UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

MAKING THE BUSINESS OF DEATH, BUSINESS-AS-USUAL: THE COMMERCE-CARE DIALECTIC IN FUNERAL PLANNING

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

Da Bi
Norman, Oklahoma
2024

Downloaded from SHAREOK. Persistent Handle URL: https://hdl.handle.net/11244/340236

MAKING THE BUSINESS OF DEATH, BUSINESS-AS-USUAL: THE COMMERCE-CARE DIALECTIC IN FUNERAL PLANNING

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

Dr. Ryan S. Bisel, Chair

Dr. Norman C.H. Wong

Dr. Justin S. Reedy

Dr. Ralph J. Beliveau

© Copyright by Da Bi 2024
All Rights Reserved.

Acknowledgments

This dissertation represents my graduate school journey at the University of Oklahoma. I am fortunate that I have an opportunity to explore the boundary of human knowledge in the field in which I have an interest.

I would like to begin by thanking my advisor and committer members. My Advisor, Dr. Ryan Bisel, is an outstanding mentor who has advised and encouraged my academic research. To my dissertation committee members, Drs. Ryan Bisel, Norman Wong, Justin Reedy, and Ralph Beliveau: Thanks for not restraining me from writing a dissertation related to the funeral industry. This dissertation is a direct result of insights gained from your suggestions. Thanks for your expertise and wisdom. I also want to acknowledge Dr. Elaine Hsieh, who brought me to the University of Oklahoma to pursue graduate school.

I would next like to thank my parents, Changchun Bi and Lihui Chen, for their unending love. I appreciate that you are always willing to take care of me, provide support, point out my disadvantages, and demonstrate the meaning of family. Your cultivation transforms me into a better person for contributing to our society.

There are a couple of groups who deserve my gratitude as well. To my middle school peers: Shengyu Hou and Bingnan Liu, you believe that I am doing something important. To my high school peers: Jialong Ma, Xuanting Li, Xin Su, Chali Wang, Yifan Jiang, and Heming Chen, I am gratefully thankful to have you believe that I am appropriate to pursue an academic career. To my college school peers, Xue Yifan, Bo Hu, Xinlei Lu, Zhanghan, Mao, Rongjun Fan, Xiang Li, and Peng Yan, I appreciate you coming into my mind occasionally and spurring me to move forward and onward.

Lastly, I appreciate many funeral directors and funeral home owners who accept my interviewing requests and provide support for my research. Although I was naive to explore the funeral industry, I appreciate that I am consistent with working on my research and standing up when I fall down somewhere.

Funding was provided by the University of Oklahoma Department of Communication's dissertation scholarship fund and research awards from the Graduate Student Senate.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements iv
Abstract vii
Chapter 1: Rationale 1
Chapter 2: Literature Review: The Funeral Home History in the United States 6
The Emergence of Funeral Homes 6
Earning its Industrial Legitimacy 9
Battling against Industrial Stereotypes 12
Transformation of the Funeral Industry 16
Moving into the 21st-Century Frontier 22
Chapter 3: Literature Review: Relational Dialectics Theory 2.0 25
RDT Assumptions 25
Bakhtin's Dialogism 28
Discursive Struggles 33
Centripetal-centrifugal Struggle 39
Recent RDT Studies 46
Chapter 4: Literature Review: The Commerce-Care Dialectic in Funeral Planning 48
Funeral Planning 49
Commodification and Decommodification 52
Research on the Commerce-Care Dialectic in Funeral Services 54
Section Conclusion 59
Chapter 5: Research Question 60
Chapter 6: Research Design and Method 63
Participants 63
Procedures 64
Analysis 65
Validation 71
Chapter 7: Findings 72
RQ1: Discourse of Commerce 72
RQ1: Discourse of Care 76
RQ2: Discursive Diachronic Interplay 80
RQ2: Discursive Synchronic Interplay 83
RQ3: Discursive Transformative Interplay 87
Chapter 8: Discussion 91
Theoretical Contributions: Relational Dialectics Theory 92
Theoretical Contributions: Control-Resistance Dialectic 95
Theoretical Contributions: The Commerce-Care Dialectic Perspective 97
Practical Implications 99
Limitations 99
Conclusion 100
References 102
Appendix: Interviewing Protocols: Appreciating Aesthetic Compromise 138

Abstract

This dissertation, grounded in relational dialectics theory 2.0 (RDT; Baxter, 2011), aims to illustrate what meanings emerge from the commerce-care dialectic when engaging in funeral planning. The contrapuntal analysis of interviews with funeral directors reveals that the *discourse of commerce* and the *discourse of care* are central to the meaning-making of the commerce-care dialectic when engaging in funeral planning. Also, the two discourses interpenetrate synchronically and diachronically. The diachronic interplay manifests in *spiraling inversion* and *segmentation*. The synchronic interplay is shown in *negating and countering*, *ambiguating* (a new form of synchronic interplay), and *entertaining*. Moreover, *hybridization* and *aesthetic moment* are identified for discursive transformative interplay. This dissertation contributes to RDT by aligning the discursive synchronic markers, including negating, countering, ambiguating (a new marker proposed), and entertaining, with four features of utterance chains. The alignment provides an additional guideline to help researchers identify discursive synchronic interplay. Additionally, the dissertation provides empirical evidence for Mumby's (2005) theorizing regarding (a) the mutual constitution of control and resistance by identifying the hybridization of the *discourse of commerce* and the *discourse of care* as the double nature (i.e., commerce and care) of funeral services and (b) the control-resistance dialectic transformation as a routine social production of daily organizational life by proposing the *discourse of mundanity*, which is "*a system of meaning in which the gravity of life and death is made to be experienced as ordinary and beautiful*." Moreover, the dissertation proposes a perspective of acknowledging human life, which is the complex interpenetration and constitutive process of the costed life and/or the sacred life, labeled as the *commerce-care dialectic perspective*, defined as:

Humans make meanings of unresolvable life events or struggles, which have two core attributes of money and humanity, and transform those struggles into mundane aesthetic moments by enacting behaviors and actions.

This *commerce-care dialectic perspective* requires further validation across other occupational interaction types to understand the concept's degree of transferability. Lastly, the dissertation offers practical implications for facilitating future funeral planning for funeral professionals, clients, and governmental agencies.

Making the Business of Death, Business-As-Usual: The Commerce-Care Dialectic in Funeral Planning

Chapter 1: Rationale

Modernity has created competing features of human life – costed and sacred (Walter, 2020). As Walter summarized, the "costed life" is fostered by capitalism, and it is economically calculated in business use or the state of costing; the "sacred life" is fostered by the revolutionary idea of the Protestant Reformation and Enlightenment, and it highlights the values of priceless, civic-right-centered, liberated, anti-slavery, and dignified. Overlapping and competing social forces that remind us of the costed *and* sacred elements of human life interpenetrate into and are constitutive of individuals' life events and experiences. This dissertation uses the term "*commerce-care dialectic*" to describe this complex interpenetration and constitutive process of the costed life and the sacred life. Three propositions help explain this term, *commerce-care dialectic*: (a) this term *commerce-care dialectic* adopts the worldview, which is "destructive of neat systems and ordered structures and compatible with the notion of a social universe that has neither fixity nor solid boundaries" (Murphy, 1971, p. 90); (b) *commerce-care dialectic* adopts the local/emergent endpoint dimension of contrast, which favors "situated knowledge claims, in contrast to the search for large-scale empirical generalization" (Deetz, 2001, p. 13); (c) the term assumes the equivalence importance of emergent meanings and the confirmed knowledge in constituting meanings.

Consider how the commerce-care dialectic can be seen in "deathcare" services. Corporations and their professionals provide deathcare services, including grief counseling, hospice service, and funeral service (e.g., Howarth, 1996; Lofland, 2019; Rando, 1984), to make a profit *and* care for their clients. Moreover, compared with other everyday services (e.g.,

traveling guides, entertainment activities, and wellness programs), deathcare services manifest the commerce-care dialectic in the extreme because of the high stakes associated with death. Deathcare services represent and embody an extreme manifestation of this dialectic. Death is a pervasive social phenomenon and a biological reality, which is simply known as "the end" (Jung, 1959) and is frequently seen as the ultimate manifestation of materiality (Fahlander & Oestigaard, 2008). Moreover, death and its discourse "capture human decay, and its meaning consists of a series of often taken-for-granted elements, such as end/cessation/termination, negativity, irreversibility, inescapability, and undesirability" (Carpentier & Van Brussel, 2012, p. 100).

As one type of deathcare service, a funeral service is a ceremony that commemorates the life of a deceased person (National Funeral Directors Association, n.d.), and it is deeply involved in the commerce-care dialectic provided by funeral homes. Korai and Souiden (2017) characterize funeral services as involving strong emotiveness, non-recurrence, irreversibility, uncommonness, symbolism, and personalization. Throughout the history of funeral homes in twentieth-century America, the commerce-care dialectic has been dancing in the funeral industry (Laderman, 2003). In the early 20th century, the commercial aspects of funeral services were, at times, criticized as paganism (e.g., Bowman, 1975)—a practice that challenged religious authority as it pertains to death and dying. In the mid-20th century, accompanied by commercialism, funeral services were criticized as deceitful rather than trustworthy and sincere in their funeral service businesses (e.g., Mitford, 2000). In the late 20th century, accompanied by McDonaldization (i.e., a process by which work is overly routinized and therefore made to require less skills in order to deliver cheaper and quicker products to consumers, Ritzer, 1983), funeral homes became corporations with complex bureaucratization, which deviated from care in

funeral services (e.g., Lofland, 2019). At present, the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA, 2023) reported more than 18,800 funeral homes throughout the United States in 2021; the funeral industry generated $16.323 billion in revenue and employed about 141,000 people; the national medium cost of a funeral with a viewing and burial was $7,848 while a funeral with cremation was $6,971. Except for business requirements, professional funeral directors are expected and motivated to provide support and care to the bereaved, such as allowing personalized funerals (Schafer, 2012), comforting the bereaved in funeral planning (Hyland & Morse, 1995), and emotional cultivation in mortuary education (Cahill, 1999a) and in professional socialization (Cahill, 1999b). As mentioned above, the commerce-care dialectic in the funeral industry exists across its past, present, and it is highly likely that the dialectic will be involved in its future. Therefore, the commerce-care dialectic seems to be a perennial and unresolvable aspect of American funeral services.

Although conceivably unresolvable, funeral professionals (e.g., Bi & Hammonds, 2021), clients (e.g., Kopp & Kemp, 2007a), and governmental agencies (e.g., Kopp & Kemp, 2007b) need to face and manage the commerce-care dialectic in funeral services (e.g., Bailey, 2010; Korai et al., 2022; Parsons, 2003), in part, because death and dying are inevitable. U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023) reported that funeral planning is one of the few key duties of funeral service workers, who help to determine the locations, dates, and times of visitations, funerals (or memorial services), burials, and cremations. To arrange funerals, funeral directors and clients are involved in contextual conversations about funeral planning (e.g., Barley, 1983; Turner & Edgley, 1990). From a communication perspective, funeral planning can be understood as “a distinctive mix of strategic and supportive interaction, enacted between funeral home staff members and their customers, which accomplishes their joint

planning of deathcare, and their co-facilitation of funeral services" (Campbell, 2021, p. 6). Then, how do funeral professionals and clients make meaning of the commerce-care dialectic when engaging in funeral planning?

This dissertation, grounded in relational dialectics theory 2.0 (RDT; Baxter, 2011), aims to illustrate what meanings emerge from the commerce-care dialectic when engaging in funeral planning. This dissertation contributes to RDT by showing how discursive synchronic markers, including negating, countering, ambiguating (a new marker proposed), and entertaining, align with four features of utterance chains. In doing so, this alignment provides an additional guideline to help researchers identify discursive synchronic. Additionally, the dissertation provides empirical evidence for Mumby's (2005) theorizing on (a) the mutual constitution of control and resistance by identifying the hybridization of the *discourse of commerce* and the *discourse of care* as the double nature (i.e., commerce and care) of funeral services and (b) the control-resistance dialectic transformation as a routine social production of daily organizational life by proposing the *discourse of mundanity*, which is "*a system of meaning in which the gravity of life and death is made to be experienced as ordinary and beautiful*." Moreover, the dissertation proposes a perspective of acknowledging human life, which is the complex interpenetration and constitutive process of the costed life and/or the sacred life, labeled as the *commerce-care dialectic perspective*, defined as:

> *Humans make meanings of unresolvable life events or struggles, which have two core attributes of money and humanity, and transform those struggles into mundane aesthetic moments by enacting behaviors and actions.*

This commerce-care dialectic perspective requires further validation across other occupational interaction types to understand the concept's degree of transferability. Lastly, the dissertation

offers practical implications for facilitating future funeral planning for funeral professionals, clients, and governmental agencies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: The Funeral Home History in the United States

The *funeral home* was innovated and existed as a societal sector (or institution) embedded in the United States. Indeed, the success of funeral homes parallels changes in modern death, modern life, and many social developments in US society (Laderman, 2003), ranging explicitly from the American Civil War to the 21st century. Reviewing the funeral home history is to learn from the past, which is a fruitful repertoire of providing suggestions to the present and the future. In concrete, historical intelligence contributes to guiding business communication between funeral directors and clients.

This review adopts Laderman's structure in the book *Rest in Peace: A Cultural History of Death and the Funeral Home in Twentieth-century America,* which includes five sections, relabeled by this review: (a) the emergence of funeral homes, (b) earning its industrial legitimacy, (c) battling against industrial stereotypes, (d) the transformation of the funeral industry, and (e) moving into the 21st-century frontier. Laderman's structure focuses on cultural and social changes in funeral homes during the historical period rather than a strict chronological sequence.

The Emergence of Funeral Homes

This section reviews the approximate time interval between the American Civil War (1861-1865) and World War I (1914-1918), aiming to illustrate the social and cultural background of the emergence of funeral homes in America. In overview, embalming advancement, change in the demographic pattern, and the rise of hospitals are the three primary drivers of the rise of the institution of funeral homes. Practically, funeral homes were identified and established with social and cultural effects in the 1920s.

Embalming advancement. Embalming in modern America is related to but different from the death ritual of ancient Egyptian burial ceremonies such as mummification. The Egyptian mummification is deeply involved in mythical values and realities with passage from this world to the next (Assmann, 1989), which suggests the spatial aspect of transition and the biomorphic model of rebirth. Otherwise, embalming in modern America is also known as the modern science of embalming (e.g., Mendelsohn, 1940) with features that include implications related to the technical, scientific, professional, medical, artistic, and ethical.

The American Civil War was a dramatic point for embalming, and it was the first American war to make provision for the return of the dead to their families (Laderman, 2003). Modern embalming was borrowed from England and France embalming fluids to preserve bodies, Dr. Thomas Holmes's research and practice of advancing embalming fluids, and the injection pump to input fluids by the arterial method from anatomists (for details, Habenstein & Lamers, 1955, pp. 321- 328). Then, by the early 1880s, this approach of embalming bodies grew in popularity among *undertakers* (i.e., a precursor to the professional label "funeral director").

Change in the demographic pattern. Since the mid- to late-eighteenth century, mortality in the US has been declining (Reher, 2011). Then, mortality and fertility declined during the second half of the nineteenth century, considered the demographic transition (Reher, 2011). An increase in life expectancy accompanies this demographic transition. Since 1870, life expectancy at birth has soared because of an associated decline in morbidity from contagious diseases and associated improvement in healthcare due to modern economic growth (Easterlin, 1995). The declining mortality rate and extended life expectancy resulted in the gradual loss of traditional familiarity with the dead in everyday life.

The rise of hospitals. From the 1870s to the 1920s, hospital counts expanded dramatically 38 times (Schlereth, 1992). In effect, patients increasingly came to doctors, rather than doctors came to patients, and dying was institutionalized within the isolated space of a hospital room. Associated with the growth of hospitals, the medicalization of death also changed the meaning of death (Ariès, 1981). Death and dying were not understood as a natural ending to lifespans but constructed as a failure, a business lost, and a devastating defeat (Walter, 2015). The medicalization of death drives the dislodging of the corpse from the family house to another location.

The funeral home origin and its effect. The American funeral home institution was emergent in towns and cities nationwide for the public to relinquish control over the dead body, lose familiarity with the dead, and embrace professional funeral services. The rise of funeral homes created a "new social space for preparing, displaying, and communing with the dead" (Laderman, 2003, p. 16). At the end of the nineteenth century, funeral directors appeared in communities and visited family houses to take care of various funeral-related responsibilities. Then, funeral directors began work on institutionalization and raising the public's view of the professionalism and legitimacy of their work; at this point, funeral directors began to rebrand themselves as "funeral directors" at the first national meeting of funeral directors in 1882 (National Funeral Directors Association, 2023). In the early twentieth century, funeral directors offered their own parlors when families could not provide a room at their houses. Later, social and cultural changes – home design (no special domestic space for life rituals), dislike of handling the dead, shifting space of dying, and standardization of embalming (Schlereth, 1992) – motivated funeral directors' needs and provided financial promise to build a freestanding mortuary facility. The mortuary facility served three functions- handling the dead body, holding

funerals, and displaying funeral merchants. By the 1920s, those establishments were identified as "funeral homes" (or similar names such as "funeral chapels"). Then, funeral homes (as well as mortuary education) proliferated during the period of modernization in American society because of many technological revolutions, such as automobiles, telephone lines, and public sanitization (Habenstein & Lamers, 2021).

Some social and cultural effects are associated with the establishment of funeral homes. This new space of death institutionalized embalming and reinforced the widening gap between the living and the dead (Laderman, 2003). Another effect of funeral homes was to provide a public setting for social interactions in communities, facilitating American engagement and familiarity with the realities of death in the earlier 20th century, such as the display of embalmed bodies (e.g., Quigley, 2005) and death scenes were more frequently included in movies and novels in famous culture (e.g., Laderman, 2000).

Earning its Industrial Legitimacy

In the same period of the emergency of funeral homes, funeral directors met a collective issue regarding the legitimacy of their duties, jobs, and occupations in society. This section discusses legitimacy challenges faced by the funeral industry, as well as efforts taken to bolster and sustain legitimacy during the first half of the twentieth century. The following paragraphs cover three public challenges funeral directors face: World War I, commercial dysfunction, and criticism of paganism. Then, the section describes how funeral directors managed and continue to manage these challenges through four approaches to their professional public image.

