Tamlyn, 1997). What is clear is that there is no single set of stages or tasks in adapting to loss, but instead qualitatively distinct paths through bereavement, which calls for a closer understanding of both patterns of complication and resilience (Hall, 2014).

Klaassens (2011) found that death commodities, such as crematoria, roadside memorials and cemeteries, play an important role in the processing of death. However, little research has been done on the specific role that private places may play in coping with death; this study holds the potential to explore this role and variety of meaningful objects or places in the bereaved’ private spheres. Additional academic contribution of this study lies in the fact that it brings theories from different disciplines

together, among which social psychology, cultural geography and demography; that it examines grief reactions through a geographical perspective.

In the first place, this study's societal relevance lies in the potential of providing information to health care professionals and grief counselors with regard to the role of place in the grieving process. Besides, this study may also inform the public about options to help those in need to cope with a significant loss in their own way. Given the notion that grieving can be a complicated and personal process, it can be expected that people turn to more private places as well; bereavement theory has not taken the role of these particular places in the grieving process into account. By examining what meaning such private places hold for the bereaved, a new angle on the nature of the grieving process is explored. This study holds the potential to shed a light on ways and places in which individuals cope with bereavement in their own, personal way.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Perspectives on bereavement and main developments in practice

The most apparent development in theory of grief is the movement away from the idea that successful grieving requires the ‘letting go’ of the deceased and alternatively, after a death, bonds with the deceased do not necessarily have to be severed (Hall, 2014). In this way there is a potentially healthy role for maintaining a so called continuing or enduring bond with the deceased. Frequently, this continuing bond can be cocreated with others (Hall, 2014). A number of studies have found that approximately half of the bereaved population experience the sense of presence of the deceased (Datson & Marwit, 1997): in their dreams, by visiting the grave or through participating in rituals or linking objects (Hall, 2014). Such continuing bonds with the deceased are viewed by Klass (2014) and Neimeyer (2001) as resources for enriched functioning and the oscillation between avoiding and engaging with grief work as fundamental to grieving. The dual process model is illustrating this phenomenon as well (Figure 1).

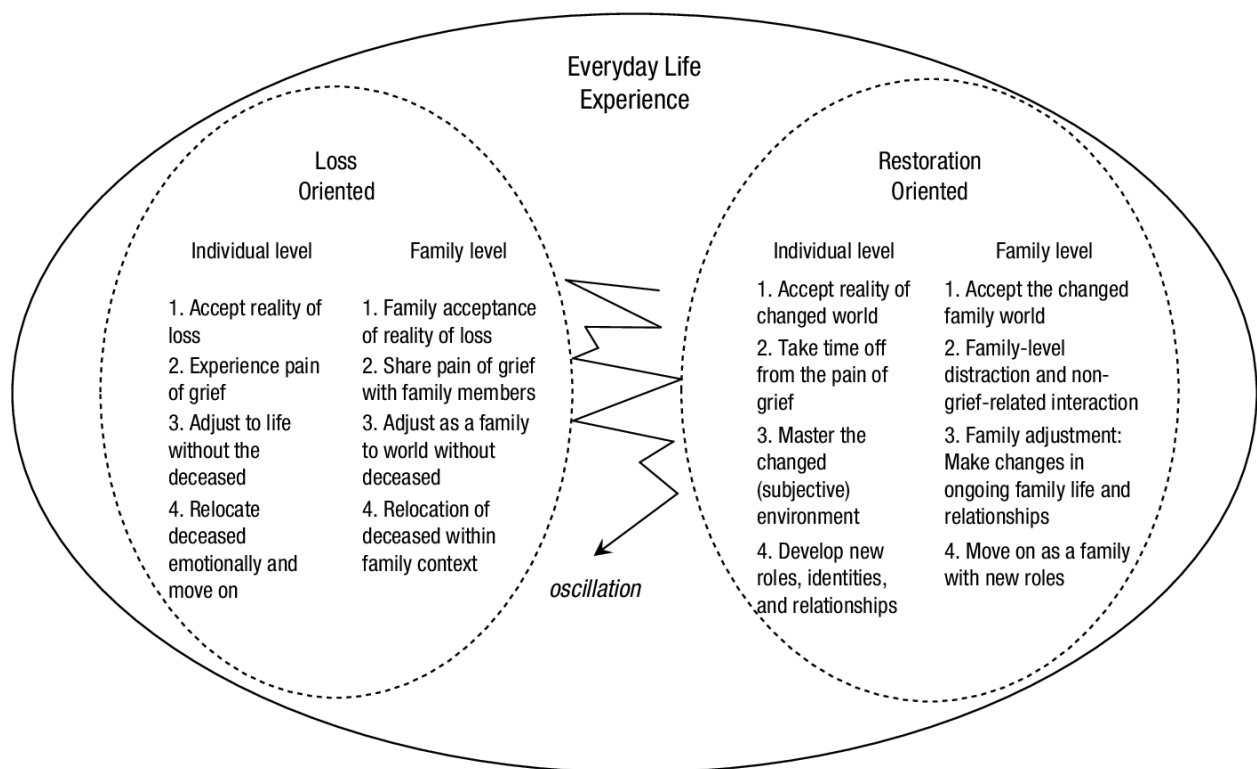


Figure 1: The Dual Process Model–Revised (DPM-R), which integrates loss-oriented and restoration-oriented tasks at both the individual and the family level (Stroebe & Schut, 2015, p.875).

Ongoing research is still examining when continuing bonds are helpful and when they are not.

As seen from the postmodern social constructionist perspective, Hall (2014, p. 12) concludes that the most important notion in bereavement theory is that “no one-size-fits all model or approach to grief is justifiable, which implies that any interventions must be tailored to the uniqueness of the person-specific loss.” What is clear is that there is “no single set of stages or tasks in adapting to loss, but instead qualitatively distinct paths through bereavement, which calls for a closer understanding of both patterns of complication and resilience (Hall, 2014, p. 9).” Worden (2008) identifies seven determining factors that are critical to appreciate in order to understand the client’s experience, which include who the person who died was, the nature of the attachment to the deceased, how the person died, historical antecedents, personality variables, social mediators and concurrent stressors. Bereaved individuals may discontinue unhealthy coping mechanisms adopted temporarily at the time of the death or hone new skills for coping with loss (Kravdal & Grundy, 2016; Moor & de Graaf, 2016). Thus, individuals may experience mental distress following a loss but eventually adapt in ways that support their eventual return to normative mental health levels (Moor & de Graaf, 2016), which may turn out to be a life changing experience (Kuykendall, 2020). For this reason the goal of mourning for people is regarded as finding way(s) to live with their loss to return to a balance or homeostasis in life, where the bereaved have restored their wellbeing to normative levels.

Although grief is a natural process in which many people adjust with support from their social networks, others seek more formal forms of support. Medical staff and services that provide bereavement support can be important for managing serious mental health risks that accompany increased emotional distress. After a death has occurred, grieving people in the Netherlands are often advised to seek professional help to aid in the processing of the loss (Verthriest & Maes, 2020). But in practice, most grievers do not require professional grief counseling and it is estimated that roughly 10-15% of the bereaved suffer from complicated grief, which can be intense or chronic for many years (Hall, 2014). However, there is no consensus in professional literature about these numbers (Larson & Hoyt, 2007). Prolonged grief disorder is now included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American psychiatric association, 2022), because critics have pointed out that severe major depression can be triggered by bereavement and may even cause suicide.

2.2. Loss and its implications for the wellbeing of the bereaved.

The loss of a loved one can be stressful. Bereavement is regarded as a severe stressor that can be detrimental to both individuals’ physical and mental wellbeing, triggering physical and mental disorders such as major depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety and sleep disorders. (McLeod, 1991; Umberson, 2003; Hall, 2014). “These co-morbidities require identification, clinical attention and treatment” (Hall, 2014, p.11), because grief can be intense, prolonged, and interfere with normal activities

accompanied by destructive thoughts and behaviors (Mason & Duffy, 2019; Hall, 2014). These thoughts and behaviors are associated with elevated risks to mental health - through increased emotional distress - morbidity and mortality (Aoun et al., 2015; Shah et al., 2013). Mayer et al. (2014) and Hall (2014) state that, in particular, circumstances surrounding a sudden loss present an obstacle to moving forward in the process of bereavement and affects their future wellbeing. Shah et al. (2013) goes even further by indicating that a lack of preparedness among suddenly bereaved persons has been shown to be associated with higher mortality among the bereaved than when the deceased had a known preexisting morbidity. In the case of parental death, research is showing decreased satisfaction and wellbeing among some offspring even 4 to 5 years after the death has occurred (Leopold & Lechner 2015; Marks et al. 2007; Moor & de Graaf, 2016). Historical events and social conditions, such as the Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic, may shape exposures to early parental death and psychological distress and coping (Guessoum et al. 2020; Koltai and Stuckler 2020). Future research should jointly consider time since death, life course stage, and historical period of loss to better position the meaning of parental death in the life course.

For the purposes of this study, I chose to consider wellbeing in its broadest sense, treating it as an umbrella concept for notions such as well-being, subjective well-being, mental well-being, hedonism, eudaimonia, health, flourishing and so on.

2.3. Place attachment after bereavement

“Very few examinations in the geography of happiness have been explicitly concerned with the difference place makes; instead they have focused on how factors that are place-related may influence how happy people appear to be.”(Ballas & Dorling, 2013, p.468). However, places or geographical units are not simply a composition of factors that might contribute to happiness. Like happiness is subjective in its meaning, so is place. Therefore, to gauge or explore an effect on happiness or wellbeing, we require to gauge subjective meanings, and as Klaassens proposes: “Places of death and remembrance are laden with intense meanings and are thus extremely interesting subjects for analysis” (Klaassens, 2011, p.22). Visiting such dark sites, which are places associated with death, tragedy or remembrance, is clearly a profoundly emotional experience which is usually characterized by a simultaneous experience of a range of emotions (Nawijn et al., 2015). As Smith (2006) claims, the most memorable experiences are clearly those that engage the bereaved in active participation in visiting dark sites, in which they are fully immersed. Visitors are, therefore, active participants or co-creators of meaning at places of death and suffering (Smith, 2006). Caduff and Timpf (2008, p. 250-251) state that “the subjective selection of spatial references implies that the cognitive abilities of the observer play an important role in selecting appropriate features for reference”, put differently, our knowledge, thoughts and preconceptions shape

what we perceive and finally select as reference for making decisions (Presson & Montello, 1988; Stevens, 2006). The cognitive processes involved in understanding and reasoning about a spatial scene include knowing, thinking, learning, assessing, and problem solving (Montello & Friendschuh, 2005). Cognitive abilities vary strongly among observers and directly influence the assessment of the subjective importance of spatial scenes. This also makes that bereaved will assess places of death as important spatial scenes. Human perception is limited to our view of the world and the properties of our sensory system as it is intrinsically tied to our egocentric frame of reference (Marcel & Dobel, 2005; Parkhurst & Niebur, 2003) and these authors imply that the meaning of a loss will be recognized in certain spatial scenes.

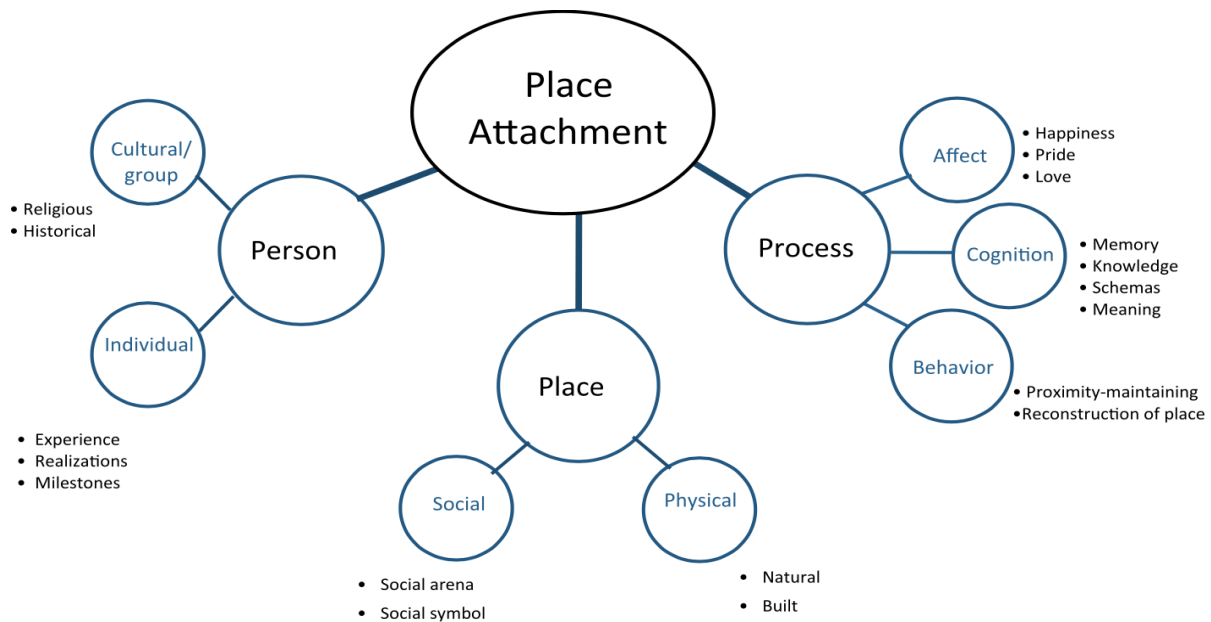


Figure 2: The tripartite model of place attachment (Scannell & Gifford, 2010, p.2).