World War I. Although funeral homes were established in the early 20th century, funeral directors had difficulties explaining their roles in controlling the dead. World War I raised questions and concerns about repatriating the remains of soldiers who died overseas Field

(Piehler, 1994), provoking an urgent national discussion. At this point, the notion of professional funeral directors resonated with most Americans and traditional military policy, as the professional offered an organized method for the repatriation of bodies. However, detractors charged funeral directors with "placing capitalism above nationalism, exploiting the sorrow of grieving citizens, and engaging in a conspiracy to sway public opinion" (Laderman, 2003, p. 50). In the end, Congress acted on repatriating bodies and turned to civilian funeral specialists to assist in identifying and shipping the bodies home (Piehler, 1994).

Commercial dysfunction. Funeral directors were criticized as deceitful rather than trustworthy and sincere in their funeral service businesses. For example, Dowd (1921) mentioned the financial burden of funeral services, the collusion of funeral directors and preachers, and the capitalist logic of supply and demand. A main complaint was that the public was not trained to shop for a reasonably-priced funeral—a reality that could be exploited by greedy funeral directors. Some malicious competition among funeral homes also resulted in upsetting stories, such that funeral directors were known to pressure destitute families into having luxurious and pricy funeral services (Gebhart, 1928).

Criticism of paganism. Ministers denounced funeral directors' paganism for misdirecting religious glorification of the body during the funeral. Some ministers challenged the modern funeral home by arguing that it reflected a dark world where barbarism triumphed over spirituality (e.g., Bowman, 1975), commerce was (wrongly) held as a sacred value, physical remains were glorified over the future destiny of the soul, and the light of the true Christian faith was absent. Indeed, funeral directors saw themselves as ritual specialists with deep patriotism who provided the service of glorifying the embalmed body. For example, during World War II, funeral directors provided services to defend American values of individualism, democracy,

freedom, and the free market to compete against fascism (Lynch & Taylor, 2002). Later, embalming (i.e., preserving and protecting social bodies), similar to the fetishism of diamonds, was framed to pursue values of permanence, protection, and durability after World War II (Lynch & Taylor, 2002).

Four approaches to managing public perceptions of its legitimacy. Funeral directors defended their public reputation by managing four public relations with religious representatives, lawyers, governmental officials, and the public. Ultimately, funeral directors earned widespread acceptance of their professional legitimacy because American families wanted funeral services in the first half of the twentieth century (Laderman, 2003, pp. 46-47), accompanied by tumultuous social changes of industrialization, consumerism, and secularization (Walter, 2005).

Funeral directors developed a cooperative relationship with local religious representatives with mutual respect and appreciation. Increasingly, Americans took for granted the notion that funeral directors had the authority over the body, and clergy had authority over souls (Blackwood, 1942). In practice, ministers deferred to funeral directors as an expert in art. The funeral industry also became increasingly attentive to religious diversity and complied with religious traditions, codifying lessons into textbooks of mortuary education (Klicker, 2009).

The funeral industry also promoted close relations with lawyers. The book *The Law of Cadavers and of Burial and Burial Places* (Jackson, 1950) was published, and it contained a list of primary US legal decisions related to funeral services. Howard Raether, a lawyer, was hired in 1939 as executive director and general counselor of the Wisconsin Funeral Directors and Embalmers Association. He advocated for crafting the national image of America's funeral directors and finding ways for the industry to explain the meaning and purpose of the final ceremonies (Laderman, 2003).

The funeral industry also interacted with numerous levels of government. Based on one report from the 1949 annual convention of the National Funeral Director Association (NFDA), the NFDA officers and members established and maintained close relationships with governmental agencies such as the Army War Memorial Division, the Mortuary Operations Division of Veterans Administration, the Bureau of the Census, Selective Service, the Office of Civil Planning, the Social Security Administration, and the Small Business Division of the Department of Commerce. On the local level, funeral directors lobbied hard in Congress to oppose intrusive bills on the funeral industry. For example, Bill 208-S in 1955, which proposed to limit funeral costs, failed because of funeral homes' opposition.

Funeral directors were endeavoring to manage their relationships with the public. Funeral directors developed their own channels for the dissemination of their profession. For example, one brochure called *Speaking Frankly: A Plain Talk about Funeral Service*, compiled by the National Funeral Director Association in 1940, provided the public with all relevant information about the modern funeral and funeral directors' code of ethics (Laderman, 2003). Another channel for the funeral industry's public relations was an expanding range of textbooks and manuals for mortuary school students, such as the book *Successful Funeral Service Management* (Krieger, 1951). Lastly, some TV programs were allied in battling for a positive public image of funeral directors, such as the *Dan Lundberg Television Show* (e.g., Armour & Williams, 1981).

Battling against Industrial Stereotypes

Although they earned widely-held status as a legitimate profession, funeral directors were not culturally accepted and socially welcomed in the mid-twentieth century in the US, roughly from the 1930s to the 1960s. This incompatible role in social life was likely emanated from the public's ambivalence about the entire experience of death – fear of death and ridding themselves

quickly of deceased bodies – which tended to position funeral directors as scapegoats or undesirables (Fulton, 1965). During this period, the public held two familiar and demeaning stereotypes of funeral directors: a greedy, malevolent, crafty business devil or a satirical, laughable, and buffoon-like trader; in other words, as either evil or stupid. These negative professional images were reinforced in stereotypes from popular culture, including novels, radio and TV programs, and films. The book *The American Way of Death* (Mitford, 1963) pointed out and criticized these stereotypes. This section will explain the two stereotypes and how funeral directors adopted a psychologized rhetoric for managing grief as a means of defending professional legitimacy while also managing professional stereotypes and stigma.

Stereotype: A greedy, malevolent, and crafty business devil. Funeral services are a type of commodity, and funeral directors are dealers, the same as other businessmen, following capitalist marketing principles. However, Mitford (1963) argued that in contrast to other types of business dealing, clients were especially vulnerable in the funeral transaction: "the disorientation caused by bereavement, the lack of standards by which to judge the value of the commodity offered by the seller, the need to make an on-the-spot decision, general ignorance of the law as it affects disposal of the dead, the ready availability of insurance money to finance the transaction" (pp. 20-21). These disorganized funeral transactions were documented and disseminated in radio and TV programs. For example, *The Life of Riley*, a popular radio and TV program in the 1940s and 1950s, described the public suspicions about the motives of funeral directors and a strong discomfort with their presence in life (e.g., Raff, 1976). The episode – *The Exploiters* – of *Dr. Kildare*, a popular TV program in the 1960s, depicted the funeral director as a resentful, indecent predator who used tricks to profit from a helpless widow (Levinson & Link, 1963).

Stereotype: A satirical, laughable, and buffoon-like trader. In Western cultures, funeral directors were depicted in broad strokes as objects of ridicule, subjects for satire, and generally as one-dimensional characters who were predictable and despicable (Mitford, 1963). Mark Twain, a famous novelist, narrated his encounter with an funeral director. In *Life on the Mississippi*, Twain (1985) described a hilarious encounter with an old acquaintance funeral director, which influenced the public's perception of funeral directors in the 20th century. Another compelling novel was *Look Homeward, Angel: A Story of the Burial Life* (Wolfe, 1929). The novel included a famous death scene where the funeral director (a salesman extraordinaire) entered to promote laughs and outrage.

Adoption of psychologized rhetoric in the management of grief. During the first half of the twentieth century, the value of modernity steered a good death moment as a time of certitude, self-control, and objective rationality (Stearns, 1994), manifested in silence on death-related topics, dispassion on death, and Sigmund Freud's pathological grief. Following these modern values, funeral directors drew from psychology and theology, and they consolidated the psychological theory of death (including *grief therapy* and *restorative art*) into the value of funeral services in the 1930s-50s (Laderman, 2003), which transformed cultural meanings associated with the experience of death and the confrontation with physical remains (explanations see below). The new, emerging expertise of grief therapy and restorative art also indirectly attenuated the two stereotypes of funeral directors- a greedy, malevolent, crafty business devil and a satirical, laughable, and buffoon-like trader (e.g., Mitford, 1963).

Grief therapy is a communicative intervention to mitigate the effect of loss and promote successful adaptation (e.g., Currier et al., 2008; Neimeyer & Currier, 2009). Grief therapy is crucial because many people meet substantial and sustained bereavement-related difficulties in

response to loss (Bonanno et al., 2001; Bonanno et al., 2002; Bonanno et al., 2004). Grief is "the process of psychological, social, and somatic reactions to the perception of loss" (Rando, 1984, p. 15). The grief process has three functions: emancipation from the bondage of the deceased, readjustment to the environment in which the deceased is missing, and formation of new relationships (Lindemann, 1944; Parkes & Weiss, 1983). The current dominant model of explaining the grief process is the dual process model of coping with bereavement (Stroebe & Schut, 2010). In the beginning and mid-twentieth century, funeral directors were professionals interested in talking about grief and believed funeral rituals were against grief (Stearns, 1994). Over time, funeral directors, relying on psychological theories, justified the legitimacy of their knowledge about grief while interacting with their clients as a natural area of expertise: grief therapy. For example, Lindemann (1944) proposed a belief in the therapeutic symbolic value of a funeral ceremony. Funeral homes provide grief support, also known as aftercare, as one of their essential services (Lensing, 2001).

Restorative art refers to the cosmetic dimension of embalming (e.g., Pine, 1975), and it concentrates on bringing the features of the deceased to a "life-like person" (e.g., Strub & Frederick, 1989). Originally, embalming was a technique for preserving the body, usually with the goal of transporting the dead back from wars. This cosmetic dimension of embalming constructed another psychological meaning on the physical remains, which "allowed survivors an opportunity to look death squarely in the face and recognized life's finality without experiencing the destabilizing terror and dread" (Laderman, 2003, p. 103). For example, in the 1930s, embalming chemical companies promoted a connection between good embalming and successful psychological recuperation – a natural-looking corpse could ease the suffering of the grieving family as a healing balm for memory (Martin, 1970). Later in the mid-20th century,

many began to believe that the embalming skills of the funeral director, especially the artistic (or cosmetic) touches, could minister to the bereaved, leave a good memory of the dead, and rescue them from a lifetime of psychic damage.

Grief therapy and restorative art transformed cultural meanings associated with religious sentiments about the dead in the 1950s. In short, the societal culture believed that successful grieving and funeral practices comprised a mixture of psychological therapeutic values and religious sacred characters (Laderman, 2003). For example, Irion (1954) defended funeral practices by relying on a mixture of Christian teaching and psychological theories about grief. Similarly, Jackson (1957) explained the psychological and sacred values of funeral practices.

Transformation of the Funeral Industry

Mitford's book *The American Way of Death* (1963), which criticized the two stereotypes of funeral directors, represented a turning point in the history of American funerals. From the 1960s to the 1980s, the funeral industry was changing because of the death awareness movement, the Federal Trade Commission investigation, the AIDS epidemic, and the Immigration Act of 1965. This section explores how these factors drove a cultural shift in the funeral industry, which remains widespread today.

Death awareness movement. The death awareness movement started with the book *The Meaning of Death* (Feifel, 1959), which proposed an agenda for the psychological and social understandings of death. In contrast to the denial of death thesis, which refers to human beings' tendency to repress anything that could evoke a reminder of mortality (Becker, 1973), the death awareness movement holds two central ideas – death as natural and death as loss (Bregman, 2017) – which encourages the voicing of biological, psychological, social, and religious facts of mortality. In the 1970s, three social phenomena documented the development of the death

awareness movement. One was that "thanatology" was a new and expanding field of inquiry in society, as seen by the popular book, *On Death and Dying* (Kübler-Ross, 1969). Thanatology aims to construct a scientific comprehension of death, its rites, and its meanings (Fonseca & Testoni, 2012). In other words, thanatology was defined as "the study of life with death left in" (Kastenbaum, 1993, p. 75). In popular culture, people were growing dissatisfied with the psychological theory of managing grief – the therapeutic symbolic value of funeral ceremonies and the cosmetic dimension of embalming. For example, Romero's film *Night of the Living Dead* was released with success in 1968, but some scenes related to death were ridiculed and controversial (Heffernan, 2002), such as the killers' eating the flesh of the dead and unburied dead coming back to life. Horror movies (e.g., *Prom Night* and *Halloween*) and romantic movies (e.g., *The Trouble with Harry*) in the 1970s illustrate cultural changes in American society (Lev, 2000), such as a lifeless body carrying forward the love of the two movie characters and a suicide to maintain human dignity and values. The third phenomenon was that the dead repatriation in the Vietnam War no longer produced the social solidarity, unanimity of meaning, and cultural consensus that was common during World War I. These changes signaled a cultural shift in how Americans imagined and made meaning of death (Laderman, 2003).

The death awareness movement affected the funeral industry. Growing acceptance of thanatology brought legitimacy to a range of death professionals, such as grief counselors (Feifel, 1974), death educators (Fonseca & Testoni, 2012), and hospice workers in palliative care (Saunders, 2000). To some extent, these death professionals challenged the traditional authorities of funeral directors and medical doctors on grief, dying, and death. Additionally, human dignity and values come into consciousness when handling and comprehending death. For example, the cosmetic dimension of embalming was constructed as psychological healing by leaving good

memories in the mid-20th century. In contrast, funeral directors reframed embalming as the dignified process of humanization, which aimed to reconstruct an illusion of life in a cold cadaver (Howarth, 1996, pp. 152-154) and to enhance the dramaturgical interpretation of funeral work (e.g., Barley, 1983; Turner & Edgley, 1990). Further, the meaning of death was entangled in a very complex contingent discourse of funeral rites, in which it encompassed both flesh and spirit, both a cessation and a process, both bereaved families and the public audience, both psychological healing and death-denying practice, and both facing the reality of death in life and approaching the agnostic of death in faith (for details, Carpentier & Van Brussel, 2012).

Federal Trade Commission investigations. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) was created in 1914, with its mission to protect consumers and promote competition (Federal Trade Commission, n.d.). The FTC was involved in economic disputes such as the sales of caskets in the 1940s and later, and the FTC began a serious examination of funeral services in the early 1970s because of the huge size of the funeral industry (roughly 2 billion dollars) and the growing concern about consumers' vulnerability, lack of prior information, and time pressure (Kopp & Kemp, 2007b). In 1975, the FTC news bulletin proposed a "trading rule" to regulate the business of death and carried out even more extensive investigations (Federal Trade Commission, 1975). Two key messages are in the trading rule for funeral practices:

> (1) Funeral directors would be prohibited from, among other things, embalming without permission, bait-and-switch tactics, impugning consumers who expressed concern about price, misrepresenting public health requirements and state and federal laws bearing on the dead, and refusing to furnish less expensive, alternative forms of disposal, like immediate disposition and cremation. (2) The proposed rules would require morticians to provide grieving family members with the following: a fact sheet covering legal aspects

> of disposal, a casket price list, an itemized list of prices for all services and funeral accouterments, with "conspicuous disclosure" of the consumer's right to choose which services are desired for the upcoming funeral; and a written record of all the financial details once arrangements have been finalized (Laderman, 2003, p. 135).

The report – *Funeral Industry Practices: Final Staff Report to the Federal Trade Commission and Proposed Trade Regulation Rule* (Federal Trade Commission, 1978) – was released, and it was about a close, careful, and thorough examination of the funeral industry practices of doing business. After the oversight hearing of this 1978 report by the Consumer Committee of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, the *Trade Regulation Rule on the Funeral Industry Practices* was enacted in 1982 (Federal Trade Commission, 1982) and became fully effective in 1984. The trade regulation rule on the funeral industry was amended as time changed, and the current one is entitled *Complying with the Funeral Rule* (Federal Trade Commission, 2023).

The FTC rules are aligned with the cultural shift in the funeral industry. First, the funeral industry was offered "an approval seal for its industrial legitimacy involved in the disposal of the dead" (Laderman, 2003, p. 140). After FTC investigations, funeral directors became more of a businessman controlling modern death. For example, business-related and consumer-related motivations shaped the funeral industry (Beard & Burger, 2017). Additionally, funeral directors increase the customization of ceremonies to suit the deceased's traits and the customer's tastes. The feature of "personalization" became a trend in funeral and memorial services since the 1970s (Staudt, 2009), focusing on personal relationships with and achievements of the dead in funeral ceremonies. "Personalization" indicates diverse methods of body disposition and funeral ritual forms (Dickinson, 2012) and the link to the need for individuality and authenticity with the

realization of a healthy grief process and the professionalization of their respective occupations (Schafer, 2012). Moreover, the FTC rule encouraged a rather unusual activity that only slowly began to gain support throughout the industry: planning ahead. This novel idea encompassed a range of business possibilities for wary customers, such as comparison shopping, preplanning, prepayment for individual ceremonies, and leaving friends and relatives out of individual funeral-related issues (Laderman, 2003). Further, funeral directors may apply marketing and communication strategies to encourage funeral preplanning and motivate preplanning attitudes (e.g., Kemp & Kopp, 2010; Kemp & Kopp, 2011).

The AIDS epidemic. The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection rate in the United States grew rapidly in the early 1980s, peaked in the mid-1980s, and declined subsequently (Brookmeyer, 1991). During the AIDS era, the report *Occupational Safety and Health, OSHA Action Needed to Improve Compliance with Hazard Communication Standard* was promulgated by the General Accounting Office, and the report provided information on employer compliance with the Hazard Communication Standard (HCS), efforts to inform small employers about HCS, and the accuracy and clarity of required material safety data sheets (General Accounting Office, 1991).

Concerns about AIDS and other infectious diseases socially changed the operation of funeral homes, a new attitude toward community responsibility, and the acceptance of cremation. These social changes further led to the greater legitimacy of the funeral industry dealing with the disposal of the dead. For example, funeral directors applied universal precautions during the embalming (Beck-Sagué et al., 1991), such as instituting the use of masks, gowns, and gloves and modifying the traditional garb worn by embalmers. Additionally, some morticians refused to work on bodies that died of causes related to HIV (Wojcik, 1993). Similarly, the study found that

people who died of acquired AIDS were cremated more frequently regardless of race or location of death (Jacobs & Wilkes, 1988).

The Immigration Act of 1965. The Immigration Act of 1965 amended the McCarran-Walter Act of 1962, and it concerned the abolition of the quota system, preference system, and labor clearances for certain classes of immigrants (Reimers, 1983). The new immigration law led to apparent changes in the origin of immigrants, and Southern European, Middle Eastern, Asian, and Caribbean immigrants make up a larger proportion of immigrants than previously (Keely, 1971). Increasing numbers of new immigrants required specialized services that crossed lines of ethnicity, religion, and race. This phenomenon aroused some cross-cultural studies that discussed the cultural heterogeneity of American society (e.g., Gudykunst & Kim, 2003), including funeral practices (Metcalf & Huntington, 1991) and bereavement practices (Eisenbruch, 1984). For example, a study found that a Chinese-American funeral ritual was combined with core identity markers of Chineseness and arbitrary markers of cultural and socio-economic contexts of the large society (Zhang, 2001).

Immigration transformed funeral services in a complicated manifestation in the late 20th century. In one aspect, funeral directors embraced multiculturalism as an unavoidable social and business reality. Funeral directors took much interest in learning the cultural intricacies of foreign death rites because of the moral and financial values of adapting their services to satisfy customers (e.g., Goren, 1994; Reimers, 1999), such as *Dia de Los Muertos* (i.e., the Mexican Day of the Dead). Nevertheless, funeral homes normalized relations between the living and the dead and established cultural universals in funeral services. For example, an Italian-American death ritual in Old World customs and traditions was subsequently modified by American social patterns, secularism, industrialization, and funeral customs (Coweii, 1986).

In summary, from the 1960s to the 1980s, the funeral industry experienced a cultural and social change in consumption patterns. These changes resonated with the McDonaldization of US society in the late 20th century (Ritzer, 2013), characterized by the rationality of efficiency, predictability, calculability, substitution of nonhuman for human technology, and control over uncertainty (Ritzer, 1983). Specifically, the funeral industry was further legitimized as an institution because of the enacted trade regulation rule by the Federal Trade Commission and the promulgated hazard communication standard by the General Accounting Office. Moreover, the funeral industry respected diversity and embraced multiculturalism because of the increasing number of immigrants. Lastly, the funeral industry transcended funeral services by integrating the meaning of human dignity and values into handling and comprehending death.

Moving into the 21st-Century Frontier

The funeral industry was crossing the 21st-century frontier with four trends- more cremations, rising funeral corporate giants, the triumph of death in mass media, and funeral services in cyberspace. These four trends are still going on and developing into the more expansive stage.

More cremations. Cremation is the mechanical, thermal, or other dissolution process that reduces human remains to bone fragments (Cremation Association of North America, n.d.). In the United States, the cremation rate was about 5 percent in the 1960s and increased to 25 percent in the 2000s (Cremation Association of North America, n.d.). This rate was close to 60 percent in 2022 and was projected to reach 80 percent in 2035 (Marsden-Ille, 2023). Although cheaper than burial services, wealthy customers initially adopted cremations, and the reasons for the rise of cremation were complicated and profound (for details, Prothero, 2001). Responding to consumers' desire to annihilate the corpse quickly but remember life through rituals and

symbols, funeral directors modified cremation only by providing a memorial service before cremation (Kubasak, 1990).

Rising funeral corporate giants. At the end of the 20th century, family-owned and operated funeral homes experienced economic threats from funeral corporate giants' mergers and acquisitions. Service Corporation International, North America's most prominent funeral corporation, acquired the Alderwoods Group in 2006 and the Steward Enterprise in 2013, the second-largest and third-largest funeral corporation (Federal Trade Commission, 2013). Currently, Service Corporation International has 1900 funeral homes and cemetery locations across 45 states in the US and eight provinces in Canada (Service Corporation International, 2023b). Well-known brands of Service Corporation International include *Dignity Memorial, Funeraria Del Angel, Caballero Rivero, Rose Hills, National Cremation*, and others (Service Corporation International, 2023a). The rise of the funeral corporation giant facilitates preneed sales of funeral services.

The ubiquitousness of death in mass media. Death abounds in the mass media (Hanusch, 2010), and Americans bring the dead to life for public consumption. For example, the image of death, the Grim Reaper, was a pervasive iconic fixture in American popular culture, such as the TV commercial for the Jeep Cherokee and the TV campaign for AIDS (Vitellone, 2001). Similarly, mass media reporting frequently covered mass shootings (e.g., Dahmen, 2018; Murray, 2017) and terrorism (e.g., Altheide, 2007), which evoked the consciousness of death in the public.

Funeral services in cyberspace. The Web and Internet have been used as a medium to introduce innovative cyberspace that can affect dying, funerals, grief, and memorialization (Walter et al., 2012). Some studies examined online support groups to reduce grief-related

symptoms for grieving persons (e.g., Robinson & Pond, 2019) and to improve the psychosocial adjustment of cancers (e.g., Hoey et al., 2008; Høybye et al., 2005). Also, the Web was utilized as an innovative channel for doing business in the funeral industry (e.g., Beard & Burger, 2017; Beaunoyer & Guitton, 2021), such as online casket selling, memorial web pages for leaving messages, and online obituary. Moreover, people could attend funerals online, especially in the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Beaunoyer et al., 2022; Riley et al., 2023), where it also enhanced their relationship with the dead and deepened their connections with others (Roberts, 2004).

Chapter 3: Literature Review: Relational Dialectics Theory 2.0

Baxter (2011) rearticulates relational dialectics theory (RDT) as a dialogically grounded theory of relational meaning-making, developing the earlier work *Relating: Dialogues and Dialectics* (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). RDT is a theory of addressing the relational meaning-making process (Baxter et al., 2021) – that is, "how the meanings surrounding individual and relationship identities are constructed through language use" (Baxter, 2011, p. 2). The core premise of RDT is that meanings are generated from the struggle of competing discourses, and the core RDT principle is that meanings at the moment are the result of the interplay of competing discourses rather than isolated, unitary, and monologic discourses. A *discourse* is a system of meaning, "a set of propositions that cohere around a given object of meaning" (Baxter, 2011, p. 2). This section reviews the RDT literature by explicating the book *Voicing Relationships: A Dialogic Perspective* comprehensively (Baxter, 2011) and reviewing recent RDT studies. The following paragraphs include RDT assumptions, Bakhtin's dialogism, discursive struggles, centripetal-centrifugal struggle, and recent RDT studies.

RDT Assumptions

RDT is one of several theories in the dialectical family, and its uniqueness is explicitly grounded in Bakhtin's theory of dialogism. One core attribute (or feature) of RDT is descriptive/sensitive, which indicates RDT has a strong heuristic capacity to provide an alternative lens to understand phenomena (Littlejohn et al., 2021). Baxter (2011) applied the core principle of RDT – that is, meanings emerge from the interplay of competing discourses – and then modified five key constructs in interpersonal and family communication: public/private, uncertainty, interactant, power, and relationship. These modifications could be considered RDT assumptions for interpersonal and family interactions.

First, according to RDT, public and private are interpenetrated instead of the binary of public and private. A *public sphere* is "a discursive space in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment" (Hauser, 1998, p. 86). People are expected to play designated social roles in the public sphere, such as workers, neighbors, and citizens. By contrast, *private* in the social world is aligned with individual, home, sentiment, love, and self-interest (Gal, 2005). The dialogical grounding of RDT argues the interpenetration of public spheres and private life, where people constitute their dialogue among multiple discourses. For example, when a person is doing an inner dialogue of intrapersonal communication in one's mind, the person also integrates cultural and social contexts into the dialogue.

Second, the theory states that uncertainty is conceived as a normal state rather than an aberration or as a subject to be handled. Uncertainty is primarily discussed in uncertainty reduction theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) and uncertainty management theory (Brashers, 2001). These theories privilege uncertainty as a central subject for either reduction or management. In contrast, the dialogical grounding assumes emergent meaning in which uncertainty is somewhat undermined and considered a natural state. While uncertainty can have a negative connotation in existing research and daily life conversations, the dialogical grounding of RDT designates a neutral (or positive) connotation to uncertainty.

Third, RDT states that an interactant is not a component embedded within communication but is a constituent animator in competing discourses. Hewes and Planalp (1987) stated that effect and intersubjectivity were foundational properties of communication. In other words, interactants influence others in communication and shared knowledge between interactants is necessary to generate intersubjective meanings from communication. Within the

dialogical grounding, interactants constitute a communication animating in competing discourses. In other words, interactants are participatory, and competing discourses circulate in communication.

Fourth, the theory assumes that power is in discourse, not individuals. From the action-oriented perspective, power refers to "the ability to control resources, own and others', without social interference" (Galinsky et al., 2003, p. 454). Individuals have three categories of power (or control): traditional power, charismatic power, and legal-bureaucratic power (Gerth & Mills, 1958). Traditional power is related to customs, traditions, and cultures. Charismatic power is about idolized, inherited, and moral power. Legal-bureaucratic power refers to institutions, laws, regulations, and rules. In contrast, power in discourse suggests that power resides in discourse and has the discursive capacity to define social reality (Van Dijk, 1995). The configuration of power in discourse is just as much the result of a discursive struggle over the meaning of social practices (Deetz & Mumby, 1990). Therefore, the dialogical grounding assumes power is conceived as a relation between discourses.

Fifth, according to RDT, relationships are not static containers in which communication occurs but are constituted through communication practices. Several decades ago, some scholars assumed relationships were static containers of communicating parties, studying friendships, marriages, cohort relationships, leader-member relationships, and inter-organizational relationships (e.g., Oliver, 1990). The dialogical perspective assumes relationships are meaning-making outcomes of communication practices in the interplay of competing discourses.

Bakhtin's Dialogism

This section explains Bakhtin's dialogism, which is a foundational inspiration for Baxter's relational dialectics theory. In short, RDT is developed from the theory of dialogism, structured by Mikhail Bakhtin, one of the most influential thinkers in the twentieth century (e.g., Emerson, 2000; Holquist, 2003). The following paragraphs review details of Bakhtin's life, dialogism in pre-1924, dialogism in post-1924, locating Bakhtin's dialogism in communication research, and locating RDT in Bakhtin dialogism.

Bakhtin's life. Bakhtin was born in the small Russian town of Odessa and studied classics, philosophy, and literature at St. Petersburg University. In his lifespan of 1895-1975, he experienced the Russian Revolution, the Stalinist political times, and the Marxist regime in the Soviet Union. He was in political trouble for exploring and advocating diverse voices in a society of a monologic voice. His earlier work on dialogism concentrated on the aesthetics of creative art, consciousness, and ethics, as shown in the volume *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays* (Bakhtin, 1990). His later dialogism work was about the struggle of competing discourses, as seen in the book *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Bakhtin, 1981a). Another substantial work is *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (Bakhtin, 1986), which teaches the core dialogic concepts of the utterance chain and genre. Interestingly, his work remained primarily hidden until 1963, when Dostoevsky and Rabelais discovered and were impressed with his work.

Dialogism in pre-1924. For this period, Bakhtin did not concentrate on language and discourse. Instead, he focused on consciousness, ethics, and aesthetics. The philosophical assumption is that art and life are not discrete domains of humanity, and the consummation of art and life is aesthetic. In other words, everyday life is prosaic– an ordinary, taken-for-granted

process of living – but not free of creative activity and art, and the fusion of prosaic life and creative art is aesthetic. The three constructs – consciousness, ethics, and aesthetics – are discussed, and they are intertwined as well as advanced.

According to Bakhtin (1984), consciousness is an awareness by the mind, and the critical dialogic principle is that consciousness is a relation of the *Self* and the *Other*. In other words, without having otherness in comparison, a person cannot have a consciousness.

Consciousness is an ongoing, situated action of relating, so a person is both an entity of acting consciousness and a comparison to raise consciousness. To better stimulate consciousness, people have an ethical obligation to participate in other's actions of relating. Thus, ethics matter in facilitating the effectiveness of stimulating other's actions of relating. For instance, it is ethical when a person smiles and nods in a conversation with others.

Further, for Bakhtin (1990), consciousness is in the dialogical assumption of "unfinalizability," and meaning is constituted in fleeting moments of the consummation of self-authoring and other-answerability. When self-authoring and other-answerability mutually merge into an equated self-and/or-other, aesthetics is achieved. Aesthetic activity includes a three-part process. First is empathy: putting oneself into other's shoes. Second is a return to one's outsideness: returning to one's own place outside. Third is one's answerability to the other's wholeness: completing the comprehensive consummation of self-authoring and other-answerability. For example, one aesthetic moment is:

> A German person plans to surf on waves and notices two refugees from Syria's civil wars begging for food on the beach. He is compassionate with their sufferings and gives all his money in his wallet to them. Returning to the sea, he starts crying while surfing the

waves. Another person sitting on the beach watches the whole story and believes tears flowing in the water sound.

Within this aesthetic moment, the person sitting on the beach puts himself into both the refugee and German person's shoes, and then, the person returns to life reality as an irrelevant, uninvolved, third-person outsider, and at last, the person completes his self-authoring about the whole moment and concludes (or answer) the consummation of the whole moment as aesthetic.

Dialogism in post-1924. For this period, Bakhtin turned the linguistic focus on language-in-use, historically significant for the subject of study, *speech communication* (Bakhtin, 1986). To some extent, this linguistic turn validates *(speech) communication* as a discipline and justifies the founding of Departments of Communication in universities. The following paragraphs explain this linguistic turn, including the basis, the utterance chain, and dialogue.

The basis of Bakhtin's dialogism focuses on language-in-use (Bakhtin, 1981a). The linguistic view associates abstract objectivism with Saussure, which focuses on structural and systemic features of languages (e.g., Saussure, 1959), such as grammar, phonology, and semantics. Moreover, this linguistic view is opposite to individualistic subjectivism in the study of language, which believes that utterances are nothing more than the expression of a speaker's inner world (e.g., Voloshinov, 1987), such as individual motivation, individual dispositions, and subjective introspection. Bakhtin views language (or expression) as constitutive of the human experience. In short, Bakhtin's view of meaning is not about the linguistic structure and individual psychology, and it is a social process of interactants' joint construction in a specific temporal, spatial, and social situation.

For Bakhtin (1981a), the utterance is the central analytic unit in language-as-dialogue. An utterance is a link in a chain of speech communion bounded by preceding and following links, so

an utterance chain is many utterances that are linked in communion flowing. There are four characteristics of an utterance. Some of an utterance's preceding links are distant and remote in time and space. For example, some old philosophers' sayings can impact current dialogues. An utterance also sits at the dialogic boundary of the said and the unsaid. For example, shared and taken-for-granted meanings, such as cultural norms, traditions, and values, can function as the background for dialogue. An utterance constructed by a speaker has taken into account the immediate listener's possible response. For example, people sometimes speak to cater to listeners' favors. Lastly, an utterance's meaning is not fixed. Listeners comprehend one utterance differently, and the speaker and listener co-construct the meaning of an utterance.

Dialogue, distinctive to the contemporary understanding as a smooth conversation, is a melody among multiple differing discourses (or systems of meaning). Bakhtin also advanced a more general claim about all dialogic discourse by suggesting that dialogue is "a process in which unity and difference, in some form, are at play, both with and against one another" (Baxter, 2011, p. 32). Some genres of communication actualize dialogue more readily than others, such as the novel and the carnival. The novel is characterized by a polyphony of voices (Bakhtin, 1984). For example, a speaker quotes someone else's voice to advance one's own argument. The carnival highlights free and familiar contact among people (Bakhtin, 1984). For example, the movie *Titanic* includes a carnivalesque atmosphere.

Locating Bakhtin's dialogism in communication research. Deetz (2001) identified two dimensions of contrast: local/emergent – elite/a priori and consensus – dissensus; the two contrast dimensions intersect and generate four paradigms – normative (or post-positivism), interpretivism, critical, and dialogic – for mapping organizational communication studies. The local/emergent endpoint favors situated knowledge claims, in contrast to the search for large-

scale empirical generalization that characterizes the elite/a prior endpoint. In the consensus view, deviance, conflict, and fragmentation are problematic, and researchers focus on how natural or social systems maintain order, predictability, and stability. By contrast, the dissensus view provides an intellectual home to researchers who view conflict, fragmentation, struggle, and disorder as normal.

The dialogic paradigm assumes that meanings are located at the intersection of dissensus and local/emergent, along the two dimensions of contrast. Dialogic research emphasizes "dissensus production and the local/situated nature of understanding" (Deetz, 2001, p. 31). Unlike critical studies' predefinition of groups and types of domination, dialogic studies focus more on "micropolitical processes and the joined nature of power and resistance" (Deetz, 2001, p. 31). Thus, dialogic studies are associated with postmodern and deconstructionist fields (e.g., Barker & Cheney, 1994; Burrell, 1988). The dialogic project is "not to get it right but to challenge guiding assumptions, fixed meanings and relations, and reopen the formative capacity of human beings in relation to others and the world" (Deetz, 2001, p. 37). Seven themes are known by organizational communication scholars who are interested in the dialogic paradigm, including the centrality of discourse, fragmented identities, the critique of the philosophy of presence, the loss of foundations and master narratives, the knowledge/power connection, hyperreality, and research as resistance and indeterminacy.

Bakhtin's (1981a) dialogism fits well within the dialogic paradigm. First, dialogism focuses on competing discourses, where the speaker and listener co-construct the meaning of an utterance. The proposition of meaning co-construction complies with dissensus production in the dialogic paradigm. Second, dialogism argues that language (or expression) is constitutive of the human experience, in which meaning is emergent from a specific temporal, spatial, and social

situation. The constitutive view of emergent meanings aligns with the dialogic paradigm's local/situated nature of understanding. Third, the labels of dialogism and dialogic are highly similar. In short, Bakhtin's dialogism is one theory growing out of the dialogic paradigm.

Locating RDT in Bakhtin dialogism. RDT is an extension of Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, taking the core principles and concepts of dialogism. Bakhtin's dialogism primarily focuses on genres of speech communion, such as the novel and the carnival. RDT, instead, examines the everyday talk of people in interpersonal and family communication.

Baxter (2011) used the cautious label *relational dialectics theory* instead of other names such as Bakhtin's dialogism theory. The term *relational* privileges the intertextuality of the utterance chain, in which an utterance is bounded by preceding and following utterances. Moreover, the term *relational* signals communication situated in human experiences, distinctive to Bakhtin's dialogism, which is more literary based. Besides, the term *dialectics*, the first chosen name in the work (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996), adopts the worldview that is "destructive of neat systems and ordered structures and compatible with the notion of a social universe that has neither fixity nor solid boundaries" (Murphy, 1971, p. 90). In other words, *dialectics* centers change through conflict, emphasizing the struggle of competing discourses, which narrows the focus of Bakhtin's dialogism on differing discourses.