In this study Scannell and Gifford’s model of place attachment (Figure 2) is used to determine in which way the bereaved attach to places and what meanings these places hold. The various definitions of the concept of place-attachment have been reviewed and synthesized into a three-dimensional, person-process-place organizing framework. This model has been applied to disaster psychology, in cases of natural disasters, burglaries or voluntary relocations (Brown & Perkins, 1992). Given the presented emotional bond between people and place in Scannell and Gifford’s model and the notion that grief reactions can be triggered by forced relocation as well (Fried, 1963; Fullilove, 1996), it is implied that the model can be applied to the loss of a person as well. The process, or psychological dimension, consists of

the three subdimensions ‘affect’, ‘cognition’, and ‘behavior’. This dimension is about the experiences, emotions, and memories that together contribute to a person’s attachment to place. By assessing the bereaved participants’ scene selections in the form of meaningful places, many insights into the participants’ frame of reference and world of meaning are expected to be obtained as well.

2.4. Wellbeing and place

Wellbeing, however defined, can have no form, expression or enhancement without consideration of place and the processes of wellbeing or becoming are essentially and necessarily emergent in place (Atkinson & Fuller, 2012). In general, contact with so called ‘green spaces’, mainly including cemeteries, burial grounds, parks, gardens and natural or semi-natural spaces (Bell et al., 2007), is associated with improved perceived and objective health outcomes and wellbeing (James et al., 2015; Gascon et al. 2015). The main three mechanisms underlying the health benefits of green spaces are deemed to be increased mental wellbeing, perceived social support and physical activity (Dadvand et al., 2016). Still, “the available evidence investigating mediation roles of these mechanisms and their relative contributions to the observed health benefits of green spaces remains scarce” (Dadvand et al., 2016, p.161). Studies of various neighborhood designs have shown that increases in natural features or perceived greenness were associated with higher levels of social contact and increased feelings of social support among neighbors (Kim & Kaplan, 2004; Maas et al., 2009). However, other authors claim that modern community these days does not have many intensive social interactions with strangers and rather feel comfortable communicating only within their own social group and do not feel the need to interact with others (Rasidi et al., 2012; Lofland, 1998).

There is an extensive body of literature on public places related to death, a quick example is found in Maddrell and Sidaway’s ‘*deathscapes*’ (2010), where they write about the life and death events that took place in public sites, which are still commemorated today, and are sites of pilgrimage, consolation, and contestation. These death sites are both intensely private and personal while simultaneously providing experiences that are expressed often collectively and publicly. However, specific research on the role of private places and their meaning in the grieving process and the effect on wellbeing is limited. When considering private places of consolation, Dozier and Ayers (2021) imply that object attachment typically occurs when people go through life events of loss such as loss of a loved one, retirement, and downsizing. Claimed benefits of attaching to objects related to a former home range from maintaining a sense of identity to being able to recall and reminisce about pleasant memories associated with their former home (Stevens et al., 2019; Meijering & Lager, 2014). Several researchers recommend to examine the meaning of private places or objects, which could inform various interventions in areas such as adjustment and grief (Dozier & Ayers, 2021; Jedan et al., 2019). Examining the subjective

meaning of places that grieving people attach to thus provides a new angle on their personal grieving process and through the examining of the subjective meanings of these places, this study holds the potential to shed light on the ways in which bereaved individuals cope with bereavement in their own, personal way. Therefore, the research questions that are addressed in this study are the following:

How do people in the Netherlands cope with bereavement to improve their wellbeing after the death of a significant one?

Which place(s) do bereaved people feel attached to and in what way are these place-meaning(s) important to their grieving process?

2.5. Conceptual framing

The deductive conceptual model (figure 3) presents the main processes and concepts in this study. When the death of a significant one has occurred, the bereaved would start to adapt to, or cope with their loss. The ways in which a bereaved individual would cope with loss is deemed dependent on the nature of the relationship with the deceased and the physical, psychological and social needs that have arisen after death. Bereavement theory outlines different ways of coping with different kinds of losses. In this study the arising needs of bereaved people to cope with their loss will be sought by determining how places, that meet the adaptation or coping needs, become more meaningful or offer peace after a significant loss. Following bereavement theory, the grieving process would be finished when the bereaved individual has accepted the loss, adjusted to it or found a place for it. In the end, the bereaved is 'recovered' from the loss, adapted to the new life circumstances and moves to a state of restored, adjusted or adapted wellbeing.

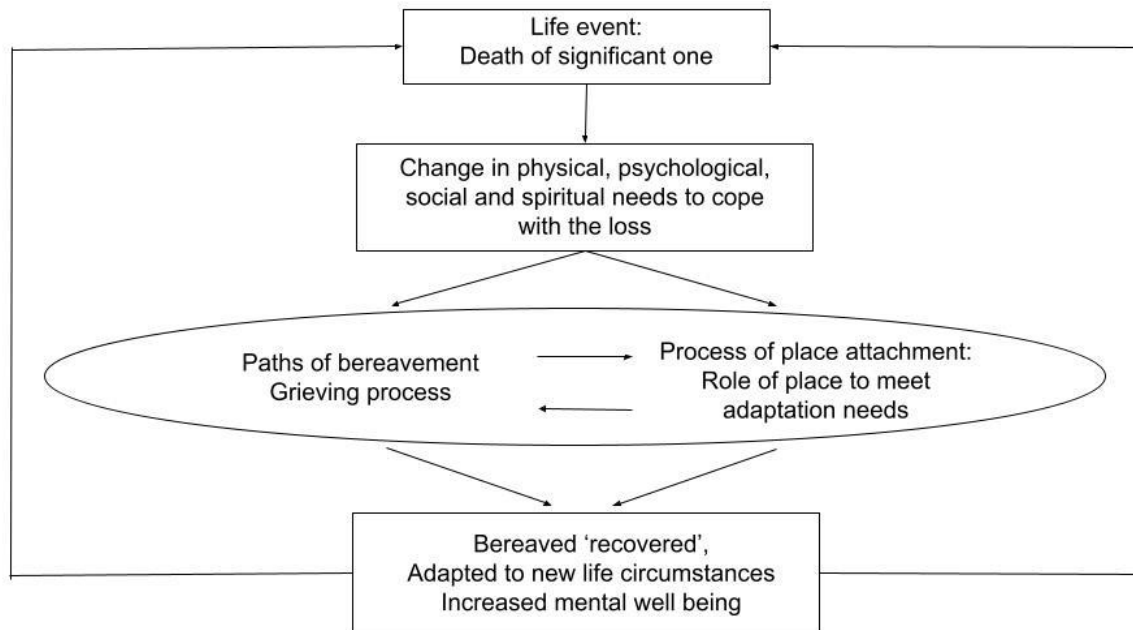


Figure 3: Conceptual framework based on the literature review.

2.6. Expectations

During the grieving process that precedes or follows the death of a loved one, the place(s) the bereaved turn to or that become more meaningful, are expected to be related with the arising needs of the bereaved as a result of the loss of a loved one and its multiple implications. Given that benefits of attaching to objects related to a former home range from maintaining a sense of identity to being able to recall and reminisce about pleasant memories associated with their former home (Stevens et al., 2019; Meijering & Lager, 2014), makes that, in this study, the meanings that certain places hold for the bereaved, are expected to be associated with a former loved one as well and be as diverse in nature as the ways in which the bereaved cope with loss. The process of place attachment after bereavement is not only expected to reflect the nature of the grieving process and the arisen needs of the bereaved, but also to speed up the grieving process ultimately leading to a recovered or increased wellbeing. Put differently, the needs of the bereaved that had arisen during the coping with their loss are expected to be related to the grieving process in various different ways. Although the emphasis in this study is on both public and private places that the bereaved feel attached to (Scannell & Gifford, 2010), linking objects (Hall, 2014) associated with their deceased loved ones are considered to be equally meaningful. Lastly, given that this study has taken place during the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated lockdowns, it is expected that the bereaved will

turn to more private places, instead of mourning at public places such as crematoria and cemeteries, mainly because of the lockdowns and restrictions on social distancing and number of visitors.

3. Methodology

Following the recent theory on bereavement and the various grieving models, this research aimed to focus on the role of place in processing the loss of a significant loved one. Place meaning and grieving experiences are subjective in nature and difficult to measure through quantitative research methods. In order to study experiences or perspectives of participants, this study required an interpretive approach to listen to people tell their personal stories (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011). To achieve this and given the COVID-19 lockdowns in 2021, I mainly conducted remote, in-depth interviews coupled with photo-elicitation by people who have recently lost a significant one and, in case the travel restrictions are lifted, I conducted the interviews in person. The observations of places were conducted first, whereafter researcher and participant discussed the meaning of these places during the interview.

3.1. Participant recruitment

Participant recruitment was initially attempted through dispersion of 100 flyers (Appendix E) throughout the neighborhood and a recruitment call on my personal social network on Facebook. After the first participant was found through my personal network, participants were contacted through a next recruitment strategy, snowball sampling, which proved to be more effective. Snowball sampling made it easier for me to get in contact with bereaved by asking relatives and former participants if they knew other recently bereaved people who might have been interested in participating. It appeared that through this personal approach, potential participants felt more inclined to take part in this study for several reasons: not only was I occasionally introduced as related to their fellow bereaved friend or relative, but also I was introduced, making me come across more as a familiar, trustworthy person who could describe the interview process and alleviate any concerns, thus potentially increasing participation in the study (Hutter & Hennink, 2011). However, the snowball recruitment stalled at the point when only bereaved related to a similar deceased person could be recruited. Given the association between lack of preparedness among suddenly bereaved persons and higher mortality, along with the lack of research on this particular group of bereaved people, one suddenly bereaved participant was sought so that I could explore ways in which this person coped with loss.

Initially, the aim was to recruit 8-10 participants from different backgrounds (age, gender, profession), for they were expected to have different understandings of place attachment (Gospodini, 2014), thus yielding more diverse insights (Vaseileiou et al., 2018). In case the number of participants interested in participating in the study would be higher than ten, selection of participants would have been

aimed at increasing the diversity of insights. With retrospect, I encountered difficulties in recruiting young male participants. The most bereaved males I managed to get into contact with, indicated that they were either occupied with work/family activities or that they found their experiences too personal and sensitive to share. According to Cook (1988) and Maes (2012), men tend to choose strategies such as thinking and doing something else, with most of their emotional releases taking place in private, whereas women tend to talk about the deceased to keep them alive. Given the timeframe of this thesis and the stalling of the snowball recruitment, observations and interviews were conducted with six bereaved participants.

3.2. Study population and context

The interviews are conducted 4-18 months after the participants have lost their loved ones, during the months May to August 2021 and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study population consists of six bereaved people in the Netherlands, all of whom are native Dutch speakers, who have lost a significant other (parent, partner and brother). In table 1 below, the participants in this study and some background information are introduced.

Table 1: Pseudonyms and background information of the study participants.

Pseudonym	Age-group	Gender	Person lost	Interview location	Time since bereavement
<i>Violet</i>	35-40	Female	Father	Online meeting	11 months
<i>Linn</i>	30-35	Female	Mother	Online meeting	6 months
<i>Maria</i>	60-65	Female	Father	Online meeting	6,5 months
<i>Roos</i>	55-60	Female	Mother	Online meeting	4,5 months
<i>Sem</i>	65-70	Male	Wife	Participant's home	18 months
<i>Frank</i>	65-70	Male	Brother	Billiard café	18months

In this period social distancing, isolation and quarantine was described as the ‘new normal’, the everyday lives of many people had changed drastically (Cabrera-Barona & Carrion, 2020). The pandemic itself has remained a sensitive topic, because its associated restrictions may have caused emotional or psychological problems, such as acute stress disorder and feelings of fear, tension, sadness, and numbness (Brooks et al., 2020; Cabrera-Barona & Carrión, 2020). In the Netherlands in times of COVID-19, three out of ten

people experienced feelings of loneliness (Van Engeland & Kanne, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity to shed new light on the connection between grieving people and place.