Discursive Struggles

Communication scholars often research utterances as a central unit of their analyses (Bakhtin, 1986). From a dialogic perspective, an utterance is bounded by preceding and following utterances and is composed of an utterance chain. An utterance chain is not just the interchange of texts, but intertextuality exists in cultural and socioeconomic contexts and corresponds with interactants' inner motivations, thoughts, and feelings. Within their early

articulations of RDT, Baxter and Montgomery (1996) presented a typology of four distinct forms of utterance chains: *distal already-spokens*, *proximal already-spokens*, *proximal not-yet-spokens*, and *distal not-yet-spokens*. The following paragraphs are elaborating these four forms of utterance chains.

Distal already-spokens. According to RDT, the distal already-spoken link in the utterance chain refers to "utterances circulating in the culture at large, which are given symbolic life when voiced by speakers" (Baxter, 2011, p. 50). In short, the distal already-spoken utterance chain indicates norms, values, and beliefs in cultural society, equated to the term *cultural discourse*, "a historically transmitted expressive system of communication practices, of acts, events, and styles, which are composed of specific symbols, symbolic forms, norms, and their meanings" (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 169).

Some prominent cultural discourses animate talk in and about relationships. For example, prominent discourse that animate talk in and about relationships can include discourses of individualism, community, privacy, rationality, and romanticism. Individualism epitomizes the political science term "*possessive individualism*," a belief that the person is a proprietor of the self (e.g., Macpherson, 1962; Sykes, 2007), indicating that one is a self-contained and autonomous entity. Bellah et al. (1985) elaborate on the discourse of individualism by identifying two categories: expressive individualism and utilitarian individualism. The former emphasizes the value of self-exploration and self-expression, and the latter pursues self-interest for individual self-improvement and achievement. For the discourse of community, Bellah et al. (1985) explicate two traditions: the biblical and the republican. The biblical tradition assumes that members are interdependent in a community and obligatory to serve the community's best interests. The republican tradition underscores a member's citizenship with corresponding civic

obligations in the public sphere. The discourse of privacy is a belief that the autonomous individual owns information and should have the right to control access to that information. For example, communication privacy management theory addresses how people manage private information from a communicative perspective (Petronio, 2010). The discourse of rationality believes in an adequate approximation for modeling and predicting human behaviors, mainly that people follow fundamental normative principles of reasoning, judgment, and decision (Shafir & LeBoeuf, 2002). The discourse of romanticism explains a general disposition of an individual whose affection related to love, marriage, and the family is excluded from conscious reflection (Spanier, 1972). To some extent, the romanticism discourse, associated with beliefs in romantic destiny (Knee, 1998), is spiritual, experiential, and ineffable.

Research for the distal already-spoken utterance chain can represent how cultural discourses animate talk in and about relationships. Existing research includes two primary approaches: the discursive struggle of integration and the discursive struggle of expression. The discursive struggle of integration is built on the conflict between the discourse of individualism and the discourse of community, also labeled as the *autonomy-connection* or *inclusion-seclusion* (e.g., Baxter & Erbert, 1999). Empirical studies explore the discursive struggle of integration in various research topics, such as individual identity construction (e.g., Sahlstein et al., 2009), voluntary relationship construction (e.g., Carr & Wang, 2012), emotional distance and closeness management (e.g., Feeney & Fitzgerald, 2022), and competing for self-interest, individual rights, time and energy, and loyalty demand (e.g., Baxter et al., 1997; Day, 2013; Oglensky, 2008; Pitts et al., 2009; Schrodt et al., 2006). Moreover, the discursive struggle of expression illustrates the conflict between the discourse of privacy and the discourses of rationality/community, commonly reframed as *revelation-concealment*, *expression-nonexpression*, *openness-closedness*,

and *disclosure-privacy* (e.g., Baxter, 1990). Empirical research about the discursive struggle of expression in various fields includes disjuncture within a discourse (e.g., Dutta, 2017), the meaning-making of individualism (e.g., Prentice, 2009), the boundary of community (e.g., Dumlao & Janke, 2012), understanding about rationality (e.g., Amati & Hannawa, 2014), privacy management (e.g., Ngcongo, 2016), and meanings of romance (e.g., Goldsmith, 1990).

Proximal already-spokens. Within the language of RDT, the proximal already-spoken link in the utterance chain is a discursive site in which the interactants' joint history interpenetrates with the meaning of their present relationship. In other words, the interactant parties' relationship is produced by integrating the past inherited relationship and the current interactional moment. Two research groups are relevant in understanding the proximal already-spoken utterance chain, including the micro-practices of intertextuality and discourses of the past and present relations at play.

The micro-practices of intertextuality encompass not only prior utterances in the conversational exchange but extend to their prior conversations together. The micro-practice of intertextuality is interested in everyday conversations, which researchers typically explicate by applying conversation analysis (Hutchby, 2019; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). Conversation analysis, a research method, investigates the sequential organization of talk, such as the design, exchange, and coordination of actions within social interactions (Hutchby, 2019). In detail, researchers focus on conversational patterns, such as serial argument (Hample & Allen, 2012; Trapp & Hoff, 1985), repetition in conversations (Tannen, 1987), and conversation coherence (Ellis et al., 1983).

Discourses of the past and present relations at play discuss how relations in the past influence present relations and induce relations' change. A classic research field related to past

and present relations is “ambiguous loss,” which is a type of loss that occurs when a loved one is physically present but psychologically absent (Boss, 1999), such as can be experienced by loved ones of dementia patients (e.g., Boss, 2010). Another research field is relationship maintenance and change (e.g., Montgomery, 1993; Ogolsky et al., 2017). Dindia and Canary (1993) summarized four conceptualizations of relational maintenance: “to keep a relationship in existence, to keep a relationship in satisfactory condition, to keep a relationship in a specific state or condition, and to keep a relationship in repair” (p.30). For example, a study explores how individuals maintain long-distance romantic relationships by using communication channels (Dainton & Aylor, 2002). Another study identifies turning points in developing romantic relationships (Baxter & Bullis, 1986).

Proximal not-yet-spokens. According to RDT, the proximal not-yet-spoken link in the utterance chain focuses on the anticipated response of the listener(s) to the speaker’s words and nonverbal gestures. In other words, speakers frame their utterances by thinking of the listener’s anticipated responses. The proximal not-yet-spoken link, the literal exchange between *self* and *other*, raises a question regarding the meaning of similarities (i.e., one’s empathy to the other) and differences (i.e., one’s excess of seeing from the other) between *self* and *other*. From the symbolic interactionism perspective, Mead (1934) proposes “taking the role of the other,” which means that an individual takes the same socio-physiological way to become conscious of oneself and others. Further, one’s consciousness of oneself and others is equally important for self-development and developing the organized society or social group to which he belongs (Golden et al., 2003). From the dialogic perspective, the self is formed by listening to others (i.e., addressivity) and responding to others (i.e., answerability; Koczanowicz, 2000), and then the

self-identity is ongoingly constructed in the interactions that "manifest similarities and differences in systems of meaning between speakers" (Baxter, 2011, p. 103).

These two perspectives ground two research groups about the meaning of differences between *self* and *other*. Many communication scholars adopt Mead's symbolic interactionism for research, in which language use is to reach a consensual and united viewpoint between the self and others (Blumer, 1969). This approach assumes that differences are disliked and need to be erased (or at least managed) through interactions. For example, the "conflict grid" identified five styles of managing conflicts, including competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating (Blake & Mouton, 1981; Rahim, 2023). However, the dialogical approach assumes that conflicts as normal and positive sites are constitutive of meanings (Bakhtin, 1986), and discursive struggles are inherent in language. Communication scholars studying deliberation have applied the dialogical approach (e.g., Burkhalter et al., 2002; Gastil, 2008). Typically, public dialogue, participatory democracy, and deliberative democracy suggest the constitutive approach of meaning-making. For example, Milam and Heath (2014) rethink collaboration through the lens of participative democracy rather than as a neutral organizational structure or process.

Distal not-yet-spokens. In RDT theorizing, the distal not-yet-spoken link in the utterance chain focuses on the anticipated normative evaluation to be provided by a possible future listener. A future listener, the so-called third person, is an outsider who primarily functions to evaluate the present conversation. In short, speakers also adapt to their utterances by thinking about what a conversation should be in the future. Similar to the distal already-spoken link, which is about conventional norms, values, and beliefs in cultural society, the distal not-yet-spoken link stays mostly the same when we think about expectations in the near future.

However, the distal not-yet-spoken link will differ from the distal already-spoken link in the longitudinal perspective.

Discursive struggles of "idealized romance" and "real family" apply the distal not-yet-spoken link in the utterance chain. For example, the meaning system of ideal romance was dominant in heterosexuality in the past, but it is challenged by homosexuality in the present (e.g., Peplau, 1982; Roisman et al., 2008). Additionally, Baxter et al. (2009) replicated Trost's (1990) study of identifying characteristics of "family" and documented a different set of characteristics of an idealized family. Research of the distal not-yet-spoken link ties into documenting social changes, which is difficult to accomplish by scholars, so this part of the research is limited.

Centripetal-centrifugal Struggle

As mentioned above, within the language of RDT, an utterance chain represents discursive struggles, and meanings are worked from the struggle of competing discourses. Competing discourses are often not on an equal-power playing field, and Bakhtin (1981b) used the terms *centripetal-centrifugal* to mark the power inequality of discourses in struggles. *Centripetal* refers to "moving toward centralization or the center, whereas *centrifugal* refers to the opposite dynamic of moving away from the center toward the margins" (Baxter, 2011, p. 123). In other words, centripetal discourses are more powerful than centrifugal discourses because their systems of meanings are centered or legitimated as social reality. This section is to understand the ways in which discourses can be in play with one another so that we can understand better how meanings are emergent from competing discourses. The following paragraphs will explain power in discourses, the interplay of discourses, and discursive struggle in communication genres.

Power in discourses. By conceptualizing power dialogically, power is understood as residing in the systems of meaning – the discourses – that produce and sustain social arrangements (Deetz, 2001; Foucault, 1977, 1980). Within the framework of a critical analysis of discourses, discourses reproduce power and dominance by *the structures and strategies of access*, that is

> Who controls the preparation, the participants, the goals, the language, the genre, the speech acts, the topics, the schemata (e.g., headlines, quotes), the style, and the rhetoric, among other text features, of communicative events… That is, who can/may/must say what, to whom, how, in what circumstances and with what effects on the recipients?" (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 102).

In short, power is conceptualized as the discursive capacity to define social reality.

Discourses, with power residing in language, are constitutive and function as a powerful self-discipline for individuals to situate themselves vis-à-vis normative behavioral standards (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Foucault, 1972; Putnam et al., 2016). From a monologic worldview, a single-voiced discourse is so dominant that other competing discourses are silenced and, often, unthinkable. This authoritative discourse functions to "subvert, obscure, and deny alternative discourses" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 61). For example, Hintz and Brown (2020) found that the *carnival*, a communication genre, enabled discursive closure via single-voiced monologue in the online discussion about whether having children (or not) was a normal autonomy decision. From the dialogic worldview, the meaning-making process should be approached for its indeterminate, fluid, and unfinalized potential. Although the centripetal discourse is centered and subverts centrifugal discourses, alternative discourses exist and contribute to the meaning-making process (Bakhtin, 1984). For example, women leaders use

both masculine- and feminine-voiced discourses to survive in a male-dominated business world (Baxster, 2011). Moreover, the current centrifugal discourses may be transformed into the centripetal discourse in the future. For example, over the last three decades, many countries worldwide, including the United States, have experienced major increases in support for LGBTQ individuals and related issues (Adamczyk & Liao, 2019). The following section explains the interplay of discourses from the dialogic worldview.

The interplay of discourses. The interplay of discourses is essential for RDT, and meanings are emergent from discourses in play. The "interplay" indicates that competing discourses interpenetrate in a dialogue, and the interplay can be diachronic and synchronic, labeled as *diachronic separation* and *synchronic interplay*.

Diachronic separation depicts a shift in which discourse is centered and which discourse is marginalized over time. An ebb and flow across time characterizes two diachronic practices: spiraling inversion and segmentation (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). The spiraling inversion suggests a back-and-forth pattern in which one discourse is dominant first, and then another is transformed into dominance for a given topical or activity domain over time. For example, Schrodt et al. (2006) identified two discourses – a legal document or a guide – regarding the divorce decree, jumping forth and back. Similarly, wives whose elderly husbands had adult dementia constantly experienced a primary contradiction between their husbands' physical presence and cognitive/emotional absence (Baxter et al., 2002), indicating the constant interexchange of discourses of certainty-uncertainty, openness-closedness, and past-present. Segmentation manifests an ebb-and-flow in which the inversion of a topical or activity domain transforms the centered discourse. For instance, Hoppe-Nagao and Ting-Toomey (2002) found that married couples manage the dialectical autonomy-connection contradiction by applying the

strategies of activity segmentation: doing one activity that favors the husband and doing another activity according to the wife's preference.

Meanwhile, RDT explains that synchronic interplay explicates how multiple discourses co-occur at a given time. Scholars attempt to identify synchronic interplay by focusing on four distinct forms of utterance chains: *distal already-spokens*, *proximal already-spokens*, *proximal not-yet-spokens*, and *distal not-yet-spokens*. Four features of utterance chains indicate the synchronic interplay, conceptualized as dimensions: *antagonistic-nonantagonistic struggle*, *direct-indirect struggle*, *serious-playful struggle*, and *polemical-transformative struggle* (Baxter, 2011).

According to the theory, the antagonistic-nonantagonistic struggle describes two speakers aligning with different semantic positions to one utterance. Antagonistic struggle, also called moral conflict (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997), means that utterances cause conflicts in which people are enmeshed in incommensurate social worlds. With this language use, speakers sometimes couple discourse with a specific kind of person rather than reference discourse in a depersonalized way (Bakhtin, 1981b). For instance, the utterance "I do not like holidays, which make me lazy" generates a unique discourse of disliking holidays, reflecting the speaker's personality, which is a criticism of the discourse of liking holidays. Nonantagonistic struggle indicates that people can identify multiple discourses in utterances (Bakhtin, 1984). For example, the utterance "I guess you could say we are dating but not really dating" contains two discourses: the discourse of romanticism and the discourse of individualism.

In RDT, the direct-indirect struggle is about the ambiguous level of an utterance situated in a binary continuum of directness-indirectness. Ambiguity allows multiple interpretations to exist among people who attend to the same message (Eisenberg, 1984). Baxter (2011) proposes

three discursive ways in which ambiguity functions in the interpenetration of discourses. First, ambiguity can elide or avoid the direct interplay between competing discourses. For example, dating is a highly ambiguous term, and it can mean love, romance, sex, gratification, and others, indicating the discourse of romanticism and the discourse of individualism. Second, ambiguity discursively produces a centrifugal discourse to refute centripetal discourse indirectly. For instance, the utterance "My mum does not allow me to go outside at night, although I truly want to hang out with you" utilizes the discourse of community to compete with the discourse of connection implicitly. Third, ambiguity can temper the authoritativeness of a dominant discourse. The use of modifiers, such as "some," "sometimes," "a little bit," and others, admit but moderate the centripetal discourse. For example, the utterance "Some people (as opposed to everyone) support collectivism" generally supports the discourse of community but retains the possibility of criticism from other discourses.

The serious-playful struggle draws attention to the tone of an utterance. The utterance tone is a complicated verbal resource through which people can challenge a competing discourse (Bakhtin, 1981b). The *rogue*, the *fool*, and the *clown* are three playful devices through which a competing discourse can be challenged. The rogue parodies a competing discourse and attributes it to a mocked person. For example, the utterance "Let me count the ways she loves her husband: car, job, income, house, and retirement package" applies the rogue to describe her specific love, indicating the discourse of rationality competing with the discourse of romance. The *fool* involves a deliberate stupidity toward a given utterance. For instance, within the utterance chain, "[Mum:] Son, throw the trash out. [Son:] I forget where the dumpster is," the son deliberately performs stupidity to challenge his mother's authority, indicating the discourse of individualism competing with the discourse of community. The clown involves a playfully malicious distortion

of a given system of meaning, creating the possibility for laughter at the absurdity of the targeted discourse. For example, within an utterance chain, "[Dad:] I am the sole breadwinner, so I should control the household's direction. [Mum:] Do you know the names of kids' teachers, how to renew our daughter's asthma medication, or even where the paper towels are stored? Could you really direct this household?" the mother's response distorts the father's meaning concerning his contribution to the family and opens a new discussion about the value of the housework chore, indicating the discourse of individualism competing with the discourse of community.

According to RDT, the polemical-transformative struggle moves from a zero-sum logic, in which competing discourses dance in the center-margin position, to an ideal-fusion logic where new meanings are created. The polemical interplay is enacted when competing discourses achieve a certain truce through *compromise* (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). For example, Kline et al. (1996) found that women used a combination of wife's and husband's surnames upon marriage as a compromise. The transformative interplay creates a new discourse from the fusion of competing discourses, including two approaches of *hybridization* and *aesthetic moments*. Hybridization is mixing two or more distinct discourses to create a new meaning. For example, Miller-Day (2004) studied grandmother-mother-daughter relationships, in which the role of the mother is the hybridization of mother and daughter. Aesthetic moments involve the interpenetration of discourses in which two meaning systems are transformed into one new meaning system. For example, a marriage transforms a man and a woman into a couple, which represents a family's wholeness. Before marriage, the autonomy-connection competing discourse existed in dating, but after marriage, the discourse of a couple takes over the meaning system of dating.

Discursive struggle in communication genres. In RDT, the utterance chains are embedded in larger social packages known as communication genres, which are pre-patterned communication actions to resolve recurrent communication problems (Günthner & Knoblauch, 1995). Three communication genres are dialogically expansive and deserve RDT scholars' attention for research, including narrative stories, the carnival, and relationship rituals.

Narrative stories are novels, tales, and other narratives that hold a good dialogic potential because of their capacity to place several viewpoints in play simultaneously. Most recent RDT studies, analyzing interviews (e.g., Scharp et al., 2021) or online texts (e.g., Scharp & Thomas, 2020), do narrative analysis.

The carnival depicts social events characterized by a carnivalesque spirit, in which people talk freely, frankly, and without concerning rules. For example, a study of American Halloween is an excellent example of a carnivalesque communication event (Clark, 2005).

Relationship rituals deserve RDT scholars' attention because rituals are rich sites where hybridization and aesthetic moments are likely to occur. Durkheim viewed rituals as social instruments to establish collective representations and community identity (Giddens, 1972). In other words, rituals make profane beings into sacred/deified beings with moral obligations. For rituals, the recurring nature, the role of communication, and the need to honor someone or something are essential characteristics (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2006; Pearson et al., 2011). Some studies explore interpersonal rituals in marriages and friendships (Bruess & Pearson, 1997, 2002), relational culture in romantic couples (Farrell et al., 2014), the ritual event of marriage renewal among long-time married couples (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2002; Braithwaite & Baxter, 1995), and ritual enactments in blended families (Braithwaite et al., 1998).

Recent RDT Studies

This section reviews RDT-based studies published after Baxter's book in 2011. In the past decade, few studies have applied the RDT framework comprehensively, and even fewer studies have attempted to develop RDT.

Many studies identified two competing discourses from discursive relational meaning-making in various samples and diverse contexts, such as voluntary childlessness (Hintz & Brown, 2020), opioid use (Wolfe & Scharp, 2023), the U.S. fostered care system (Thomas & Scharp, 2020), hearing loss (Scharp & Barker, 2021), and online suicide chat (Conrad & Coohey, 2023). Some studies noticed the complexity of occasions and identified three (or even four) competing discourses in play, such as seahorse dads' pregnancy (Alvarez et al., 2023), childfree parenting (Hintz & Scharp, 2023), women's experiences of endometriosis diagnoses (Krebs & Schoenbauer, 2020), and Finnish mothers' mothering (four discourses) (Raudasoja et al., 2022). Although some did not (e.g., Wozniak et al., 2014), many studies have discussed how competing discourses are (primarily synchronic) in play and the meaning-making emergent from the interplay (e.g., Scharp & Thomas, 2021), especially that some studies attempt to propose decision-making or behavioral guidelines (e.g., Apker et al., 2016; Harrigan et al., 2021; Table et al., 2022).

Only some studies attempt to develop RDT. Some studies borrowed the critical interpersonal and family communication (CIFC) framework to develop (or at least compare with) the RDT framework (Suter, 2018; Suter & Norwood, 2017), which enriches critical family communication theorizing. Additionally, Malhotra et al. (2022) argue for extending RDT by elucidating that the meaning of a semantic object is predicated on a web of larger intertextual meaning. However, Baxter makes a similar point in *distal non-spoken utterances* and so an

extension may not be necessary. Lastly, Thompson et al. (2018) argue for identifying three supra-dialectics, which the author disproves as an extension because *supra-dialectics* do not go beyond the term *discourses*.

Baxter et al. (2021) review RDT studies in the past decade, and three suggestions are proposed. First, RDT researchers should study communication genres other than narratives, especially relationship rituals and carnivalesque enactments. Second, researchers should study the full utterance chain – discourses in relationship history and anticipated responses to utterances, such as the distal not-yet-spoken and distal already-spoken utterances. In other words, scholars have focused on discourses in synchronic interplay but lack attention to discourse in diachronic interplay. Third, researchers should collect longitudinal data to document and represent discourses in relationship history and anticipated responses to utterances.

Chapter 4: Literature Review: The Commerce-Care Dialectic in Funeral Planning

The National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA, 2023) reported more than 18,800 funeral homes throughout the United States in 2021; 89.2 % of those were family-owned, with an average of three full-time employees and four part-time employees. The NFDA lists funeral directors' duties, which include embalming, burial and cremation, securing legal papers, arranging memorial services, directing funerals, and offering grief support.

Funeral services are *(un)wanted* and *(un)sought* (Bi & Ploeger-Lyons, 2022), referring to the fact that they are needed and accepted by communities and society, yet, also associated with death and dying and therefore . Funeral services have three characteristics: services or products (1) evoke negative emotions in buying situations, (2) are unknown and/or reluctant to be known, but (3) are essentially needed and accepted by society (Schwartz et al., 1986; Wilson & West, 1981).

Funeral planning is the core of funeral services. To arrange a funeral, funeral directors and clients are involved in contextual conversations to decide on funeral service details (e.g., Barley, 1983; Campbell, 2021; Turner & Edgley, 1990), such as location, setting, procedure, music, and other information. Ironically, although mattering to everyone across class, race, gender, and culture, few scholars examine funeral services, fewer of those explore funeral planning, and fewer and fewer researchers directly discuss the issue related to the commerce-care dialectic in funeral planning. This section aims to review the commerce-care dialectic in funeral planning, including funeral planning, commodification and decommodification, and research on the commerce-care dialectic in funeral services. Impressively, the author is likely to be the first person to integrate the literature of the commerce-care dialectic in funeral planning.

Funeral Planning

The section explicates death, funeral, and funeral planning.

Death. Death is known as "the end" (Jung, 1959), and physical death in science is typically identified by the loss of the heartbeat, the absence of spontaneous breathing, and brain death. Socially, Hertz (1960) describes the collective consciousness of death in four natures. First, death has a mythical nature. Death is a temporary exclusion of the individual from human society (e.g., resurrection, communal memories, and the soul survival). Second, death has a transitional nature. Death is considered a turning point when individuals are excluded from the visible society of the living into the invisible society of the dead. Third, death has an emotional nature. Mourning is a necessary and natural emotional reaction when living in front of death. Fourth, death has an adaptive and processing nature. Death consists of a dual and painful process of mental disintegration and synthesis, and the process lasts until peace is recovered in society. The ontology of death essentially falls into the philosophical discussion of agnosticism and existentialism, such as questions, "Do humans have the freedom/power to master over death? Do humans have the wish/willingness to quit a life of untruth?"

Social scientists are devoted to acknowledging and interpreting death from various perspectives (for a review, see the book, Feifel, 1959). Glaser and Strauss (1965) propose four distinctly different stages of being aware of dying: closed awareness (e.g., the patient does not recognize his impending death), suspected awareness (e.g., the patient attempts to confirm his suspicion), mutual pretense awareness (e.g., each party defines the patients as dying, but each pretends that the other has not done so), and open awareness (e.g., personnel and patient both are aware that he is dying). Similarly, Rando (1984) argues that all societies can fit into death-accepting, death-defying, and death-denying general models of responding to death. *Death-*

defying societies (e.g., Egypt) are mythical and refuse to believe death would take anything away. *Death-denying* societies (e.g., the United States) deny death in culture and refuse to confront death until the last second. *Death-accepting* societies (e.g., Fiji) view death as an inevitable and natural part of the life cycle. Moreover, humans construct standards for evaluating death. The term "good death" describes that individuals are satisfied with the process of addressing and experiencing death (Kehl, 2006), and it typically shares characteristics with having peacefulness, being in control, having frank conversations, honoring beliefs and values, and having trust (e.g., Kehl, 2006; Lang, 2020; Semino et al., 2014). Lastly, the denial of death thesis is about the most fundamental human motivation and argues that all human beings instinctively deny their awareness of death, repressing it from consciousness (Becker, 1973). The basis of the denial of death thesis is two existential tensions in human nature (Runstrom, 2015). One is that the human's *causa-sui* (cause of himself) aspiration is teased by its mortality. The other is the human's *desire to yield* (abandonment of the causa-sui project) because of fear of death and life. Scholars scrutinize the nature of denial (Kauffman, 2001) as a defensive behavior or psychological mechanism. Many critiques of the thesis are proposed primarily because of postmodern philosophy's skepticism, subjectivism, and relativism (e.g., Mellor, 1992; Simon et al., 1993). The denial of death thesis is primarily persistent in contemporary American society, as well as many others (e.g., Tradii & Robert, 2019).

Funeral. A funeral is a rite commonly employed by humans to cope with and adapt to death (Corr & Doka, 2001; Howarth, 1996). In other words, a funeral does not prevent or delay the coming of death; it occurs after the confirmation of death and encourages the bereaved to cope with and adapt to death. Funerals function to "catalyze acute grief responses, prescribe structured behaviors in a time of flux, and encourage recognition of the loss and development of

new relationships with both the deceased and the community" (Rando, 1984, p. 190). The nature of funerals includes the elements of disposal of a corpse, marking of a death, affirmation of the deceased's life, commendation of the deceased, proclaiming faith, grieving, and cultural mirroring (James, 2004). In short, funerals, although honoring decedents, are primarily held for the living to facilitate the bereavement process and adapt to life change. Further, two psychological mechanisms explain how funerals help people overcome difficult times: the return-to-baseline model and the meaning-making model (O'Connor, 2003). The *return-to-baseline* model explains that mental homeostasis will return through time and the expression of negative affect. The *meaning-making* model involves restructuring cognition and emotion and generating new meanings.

Walter (2005) summarized three models of the modern Western funeral arrangement: commercial, municipal, and religious. The *commercial* model is that the liberal market is responsible for providing funeral services (e.g., the United States). The *municipal* model is that funeral services are subject to municipal control (e.g., France). The *religious* model is that churches are in charge of cemeteries, crematoria, and death registration (e.g., Sweden).

Funeral planning. Funeral planning is the process of making arrangements for a funeral, including wishes about funerals, financial arrangements, and messages to family members (Cremation.com, n.d.). Funeral planning includes two types: *pre-planning* and *at-need planning* (Schinzel, 2006).

Pre-planning is when funeral planning is done before passing. Pre-planning usually reduces fear and stress, likely reduces expenses by allowing for cost comparisons, and offsets emotional decision-making (Spence, 2016). Several reasons encourage people to do funeral pre-planning (Torres & Turner, 1989), including overcoming grief and stress, making an appropriate

decision not in a hurry, being aware of customers' rights and options, and bargaining with funeral directors. As a pre-need event, a client reaches a trustworthy funeral home, meets with a funeral director several times, and discusses funeral arrangements in advance. When the passing occurs, a funeral director will take over the deceased, follow the arrangement, and provide a funeral service (which is either pre-paid, pre-arranged, or both).

At-need planning is when no pre-arrangements have been made as of the time of passing, so, as a result, all details must be attended to at that time. As an at-need event, a client makes the first contact with a funeral home and meets with a funeral director on behalf of a deceased family member or friend to plan funeral services. Usually, funeral service is required to be arranged in a time-sensitive need, so a client is under pressure with likely emotional disorder reactions.

Commodification and Decommodification

This section explains the commerce-care dialectic by explaining commodity, commodification, and decommodification.

Commodity. A commodity is a useful and valuable thing, and it consists of "the same unsubstantial reality in each, a mere congelation of homogeneous human labor, of labor power expended without regard to the mode of its expenditure… When looked at as crystals of this social substance, common to them all, they are – Values" (Marx, 1867b, p. 27). According to Marx (1867b), a commodity has two factors: *use-value* and *exchange-value*. The utility of a thing makes it a use-value. For example, corn can be used to feed people and produce corn oil. Exchange-value presents itself as a quantitative relation, as the proportion in which values in use of one sort are exchanged for those of another sort, a relation constantly changing with time and place. For example, gasoline in Saudi Arabia is cheaper than that in the United States.

The character of commodities does not originate in their use-value but functions in human brains. Commodity fetishism explains that people transform the subjective, abstract aspects of economic value into objective, real things that people believe have intrinsic value. (Marx, 1867a). Two phenomena are usually in tandem with commodity fetishism. First, people buy products not for consumption and satisfaction but to sell them, and they aim at a never-ending augmentation of exchange value and a never-ending process of making a profit alone. For instance, people buy stocks to sell those in the financial market and sell stocks to buy more from the financial market. Second, people are even willing to be alienated to satisfy the need for the desired commodity. For example, some people take a secondary job to have a big diamond or luxurious wallet.

Commodification and decommodification. Commodification and decommodification provide a central theoretical element for the work *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Esping-Andersen, 1990), which discusses the state welfare system and follows the Marxist tradition (e.g., Marx, 2016).

Commodification describes the condition of labor power under capitalism, that is, "without employment, the worker lacks the means to subsist, and from the standpoint of capitalist society, he is unreal, lacking any significance" (Room, 2000, p. 332). Based on *the Communist Manifesto* (Marx & Engels, 2002), commodities are constantly revolutionized by advancing the instruments of production. Commodification is also accompanied by *division of labor in society*, particularly related to characteristics of the growth of structural difference, the extension of individualism to the suicide of collective conscience, and the higher competition level within the population (Giddens, 1972).

Decommodification describes a worker "who, notwithstanding unemployment, sickness, or other interruption to normal earnings, is able to maintain a basic standard of living" (Room, 2000, p. 333). According to Esping-Andersen's explanations, decommodification is achieved through the welfare systems of the 20th century, and he operationalized the welfare system by the index of pension, unemployment, and other social benefit. Two forms of decommodification are with reference to *common basic needs* and *income continuity within an income hierarchy*. Esping-Andersen (1990) also identifies three kinds of decommodification. The *conservative* approach considers social stability to be based on church and family. The *liberal* approach relies on the market but recognizes that the market will always leave gaps that need to be filled by charity and the family. The *socialist* approach reflects the state-funded universal services, such as free K-12 education.

Robison et al. (2015) applied the exchange perspective to understand relational goods and conceptualized commodification and decommodification. In concrete, commodification is a process in which relational goods are converted into commodities, such as land, art, culture, relationship, identity, and history; decommodification represents the reverse of commodification – specifically, the processes in which commodities are converted into relational goods or in something's value as a commodity is enhanced by embedding it with feelings related to validation, belonging or knowing – resulting in the emergence of a relational good.

Research on the Commerce-Care Dialectic in Funeral Services

The manuscript identifies three research groups on the commerce-care dialectic in funeral services: dialectic management, dialectic trend, and dialectic difference.

Dialectic management. Research explores how governmental agencies and funeral professionals manage the commerce-care dialectic in arranging and displaying funeral services.

Governmental agencies enact policies for regulating funeral services. In 1975, the FTC news bulletin proposed a “trading rule” to regulate the business of death and carried out even more extensive investigations (Federal Trade Commission, 1975). The trade regulation rule on the funeral industry was amended as time changed, and the current one is entitled *Complying with the Funeral Rule* (Federal Trade Commission, 2023). Two key messages are in the trading rule for funeral practices: clients’ control of their funeral services and open information about merchandise of funeral items. Governmental agencies adapt to their regulations aligned with culture, technology, and societal development. For example, Maphela (2021) proposed that emerging funeral homes should grow in tandem with local environmental health and economic development. Similarly, Marsh (2018) argued that the occupational licensing regime of the funeral industry has limited competition and innovation through expensive barriers to entry that emphasize embalming education and equipment. Moreover, James et al. (2022) advocated specific training for funeral professionals to improve their skills and knowledge of pediatric funeral services.

Some research discusses how to manage the commerce-care dialectic when funeral professionals interact with clients. Four areas of interaction deserve scholars’ attention to manifest the commerce-care dialectic: the economic environment of funerals, the contractual relationship between the funeral director and client, control of the funeral, and the funeral director as an agent between the bereaved and third parties (Parsons, 2003). Three research directions have been conducted to manage the commerce-care dialectic in funeral services. First, for role performance, funeral directors commonly perform the roles of businessman and comforter in conversations with the bereaved (Hyland & Morse, 1995; Reynolds & Kalish, 1974). Second, some studies further explore the professionalism of funeral directors while

interacting with the bereaved (McCarthy, 2016; Sanders, 2009), and typically, the professionalism shares features of emotional detachment, decision-making facilitation for the bereaved, dead body preparation, and caring for the bereaved. Third, other studies examine emotional management in organizing funeral services (Bailey, 2010; Korai et al., 2022).

Other research develops marketing strategies for managing the commerce-care dialectic with the public. Some studies explore advertising strategies. For example, Trompette (2007) explored the use of diverse devices and arrangements to capture the funeral business market. Coetzee et al. (2014) found that the user-friendliness of funeral home websites was satisfactory in terms of their overall ease of use. Other studies discussed innovative approaches to mediating relationships between clients and funeral corporations by funeral directors, such as offering digital products and services (Van Ryn et al., 2019), applying music-related funeral practices (Parsons, 2012), and organizing the Memorial Societies' movement (Sommer et al., 1985).

Dialectic trend. Research documents social trends in funeral services related to the commerce-care dialectic.

A modern way of death is characterized by rationality, secularization, medicalization, a loss of community, individualization, and a consequent loss of ritual (e.g., Aries, 1974; Blauner, 1966; Mellor, 1992; Mellor & Shilling, 1993; Walter, 2002). Other social trends and practices related to the denial of death thesis in modern societies include the medicalization of death, the beautification of the corpse and embalming, and the bureaucratization of death procedures (Tradii & Robert, 2019). Walter (2005) notes common modern trends of funeral services in Western countries, namely "19th-century rationalization and specialization, and 21st-century individualization" (p. 187). In particular, funeral institutes account for the secularization and commercialization in modern society (Walter, 2005). In the United States, Lynch (2004)

proposed that the funeral corporation would merge, acquire, and consolidate family-owned funeral homes in the market sharing, and he also claimed more pre-needs than at-needs funeral services. Moreover, Beard and Burger (2017) identified two themes associated with the motivations of these trends: business-related motivation and customer-related motivation. Similarly, the state bureaucracy in Kuwait has made burial rituals more efficient, standardized, calculable, and controlled (Iqbal, 2011).

Some research discusses social change in attitudes to death. For example, Fulton and Owen (1988) found that, compared to people prior to the atomic bomb, people born in the nuclear age expressed their fears and frustrations with death in music, drugs, violence, and vicarious death experiences, which could have some connections to the rising interest in spirituality and the increase in suicide in an impersonal and threatened world. Similarly, Foreman (1973) identified three types of ideal funeral professionals – sanitizing in 1905, naturalizing in 1939, and sympathizing in 1963 – which reflected social change in funeral professionals.

Other research documents social change in funeral practices. For example, Schafer (2007, 2012) documented the personalization of funeral services, which maximized individual needs, the flexibility of organizing funerals, and funeral meaning-creation. Beard and Burger (2020) found that funeral home owners should market their services via the use of technology, pet services, individualized services, and diversity admission and perform community engagement via education, aftercare, and community activities. Similarly, Sanders (2012) discussed that brandscapes became more widespread in funeral products and services.

Dialectic difference. Research explores rural-urban and cross-cultural comparisons in funeral services related to the commerce-care dialectic.