3.3. Data collection methods

3.3.1. Semi-structured in-depth interviews

Interviewing was selected as the primary data collection method, because interviews allow to gather detailed information and to follow up on new and unexpected topics that emerge during the conversation. Trusting in emergence and learning from your participants are hallmarks of qualitative research. In this study, the interviews were held in Dutch and started off with both light and general questions to help the participant feel more at ease (Hay, 2016) and to build rapport, followed by more focused and reflective questions that gradually became more sensitive as the participant got more accustomed to being interviewed. In order to make the participants feel at ease during the interview, allowing them to feel comfortable, open up and tell their stories to reach depth in the data, I have been building rapport with the participant. Prior to the interview, I focused on removing doubts or any arisen unclarities the participants; in case these were unclear to me, I asked them to explain them to me. During the interview this was attempted through the wearing of neutral clothing, by introducing myself, my personal experience with bereavement and the research I was conducting. Additionally, I used nodding, words and noises of confirmation, attaching positive responses to good memories, smiles and the raising of eyebrows during the interviews. After participants had given their consent, I started off with easy-to-answer questions to make the participants get comfortable with being interviewed. After a few introductory questions, I proceeded with more personal and sensitive questions, where I asked the participants about the deceased, both their backgrounds and their relationships with them; to elaborate on their choice of photographs of places. At that point I was letting the participant choose the direction of the interview. During the final part of the interview, I aimed to close off with some easy-to-answer questions again, asking the participants how they experienced the interview and if they had any more additions or remaining questions (Appendix B). Finally I expressed my gratitude once more for participation and the sharing of their story and sensitive information.

The interviews were held in a semi-structured form, which provided enough space for spontaneity and flexibility, whilst maintaining focus (Hay, 2016). The main structure of the interview guide (Appendix B) was based on the person, place and process components of Scannell & Gifford's (2010, p. 2) model for place attachment and the main processes and terminology used in grief models (Chapter 2). The concepts used for the structuring of the interview guide and their operationalization are found in appendix B. A carefully worded semi-structured interview guide was preferred over a more structured one, because it offered the participant the opportunity to talk more freely and go off on tangents that the

researcher could not prepare for; this brought forth interesting, inductive aspects and insights on attachment to place after bereavement. Challenges could have arisen as questions that were too planned may sometimes have appeared out of place (Hay, 2016). The aim was to avoid this by allowing the interview discussion to develop naturally, by probing after each question and by asking questions in an order according to relevance instead of asking each one in order.

Given the travel restrictions associated with Covid-19, four of the recorded interviews, with a duration ranging between 45-75 minutes, took place online through google-meet. Among the advantages of online interviewing were that both the participant and researcher could find a comfortable and safe space without any disturbances, such as a private office. During two interviews, some questions and comments were repeated due to internet connection lag. Four of the interviews were conducted online, which raises the ethical issue of confidentiality and impacts how we perceive participants (Maher et al., 2018). The online environment might have affected the understanding and interpretations of both parties. This proved particularly challenging in qualitative research, as part of interviewing was about interpreting meanings through the manner in which things were conveyed (Hay, 2016). After the travel restrictions were lifted, the last two interview meetings took place in person and both the interviewer and interviewee had carried out a COVID-test beforehand. These interviews were conducted in a neutral and quiet environment of the participant's choosing, recording was performed using a mobile phone and fieldnotes were written to document body-language and tone to make later interpretation more accurate.

Participants and peers from former interviews that I conducted have pointed out that my way of interviewing was influencing the data collection in a few ways: sometimes I could get somewhat overenthusiastic during the answering of the participant which makes the participants feel comfortable and heard, but at a few moments this resulted in me cutting off their answers or steering too much in certain directions, especially in situations where I could personally relate to an opinion, phenomenon or thought. In this way I might have distracted the participant from telling their full story, which might have led to less in-depth answers from the participant. I attempted to avoid this by nodding enthusiastically and waiting until the participants have clearly finished their answers. By observing myself observing in the interview recordings, I noticed that during the first two interviews, I lost focus at some points because I was performing too many tasks simultaneously (listening, confirming, making notes on body language, finding probe possibilities), which might have resulted in a somewhat distracted or less interested attitude from my side at some points. At the end of each interview the participant was asked whether there was something missed or they would want to add something to what was discussed during the interview.

3.3.2. Photo elicitation

Observations of place through walk-along interviews was the preferred method at the onset of this study, but this was obstructed by the COVID-19 safety measures. As an alternative and in order to still capture observations of the physical context of places that grieving people attach to, participants were asked to take pictures of places that were meaningful to them during their grieving processes. By photographing their meaningful places, the participants were enabled to influence the direction of the interview, making them more relaxed and prepared because they knew what the content of the interview would be (Glaw et al., 2017). Besides, photo-elicitation holds the potential to open up unexpected insights for analysis and help us better understand participants' social worlds and meanings, which is consistent with the paradigm of qualitative research (Meo, 2010; Charmaz, 2008). The advantage of using photo elicitation as a data collection method is further supported by Hay (2016, p.285): "Photographs whose spatial dimensions correspond with those of the physical object being depicted, are more realistic than graphs, whose spatial dimensions represent nonspatial quantitative data or diagrams in which spatial relations are topological." Thus, the combination of photo elicitation and conceptual thought coupled with textual analysis creates a new and valid research process (Hay, 2016). Given the notions above and the interpretive nature of this study, photo-elicitation is regarded an highly suitable method that prepared and empowered the participants to tell their stories during the follow up interviews and thus increasing the potential of acquiring inductive findings and theory.

Following Hutter & Hennink (2011, p.19), the interpretive approach acknowledges that the researcher's background, position or emotions are an integral part of the process of producing data. The manner in which pictures were selected by the participants depended on the interpretation of the instruction provided by the researcher (Appendix C); here the participants were asked to send in photographs of places or objects that they started visiting more frequently, or which became more meaningful after the death of their significant one. The manner in which pictures were selected depended on the interpretation of the assignment and the way it was explained by the researchers. There is a performative aspect to the selection process as participants have likely shared the photos they have positive associations with, which assumably has led to a positive bias. Also, depressed individuals might not have felt a need to talk about or be confronted with the reality of their loss. For this reason, my account presents a somewhat optimistic or idealized version of participants' grieving processes.

3.4. Ethical considerations

Before starting the data collection, the participants were asked for their informed consent to the recording of the interview, for including their photo elicitation images in the final report and for their participation in this study in general by marking checkboxes on the written consent form (Appendix D). In case the

interview took place online, the consent form was sent to the participants before the interview took place; they were asked to verbally consent after the researcher had read the information to them out loud.

Analyzing object or place attachment of the bereaved has been used as indirect and anticipated less sensitive way of exploring ways in which bereaved individuals cope with loss to improve their wellbeing. Given the sensitivity of the research topic; if any participant would experience severe emotional distress, I would have been able to provide the contact information of ‘MIND Korrelatie’, a free and online accessible professional psychological service. This contact information was added to the informed consent form as well. It was expected that most participants would feel emotional at some point during the interviews; to minimize potential harm to the participants, I expressed my gratitude for sharing their sensitive information, emphasized that it was normal to be emotional and offered to take a pause or shifted focus towards a less sensitive part of the interview.

In this qualitative research it was difficult to assure complete confidentiality because research quotations are included in the report. The necessity of the participants remaining anonymous throughout the research process, was because the exploration of strong emotional experiences and meanings were expected to potentially contain highly personal and sensitive information about the participants. This was primarily aimed for by informing the participants about their data being stored carefully and that their information would be used for educational purposes only. Additionally and to further enhance anonymity in this study, not only the participants’ names were replaced by pseudonyms, but also any text (e.g. mother’s name; name of street of residence) that may have indirectly identified a participant was pseudonymized (Hutter & Hennink, 2011). And lastly, photographs with recognizable faces were blurred.

The recordings of the interviews and the photos that the participants sent in could not be kept completely confidential as they have been shared online. As recommended by the university of Groningen to her staff and students, these files have been shared through SURFfilesender, because this digital service enables the researcher to send and receive large files that are securely encrypted (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, n.d.). In this study Google Meet has been used via my personal university account to record interviews and for data storage, because at the time of data collection this was regarded as the safest medium, as Google had taken extra security measures to ensure privacy (Hasani, 2020). The interview recordings were stored on USB, after they were imported through the researcher’s university account, which was protected by authentication.

3.5. Positionality of the researcher and reflexivity in the study

As Moos (1995) wrote, how grief is defined and observed, depends on the perspective of the researcher. My most profound personal grieving process experience, albeit 16 years ago, was when my mother died

of lung cancer after a very brief period of sickness. In my grieving experience, I noticed that talking with other bereaved individuals helped in the processing of my loss. Besides, during my period of studying I noticed that many people shared sensitive and confidential personal information with me, which made me start thinking of a qualitative master thesis topic. When I conducted an interview with a woman about her experience of visiting the 'Lichtjesavond' event on a war cemetery, she explained that during this ceremony, attended by hundreds of people, she would think of her deceased father and hypothetically tell him that she felt very happy with her husband. Her fascinating story made me reflect on my own loss as well and I found it interesting that certain places or events could trigger a personal emotional reaction. Above all, it made me highly curious about other places that help bereaved in the Netherlands to cope with bereavement. Regarding the theoretical background of this study, my personal experience with grieving was that the process does not have a certain duration, starting point or end and can cause emotional experiences at unexpected moments or places.

As a bereaved researcher I aimed to use the lens of my own past experiences in making meaning of the narratives of the bereaved individuals. At some points during the first interviews, when the participants were asked what forms of support they experienced as uncomfortable, many could not come up with a particular saying or specific moment. However, when I shared one of my own experiences as an example or reference, in some occasions it helped them to think in another direction or understand the question better, enabling the participants to find an answer.

Regarding power relations, prior to the interviews I am aware of the fact that participants might feel uncomfortable talking to a stranger and researcher about such a personal and emotional topic. During some of the conversations with participants this seemed to be apparent: some of the participants acted a bit retained at first, mostly because of a long introduction, but as soon as I started building rapport and showed interest in their educational or occupational background, this uncertainty disappeared. During and after the interviews, some of the participants explicitly mentioned they were happy with my interest in their stories and some expressed to feel relieved to be able to tell their story. The photo-elicitation and the in-depth dialogue during the interviews together constituted a powerful and deep reflection exercise: through selecting objects/places, photographs and dialogue the bereaved were empowered to give shape and words how one has changed as a person since the loss, both in relation to oneself and in relation to the environment (Hooghe et al., 2018); through this transformative reflexivity both researcher and participants reflected on their (mis)understandings and negotiate the meanings of information generated together (Crang, 2003). Because the bereaved were provided with opportunity to tell their stories, reflect on their grieving process and were additionally gifted a homemade personal thank you card, the relationships between the participants and me were deemed reciprocal: "the researcher and the researched

were in comparable social positions and have relatively equal benefits and costs from participating in the research” (Hay, 2016, p.36).

3.6. Data analysis

3.6.1. Analytical approach

The analytical method used in this study was the constructivist grounded theory process as described by Hutter & Hennink (2011) and Charmaz (2008; 2017). Constructivist grounded theory was deemed a highly suitable method to examine subjective experiences of grief and place-meanings for multiple reasons. First, “the verbatim transcripts allowed the researcher to understand the views of study participants in their own words (the emic perspective), interpret their meanings and form conclusions that are well rooted in the data” (Hutter & Hennink, 2011, p. 208). To further aim for the emic perspective, *vivo* codes were used, extracting specific phrases or metaphors used by the participants that refer to a specific concept. Secondly, the research cycle enabled me to collect and analyze data using both inductive and deductive theory in a circular way, to reach the depth in the data that was required to ultimately construct inductive analytical concepts.

Constructivist grounded theory was described as inductive, indeterminate and open-ended: an emergent method that ‘begins with the empirical world and builds an inductive understanding of it as events unfold and knowledge accrues’ (Charmaz, 2008, p. 155). Constructivist grounded theory went further than other qualitative approaches in two ways. First, constructivist grounded theory systematically brings doubt into the analytic process, e.g. by grappling with preconceptions, I aimed to develop a methodological self-consciousness to turn a deeply reflexive gaze back on myself and the research process as well as on the empirical world. This methodological self-consciousness required scrutinizing my position, privileges, and priorities and assessing how they affected the steps during the research process and my relationships with research participants. Thus, engaging in this kind of reflexivity profoundly affected the practice of constructivist grounded theory in critical inquiry and it shaped the ways in which I proceeded with analysis (Charmaz, 2017; Hay, 2016). Second, using constructivist grounded theory aimed to design and fit methodological strategies to explore what the researcher discovers along the way (Hay, 2016). To enhance transparency, rigor and trustworthiness of the research process I used analytical- and reflexive memo writing both on paper and in Atlas.ti. Moving back and forth between the design-, ethnographic- and analytical cycles I have continuously reflected on the decisions made and documented every step (Berger, 2016). For example, after an interview took place, I made notes in case a question seemed irrelevant; if I excluded these later on, I documented that choice as well.

Participants from different age groups and with different social and cultural backgrounds were recruited to make this research approach transferable and comparable to familial contexts and relationships. Underpinned by constructivist grounded theory which pointed to how theory is constructed in dialogue between the researcher and participants, purposive sampling was engaged to generate data on both the expectations and aspirations of those who were aging and contemplating the prospect of having support needs and the aspirations and practices of younger participants with regard to providing help, support, and care for older family members (Conlon et al., 2020, p.941). Although I only managed to recruit participants from two generations, the data nonetheless yielded multiple accounts of the meaning and practice of solidarity within familial relationships.