Accompanied by 1960s urbanization in the United States (U.S.), urban funeral services became akin to the McDonaldized products of a corporation assembly line (Mitford, 2000). Distinctively, people get personalized service at family-owned funeral homes in rural communities (Zamfirache, 2021). The commerce-care dialectic in funeral services is represented as conflicting organizational patterns in funeral directing (Habenstein, 1963). Within urban metropolises, funeral homes have specialized workers for different procedures, serve metro-based people, have no kinship with customers, apply bureaucratic corporation management, and encourage unlimited profiting. Comparatively, local funeral homes have general or all-around workers for the whole service, serve community-based people, have (somewhat) kinship with customers, admit reciprocal commitment, and apply limited profiting. The commerce-care dialectic in funeral services is also reflected in the different goal orientations of urban and rural funeral homes. Urban funeral homes are profit-oriented (Beard & Burger, 2017), bureaucratic-control (Lofland, 2019), corporate-dominated (Parsons, 1999), and dehumanized and commodified (Han, 2016). Funeral services in rural communities emphasize the communal past, serve the community, and provide support and care (Floersch & Longhofer, 1997). Moreover, Canine (1996) claimed that urban residents experienced higher rates of suicide, homicide, and AIDS than rural people. Similarly, Marrall (2006) found that urban residents were more likely to choose alternative funeral options than their rural counterparts.

Another group research is the cross-cultural comparison in funeral services related to the commerce-care dialectic. Walter (2005) summarized three modern Western funeral arrangement models: commercial, municipal, and religious. The *commercial* model assumes the liberal market of providing funeral services (e.g., the United States), so it leans toward the commerce side of the dialectic. In the municipal model, the government controls and manages funeral services

(e.g., France), so the commerce-care dialectic is managed neutrally. The *religious* model is that charities and churches are responsible for providing funeral services (e.g., Sweden), so it inclines the care side of the dialectic. For example, Pine (1969) suggested that funeral practices had some universal features of the provision of social support for the bereaved, funeral expenditure, and funeral rituals across cultures. Other studies identify cross-cultural differences in practices and beliefs in funeral services, such as Swedish immigrants' cultural identities reflected by funeral symbols (Reimers, 1999), bereavement practices aligned with ethnic groups (Eisenbruch, 1984), approaches to being aware of death (Palgi & Abramovitch, 1984), hospice developments (Glass et al., 2010), and funeral and end-of-life activities (Boateng & Anngela-Cole, 2016).

Section Conclusion

This section reviewed the commerce-care dialectic in funeral planning, including funeral planning, commodification and decommodification, and research on the commerce-care dialectic in funeral services. An initial definition of the commerce-care dialectic in funeral planning might thus be:

The struggle to cope with and adapt to death manifests in arranging funerals with two attributes that are commodity and social welfare, and it is constituted by meanings while people are facing and addressing.

Chapter 5: Research Questions

Throughout reviewing the history of American funeral homes in Chapter Two, the author identifies three characteristics of the commerce-care dialectic in funeral services. First, a funeral service is a business that provide profound care for clients. Funeral homes (and funeral professionals) make a profit by providing funeral services for survival and success (e.g., Beard & Burger, 2020; Habenstein, 1963), while they also take care of and comfort the bereaved who are in challenging times (e.g., Hyland & Morse, 1995; Pine & Phillips, 1970). Second, the commerce-care dialectic is perennial and thereby unresolvable in funeral services. The commerce-care dialectic was apparent in the funeral industry in the 20th century, such as the criticism of paganism in the early 20th century (e.g., Bowman, 1975), a stereotype of a greedy, malevolent, and crafty business devil in the mid-20th century (e.g., Mitford, 2000), and the rising of bureaucratic funeral corporations in the late 20th century (e.g., Lofland, 2019). Also, in the foreseeable future, the commerce-care dialectic will be involved in funeral services. Third, although conceivably unresolvable, funeral professionals (e.g., Bi & Hammonds, 2021), clients (e.g., Kopp & Kemp, 2007a), and governmental agencies (e.g., Kopp & Kemp, 2007b) need to face and manage the commerce-care dialectic in funeral services (e.g., Bailey, 2010; Korai et al., 2022; Parsons, 2003). In short, the commerce-care dialectic in funeral services has been present for more than a century, and thereby it seems unresolvable; although it is unresolvable, people need to respond to it because everyone needs to face mortality one day.

RDT is a theory of addressing the relational meaning-making process (Baxter et al., 2021). Throughout reviewing the literature on RDT in Chapter Three, RDT was applied as a framework to understand relational meaning-making emergent from competing discourses in various samples and diverse contexts in the past decade (e.g., Hintz & Scharp, 2023). However,

researchers have never applied RDT in the scenario of funeral planning, and this dissertation focuses on funeral director-client interactions for funeral planning. Moreover, Baxter et al. (2021) suggest that RDT researchers examine communication genres other than narratives, especially relationship rituals and carnivalesque enactments. Following this suggestion, this dissertation discusses funeral planning, which is the conversational process of arranging a ritual-based memorial service. In addition, Baxter et al. (2021) direct RDT researchers to look into the full utterance chain, especially the distal not-yet-spoken and distal already-spoken utterances. Adapting to this guideline, the interviewing questions of this dissertation are dedicated to representing the funeral planning process.

The commerce-care dialectic in funeral planning has two attributes: commodity and social welfare. Throughout reviewing the literature on the commerce-care dialectic in funeral planning in Chapter Four, the author recognized that existing research is primarily in the fields of dialectic management, dialectic trends, and dialectic differences. The communication perspective is particularly ignored in the extant literature (but for some exceptions, Riley Jr., 1983; Woodthorpe, 2017). Woodthorpe (2017) identifies relational features of a contemporary funeral, inclusive of the determination of funeral content, participation in the funeral performance, and the commercial choice(s) made. This study, although proposing the relational features, did not discuss the meanings of these relational features. Riley Jr. (1983) saw a promising future for sociological inquiries on death and dying and concluded that the meanings of death are in the process of continuing transformation. This article was aligned with the communication perspective but did not explore how the meanings of death were transformed. The core of the communication perspective regards its process of constituting the indeterminant and ambiguous external world into specific objects through language use (Deetz, 2001). This dissertation applies

the communication perspective to understand the commerce-care dialectic in funeral planning by interviewing funeral directors. By doing this, the dissertation can explicate the meaning-making of funeral planning and how people transform the unresolvable dialectic into a meaningful experience through interactions.

As mentioned above, three research questions are proposed below.

RQ1: What discourses of commerce-care dialectic are apparent in funeral director-client interactions for funeral planning?

RQ2: How do the discourses interpenetrate (a) synchronically and (b) diachronically?

RQ3: What meanings emerge from the transformative interplay of the discourses?

Chapter 6: Research Design and Methods

Participants

The study included 15 funeral directors, with eight in the Oklahoma City Metropolis (population of 1.4 million) and seven in rural Oklahoma (population below 18,000). Based on the author's interviewing experience, urban funeral homes typically hire 15-20 employees, having 2-3 owners, 3-4 full-time funeral directors, and 8-12 part-time workers. Rural funeral homes have workers with numbers smaller than five. All participants are Caucasians, licensed as funeral directors and embalmers by the state licensing agencies. Eleven participants reported more than ten years of experience in the industry, including eight individuals with more than 20 years of experience. All funeral homes provided primary services, including transportation for the deceased, embalming services, and directed funerals. However, distinctive to rural funeral homes, which provide these services at the same facility, urban funeral homes provide these services at different facilities because urban funeral services are akin to the McDonaldized products of a corporation assembly line (Mitford, 2000; Zamfirache, 2021). Specifically, urban funeral homes are primarily utilized to discuss funeral planning; chapels affiliated with funeral homes are to hold funeral ceremonies, and another facility (usually not open to the public) is for embalming work.

Funeral services are culture-laden and value-based (e.g., Pine, 1969; Reimers, 1999), and it is necessary to narrate the cultural background of participants. Oklahoma's culture and territory were historically intermingled with the American regional cultures of the Midwest and the South (see details below, Roark, 1979, pp. 311-344). In terms of religious adherence, Southern populations tend to be Baptist or Methodist and have little religious diversity; in contrast, Midwestern populations have higher Protestant diversity, with Methodist and Episcopal

being the leading denominations. For political affiliation, Southerners tend to be Democrats, while Midwesterners tend to be Republicans, historically. Since the 1960s, Oklahomans have been Republicans dominantly (Gaddie, n.d.,). For social behaviors, family life is diverse with the proportions of a society's nuclear and extended or other complex households. The Oklahoma City and Tulsa metropolitans have Fortune 500 companies, including domains of manufacturing, retail, and service industries (Oklahoma Commerce, 2023). Oil and energy companies such as ONEOK, Devon Energy, and Chevron are reputational. Other top industries in Oklahoma include technology (e.g., Apple, Dell Technologies), aerospace and defense industry (e.g., Raytheon Technologies, Boeing, Lockheed Martin), and transportation (e.g., airlines, motor vehicle companies, tire companies).

Procedure

Institutional Review Board approvals were sought and obtained prior to beginning the study. Study participants were solicited for participation via face-to-face requests. Consent forms were signed by participants prior to interviews. Interviews were conducted at the participant's place of employment in a private room. Participants were provided with $50 for an hour-long interview as gratis. With a few exceptions, the author visited funeral homes twice; the first time was to make an appointment, and the second time was to conduct an interview. The author conducted interviews with 15 funeral directors, lasting 12 minutes to 91 minutes (M = 58.38, SD = 23.59). Those interviews generate 222 pages of double-spaced transcripts.

A previously collected dataset was also consulted. The author interviewed 27 funeral directors from rural communities in Oklahoma over the past three years, and these experiences functioned as social comparison groups (Festinger, 1954), enhancing and evaluating aspects of urban funeral services (Suls et al., 2002). Second, to better understand funeral services in

Oklahoma, the author attended and observed eight funerals (more than 2 hours each), including attendees' chatting activities in the corridor of chapels, memorial services, transportation to cemeteries, and burial activities.

See Appendix A for interview guide of questions. Interview questions were inspired by RDT, which assumes meaning emergent from the struggle of competing, often contradictory discourses (Baxter, 2011). Specifically, interviewing questions are devoted to having dyadic contextual data, which is preferred in dialectic research fields (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2010), and open-ended questions regarding funeral pre-planning and funeral planning scenarios were sought, such that, "Can you tell me a time you encouraged clients to do a memorial, ritual, or viewing service?" and "Can you tell me a story about introducing different types of caskets, urns, and options for funeral packages to a client?" (RQ1). Some interviewing questions regarding funeral planning and funeral post-planning were to explore the interpenetration of competing discourses, such that, for the synchronic interpenetration (RQ2a), "Can you describe an ordinary family visitation or viewing? How long does a family typically stay? What do families do and say during the viewing?" and for the diachronic interpenetration (RQ2b), "How do you confirm that families completed the final viewing and were ready to go to the cemetery?" Some interview questions regarding funeral directors' self-understandings about their job and life targeted discursive transformative interplay, such as "Do families express appreciation to you during a reception service?" "How do you like your job?" (RQ3).

Analysis

In order to answer research questions, all transcripts were subjected to contrapuntal analysis. Contrapuntal is a musical term that refers to playing contrasting or counterpoint melodies in conjunction with one another (Baxter, 2011). A contrapuntal analysis focuses on the

interplay of contrasting discourses in spoken or written texts, and it is used to analyze discursive and ideological interplay and competition in the dialogue of related parties (e.g., Suter, 2018; Thomas, 2017). Three key components of contrapuntal analysis are selecting text, establishing discourse, and identifying discourse interplay.

Selecting text. RDT scholars should have dialogically expansive texts in which multiple voices are at play. In contrast, dialogically contractive texts are worthy of attention from a critical lens, and some discourses are marginalized and dismissed. The author applied two strategies to select dialogically expansive texts from interviewing transcripts, focusing on (a) narrative stories, especially in sites of rupture, challenge, and change, and (b) relationship transitions, especially in conversation utterance chains.

Establishing discourse. RDT researchers need to identify discourses in texts, and typically, two types of discourses should be considered – *sociocultural discourses*, which emphasize the distal already-spoken and the distal not-yet-spoken, and *interpersonal discourses*, which emphasize the proximal already-spoken and the proximal not-yet-spoken.

To identify discourses, thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) was applied, including a six-step framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). (a) To get familiarized with the data, the author transcribed the interviews and re-read the transcript. (b) In generating initial codes, the author highlighted sentences in the transcript that attracted the author's attention. Those sentences were typically relevant to funeral directors' stories of interacting with their bereaved clients, their relationship-building with clients, bereaved clients' performance in a difficult time, and bereaved clients' acceptance of life change. (c) The author searched for themes in those sentences, including collating codes into potential themes and gathering all data relevant to each potential theme. For this stage, the author refined terms and ideas to generate themes. Concretely, the

author understood discursive conflicts that animate the meanings of funeral planning (RQ1). (d) In the reviewing themes stage, the author checked whether those generated themes worked in relation to all highlighted sentences and the entire transcript. (e) The author defined and named themes and then generated competing discourses. In this stage, the author integrated and constructed the generated themes into a couple of specific themes and then generated two competing discourses (i.e., commerce-care competing discourses; see findings for details). These specific themes were the intersubjective outcome of interpreting (or constructing) and refining (or coding) themes. (f) The author produced the report, which was also considered a theme analysis. The author selected the most compelling extract examples, made themes related to the research question, and produced a scholarly analysis report.

Identifying discourse interplay. RDT scholars presume the *native*'s points of view, including two propositions. First, the researcher's identification of competing discourses rings true to the participants themselves. In other words, the participants' talk reflects competing discourses. Second, "native" is also important in the identification of transformations in the interplay of discourse. This *native* perspective is supported by *engagement* and *graduation* in a dialogic perspective (Martin & White, 2005). *Engagement* suggests that a speaker's locution (i.e., wordings are traditionally treated under such headings as modality, polarity, evidentiality, intensification, attribution, concession, and consequentiality) "provides the means for the authorial voice to position itself with respect to, and hence to engage with, the other voices and alternative positions construed as being in play in the current communicative context" (Martin & White, 2005, p. 94). *Graduation* indicates that words of hedges, downtoners, boosters, and intensifiers (such as somewhat, slightly, very, entirely, and etc.) "enable speakers/writers to present themselves as more strongly aligned or less strongly aligned with the value position

being advanced by the text and thereby to locate themselves with respect to the communities of shared value and belief associated with those positions" (Martin & White, 2005, p. 94). According to *engagement* and *graduation*, a speaker's talk can be examined for how the speaker's position is aligned or unaligned concerning various value positions (discourses) at play (Baxter, 2011). Therefore, RDT scholars can identify discourse interplay by studying the utterance chain.

According to RDT, three kinds of discourse markers are important in identifying discourses positioned in counterpoint relation to one another: negating, countering, and entertaining. *Negating* is a disclaiming that serves to reject or supplant a discourse or to claim it as irrelevant. For example, the lexical marker "I do not believe …" represents negating. The author argues that negating is similar to denying. *Countering* is another disclaiming by which some discursive position replaces or supplants an alternative discursive position that could normally have been expected in its place. Countering is indicated by lexical conjunction markers such as "although, however, but, yet, nevertheless" and lexical adjunct markers such as "even, only, just, still." The author argues that countering is similar to replacement. *Entertaining* functions to indicate a given discursive position that is one possibility among alternative discursive positions. Entertaining is suggested by some lexical auxiliary markers such as "might, may, could," some lexical attribute markers such as "possible, likely, seem," and some lexical choice markers such as "on one hand…on the other hand." The author argues that entertaining is similar to alternative/other.

According to RDT, the interplay of competing discourses is reflected as dialogically contractive discursive practices and expansive discursive practices. *Dialogically contractive discursive practices* are deployed to challenge alternative discourses for the purpose of

marginalizing and even silencing them. Dialogically contractive discursive practices include utterance tones and practices of discursive closure. For utterance tones, the *rogue* (i.e., parody), the *fool* (i.e., enacted ignorance for purposes of unmasking implicit assumptions), and the *clown* (i.e., malicious distortion of a discursive position for purposes of laughing at its absurdity) are three playful devices through which a competing discourse can be challenged.

For practices of discursive closure, Deetz (1992) identifies several discursive practices by which some discourses are challenged and other discourses are privileged. Those discursive practices include disqualification, naturalization, neutralization, topical avoidance, subjectification of experience, and pacification. These practices are proposed for organizational communication but can be imported into the study of relational communication (Baxter, 2011). *Disqualification* is a discursive move in which alternative discourses are denied a hearing because the embodied persons or groups aligned with those positions are presented as lacking expertise or the right of expression, such as an utterance, "You lost the privilege of critiquing the dinner because you did not meet your kitchen responsibility." *Naturalization* is the discursive practice of reification, such as an utterance, "My husband has cheated on me several times, and that is just the way men are." *Neutralization* is a talk in which value-laden discursive positions are value-free or objective, such as the utterance, "My teacher says that the job of teenagers is to be independent of their parents, and it is part of growing up and becoming an adult, so you cannot tell me what to do anymore." *Topical avoidance* is that under the mantle of propriety, certain alternative discursive positions are constructed as off-limits for discussion. For example, the cultural discourses of privacy and patriarchy have functioned to silence disclosure of abuse perpetrated by men against women and adults against children. *Subjectification of experience* argues that a given value position is simply a matter of individual opinion or experience, as

opposed to being a social formation, and speakers can close down challenges from competing discourse positions, such as the utterance, “This is just the way I feel about it, and you cannot tell me how to feel because you are not me.” *Pacification* is a powerful discursive practice by which competing discourses can be silenced. Competing discourses can be pacified by positioning differences as trivial or futile, following a discursive plea to a higher-order discursive position such as consensus, and co-opting on others’ perspectives.

Dialogically expansive discursive practices are deployed to align with marginalized discursive positions to dislodge the dominance of centripetal discourses, and these discursive practices open up the conversation to those alternative voices. Attributing functions in a dialogically expansive way, such as some lexical attribute markers “possible, likely, seem,” and some lexical choice markers “on the one hand…on the other hand.” Existing work on dialogically expansive discursive practices largely sits at the level of genre study, with narratives, the carnivalesque, and rituals. However, research on dialogically expansive discursive practices is very limited and deserves scholarly attention.

The author analyzed to identify the discursive interplay of creating the meaning of funeral planning interactions. Specifically, *unfolding* is used for examining diachronic separation (i.e., change over time) and synchronic interplay (i.e., polemic at the moment). Through unfolding, researchers uncover hegemonic ideologies that are often taken for granted or silence alternative meanings (Scharp & Thomas, 2016). Diachronic interplay (RQ2b) is typically manifested in spiraling inversion and segmentation of the chain of utterances, and synchronic interplay (RQ2a) focuses on the co-occurrence of multiple discourses within an utterance, containing discourse markers such as negating, countering, and entertaining (Scharp & Thomas,

2021). Finally, the author searched for constructing dialogic transformation, especially in the form of either a discursive hybridization or aesthetic moments (RQ3).

Validation

Creswell (2007) recommends using multiple (at least two) verification methods, and the study selected two techniques to ensure quality of findings. For the external audit, a senior scholar reviewed the analysis, challenged early theorizing, and cross-checked that claims were substantiated by participants' words. Also, the author conducted member-checking. For the last two interviews, the author led conversations with participants, in which he shared answers to research questions based on emerging themes and encouraged participants to evaluate their veracity. The author also let the two interviewees read the findings. The two participants suggested a few technical clarifications incorporated in the findings; otherwise, participants agreed with the findings.

Chapter 7: Findings

Interviews with funeral directors revealed two discourses that competed to create meaning of the commerce-care dialectic in funeral planning: *Discourse of Commerce* and *Discourse of Care* (RQ1). Moreover, the two discourses interpenetrate synchronically and diachronically. The diachronic interplay manifested in *spiraling inversion* and *segmentation* (RQ2b). The synchronic interplay was shown in *negating and countering*, *ambiguating* (a new form of synchronic interplay), and *entertaining* (RQ2a). Finally, *hybridization* and *aesthetic moment* were identified for discursive transformative interplay (RQ3). For hybridization, funeral directors mixed the discourse of commerce and the discourse of care to create a new meaning – the commitment to the double natures of funeral services: commerce and care. For aesthetic moment, *discourse of mundanity* (defined here as *a system of meaning in which the gravity of life and death is made to be experienced as ordinary and beautiful*) was proposed as the fusion of the discourse of commerce and the discourse of care. The following paragraphs will discuss these findings in detail.

RQ1: Discourse of Commerce

As a social sector, funeral homes in the US are involved in the capitalist system and adopt core values of the liberal market competition. In doing so, funeral service, although commemorating the life of a deceased person, is commodified, commercialized, and corporatized.

Commodification is necessary. In contemporary US society, funeral homes provide funeral services to people in exchange for money, and thereby, funeral service is commodified for sale. Participating funeral directors believed in the profitable essence of funeral services; for instance, they mentioned, “A funeral home has to make so much money a year to keep the door

open," "Funeral service is a funeral business, making profits, getting paid for providing services, and being a business," and "This funeral home is how my family makes a living and pays bills." Additionally, participating funeral directors described supplying individualized services to best meet customer demands. For example, Kyle, a funeral director with eight years of experience, met Ethiopian families' request by "taking our shoes off and walking with caskets into their church in our socks." Breame, a funeral director with 20 years of experience, narrated providing exceptional services for Jewish and Muslim families. Breame commented, "The funeral home drops everything and caters to their religious request…when someone passed away, the funeral director has to be there immediately…because those types of services have to be done within X number of hours." Furthermore, participating funeral directors reported evolving their funeral services in order to adapt to technological and market changes. For instance, Harley, a funeral director with 18 years of experience, explained how technologies were incorporated into funeral services, "With cell phones now, we can even do webcasts at the graveside service… Recently, livestreaming is the newest innovation. Especially with COVID…people could watch services online." Chris, a funeral home owner with 33 years of experience, observed the growth of green burials and pet funerals, "Green cemeteries are open all over Oklahoma…I think that green burials will take off in millennials…Millennials look at their pets as kids. I expect pet funerals to go up. In Oklahoma, one Pet Cemetery is basically full." In short, funeral service is commodified in that it has a profitable nature, catering to customer demand, and adapting to technological and market change.

Commercialization is encouraged. Consider that funeral homes engage in activities to attract customers and promote the sale of funeral services. Funeral homes participate in community engagement to attract potential customers. Some participating funeral directors put

on events where people can pick up a package of funeral service information, such as “hosting an ice cream truck at some of the retirement centers, hosting a movie night for senior citizens, and giving funeral pre-arrangement talks in churches.” Other participating funeral directors are involved in community events where people can get to know funeral service, and they mentioned: “being a member of the Lions Club, sponsoring annual sports tournaments, being on the Christmas parade, having town breakfast together with business owners, and passing on fans, pens, and bags [with funeral home symbols] in state affairs.” Funeral homes also do advertise to promote their business; participating funeral directors said, “[We] have a television, [newspaper, and radio] commercial,” “[We] advertise around town, like panels on the outfield in baseball fields [and] the [town’s] billboard,” “[We] go to restaurants, and got an advertisement under glass on the [dining] table,” “[We] have a Facebook page, have a website, and are in the senior living magazine and the community web page,” and “[We] send out mailers [about funeral services].” Furthermore, consider that funeral homes develop their organizational brand to create service distinctiveness and customer loyalty. Lucia, an area manager of the funeral corporation, explained how to build the corporation brand: “All Dignity Memorial websites look identical and have the same color scheme…The corporation also offers a 100% service guarantee, [which means that we strive to get every detail right the first time, every time] … Policies are transferrable because the corporation has [nationwide] network.” Chris, a funeral home owner, claimed that some funeral homes built customer loyalty in certain ethnic groups, “XYZ funeral home in Oklahoma City does almost every single Jewish and Muslim service…The [ethnic group] trusts and continues to use the funeral home, and [it does not have a specific reason] because the funeral home just did a good job for 40 or 50 years.” In short, funeral homes

commercialize funeral services to enlarge profit by participating in community engagement, distributing various advertisements, and developing their brands.

Corporatization is reinforced. Funeral homes are transforming into funeral corporations for success and survival in the funeral market. Compared with independent family-owned funeral homes, funeral corporations tend to be more competitive and profitable in the funeral service market. Funeral homes adopt bureaucratic management to organize their employees effectively. To make reasoning business decisions, a funeral director explained, “In funeral corporations, there is a reason behind everything that they do. Funeral corporations have much paperwork, [such as] signature permission forms for embalming, authorization forms for fingerprints, and authorization forms to have catering.” Similarly, funeral corporations pushed sales as much as possible, as funeral directors clarified, “In funeral corporations, salespeople are commission-based, [meaning that] they get a certain type of commission out of anything they sell. Funeral directors and [managers] are hourly-paid or salary-paid.” Besides bureaucratic management, funeral homes also merge with other funeral homes for expansion. Robert, a funeral home owner, told a story, “The community had two funeral homes a few years ago. [For] the other funeral home, the guy wanted to retire, and we ended up working out a deal to purchase it. At that moment, we shut it down because, for the [community] size, only one funeral home was needed really.” Lucia, an area manager of the funeral corporation, said, “Corporate funeral homes are always seeking to absorb family-owned funeral homes. Corporations are buying those small funeral homes, so my prediction is that we will have a lot of more funeral corporations.” Moreover, funeral homes are transformed into funeral corporations focusing on shareholders’ financial interests. Harley, a funeral director with 18 years of experience, had a conversation with a regional manager of the funeral corporation regarding making funeral services more

affordable for poor families, and the manager responded, “We are not concerned about that. We want to take the cream off the top. We want expensive clients, and they can spend more money. We are shooting for expensive funerals whether a family can actually afford it.” Dennis, a funeral director with 21 years of experience, said that funeral corporations were pushing sales: “Their salespeople need to sell an expensive package, catering, casket, and [other merchandises] because they make more money… regardless of what a family really wants or needs in a service.” Funeral homes also acquired capital from the stock market and other investors, such that Service Corporate International was listed in the stock market since 1992 (NASDAQ, n.d.) and that Mark, a funeral home owner, was “constantly talking with different investors regarding expansion.” In short, to sustain and expand the funeral service business, funeral homes adopt bureaucratic management forms, merge with other funeral homes, and focus on shareholders’ financial interests.

RQ1: Discourse of Care

Participating funeral directors’ comments demonstrated a consistent respect for humanity, particularly concerning compassion, support, and sacredness while working in funeral service.

Compassion is natural. Participating funeral directors showed their concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others. The deceased associated with death arouses people’s grief as a natural human reaction, and a participating funeral director said, “We get no choice. If we love, we grieve.” Another said, “Grief is very real. In the small town, these people are friends and neighbors, so there are more personal aspects there.” Yet another mentioned, “We went on a big strain with babies’ [service] lately. [It is very difficult to embalm babies].” Funeral directors also put themselves into the bereaved’s perspective. Breame, a funeral director with 20 years of experience, narrated, “Sometimes I have an old lady all by herself seeing her husband [in the

visitation], and she does not have anybody with her. I am going to stay there with her, hug her, and stay with her while she needs to be." Kyle, a funeral director with eight years of experience, described his approach to talking with the bereaved, "Let's not think about money right now. Thank you for bringing that up. Let's focus on this funeral for your mum…Do not have the first worry [about money]. You just lost your mum. Let's figure that out." Funeral directors further bemoan the transience and fragility of human life. Mike, a funeral home owner with 24 years of experience, described, "When you come to serve [the deceased], the reality is that someday we are all going to pass away, [and] someday we are all gone to cross that bridge." Bob, a second-generation funeral home owner, stated, "As a local funeral home, we should be more flexible in providing services and more adaptable to families' needs. We never know when the next [pandemic emergency] comes." In short, participating funeral directors' comments clearly indicated compassion for the bereaved and the deceased because they had their own grief, put themselves into others' shoes, and recognized life's transience and fragility.

Support is socialized. Participating funeral directors provided social support to fit into social and professional expectations. The professionalism of funeral directors requires enacting social support. Mike, a funeral director with 24 years of experience, reviewed one of the Federal Trade Commission rules regarding providing information support, "having a price list available for anybody who walks into funeral homes." Funeral directors also mentioned their job duties and responsibilities, such as "guiding families' funeral arrangements," "being present at the graveside," "securing caskets at the cemetery," and "doing the death certificate." Moreover, participating funeral directors reported displaying supportive behaviors to maintain a good reputation in the community and remain in business. Many participating funeral directors are conscious of their reputations while working in funeral services, so they "do the right thing,

[show] their morals, stay straight, do not give people a reason to doubt them, and do not get names on something negative." Some funeral homes provide many additional (and typically free) aftercare services, "We provide a grief support group that meets at the funeral home monthly," "We also send families to other resources, such as monuments for the cemetery, estate planning for probate, and handouts for contacting Facebook," and "We text them, call them, and check how their life is going." Funeral directors also internalize social support into their self-identity. Brandon, a funeral director with 18 years of experience, told a story of on-call 24/7: "I had a woman who passed away at 12:02 am, and I got her and went to bed at 4:40 am." Rebecca, a funeral director with 18 years of experience, lost track of time while embalming, "I worked as I want to do my best every time. If it is going to take two hours for this person to be ready, I am going to take two hours." In short, funeral directors are socialized to provide social support because of the professionalism requirement, reputation in the community, and internalized self-identity.

Sacredness is existential. Participating funeral directors claimed of experiencing sacredness while working in space that connects people to the mystery of the beyond. Some funeral directors interpreted themselves as having a fatalistic professional career; as one participant said, "It is a calling [to be a funeral director]. There is no grey area. Either you can do this, or you cannot do this." Another participant mentioned, "I am one of those people that was born to do [funeral service]." Yet another participant declared, "I am a third-generation funeral director…I was raised in this small town and in a funeral business." Many participating funeral directors identified their job as rewarding because of helping people. Ryan, a funeral director with 18 years of experience, shared his experience, "When people come to hug me and say: thank you, they make me think I cannot leave this job, this profession, some [other] jobs are

better paid though." Mike, a funeral director with 24 years of experience, shared, "I would call this job: the happy in the sad. I helped them walk through the process. Grief, automobile accidents, children, not everything I see is pleasant, but I think at the end of the day, I go home, and I feel rewarded." Funeral directors are closely associated with death and dying. Sonny, a funeral director with 12 years of experience, said, "I experience sacredness while doing embalming." Chad, a funeral director with 12 years of experience, mentioned, "Some people are scared to talk to us. They are scared to walk into funeral homes. There are two [types of] people. They either have a hundred questions or walk away." In short, funeral directors take care of people for sacred reasons, inclusive of having a fateful professional career, experiencing self-rewarding, and being closely associated with death and dying.

As such, the *Discourse of Commerce* and the *Discourse of Care* represent two meaning systems that compete to create meanings of the commerce-care dialectic in funeral planning. The *Discourse of Commerce* indicates the capitalist system, which applies the core values of the liberal market competition. In specific, funeral services are commodified in exchange for money. Funeral homes also engage in commercial activities to attract customers and promote sales. To further control and dominate the funeral market, funeral homes are transforming into funeral corporations for success and survival. However, the *Discourse of Care* reflects the consistent respect for humanity, which resists the alienation caused by capital. In specific, funeral directors show their natural compassion to clients, provide social support as part of professionalism, and experience sacredness while working.

RQ2: Discursive Diachronic Interplay

The two discourses, *Discourse of Commerce* and *Discourse of Care*, compete to make meaning of the commerce-care dialectic in funeral planning. Findings show that the two discourses interplay diachronically, including spiraling inversion and segmentation. Spiraling inversion and segmentation are related but different. Segmentation focuses on topical or activity domains where indicate different discourses. Conversely, spiral inversion focuses on the same topic that reflects competing discourses throughout the longitudinal conversations.

Segmentation. Segmentation, the other one of the two diachronic practices identified by Baxter and Montgomery, manifests the ebb and flow in which the displacement of a topical or activity domain transforms the centered discourse. Funeral directors manifest this ebb and flow within steps of providing funeral services and types of community engagement of funeral homes.

Providing funeral services includes many steps across various topics and activities. Mike, a funeral director with 22 years of experience,

> We first meet families and say sorry for their loved one's death… then we pick up our items [or merchandise] and get the contract… Usually, families will have a visitation or viewing, and then we have a funeral… We may be in contact with that family for a week or two until we get insurance and the death certificate is taken care of … We may give them a phone call and ask how they are doing months later.

In the narrative, Mike has telephone communication, which indicates care; then, he guides clients in picking merchandise, which means commerce; then, viewing, visitation, and memorial services are related to care; then, the insurance payment is about commerce; finally, the aftercare of checking clients' life suggests care. In short, within this narrative, Mike illustrates many steps

of providing a funeral service, which shows the ebb and flow of the discourse of commerce and the discourse of care.

Funeral homes, as a social sector in communities, do multiple types of community engagement. Participating funeral directors said, “We support all sports tournaments in our areas;” and “We support all school events. We have two k through 12 schools in our area plus the community college.” Yet other participants mentioned, “We do host a pre-arrangement seminar about once a year at [our funeral home],” and “We [get] invited to give a talk at senior living homes.” Here, we see that community engagement related to sports tournaments and school events is centered on the discourse of care. Also, giving funeral pre-arrangement seminars and senior affairs concerns the discourse of commerce. In short, interviews with participating funeral directors illustrated many types of community engagement, which show the ebb and flow of commerce and care.

As such, the analysis of interviews reveals two diachronic practices, spiraling inversion and segmentation, which reflect the diachronic interplay between the *discourse of commerce* and the *discourse of care*. For spiral inversion, conversations in a period regarding guiding funeral planning and having telephone communication with clients reflect this back-and-forth pattern of care and commerce. For segmentation, funeral directors manifest this ebb and flow of commerce and care within steps of providing funeral services and types of community engagement of funeral homes.

Spiraling inversion. The spiraling inversion, one of the two diachronic practices identified by Baxter and Montgomery, suggests a back-and-forth pattern in which one discourse is dominant first, and then another is transformed into dominance for a given topical or activity domain over time. Analysis of interviews reveals this back-and-forth pattern within

conversations in a period regarding guiding funeral planning and having telephone communication with clients. (The interviewing data of this study is not longitudinal, but it attempts to capture conversations of families and funeral professionals in funeral planning.)

Harley, a funeral director with 18 years of experience, reviewed his conversation with clients regarding guiding funeral planning, and he mentioned,

> [While families come in], "let's not think about money right now, thank you for bringing that up, you got the means to pay for it, let's focus on this funeral for your mum… Do not have the first worry. You just lost your mum. Let's figure that out." … And then, we are going to pick out our items. I will tell them, "Okay, it is the time to pick out other things. The biggest choice is usually the casket. Are you comfortable to go to the show room? I can show you the caskets." We have a placard on each casket that shows the price… [Sometimes a family asks for price negotiation], we can make that decision. We can do that, and we will help people. We are not turning everybody away. We will find a way to help them… However, in the end, I am going to say, "By the way, how are you going to pay for this?" I do not like to talk about payment until the very end.

Within the narrative, Harley emphasizes that he does not let families worry about payment at first, which focuses on the discourse of care at the beginning; then, he guides families in picking merchandise, which is related to the discourse of commerce; then, he guides families into affordable services and products, which is aligned to the discourse of care; finally, he asks for a payment, which is the discourse of commerce. In short, this narrative shows that the centripetal discourse jumps back and forth as "care, commerce, care, and commerce" in funeral planning.

Kyle, a funeral director with 13 years of experience, reviewed his telephone communication with clients from the first phone call to the last, and he said,

> When we first get a phone call and talk to them on the phone, we will say, "I am so sorry, please accept our condolence, what questions do you have right now, what is your main concerns, let's talk about that. Do you want to set up a time and come in?" … In some cases, both funeral homes are willing to serve this family. [Before families pay for funeral services], a family will jump back and forth on a phone call and try to negotiate [the price] … [A couple of weeks later, after funeral services,] we call them and check how their life is going. Sometimes, we meet them at the Walmart. Usually, they respond, "Thank you for checking on me, and I appreciate everything you did."

In the narrative, Kyle comforts families when he first receives a family phone call, which indicates the discourse of care; and then, he may do price negotiation on the phone when families do funeral home shopping, which centers on the discourse of commerce; later, Kyle checks families' life after funeral services, which shows his care. In short, this narrative shows that the centripetal discourse jumps back and forth between "care, commerce, and care" in their telephone communication with clients from the first phone call to the last.

RQ2: Discursive Synchronic Interplay

The *Discourse of Commerce* and the *Discourse of Care* also interplay synchronically. Findings show that the two discourses interplay synchronically, including negating and countering, ambiguating (a new form of synchronic interplay), and entertaining.

Negating and Countering. Negating and countering occur in utterances with a feature of the antagonistic-nonantagonistic struggle, which describes two speakers aligning with different discursive positions in one utterance. *Negating* is a disclaiming that one speaker applies to reject the other speaker's discursive position. *Countering* is a disclaiming that one speaker applies to replace the other speaker's discursive position with an alternative discursive position.