3.6.2. Data transcription

Before the analysis took place the interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, where focus was put on the informational content of the interview and the social or cultural meanings attached to it. Therefore, the transcripts of this grounded theory research were word-for-word replicas of the words spoken in the interview, including some aspects of speech that would help to interpret the meaning of what has been said (Hutter & Hennink, 2011). The transcribed content of the first two interviews was checked by both supervisors, which further adds to the validity of this study (Tong et al., 2007). The transcription of the interviews was conducted using the program oTranscribe, which did not store the recording of the interviews and transcripts. This program enabled me to transcribe more easily because it included shortcuts to couple quotations with a time-marks and to rewind the recording swiftly.

3.6.3. Coding process

Before conducting interviews, a preliminary deductive codebook was developed based on the place attachment process (Figure 2). The first parts of the interview, including the questions on personal experience of the grieving process, relationship with the bereaved and social arena, were coded inductively in the first coding round. The second part, where we discussed their pictures of places and objects, were coded deductively. In the second coding round, attention was paid to inductively code and name the arisen needs and the facets of loss that the bereaved are missing, the way(s) in which participants felt they adapted to their loss or how they had changed and their strategies, to cope with bereavement to improve their wellbeing (Figure 3). The commonalities and contrasts between the interviewees were interpreted multiple times over. The validity of inductive codes was determined by identifying whether the issue was repeated across different interviews or highlighted by participants themselves as an important issue (Hutter & Hennink, 2011). During the coding process, much attention was paid to other subtleties such as emotions expressed by the participants, points where emphasis was given and specific words or phrases used to describe phenomena in order to approach the emic

perspective. For example, during the final interview with Frank, he did not think that people adapt to a loss, but rather learn to live with it; this was also mentioned in different words by Violet and Sem. This resulted in that during the third coding round several codes were renamed and recategorized to ways of coping with loss instead of ways of adapting to loss.

Finally, a selective coding step aimed to construct themes with the code categories and then reread the transcripts to refine categories or codes once more. The latter two processes were conducted two times, to explore a broader and more diverse understanding of the phenomena (Tong et al., 2007). Description and thoughts of concepts, categories and comparisons were documented in code memos. In most cases inconsistencies or improbabilities could be explained by theory, the participants' background information or related the concepts and models presented in the theoretical framework section and the inductive model (Figure 8) in particular, which is described and explained in the next chapter.

4. Findings

Participants were asked how they coped with their loss to improve their wellbeing and to which meaningful places they felt more attached to during their grieving process. The varied strategies and experiences of the bereaved in this study are described in this chapter. Following the model in figure 8 (Section 4.7), the first section of this chapter is about grief work conducted by the participants prior to the death of their significant other. In the second section the acceptance and realization of the implications of loss are described, followed by a third section on how participants find a balance between engaging in grief work (confrontation) and going on with daily life (avoidance), individual grief and group-level grief work; intentional grief and instinctive grief. The fourth section (Section 4.4) describes the ways in which the bereaved adapt or adjust to loss, from ‘finding benefit-meaning’ and live on with their loss. In section 4.5 the main ‘outcomes of grief’ are explained and the chapter is concluded with a section (4.6) which brings the findings and main themes together in a new and inductive conceptual model.

4.1. Pre-loss, anticipatory grief

In case the deceased was going through a long-term sickness such as cancer, depression or the process of euthanasia, three bereaved loved ones indicated that they experienced anticipated grief reactions prior to the death. These participants described this as a difficult and emotional period in which they started realizing their loved one was going to die, yet it did allow them more time to anticipate their loss by preparing a suitable goodbye, settle disputes or to fulfill the last wishes of their significant other. For example, during and after her parents moved house, Violet spent all of her spare time taking care of her father at home and witnessed him passing away slowly.

Violet (36): ‘Yeah, you know my father, how incredibly busy.. and always wanting to be in control of everything and.. and now he had to submit to a certain situation, for example that he did not want to open his mail anymore.. that I took over that task (...) that you already, uhm.. have said goodbye to a certain person, or that you notice that.. oh, you are still my dad, but no longer the person that you have always been (...) Yeah and I think that you automatically start to say goodbye (...) and uhm.. that is at the moment of passing, you think it sucks, but uhm.. it is also a relief, as: finally, we made it through [je hebt dus zoiets van da's kut, maar...ehh.. het is ook een opluchting, van: hè hè, we hebben ‘t erop zitten]’¹

¹ In the quotes that proved difficult to translate accurately, the original Dutch quote is placed in between brackets.

Violet realized that her dad's health was declining fast and he appeared not as energetic, capable and optimistic as before. The fact that Violet described her feeling after her father's passing away as a relief, implies that this period of realization of declining health prior to her father's death was experienced as the most stressful part of her grieving process. At the point where Violet and her dad started to realize that he did not have much time left, they anticipated his death in a few ways. First, the extra time enabled them to anticipate his death by fulfilling his last wish: the organization of what they called a 'living funeral' for his close family and friends. Due to the travel restrictions associated with Covid-19, the family decided to visit amusement park 'Efteling' instead of making the planned trips to South-Africa and France. Additionally, Violet and her sister decided to celebrate their birthdays together to make sure their dad could attend as well, because their dad was not likely to make it until the younger sister's birthday. Throughout his life, Violet's father used to frequently take his close friends and family on trips to destinations all over the world. The living funeral and the merger of birthday parties allowed the family two more opportunities to enjoy what they realized would be their last happy family trips together with dad; in this way, they were gradually and mentally prepared for the life without their father. Violet explained that after this living funeral and visit to the Efteling, the family decided to go to the amusement parc on a regular basis and through this tradition they seem to prevent a part of their loss by taking over the organizing role of their soon-to-be deceased father; simultaneously commemorate him.

A different form of anticipatory grief, managed with a coping strategy, is described by Linn (31), who had moved out of her parental home in 2016 and broken contact with her mother because of unfortunate events and related arguments. Linn explained that her grieving process started at the moment she left her parental home, while her mother was still in good health.

Linn (31): And because of that, uhm (...) I've had many talks with my mother to get some of our issues out of the way for myself, because of all that has been said and what happened in my youth, so I (...) [om toch voor mezelf toch ook wat issues los te kunnen laten omdat alles wat in mijn jeugd gebeurd is of gezegd is of gedaan is, dus ik...] basically I had a very long grieving process (...) Yeah, really, yeah I thought I had to do that to close that chapter for myself and uhm... that did not go easily, because, in fact, two days before she passed away I still felt I had to say so many things, as if I felt that it was the last time I could say something to her.. but we closed it well, no hate or envy or something like that, like: 'alright, we cleared our conscience, it happened and we have to move on. And in the end, after that conversation she managed to accept it fast, so that is really bizarre.' [En uiteindelijk heeft ze na dat gesprek het eigenlijk heel snel losgelaten dus dat is wel heel bizar.]

Linn started visiting her mother at her sickbed to attempt settle past disputes and by taking the opportunity to clear part of her conscience, she protected herself from having potential feelings of regret - of not having taken the opportunity to make amends - afterwards. Their personal goodbye was experienced as coming to a mutual understanding in a forgiving and friendly way. Roos (58) experienced a similar satisfactory closure when going through her mother's process of euthanasia, where she had multiple talks with their general practitioner and both parents. Roos' mother organized a last family dinner on the evening of euthanasia and expressed to be happy to end with her family around her.

In contrast to a long period of sickness and time to anticipate Linn's, Roos' and Violet's losses, Sem (68) had no clue that his wife was about to die. Despite the fact that Sem's wife was suffering from cancer for four years and her health state had worsened, Sem remained convinced she would recover from her sickness eventually.

Sem: Never had that [feeling she was going to die]... let's say the two of us, we... And she never spoke about death either... She said: 'Well, I will get better' and I shared that same strong feeling... that she would recover. I think she knows [knew] deep in her hearth [she would die], but she never said.. that it might be one of the last times [they would be able to have a conversation]. I was in shock, yeah.. in February I was in shock, I could not arrange anything. The children have been arranging the cremation, they did all the work.'

The additional time to anticipate their losses enabled Linn and Violet to arrange a meaningful funeral or cremation and a satisfactory personal goodbye, however not for Sem, who would experience a period of shock and worse wellbeing state. The experiences described in this section suggest that having more time to anticipate the loss of a significant other protects the wellbeing of bereaved from the shock and distress that an imminent loss and its overwhelming implications brings; instead, it allows the bereaved to cope with realizations of several implications of a loss in order.

4.2. Realization and acceptance of loss and its implications: loss-oriented grief

A few important realizations that make loss more bearable were described by the participants as the realness and severity of (painful consequences of) loss, the inability to avoid confrontation with its multiple implications in various, usually unexpected circumstances and the inability to not express sad emotions in company of others. When the bereaved, be it either individually or through interaction with others, reflect on difficult moments and the realizations that come with it, they find meaning(s) in their loss that alleviates distress.

For example, one and a half years after the passing away of his wife, Sem has accepted the loss of his wife, yet he was still confronted with his immeasurable loss frequently.

Sem: Yeah, you know what it is? The way I see it.. the acceptance that she is sick, you [I] accepted that long ago (...) The sorrow of her being gone, you [I] have already accepted that as well. And now it is just the missing of this and that, because look (...) I sometimes get jealous of older people who are still able to do all these things together, that makes me very jealous. (...) That's when it hits me (...) we could do so many things together [if she were still alive] she likes going for walks, but not on her own (...) And I think that I want to walk in company (...) talking about this and that, I prefer that over going alone. Going for walks with her, sometimes we don't talk much, but we are still together (...) When I see people, older people, but also younger people, going for a walk together, that hurts a bit. When I realize that other people can still go for walks together, I have to do it on my own.

Sem realizes he does not like going for walks on his own and this makes him think about his wife telling him to look for a new partner. If he would eventually find a new walking partner, Sem would find benefit from this meaning of loss and alleviate his distress.

Frank (69), of similar age as Sem, lost his brother and best friend around the same time as Sem lost his wife, feels that the ability to accept and put a loss into perspective helps to cope with loss and that it is a skill that improves with age and former experiences of loss. This notion appears to be confirmed by Violet (36), who described that a year after losing her father she was experiencing a tough period and a burnout due to a lack of relaxation. Shortly before the passing away of her father she lost her job at a local store, which closed due to COVID-19 restrictions on social distancing. Although Violet puts her loss into perspective by saying that many people are feeling bad in times of COVID-19, she appeared to marginalize her losses and suppress her emotions.

Violet: The constant asking of people, how are you doing, how are you doing? Uhm (...) especially in the shop where I was working, you know (...) they are not your friends, they only ask out of courtesy, like 'how are you?' and at some point I found it annoying to constantly answer with 'I'm doing fine, I'm doing fine'

Roel: Okay. (...) So, uhm (...) then it feels a bit (...)

Violet: Yeah, (...) fake. (...) Yeah (...) I thought it was annoying that I didn't get the distraction, that you can't act as if the world is normal again for just a moment (...)

and, uhm (...) the constant act (...) that some days are better than other days (...) but those people, it is none of their business that I feel bad at that moment.

In this quote Violet claimed to be fine on the one hand while feeling bad at the same time, implies that Violet impeded support from people she did not feel close with. During the interview she was drinking wine and found it difficult to come up with examples of positive support and imputes the lack thereof to the COVID-19 restrictions at that time; this seems to have obstructed her to express her feelings because she does not feel comfortable or legitimated to do so in her working environment. Aside from being confronted with her loss by colleagues who curiously and carefully attempt to gauge how she was doing, Violet pointed out that she attempted to improve her wellbeing by seeking distraction and relaxation by listening to audiobooks, playing computer games and engaging in creative hobbies at home. The losses of her job and father seemed to have complicated her grief.

Maria felt sad and confronted with the loss of her father when she sees an old man talking to his daughter on television, which reminds her of how her father used to cheer her up. It made her realize that her deceased father was a main source of inspiration for her work in the classroom through his capability to create a positive atmosphere with simple humor, optimism and working spirit. Although she did not explicitly mention so, Maria seems to have attempted to hide her emotions and pain in front of the children in her classroom in order to be as inspirational and positive to and concerned with them as her father was to her.

4.3. Balancing during the grieving process

In contrast to Violet's ability to avoid confrontation with her loss and related sad feelings to a large extent, Sem (68), who lost his wife one and a half year earlier, mentioned that he could not escape his sorrow during the early stages of his grieving process, although initially he attempted to hide his tears and pain from his two youngest children. His children, living in their parental home, described Sem's mornings during the first two months of bereavement as "dad's usual daily minutes of crying". Multiple times during the interview, Sem emphasized that 'letting his emotions run their course at the coffee table' in the morning had done him much good and made him feel considerably better. The fact that Sem was confronted with sad emotions every morning and he could not start his day without his wife is explained by their habit of starting their day together at the coffee table. This might have meant that Sem could not avoid confrontation with his loss in that particular place in the morning. In contrast, both Violet and Frank (who lost his brother and best friend one and a half years earlier) described that they experienced confrontation with their loss and the associated sad emotions at random moments, which is in line with the fact that most of their contact took place impulsively and they avoided certain places of confrontation.

Their weekly meeting routine took place in the café (to play billiards) and at their former soccer club (to watch games), places that Frank avoided after bereavement.

Intentional or conscious grieving was described by Sem as follows: at the coffee table he would turn on his deceased wife's favorite music to access memories of the good times they experienced together or trumpet music that she loved, which reminded Sem that he taught himself to play trumpet for her. Although such confrontations with his loss made him feel very emotional, at the same time these memories are interpreted to make Sem realize they had a happy life together. This form of pride appeared to have given Sem the strength and motivation to move on without his beloved wife. Similar to Sem's initial attempts to hide his tears and sorrow from his children, teacher Maria (60) described the fear of her emotions taking over in case the children in her class - with whom she had a strong bond - would curiously ask about her deceased father:

Maria: I had to cry so often and I was afraid that when I stood in front of the classroom, I had to cry again. I thought: 'Oh my (...) and if someone asks about (...)', because those children, they are all so sweet and they (...) of course they would sympathize and then I think; 'Oh, what will they ask next?', but yeah (...) it turned out that I didn't have to go to school because of the lockdown.. So I could just turn off the camera, you know, if it wouldn't be fine, so.. yeah.. but also, it was less demanding this way, that's the positive side and on the other hand I was less distracted, so for a moment I was completely immersed (...) which maybe wasn't that bad, because otherwise I would have the tendency to avoid it (...) but in this case that was not possible. So, uhm (...) you could not go anywhere, there were no children who demanded much attention, only in this way with the screen, yeah (smiles).

Maria and Violet both attempted to suppress their feelings and emotions and palliate their losses in their working place. In contrast to Violet, who was able and wanted to avoid confrontation with her loss in most occasions, Maria had fewer opportunities to avoid the implications of her loss, except the lockdown mentioned above. Maria describes three additional confrontational events in early phase of her grieving process: the first was on her deceased father's birthday, the second during a family dinner for Christmas and the third on father's day. In all three occasions, a close relative spoke a few words about the father being absent for the first time.

Maria: Together, my mother and uhm (...) my sister and uhm (...) my children and their wives and, uhm (...) [name husband] and my granddaughter and all of them and then we had a barbecue, well that is a lot of bustle and (...) then [son's name] said, at

some point he said: 'well, we are going..', he says, 'we are going to give a toast to grandpa, because this is the first time he is not here!' and that was a painful moment and sad, but it was beautiful at the same time! (...) It had been named, yes (...) So it had been named and we toasted and afterwards we enjoyed the evening together, uhm (...) yeah, without my dad being there.

By simply naming the absence of the deceased at that moment, the lingering pain of the family's loss is confirmed and shared within the family. In this way Maria's son indirectly pointed out that it is normal to still feel the sting of loss and by not explicitly defining the meaning of the loss, it remained open for interpretation for each family member individually. This is interpreted as a form of collective grieving. Roos, mentioned that she celebrated Mother's Day with her brother, sister and father to go through photo albums to retract joyful memories of her mother, which is another collective grieving strategy.

Roel: Yes, why do you feel that you have to celebrate [Mother's Day]?

Roos: Yes. Right, uhm (...) then the realization comes that she is no longer (...) there. Then you will start to get that, uhm (...) and, uhm (...) yeah, that you have celebrated it last year and, uhm (...) then you can still see the pictures and, uhm (...) yeah, that (...) I am not in the phase that I celebrate Mother's Day because I had a mother [laughs loudly] uhm (...) it is not like that, but more like (...) yeah, that (...) Yes, but it also becomes painfully clear that she is no longer there.

Roos explained that talking about her mother with her close family on such confrontational moments helps to let their loss land. As a registered nurse, Roos took the initiative to facilitate such meetings and described her father's need of support, his open-heartedness and her need to talk about her mother as the main motives to meet and commemorate their deceased mother and wife. Frank, on the other hand, considered it 'to be a mockery' if he and his family would need to put such effort to process the loss of his deceased brother. Frank prefers to grieve individually. However, Frank did feel the same need as Maria and Roos to console his late brother's wife personally. Frank supported her by calling her on his brother's birthday and expressing his sad feelings at such a day. Additionally; in order to memorate a meaningful part of his personal loss, Frank kept his deceased brother's billiard cue and casing next to his front door as a constant reminder of joyful memories (Figure 4). Despite the fact that Frank avoided the local café after his brother passed away and the confrontation with the loss of practicing their favorite sport with it, the cue case makes Frank feel better. He explained that he let the casing be signed with his brother's name

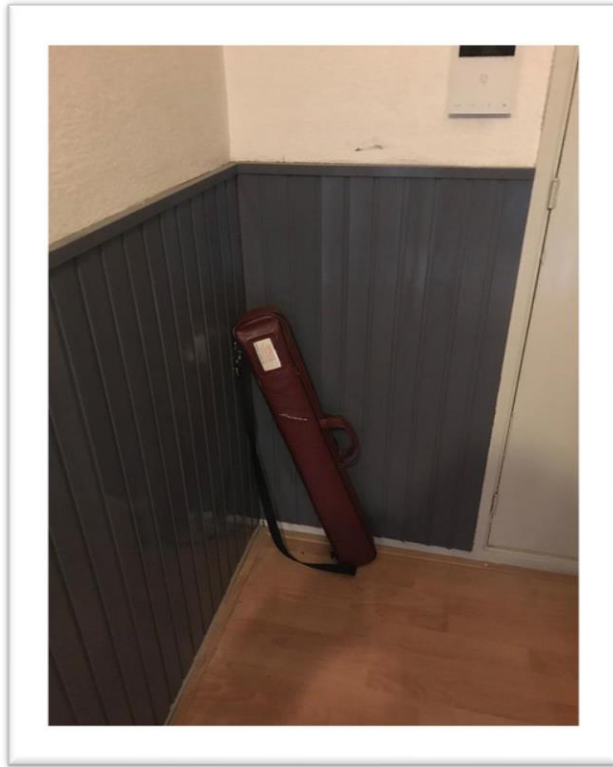


Figure 4: Frank's deceased brother's billiard cue and casing, positioned next to his front door.

and the name of the local café and gave the casing as a present to his brother. Although Frank did not explicitly mention so, the position of the cue next to the door is interpreted to relate to Frank's memories of his brother taking him on walks in order to rehabilitate from a severe hernia, symbolizing their mutual friendship and fraternal bond. Comparable to Sem listening to trumpet music in the kitchen in the morning, Frank placed the cue casing, which he called a sign of tribute, next to his front door to be reminded of joyful memories of his brother frequently.

Generally speaking, participants implied that they had actively avoided sad feelings, emotional moments or talks about the deceased in the first two years after the passing away. Although the confrontation with the implications of loss are described by the participants as difficult in the moment itself, they felt better afterwards. By sharing the lingering pain of loss, connecting emotionally to close ones within the social arena and letting emotions run their course made participants feel better. This makes that successful mourning is considered to be able to move back and forth between avoidance and confrontation, individual and collective grieving work, between distance and proximity, between dwelling on the loss and reorganizing life, between taking apart and putting back together, between living without and living with. In this way the many implications and meaning of loss are found and coped with over a longer period of time.

4.4. Adjusting to & finding benefit from the loss: restoration-oriented grief

Participants in this study described several different forms of consoling fellow bereaved, that helped them find direction in their grieving process, find meaning of their loss or, forms of consolation that made them feel better. In the times of COVID-19 lockdowns, bereaved in this study mainly found their support in close family members and friends. In a private setting, the bereaved feel comfortable enough to talk about their loss and its associated feelings in an open-hearted manner.

For one and a half months Sem and his children slept together in Sem's bedroom, to be together during the difficult times and to make sure they would not feel alone at night; in this way substituting the role of their caregiving mother and wife. Roos' pictures of places reflect her and her dad's confusion in the shifting roles within the family and the redistribution of housekeeping tasks. After Roos' mother died, her cat approached and attached to both Roos and her father instead of the deceased mother, making Roos feel as if 'her mother was in the cat' (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Rosey, the cat of Roos' deceased mother.

The somewhat older participants appeared to be more inclined to take initiative in consoling their bereaved close ones. Roos, as a registered nurse, took a leading role in the family with regard to planning her mother's cremation and by organizing meetings to commemorate her mother together with her close family.

Roel: And, uhm... one last question about this... a few moments ago you told me about your mother, that she is more inside herself... and she does not talk with you about... [loss]?

Maria: Yeah, I am not sure how that... yeah, she... she... uhm... she relates the grief more to herself, she... she... uhm... she has the idea that... it [grief] is the hardest for her... and that is a pity, because then we have a conversation at a distance, sort of...

Maria, although she initially pointed out that it felt like her mother is claiming the rights to be sad and appeared confused about shifting roles of support or caregiving, she instinctively realized that it was her responsibility to console her bereaved mother.

Roel: It is no one's fault, but oftentimes, when people start feeling guilty of.. declining health of their partner, grief can become very difficult to process.

Maria: Yeah, I imagine so.. With my mother I feel a bit like that, because she felt guilty of not keeping dad at home, uhm... yeah and she was also being hard on him.. but it is difficult, I think.. as daughter, even though we witnessed it from up close, to judge that, because it is their marriage, their relationship and.. look..

A few months after losing his wife, Sem encountered difficulties in the supporting of his youngest daughter, which changed their relationship. By his own saying he came across a bit blunt when he would attempt to make something clear to her, which led to some minor disputes when his daughter would visit her parental home in the weekend. Sem called his sister-in-law and asked her to talk to his daughter on occasion; her different way of approaching helped them settle their minor disputes. Sem described that when he got emotional on the phone with close family members to seek the consolation he desperately required, his close family members would be eager to help with giving advice or helping out with his daughter.

Sem (68): Yeah and sometimes I would call friends and I would say: 'I have to cry and...', they would appreciate that, but... they don't want to talk that much about it, the crying, that is... I guess it depends on what you are used to...

Being a Dutch person himself as well, Sem got the impression that Dutch people are not used to share feelings and talk about deceased loved ones and loss implications as much as he was used to during his work in the navy and with his family in Indonesia. Violet, Maria and Sem described and experienced how difficult, emotional and personal the task of supporting each other can be, even within the immediate family. To sum up, after a death has occurred, the bereaved adjust and find benefit from their loss through the changing of relationships within the social arena along with communication patterns, as well as shifting roles and consoling fellow bereaved.

4.5. Outcomes of the grieving process

Linn (31) explained a form of social support that eventually gave her much consolation (Section 4.2), when her brother and niece encouraged her to visit her mother at the point when she had not spoken to her mother for several years because of their disputes.

Roel: Yeah, I think that helped you in your grieving process..

Linn: Absolutely, yeah.. I think, if I hadn't done it that way, I would have had to carry that weight for a long time, like 'I did not ever have the strength to speak out' and now I feel that I have cleared my conscience and closed it off well... yeah... really...

Linn appeared to have found solace in having made the effort to settle disputes with her mother before she passed away. Consolation or the supporting of a fellow bereaved, became important for Maria, who accepted this new role.

Continuing or maintaining a bond with the deceased

The bereaved in this study implied that moving on after losing a significant other is not just a matter of adapting to loss or seeing to arisen needs. Frank indicated that his brother is irreplaceable and that 'no person should try to replace his buddy'. Sem, although he is considering to find a new partner, is not actively looking for someone special. Instead, they still feel bound to their deceased loved ones in various ways.

Talking about the deceased in present tense was found to be common and Maria and Sem still regularly talk with their deceased father and wife respectively. Maria's father was important to her through his inspiring attitude, humor and optimism, which still makes her feel connected to her father. During the interview Maria explained that in the morning, she talks to her father's ashes in her private chambers, whereas Sem speaks to his wife when he is working in the garden. This garden and their house symbolize many aspects of Sem's relationship with his wife, among which their shared values such as living in a sustainable manner and a way to get in contact with other people to share ideas, furniture, plants and knowledge. Many of project garden's attributes were collected from foreign countries, taken as souvenirs and act as reminders of shared adventures and holiday trips. In this way, Sem's wife still makes him happy through many meaningful and linking objects.

Attached to meaningful places

The meaningful places and objects that the participants described all had in common that they are reminded the bereaved of the happy memories, meaningful experiences, shared interests or important

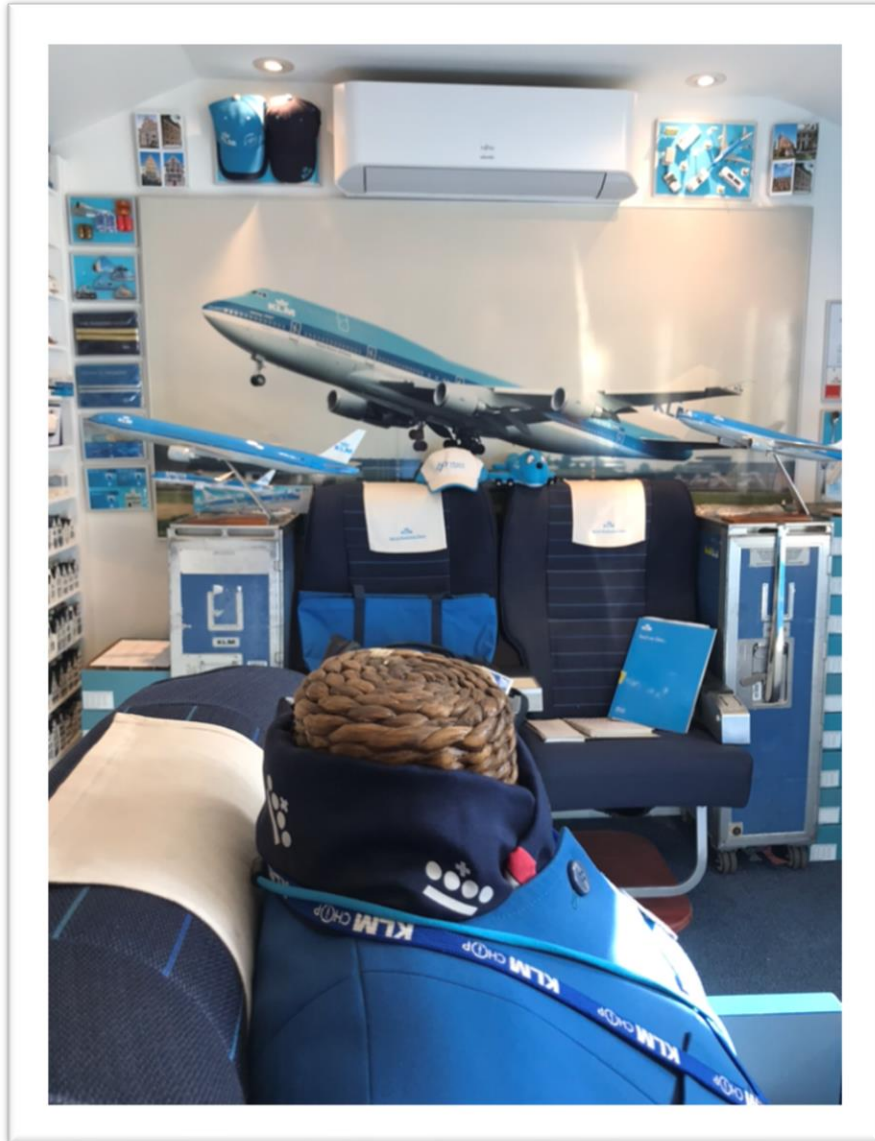


Figure 6: Violet's basement collection of her and her deceased dad's KLM attributes.

values of the bereaved and deceased. In different ways these places and objects hold significant meaning for the bereaved and as expected, the nature of these objects and places are rich in variation and highly personal. In the times of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated lockdowns, the bereaved were found to mainly turn to private objects and places, such as altars, photographs in their private and domestic places. Some bereaved used such private altars as a place to speak a few words to the ashes of the deceased and in several cases, these places were supplemented with photographs, which remind the

bereaved of happy memories, good health and meaningful experiences. Maria keeps her father's ashes in her working place at home. At her mother's place, Violet furnished an entire basement with their shared collection of KLM attributes (Figure 6), symbolizing their joyful and exciting experiences abroad. At her own place she kept a box, containing her deceased father's personal attributes, which she can open at a moment of choice to retract memories. Examples are her dad's birth card and mourning cards with personal messages.

Violet: That when you ask people who you used to be close with and that I have known for years, that it is only then [after passing away of dad] that you ask about how you have met each other.. and then you hear these funny stories... those are the good things...

Roel: Yes, so in fact that means you can still get to know more about your father after he passed away?

Violet: Yes!

Linn and Maria have decorated their altars with the ash box and photographs of their deceased mother in the living room and father in her working place respectively.

Linn (31): Well, usually when I sit on the couch in the evening and I am daydreaming, that my eyes wander to that corner, or uhm (...) yeah, I also have a plant there, where (...) I cannot keep plants alive, but that plant for some reason, is doing well and I am very careful with that one (...) so I use to stand in front of it, or when I am dusting it off, then I am like [I say}: 'Oh, mom, you are filthy', you know, [laughs and gestures] that kind of things, yeah (...) so I use to pass by it and oftentimes I look at it and it gives me some sort of comfort or something, like: 'Okay, they are all there, it is complete, yes.'

As described earlier, Maria's deceased father was an inspiration for her work in the classroom. Linn retracts memories of her mother to stimulate preparing for the phase in her life start a family of her own; to reflect on the importance and role of the maternal figure in the process of raising children. Her mother made her realize the importance of remembering the past and the fact that she did not have this at home

when she was a child, makes that Linn has assembled photographs of her and her boyfriend's deceased family members on this altar of remembrance (Figure 7).

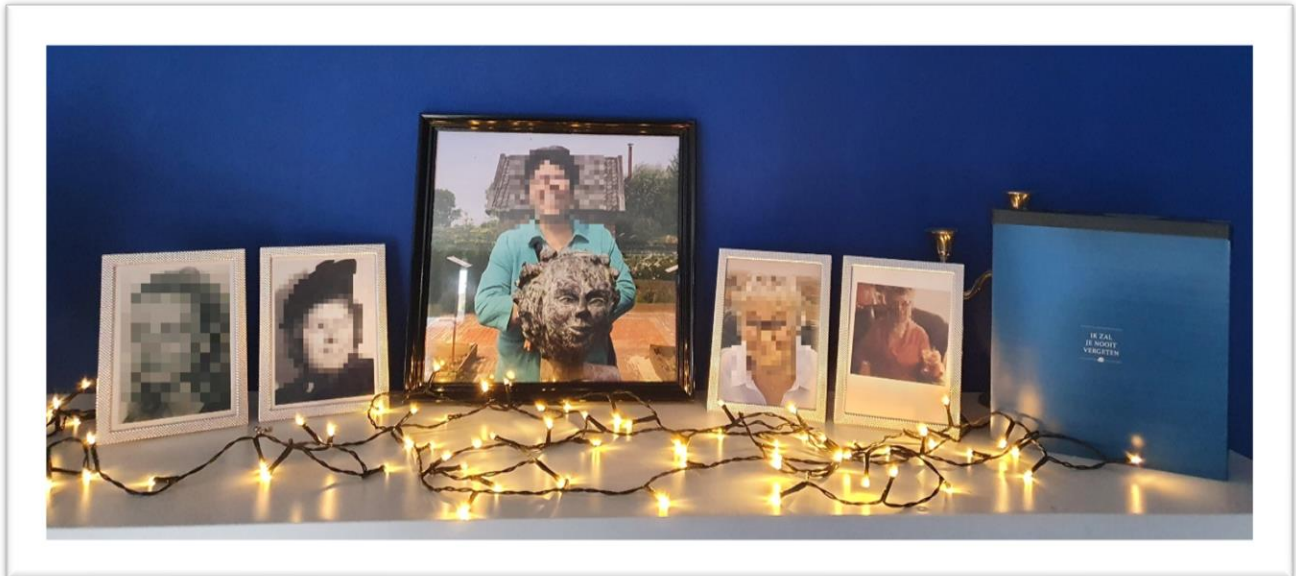


Figure 7: Altar of remembrance of deceased family members in Linn's living room.

Although this study mainly focused on the places that the bereaved turn to, an additional interesting finding was that some participants also mentioned and described certain places they actively avoided. Such places were associated with negative, and in some cases, traumatic experiences or because the atmosphere in these places had changed because of the deceased no longer being present. Initially, Maria felt to lose the motivation to visit her mother in her parental home, because her father was no longer there and she felt that her mother was claiming the 'rights' to be sad. Nonetheless, Maria kept on visiting her mother in the parental home weekly, because the need to support her bereaved and lone mother was more important. In a similar way Frank felt less motivated to visit the café where he used to play billiards with his brother, because his purpose there is gone and he does not feel the need to meet his brother's teammates. In the quotation below, Linn describes traumatic experiences on the attic in her parental home, which has changed the meaning of this room entirely for her.

Linn: To give you some more background information (...) my dad has a bipolar disorder, uhm (...) which meant that when he started drinking, he got into a psychosis (...) My dad has made four suicide attempts in this house and we had to take action when he was trying to hang himself on the attic. Yeah (...) and my little brother has seen it from up close, so he really has many, uhm (...) very many bad memories in that house, so to say, and he is still living there, uhm (...) that is, yeah, because he can't get another place, uhm (...) the housing market in the Netherlands is nuts at this moment.

Because of these negative experiences Linn felt she had to take care of their little brother, taking over this role or task of her mother and consequently, she started to file a lawsuit to prevent her brother having to move house due to their mother's death.

By clinging on to certain personal objects or belongings of the deceased that are associated with the deceased' qualities (and by avoiding those associated with negative feelings), the bereaved keep the meaningful presence of the deceased close by and in doing so, they assure themselves of having access to precious memories with/of the deceased. In this way, these objects and places act as a reminder of joyful reminders and virtues of the deceased and they are the means for the bereaved to find benefit, solace or comfort in their loss and seem to improve the wellbeing of the bereaved both directly and indirectly.

4.6. Inductive conceptual model of grieving and remembrance through meaningful places

Figure 8 below shows the main concepts and findings from this chapter. After the death of a significant other has occurred, the multiple characteristics and aspects of the grieving process are outlined in the 'Post-death grieving' box. In the box on the left side there is the main theme of loss-oriented grieving, which is comprised of the categories of realization and acceptance of the implications of the loss; this theme is closely related to the sense-making of a loss. The right side on the other hand, is closely related to the benefit-finding of a loss and this theme is named 'restoration-oriented grieving.' The fourth theme is named 'balancing' with its subcategories. Ultimately, the bottom box in Figure 8 is comprised of several categories which contain the outcomes of the grieving process. Firstly, the bereaved are assumed to have improved, restored and/or stabilized their wellbeing through their grieving work. Secondly, there are new roles, identities and relationships for the bereaved (and within their social networks). Next, the detachment from the deceased or the maintaining of a continuing bond with the deceased are both regarded as a grieving process outcomes. Lastly, there is the outcome of being attached to or detached from certain objects or places and finally the category that includes the outcome codes 'increased resilience' is described by Violet and Frank to grow after each loss and with the growing of age as well as the ability to put loss into perspective.

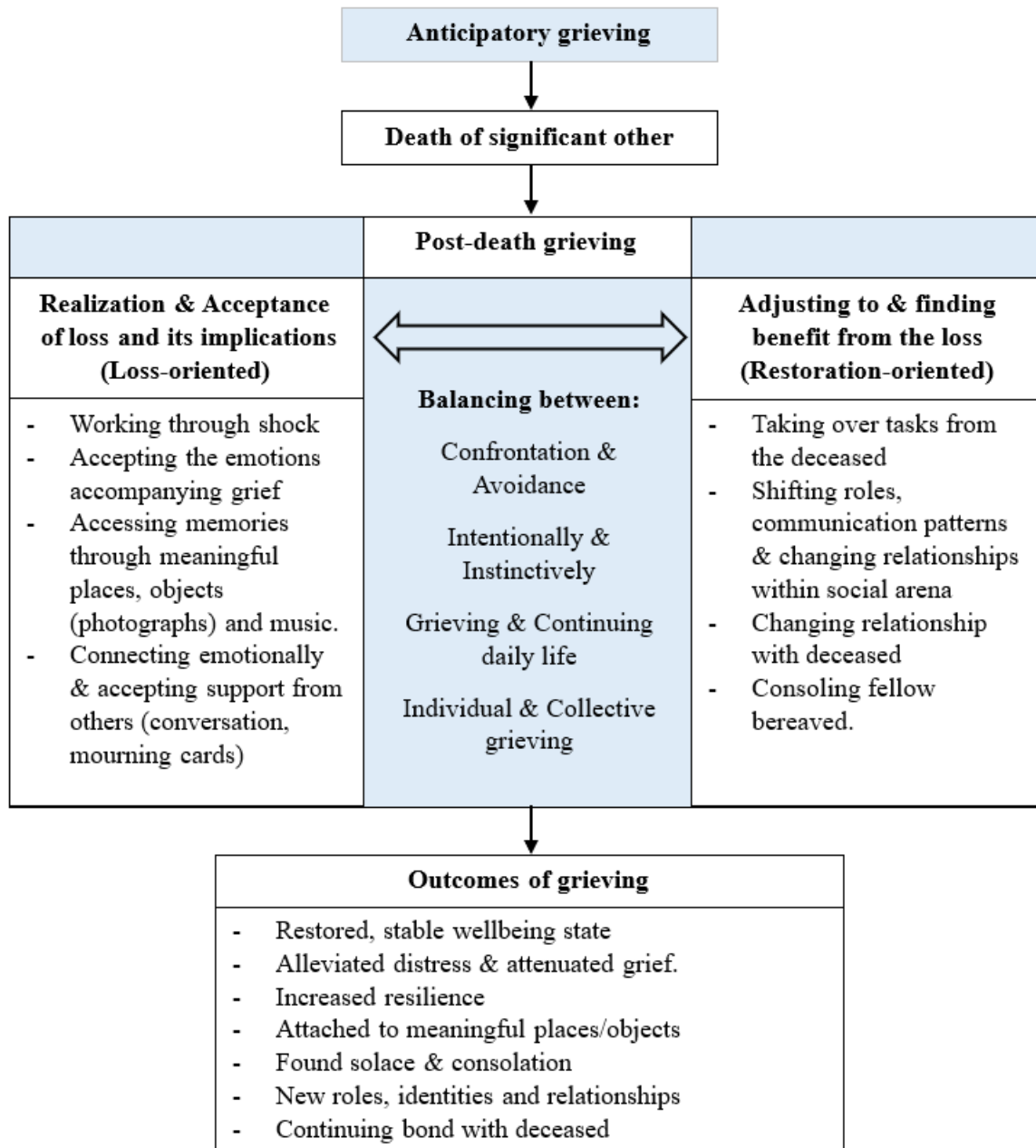


Figure 8: Inductive model with main themes and code-categories

5. Discussion

5.1. Acceptance and realization (sense-making) and finding meaning (benefit-finding)

Generally speaking, participants in this study implied that they had actively avoided sad feelings, emotional moments or talks about the deceased in the first two years after the passing away. Although the confrontation with the implications of loss are described by the participants as difficult in the moment itself, they often felt better afterwards. Meaning-making, although in this study conceptualized as

meaning-finding, according to Nadeau (1997) has proven to be a highly iterative and interactive process and the meaning or significance of a loss can be affirmed or disconfirmed, congruent or discrepant, and supported or contested within families and other reference groups. An example of this phenomenon is found in the experience of Maria, who found the benefit-meaning of consoling her mother eventually more important than being confronted with her mother's sorrow, resulting in Maria visiting her mother on a weekly basis. Neimeyer et al. (2001) also argue that grief or mourning is not primarily an interior process, but rather a social one as the bereaved commonly seek meaning in this unsought transition in not only personal and familial, but also broader community and even cultural spheres.

Although the findings in this study did not clearly entail the latter two spheres, which is considered to be strongly related to COVID-19 restrictions on the number of people allowed to gather in one place, I argue that the authors (Neimeyer et al., 2001) justifiably advocate a social constructionist model of grieving in which the narrative processes by which meanings are found, appropriated, or assembled occur at least as fully between people as within them. In this study, most bereaved participants emphasized the value of talking and being listened to by those with shared experiences, empathy and understanding, as Bowlby (1980) determined: the most important function in the facilitation of mourning was the acceptance, even the encouragement of expressive mourning. Carlsson et al. (2020) and Harrop et al. (2020) further support the importance of compassionate support during the challenging transition in the process of grief. According to Klass (2013: 610), "To be consoled is to be comforted." Frank, as an example on the other hand, explained to find solace in consoling his late brother's wife and seems to find comfort in his brother's memories mainly (Section 4.3), which implies that comfort or solace can also be found without being consoled and maintaining a bond with the deceased.

Data from this research support Hall's (2014) notion that sense-making and benefit-finding are two distinct processes and represent two distinguishable psychological issues for the bereaved person. It is not so much making sense of the loss that alleviates distress (ibid, p.10), but mainly the finding of benefit which grows stronger with time (Davis et al., 1998) and by making clear what exists (sense-making or realization and acceptance), new grief therapy helps the bereaved find this benefit-meaning (Andriessen, 2008), which in turn can make that the bereaved 'grow' or feel better after a significant loss.

5.2. Maintaining an enduring bond or detached from deceased

A number of studies have found that approximately half of the bereaved population experience a sense of presence of the deceased (Datson & Marwit, 1997): in their dreams, by visiting the grave or through participating in rituals or linking objects (Hall, 2014). These and many other different grieving activities enhance the work of sustaining, or transforming the relationship into an internalized continuing bond

(Kosminsky & Jordan, 2016), instead of breaking ties between the bereaved and the dead and letting go (Klass, Silverman & Nickman, 1996; Walter, 1996; Houtappels, 2022). Klass (2014) even goes as far to claim that the most common source of solace comes in the continuing bonds the living maintain with the dead. Kan (2015, p.16) has termed this as symbolic immortality: “Witnessing the death of others - especially significant others - and anticipating our own death, we are forced to question the ad hoc cognitive and normative operating procedures of our normal social life.” Death presents society with a formidable problem not only because it is an obvious threat to the continuity of human relations, but also because it threatens the basic assumptions of order on which society rests. To maintain the reality of this socially constructed world in the face of death, humankind often relies on religion or other powerful ideological systems (Klass, 2014) that promise what psychologist Robert Jay Lifton (1983) called a sense of symbolic immortality: a continuous symbolic relationship between our finite individual lives and both what has gone before us and what will come after. Klass (2014) considers continuing bonds with the dead, often supported by religion, particularly consoling. Florian and Mikulincer (1992, p.732) claim that “the development of a sense of symbolic immortality may be a facet of growth motives.” In this study this notion has found great support, because not only do the bereaved keep valued and meaningful memories close, but also sources of knowledge that provide the opportunity for post-traumatic growth as one integrates lessons of loss and how to find benefit in its meaning. In this way and as described by Neimeyer (2001): the meaning of a place can be reconstructed by the bereaved. The most apparent example was explained by Sem in this study (Section 4.3), who changed the meaning of the very confronting coffee table, where he would miss his beloved wife, into a place of reminiscing and retracting his dearest memories with his wife to feel proud and find solace in the realizing how happy they have been together. It can be argued that through such a meaning reconstruction and attachment to meaningful objects not only Sem, but also Linn, Violet, Frank, Roos and Maria strengthen or change the bond with their deceased loved one in similar ways rather than letting go and detach from the deceased.

5.3. The role of meaningful places in the grieving process

As was expected in times of COVID-19, the bereaved mainly attached to meaningful personal and private places during the corona crisis. By clinging on to meaningful objects or personal belongings of the deceased that are associated joyful memories, the bereaved keep the meaningful and beneficial traits, experiences and memories of the deceased close and by doing so, they assure themselves of having access to these memories. In this way, these objects and places, termed by Jedan et al. (2019) as ‘consolationscapes’ act as a reminder of the positive and meaningful memories of the deceased and to the bereaved, they are a visual means to define and reconstruct the meaning of their loss into a meaning or thought that provides solace. In the previous section and in chapter 4, Sem’s story is the perfect example

of how places of meaning hold the potential to improve the wellbeing of the bereaved. Conversely, Manzo's notion (2005, p. 84) that people avoid places that "remind them of aspects of themselves that they would rather forget, or which were reminders of painful experiences" which can harm the wellbeing of the bereaved. The most apparent examples of this phenomenon are found in Linn's associated experiences on the attic of her parental home (Section 4.5).

Other meaningful ways of retracting precious memories of the deceased in this study are through visuals such as linking objects, photographs, photo albums or digitally through Apple or Facebook memories software. Also, writing or speaking about or to the deceased person (Section 4.5: Maria and Sem) are strongly considered to help the bereaved to find meaning in loss, or a particular aspect of it (Neimeyer, 2012). In this study (Sem in section 4.3), music was found a helpful means in the processing of loss, which is supported by Beije's (2020) work: the Canadian musicologist Heather Sparling claims that songs aid people going through their grieving processes through provision of predictability, emotionality and help to continue life in another way, other authors imply that music helps to amplify or change mood (Avdeeff, 2012; Nylund Hagen, 2015). Music and places are part of an imagination that revolved around social relations and memory (Bolderman & Reijnders, 2021).

5.4. Strengths and limitations

The main strength of this study lies in the model of grieving and the role of attachment to meaningful places or objects (Figure 8). Additionally, concepts from multiple disciplines are brought together in this model and the accepting of, realizing of and adapting to the multiple implications of loss do not happen in a prescribed order and can be interpreted as different meanings that are discovered one at a time and either conscious (intentionally) or subconscious (instinctively). Besides, the model also includes aspects and concepts from traditional stage and task models, as well as from the more recent dual process model (Figure 1), the three dimensional grief model (Verthriest & Maes, 2020) and Worden's (2008) suggestions that grieving should be considered as an active process that involves adjusting to a world without the deceased (including both internal, external and spiritual adjustments); finding an enduring connection with the deceased in the midst of embarking on a new life. On top of that, it not only entails Hall's (2014, p.10) definitions of meaning of loss – "encompassing the two concepts: (1) making sense of the loss (eg. the death had been predictable in some way; it was consistent with the caregiver's perspective on life; or religious or spiritual beliefs provide meaning); and (2) finding benefits from the loss (eg. it led to a growth in character, a gain in perspective and strengthening of relationships)" - but also to find comfort in maintaining or transforming a bond or relationship with the deceased.

Limiting to the outcomes of this research, however, is the lacking of younger bereaved male participants and the limited number of six participants in general. Furthermore, it proved difficult for

many participants to describe what certain places meant to them and given the reconstruction of and changing nature of meaning through time and that the data was collected in a single moment in time, changing meaning of place was observed but in a few occasions. Participatory action research (PAR) would be highly suitable as a follow-up study to further enhance transformative reflexivity and empowerment of the bereaved, for PAR would help them find more meaning in their loss because the participants are included in the process of designing the research as well (Crang, 2003; Hay, 2016).

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the ways in which people in the Netherlands cope with the loss of a significant other to restore their wellbeing. As for my research group, it was found that people in the Netherlands coped with the loss of a close one in their own personal way and by consoling fellow bereaved, but also by attaching to meaningful places and linking objects. The findings have shown that clinging on to certain personal objects or belongings of the deceased and places that are associated with the deceased' qualities, the bereaved can keep a meaningful presence of the deceased close-by and by doing so, they assure themselves of having access to precious memories with/of the deceased to maintain a perceived and transforming bond instead of detachment from the deceased. This continuing bond and meaningful places or objects are often used by the bereaved to reconstruct the meaning of their loss, which results in restored wellbeing, alleviated distress, attenuated grief and increased resilience for future losses. Conversely, the notion that places that remind of vices of, or painful experiences with the deceased, are avoided is supported by the findings in this study too.

Although this study and the inductive model, as presented in this thesis, do not provide a single way of how to cope with loss, it does highlight the importance of the role of meaningful places and objects in the grieving process; the subjectivity of meaningful places reflects the personal nature of the grieving process as well.

Recommendations

Given the complexity of processing the loss of a significant other, priority lies with informing people about the multiple possibilities to become aware of the implications of their loss to find benefit and alleviate distress, to live with the loss and improve resilience to future losses. The model (Figure 8) presented in this study holds the potential to serve as an hermeneutical tool to grieve and be used in bereavement practice. With close family members and relatives, the inclusion of dialogues and activities (rituals) that encourage either or both co-construction of meaning and the forming of a personal meaning of loss is considered of paramount importance. The most important function in the facilitation of mourning in practice is deemed the acceptance, normality and even the encouragement of expressive

mourning. Given the complexity and various ways of grieving, the model (Figure 8) presented in this study holds the potential to serve as an hermeneutical tool to engage or avoid grieving and to be used in bereavement practice. Moreover, it encourages the bereaved to reconstruct their personal physical environment with precious and meaningful objects to either find benefit from their loss or to keep the meaningful presence of the deceased close-by to feel better. Practicians in bereavement care are recommended to further advise mourners to engage in activities such as writing/speaking to or about the deceased, listening to music to connect emotionally, retract precious memories of the deceased and chat and share experiences with fellow bereaved in online communities. Additionally, the bereaved could be encouraged to engage in home-making: keeping objects associated with joyful and meaningful memories of the deceased close to alleviate distress and maintaining a continuing bond with the deceased.

A longitudinal follow-up study is deemed useful for allowing to examine the ways in which participants' continuing bonds evolve through time, how long places associated with negative experiences are avoided and to examine the finding and changing of meaning(s) of places and object through time.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Codebook

Theme	Subtheme	Code examples	Description
Process			
Affect	Love Happiness Pride		
Cognition	Memories Beliefs		
Behavior	Proximity-maintaining behavior Reconstruction of place		
Person			
Individual	Milestones Personal background Experiences Realizations	Living situation Work	
Group	Collective experiences Relationships		
Place			
Social	Social arena Symbolic meaning Relationships		
Physical			

			Not coded, but through pictures
Deceased background	Common interests/habits Relationship with the deceased	Continuing project garden Raising the kids Keeping collection of KLM attributes	
Grieving process experience		Subjective wellbeing Individual grieving process	
Strategies to cope with bereavement	Attachment to meaningful place/object		
	Maintaining enduring bond	Talking with deceased	
	Anticipatory grief	Busy arranging funeral Changing plans for deceased Caring for deceased Feeling of relief Euthanasia process Organization of living funerals Long term sickness Seeking closure Settling disputes	
	Avoidance/distraction	Attempt to hide emotions Ability to put loss into perspective Fear to not have control over emotions	

		Need for distraction Preventing feeling of regret	
	Confrontation	Accepting to not be in control of emotions Accepting moments of emptiness Becoming more introvert Bereavement leave Commemorating deceased Difficult moments Preparing for confrontation Lighting candles for deceased Listening to music Realization Regret of not anticipating	Funeral experience Celebrating without deceased Toasting for deceased Overwhelming support Feeling of guilt Naming absence Shock
	Taking over task/role of deceased	Leading role in family Household tasks Facilitating family activity Caregiver	
Arisen needs	Ability to access precious memories of the deceased	Photographs Listening to music Stories about deceased	

		Apple memories software	
	Missing something	Partner Support Family trips/traditions Gardening help Social initiative Practical support Humorous stories Personal goodbye Talking about deceased Someone to talk to	
	Time to process	Distraction Gradual transition	Sleeping together with son and daughter

Appendix B: The interview guide including operationalized concepts

Prior to conducting the interviews, I will build a rapport with the informants to make them feel comfortable. This will include briefly touching upon the following points:

1. Introducing myself and thanking them for their time
2. Confirming their agreement to record and transcribe the interview, and informing them that I will send them the transcript if they wish to read it and take part in reviewing it
3. Stating their rights as a participant, including their right to terminate the interview and to skip a question if they so desire.
4. Explaining the general structure and estimated duration of the interview.

Questions and time estimates > = probes	Deductive theory: concepts	Type of data and benefits (based on Hay, 2016)
Starting questions, building rapport Max. 5 minutes		
Can you start with telling me something about yourself? Happy to have you participating, how come you decided to do so?	Personal background	Building a rapport with the informant, easy-to-answer opening question. Related to the person dimension of Scannell and Gifford (2010): the actor
What do you do in your daily life? Work, social life, sports, hobby's > What did you do this week? > Can you describe what a regular week looks like for you to me?	Personal background	Building a rapport with the informant, easy-to-answer opening question. Related to the person dimension of Scannell and Gifford (2010): the actor An ordering of events. To make the participant feel more comfortable, and to get a first insight into their weekly routine.
Personal background, mental health state and grieving process 5-10 minutes		
How are you doing today? ➤ Feeling well? ➤ How is work going? ➤ Sports? ➤ Distracted?	Subjective wellbeing Grieving process	
What is your housing situation here? > How is your living status > In what kind of neighborhood?	Personal background	To understand their current living and housing situation, which may influence the way they experience place attachment. Related to the place

<p>How is living here for you?</p>		<p>dimension of Scannell and Gifford (2010): what is the attachment to, and what is the nature of this place?</p>
<p>Can you start with telling me something about ... (deceased)?</p> <p>How would you describe your relationship with?</p> <p>During what kind of moments do you miss [deceased] the most.</p> <p>Did you seek or receive help or support? Professional? Friends? Relatives?</p> <p>What do you think of the people around you? > Are they supportive? > How do they make you feel? What felt good, what did not? > Are they easy to connect with? (Both close people and far-acquaintances) Family, friends, colleagues, close people vs far-acquaintances)</p>	<p>Relationship with the deceased.</p> <p>Personal background</p> <p>Memories</p> <p>Grieving process</p> <p>Social Arena</p> <p>Social Arena</p>	<p>To get an insight into the background of the participant, related to the person dimension of Scannell and Gifford (2010)</p> <p>The background of the participant and his/her relationship with the deceased may influence the way he/she attaches to certain places.</p> <p>Related to the social place dimension of Scannell and Gifford (2010), specifically the social dimension; what is the attachment to? Which people? And why?</p>
<p>How would you describe your grieving process?</p> <p>Are you overall satisfied with your grieving process? Why (not)?</p> <p>Summarize answers to check if I understood correctly...</p>	<p>Grieving process</p> <p>Own perception on personal path of bereavement</p>	<p>To get to know participants' opinions, impressions and feelings about their grieving process.</p>
<p>Experiences of and opinions on place attachment after bereavement 30 minutes</p>		

<p>You have provided us with pictures of places you feel attached to, hold significant meaning or started to visit more often after bereavement. Based on these photos, why do they make you feel comfortable or visit them more often?</p>	<p>Place meaning Process dimension</p>	<p>Related to all dimensions of Scannell and Gifford (2010): Place, person and process, depending on how the participants respond. For example, a meaningful memory created in a certain place is different from liking a place for its physical beauty, which would be the process and place dimensions, respectively.</p>
<p>Memories of/with the deceased? Familiar places? How do you feel when you visit this place? Things you (dis)like about these places? What do you do in this place? In what way has this place/object become more important to you? In what way do you think these places/objects aid you going through the grieving process? Summarize answers to check if I understood correctly...</p>	<p>Memories Cognition Affect Affect Behavior Proximity-maintaining behavior Reconstruction of place Grieving process</p>	<p>Related to the process dimension of Scannell and Gifford (2010, p. 3), specifically the cognitive aspect (memories, beliefs, meanings that people associate with the deceased).</p> <p>Person-place bonding undoubtedly involves an emotional connection to a particular place (Manzo, 2005). Human geographers describe place belongingness in emotional terms. We must learn more about the full spectrum of people’s experiences in places if we are to understand the complex and multi-faceted phenomena that comprise our emotional relationships to places (Manzo, 2003).</p> <p>The third aspect of the psychological process dimension of place attachment is the behavioral level, in which attachment is typified by proximity-maintaining behaviors and is a positive, affective bond between an individual and a specific place, the main characteristic of which is to maintain closeness to a such a place (Scannell and Gifford, 2010, p. 4).</p> <p>How is the place/object associated with / relate to the coping with loss of a loved one?</p>
<p>Do you often find yourself going to places that remind you of? ➤ Or rather avoid certain places Why? Any other places come to mind?</p>	<p>Grieving process</p>	<p>Reconstruction of place is part of the behavior aspect in the process dimension (Scannell and Gifford, 2010, p. 4). Relevant particularly among some, who try to reconstruct the ‘old’ situation they used to live in when the deceased was still alive.</p>

<p>> What do you think would have been different regarding these places or the grieving process if there was no pandemic? Why?</p>	<p>COVID-19</p>	<p>Structural question that encourages reflection on experiences (Hay, 2016, p. 155), specifically about the causality between Covid-19 and place attachment. Comparison of experience by place and time.</p>
<p>Do you think you will keep visiting these particular places?</p>	<p>Cognition Memories Process dimension</p>	<p>To understand their purpose in a certain place: relates mostly to the process dimension; specifically the cognitive aspect (memories, beliefs, meanings that people associate with a place).</p>
<p>Closing comments and thanking participant Max. 5 minutes</p>		
<p>Summarize answers to check if I understood correctly...</p> <p>Is there something I didn't ask and what you think is important?</p> <p>What did you think about the interview?</p> <p>What did you find most interesting part?</p> <p>What are your plans later this week?</p>		<p>Thank you very much for participating in this study. I would like to give you a small present to express my gratitude.</p> <p>Can I contact you in case I am interested in further elaboration on a certain topic we talked about? If you wish to receive any information or have any questions don't hesitate to contact me.</p>

Appendix C: Photo elicitation guide

Een kwalitatief onderzoek naar het hechten aan plaatsen na het verlies van een dierbare.

U bent uitgenodigd om deel te nemen aan een onderzoek. Het doel van dit onderzoek is om een beeld te krijgen welke en op welke manier mensen bepaalde plaatsen gaan opzoeken. Zoals u misschien al weet, begint de deelname aan het onderzoek met het zoeken of maken van afbeeldingen/foto's van plaatsen (of objecten):

- die voor u van meer waarde zijn geworden na het verlies van uw dierbare óf
- die u meer bent gaan bezoeken na het overlijden van uw dierbare óf
- waar u zich meer mee verbonden voelt na het verlies óf
- waar u zich na het overlijden van uw naaste een stuk comfortabeler voelt.

Later, wanneer we een interview houden, zult u een serie vragen krijgen over deze plekken (of objecten) en zal ik u vragen toe te lichten waarom u deze afbeeldingen of foto's uitgekozen heeft.

Procedures

U hoeft zich geen zorgen te maken over uw privacy, gezien ik geen informatie of foto's van dit onderzoek zal gebruiken, anders dan analytische en niet-identificeerbare persoonlijke informatie. De foto's en afbeeldingen die u instuurt via SURFfilesender zullen veilig versleuteld zijn waardoor uw persoonlijke informatie niet kan worden verspreid. Voordat u aan uw deelname begint, zal ik u vragen om een toestemmingsformulier in te vullen en indien het online plaatsvindt, zal ik het u voorlezen. Hier kunt u kiezen of uw foto's in de scriptie gebruikt mogen worden. Als u zich later bedenkt kun u altijd contact met me opnemen.

Contact informatie

Dit onderzoek is deel van een Master thesis project van de Master Population Studies van de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. Indien u vragen heeft of contact wilt opnemen voor een kopie van het transcript of de bevindingen, kunt u mij bereiken via het emailadres r.van.der.veer.3@student.rug.nl of via de telefoon, 0621254223.

Researcher:

Roel van der Veer
Master student population studies
Population Research Centre,
Faculty of Spatial Sciences,
University of Groningen



Appendix D: Informed consent form

Een kwalitatief onderzoek naar het hechten aan plaats na het verlies van een dierbare.

U bent uitgenodigd om deel te nemen aan een onderzoek. Voordat u akkoord gaat, wil ik u uitleggen waar dit onderzoek over gaat en wat de deelname inhoudt. Gelieve dit formulier door te lezen en laat me weten als u een vraag heeft of er iets opgehelderd dient te worden.

Het doel van het onderzoek:

Mocht u willen deelnemen aan dit onderzoek, zal ik u tijdens het interview enkele persoonlijke vragen stellen over uw achtergrond, de overledene in kwestie en uw rouwproces. Daarna zal ik u vragen om te vertellen waarom u deze plaatsen (of objecten) meer bent gaan bezoeken/welke betekenis deze voor u hebben, heeft gekozen. Het doel van dit onderzoek is om inzichten te verkrijgen op welke manier mensen met verlies van een dierbare omgaan en aan welke plaatsen zij zich hechten gedurende het rouwproces.

Onderzoeksprocedure:

De foto's en afbeeldingen die u instuurt via SURFfilesender zullen veilig versleuteld zijn waardoor uw persoonlijke informatie niet kan worden verspreid. Het interview zal tussen de 45-60 minuten duren. Indien u, gezien de gevoeligheid van de besproken onderwerpen, later behoefte hebben aan psychologische hulp, dan kunt u contact opnemen met MIND correlatie via het telefoonnummer: 0900-1450. Hier zijn geen kosten aan verbonden.

Privacy:

U hoeft zich geen zorgen te maken over uw privacy, gezien ik geen informatie of foto's van dit onderzoek zal gebruiken, anders dan analytische en niet-identificeerbare persoonlijke informatie. De afbeeldingen die u instuurt en de geluidsopname van het interview zullen via SURFfilesender veilig versleuteld zijn waardoor uw persoonlijke informatie niet kan worden verspreid. Voordat u aan uw deelname begint, zal ik u vragen om een toestemmingsformulier in te vullen en indien het interview online plaatsvindt, zal ik het u voorlezen. Hier kunt u kiezen of uw foto's in het eindrapport gebruikt mogen worden. Als u zich later bedenkt kun u altijd contact met mij opnemen. Mocht u besluiten te stoppen met de deelname, wordt alle informatie inclusief het toestemmingsformulier door mij verwijderd.

Contact informatie

Dit onderzoek is deel van een Master thesis project van de Master Population Studies aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. Indien u vragen heeft of contact wilt opnemen voor een kopie van het transcript of de bevindingen, kunt u mij bereiken via het emailadres r.van.der.veer.3@student.rug.nl of via het telefoonnummer 0621254223.

Toestemming voor deelname

Ik heb de bovenstaande informatie gelezen of het werd mij voorgelezen. Ik heb de mogelijkheid gekregen om vragen te stellen en deze werden naar mijn zin beantwoord. Ik ben mij ervan bewust dat deelname aan dit onderzoek vrijwillig is. Dit betekent dat ik op elk moment kan stoppen, zonder dat ik daar een reden voor hoef te geven. De Rijksuniversiteit Groningen en de onderzoekers krijgen hierbij toestemming om de data anoniem te verwerken; ik begrijp dat deze informatie alleen zullen worden gebruikt voor wetenschappelijke analyses en doeleinden.

- Ik geef hierbij mijn toestemming om mijn foto's en afbeeldingen te gebruiken in het onderzoeksrapport.
- Ik bevestig hierbij dat ik wil deelnemen aan het onderzoek.
- Ik geef hierbij toestemming voor het maken van een geluidsopname van het interview.

Onderzoeker:

Roel van der Veer
Master student population studies
Population Research Centre,
Faculty of Spatial Sciences,
University of Groningen

Deelnemer:

Naam:
Achternaam:
Leeftijd:
Datum:

Handtekening:



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De betekenis van plaatsen tijdens het rouwproces

GEZOCHT

Voor dit onderzoek ben ik op zoek naar mensen:

- Recent (afgelopen jaar) een dierbare verloren hebben; partner, ouder of kind
- Ouder dan 18 jaar
- Woonachtig in Nederland

Deelname aan het onderzoek houdt in:

- Het vooraf opsturen van een afbeelding van plaats(en)/ objecten die meer voor u zijn gaan betekenen of u vaker bent gaan bezoeken
- Een interview, online of live-ontmoeting, van 60-90 minuten, waarin de opgestuurde afbeelding centraal staat
- Corona- en A.V.G.-regels worden nageleefd

Geïnteresseerd in deelname?

Neem contact met mij op:

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