Participating funeral directors negated clients' discursive position when clients couple funeral directors with the discourse of commerce in funeral planning. For example, Kristina, a funeral director with ten years of experience, rejected clients' potentially negative discursive positioning of funeral directors by saying, "[Families] are grieving …They think that we are sharks and try to get every penny from them. We are not. We do not make a lot of money. We are not all about the money." Rebecca, a funeral director with 18 years of experience, corrected a potential misunderstanding: many funeral directors took advantage of the bereaved for profit. Rebecca mentioned, "I do not personally like to ask families for money, and a lot of funeral directors are that way. I do feel bad asking because they just lost someone, they are grieving, and that is where people think that we take advantage of people." In short, funeral directors negate the discourse of commerce by rejecting clients' discursive positions and correcting clients' misunderstandings.

While they are likely unaware of it, participating funeral directors also replaced the discourse of commerce with the discourse of care when clients associate funeral directors with the discourse of commerce in funeral planning. Some participating funeral directors included conjunctions in their utterances to accomplish countering, and they commented, "Even though we have not done anything, we are there to help them;" "We have to make money, but that is not why most of us are here;" "If a funeral director only works for money, he is in a wrong profession;" and "If funeral directors care about money only, they will just leave the job immediately once they can find a better payment." Some participating funeral directors emphasized the caring nature of funeral services, and they said, "We are here helping people, helping the community, and preserving your loved one's image for you." In short, funeral

directors replace the discourse of commerce with the discourse of care by including conjunctions (e.g., but, though, and if) in utterances and emphasizing the caring nature of funeral services.

Ambiguating. This study introduces *ambiguating* as a new form of synchronic interplay. This new form provides an additional discursive marker that can be used to identify discursive synchronic interplay in utterances. Ambiguating occurs in utterances with a feature of the direct-indirect struggle, which describes the ambiguous level of an utterance situated in a binary continuum of directness-indirectness. *Ambiguating* is a linguistic strategy by which a speaker makes utterances in an ambiguous style, and it has the function of swinging the centripetal discourse (i.e., dominant discourse) to straddle centripetal and centrifugal discourse (i.e., marginal discourse) in one utterance.

Analysis revealed that participating funeral directors ambiguated their responses to straddle the discourse of commerce and the discourse of care when clients negotiate the price of funeral services. Funeral directors use ambiguous terms to indicate the discourse of care. Lucia, a funeral director with 13 years of experience, said, “There is not really a difference between funeral service and funeral business. It is unique that we put service and business as [completely interchangeable terms]. [Everyone likes the term of funeral service].” Participating funeral directors utilized modifiers (e.g., sometimes) in utterances to diminish the discourse of commerce. Robert, a funeral home owner, narrated his experience, “Sometimes families do not have enough, and we can work out something so that it is affordable. Of course, sometimes they may not have anything, but as the only funeral home in town, we have to work with that.” Participating funeral directors also tempered the discourse of commerce by producing the discourse of care. Ryan, a funeral director with 18 years of experience, produced the discourse of care by providing multiple options rather than being strict with the cost of funeral services,

"What about this [nice but cheaper] casket right here? I know you really want a burial. Has your mother or father ever considered cremation? Our policy is 50% required and monthly payment in the second half." In short, funeral directors ambiguate their responses to straddle the discourse of commerce and the discourse of care by using ambiguous terms, utilizing modifiers in utterances, and producing the discourse of care.

Entertaining. Entertaining occurs in utterances with a feature of the serious-playful struggle, which draws attention to the tone of an utterance. *Entertaining* is a linguistic strategy that makes a dominant discourse acknowledge the possibility of a marginalized discourse.

Analysis revealed that participating funeral directors entertained funeral planning conversations to acknowledge the discourse of care when the discourse of commerce is dominant. Participating funeral directors apply the playful device of the *rogue* (i.e., parody) to challenge the discourse of commerce. For example, John, a funeral director with 18 years of experience, frequently received families' questions about the placement of deceased organs because funeral directors sold organs to biomedical supply companies in horror movies, and he responded, "I did not do anything for that, and those organs left there, in the body [after embalming]." John's response mentioned taking care of the deceased body, indicating that the discourse of care competes with the discourse of commerce. Moreover, participating funeral directors also applied the playful device, *fool* (i.e., enacted ignorance for purposes of unmasking implicit assumptions), to challenge the discourse of commerce. Kristina, a funeral director with 13 years of experience, frequently received client requests to bury the deceased in a cardboard box, and she replied, "There are some things you can do, but there are some things you cannot…Cemeteries require caskets. I mean, it is not like I am out to just take [their money]. It is a business, just like everything else." Kristina's reply ignored clients' assumption that was a

burial in a cardboard box cheaper than in a casket, and they unmasked the rule of a burial for taking care of clients. The analysis also revealed that participating funeral directors also utilized the *clown* (i.e., malicious distortion of a discursive position for purposes of laughing at its absurdity), a playful device, to challenge the discourse of commerce. For example, Ryan, a funeral director with 18 years of experience, commented on the difficulty of discussing money with families, "You know. It is a lot easier to work with people dead [like embalming] than people alive [for money issues]. Haha…" In short, funeral directors entertain funeral planning conversations by applying the playful devices of *rogue*, *fool*, and *clown* to acknowledge the discourse of care when the discourse of commerce is dominant.

RQ3: Discursive Transformative Interplay

The *Discourse of Commerce* and the *Discourse of Care* are further discursive transformative interplay and generate meanings. Analysis of interviews reveals the two approaches of discursive transformative interplay: *hybridization* and *aesthetic moments*. These two approaches are enacted when competing discourses achieve a certain truce through *compromise* (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

Hybridization. Hybridization is mixing two or more distinct discourses to create a new meaning. Participating funeral directors mixed the discourse of commerce and the discourse of care to create a new meaning, and that was the commitment to the double natures of funeral services: commerce and care. Ruth, a funeral home owner, described, "Most people are happy and relaxed when they pay [for their funeral service contract] because they get that burden finished... So, a paying customer is a happy customer; a happy customer is a paying customer." Notice how the comment highlights a customer's happiness, which indicates the outcome of care, accompanied by the transactional nature of paying for a funeral service contract. Similarly,

Lucia, a funeral director with 13 years of experience, highlighted the two key characteristics of funeral professionals, "You are gonna be empathetic and compassionate, but you also have to be business savvy in the sense that we are still a business…It is no fun asking a grieving family for 10000 dollars, but unfortunately, that is the service we are providing."

Aesthetic moment. Aesthetic moments involve the interpenetration of discourses in which two meaning systems are transformed into one new meaning system. Within funeral services, the discourse of commerce and the discourse of care were interpenetrated and fused into a new meaning system, the *discourse of mundanity*, which was "*a system of meaning in which the gravity of life and death is made to be experienced as ordinary and beautiful*." Aesthetic moments happen uncommonly in funeral professionals' everyday life, but funeral directors are likely to experience them when they appreciate their long-time commitment to their professional careers, especially at the time when they are about to retire. Ryan, a funeral director with 18 years of experience, described,

> I will be honest with you: I thought about leaving the industry because there are jobs that pay better in money. And this job had no weekends, no nights, and no holidays. But when I talk to somebody, usually in person, after funerals or cremations, they will come and hug you and thank you. When I get something like that, it makes me think, "I cannot leave this job, I cannot leave this profession." I do not know if you call it, maybe "reaffirming" or "rewarding." You know everybody has to get paid. You know, We have bills, and we have to pay, but to me, this is more rewarding.

Within this description, a funeral director mentioned the care and commerce nature of funeral services, such as payments, jobs, holidays, and hugs. Then, he admitted the ordinariness of life, such as bills and payments. Also, he valued his ordinary job by stating his preference for being a

funeral professional, which involves tasks related to death. Further, he enjoyed his ordinary job while experiencing strong self-rewarding as a funeral professional. In short, this narrative describes the ordinariness of life and interprets those ordinary tasks as rewarding, indicating that ordinary life tasks are transformed into enjoyable and beautiful life moments for funeral directors.

Another story of Richy, a funeral director with 39 years of experience, reflected another aesthetic moment, he narrated,

> I have to tell you this, brother. It happens with my dad, my granddad, and a lot of my friends. Embalmers reach a period where they do not want to do [embalming] anymore; they go to the burnout phase that we call "the Last Zion." A lot of embalmers, when they get in their 60s, are like, "Okay, I am through." We are through the prep room, embalming, making a decision, draining blood, restoring, and serving bodies." I did not understand it ten years ago, but I understand it now. I am close to that point. [He] is my friend; what if he dies next week? [Crying…] I do not want to do it. I am tired of it. That is something we all have to deal with. It is very similar to retirement. I have seen every death known to man, such as gun shooting and car crash, [and I do not want to do it anymore].

Within this description, an embalmer mentioned the care and commerce nature of embalming tasks, such as decision-making, serving bodies, restoring, and draining blood. Also, he admits the finite nature of embalming, indicating that he will retire one day and cannot do more embalming. Further, embalmers called this burnout stage of their professional career "the Last Zion," which indicates the transformation of embalming tasks. In short, this narrative describes the ordinary embalming tasks that will reach the burnout phase, "the Last Zion," indicating

that ordinary embalming tasks are transformed into grief but beautiful life moments for embalmers. In short, these two whole narratives suggested a new meaning system, the *discourse of mundanity*, that was "*a system of meaning in which the gravity of life and death is made to be experienced as ordinary and beautiful*."

Chapter 8: Discussion

This dissertation, grounded in relational dialectics theory 2.0, aims to illustrate what meanings emerge from the commerce-care dialectic when engaging in funeral planning. The contrapuntal analysis of interviews reveals that the *discourse of commerce* and the *discourse of care* are central to the meaning-making of the commerce-care dialectic when engaging in funeral planning (RQ1). Also, the two discourses interplay synchronically and diachronically. The diachronic interplay manifests in *spiraling inversion* and *segmentation*, and the synchronic interplay is shown in *negating and countering*, *ambiguating* (a new form of synchronic interplay), and *entertaining* (RQ2). Based on these findings, this dissertation aligns the discursive synchronic markers, including negating, countering, ambiguating (a new marker proposed), and entertaining, with four features of utterance chains. The alignment gives an additional guideline to make researchers confident in identifying discursive synchronic interplay other than having the guideline of the three discursive markers. Moreover, *hybridization* and *aesthetic moment* are identified for discursive transformative interplay, which indicates meanings emergent from the interplay (RQ3). These findings provide empirical evidence to support Mumby's (2005) theorizing that control and resistance are mutually constitutive. For hybridization, funeral directors are mixing the discourse of commerce and the discourse of care to create a new meaning, and that is the commitment to the double nature of funeral services: commerce and care. For aesthetic moments, the *discourse of mundanity* is proposed as the fusion of the discourse of commerce and the discourse of care, and that is "*a system of meaning in which the gravity of life and death is made to be experienced as ordinary and beautiful*." These findings provide empirical evidence to support Mumby's (2005) theorizing that the control-resistance constitutive transforms as a routine social production of daily organizational life (see

details below). Furthermore, the dissertation proposes a perspective of acknowledging human life, which is the complex interpenetration and constitutive process of the costed life and/or the sacred life, labeled as the *commerce-care dialectic perspective*, defined as:

> *Humans make meanings of unresolvable life events or struggles, which have two core attributes of money and humanity, and transform those struggles into mundane aesthetic moments by enacting behaviors and actions.*

Lastly, the dissertation provides practical implications for facilitating funeral planning.

Theoretical Contributions

Relational dialectics theory. This dissertation contributes to RDT by comprehensively applying the RDT framework to the scenario of funeral planning. Baxter et al. (2021) direct RDT researchers to look into the full utterance chain, especially the distal not-yet-spoken and distal already-spoken utterances. Funeral planning is a *conversational* process of arranging funerals, which represents the full utterance chain and documents discursive synchronic interplay and discursive diachronic interplay. For discursive diachronic interplay, *spiral inversion* is identified in funeral directors' narratives of guiding funeral planning and having telephone communication with clients, and *segmentation* is identified in steps of providing funeral services and types of community engagement of funeral homes. For discursive synchronic interplay, findings identified discursive markers of negating and countering, ambiguating (a new form of synchronic interplay), and entertaining. The following paragraphs explain theoretical contributions to RDT.

The dissertation develops the discursive markers, which are indicators applied by researchers to identify discursive synchronic interplay for the contrapuntal analysis, by (a) aligning the discursive markers (i.e., negating, countering, and entertaining) with four features of utterance chains and (b) proposing another discursive marker, *ambiguating*. Baxter (2011)

proposed four features of utterance chains that manifest the discursive synchronic interplay, conceptualized as dimensions: *antagonistic-nonantagonistic struggle*, *direct-indirect struggle, serious-playful struggle,* and *polemical-transformative struggle*. Additionally, although negating, countering, and entertaining are suggested to identify discursive synchronic interplay (Baxter, 2011; Scharp & Thomas, 2021), these three discursive markers are general and are not explicitly aligned with the four features of utterance chains, so researchers usually encounter an internal uncertainty when they claim to identify synchronic interplay by just having a guideline of the three discursive markers. This dissertation attempts to resolve this issue by aligning the discursive markers with four features of utterance chains. The alignment gives an additional guideline to make researchers confident in identifying discursive synchronic interplay other than having the guideline of the three discursive markers.

More specifically, the dissertation argues that *negating* and *countering* occur in utterances with a feature of the antagonistic-nonantagonistic struggle, which describes two speakers aligning with different discursive positions in one utterance. *Negating* is a disclaiming that one speaker applies to reject the other speaker's discursive position. Concretely, funeral directors negate the discourse of commerce by rejecting clients' discursive positions related to commerce and correcting clients' misunderstandings. For example, a funeral director denied families' beliefs of commerce, "they think that we are sharks and try to get every penny from them. We are not. We do not make a lot of money. We are not all about the money." Negating challenges clients' assumptions and forces clients to receive new messages and discursive positions about funeral planning. *Countering* is a disclaiming that one speaker applies to supplant the other speaker's discursive position with an alternative discursive position. Funeral directors supplant the discourse of commerce with the discourse of care by including conjunctions and

connectives in utterances (e.g., however, but, yet, nevertheless, even, only, just, still, and so on) and emphasizing the caring nature of funeral services (e.g., a funeral director clearly states that, "we are here to help people."). Countering directs clients to an alternative discursive position so that clients will develop their past assumptions into new assumptions on funeral planning.

This dissertation introduces *ambiguating* as a new form of synchronic interplay. The dissertation argues that ambiguating occurs in utterances with a feature of the direct-indirect struggle, which describes the ambiguous level of an utterance situated in a binary continuum of directness-indirectness. *Ambiguating* is a linguistic strategy by which a speaker makes utterances in an unclear style. Concretely, funeral directors ambiguate their responses to enhance the discourse of care by using vagueness (e.g., funeral service is an ambiguous term to represent funeral business), utilizing modifiers in utterances (e.g., sometimes, occasionally, often), and providing additional options beyond commerce (e.g., instead of paying the full in advance, 50% required payment and monthly payment in the second half). Corresponding to functions of strategic ambiguity, which promote unified diversity, facilitate organizational change, amplify existing source attributions, and preserve privileged positions (Eisenberg, 1984), *ambiguating* represents synchronic interplay because it allows multiple interpretations to exist and cultivates different interpretations to grow among people who attend to the same message.

The dissertation also argues that *entertaining* occurs in utterances with a feature of the serious-playful struggle, which draws attention to the tone of an utterance. *Entertaining* is a linguistic strategy that integrates alternative discursive positions into utterances. Specifically, funeral directors entertain funeral planning conversations by applying the playful devices of *rogue*, *fool*, and *clown* to acknowledge the discourse of care when the discourse of commerce is dominant. These playful devices arise alternative discursive positions into utterances because of

humorous communication, which functions to increase group cohesion and cope with stress (e.g., Banas et al., 2011; Booth-Butterfield et al., 2007; Mulkay, 1988). Humorous communication can also promote resource-building social play (Gervais & Wilson, 2005), which allows alternative discursive positions to exist.

As such, this dissertation aligns the discursive synchronic markers, including negating, countering, ambiguating (a new marker proposed), and entertaining, with four features of utterance chains. The alignment gives an additional guideline to make researchers confident in identifying discursive synchronic interplay other than having the guideline of the three discursive markers. In other words, for RDT research in the future, to identify discursive synchronic interplay, researchers should analyze utterance chains by recognizing both discursive synchronic markers and features of utterance chains and then confirming discursive synchronic markers and features of utterance chains aligned.

Control-Resistance dialectic. This dissertation contributes to the control-resistance dialectic in organization studies (e.g., Mumby, 2005) by providing empirical evidence of the commerce-care dialectic in funeral planning. Mumby (2005) theorized the notion of control and resistance as "mutually constitutive, and as a routine social production of daily organizational life" (p. 20). The commerce-care dialectic in funeral planning, which is the struggle of coping with and adapting to death manifests in arranging funerals, perfectly represented Mumby's theorizing by applying the dialectic approach.

Specifically, findings identify the two meaning systems, the *discourse of commerce* and *the discourse of care*, in which people make meaning of the commerce-care dialectic in funeral planning. Three assertions explain the discourse of commerce, including that commodification is necessary, commercialization is encouraged, and corporatization is reinforced. These assertions

reflect that funeral homes are involved in the capitalist system and adopt the core values of liberal market competition. In other words, the discourse of commerce reflects capitalism control, which reproduces and reinforces the capitalist system of contemporary US society. Moreover, three assertions explain the discourse of care, including that compassion is natural, support is socialized, and sacredness is existential. These three assertions reflect that funeral directors demonstrate consistent respect for humanity, particularly concerning compassion, support, and sacredness while working in funeral service. In other words, the discourse of care reflects the resistance of humanity, which confronts and deflects the capitalist system.

Additionally, findings also identify discursive transformative interplay: the *hybridization* of the *discourse of commerce* and the *discourse of care*, where emergent meanings reflect the mutual constitutive of the control and resistance. Specifically, funeral directors hybridize the discourse of commerce and the discourse of care and commit the double nature of funeral services: commerce and care. This hybridization reflects that what appears to be the resistance of care as the control to professionals (e.g., funeral directors are socialized to provide social support because of the professionalism requirement) and what appears to be the control of commerce as the resistance to professionals (e.g., funeral homes commercialize funeral services to enlarge profit by participating in community engagement).

Moreover, findings also identify discursive transformative interplay: the *aesthetic moment* of the *discourse of commerce* and the *discourse of care*, where emergent meanings sediment as a routine social production of daily organizational life. In particular, in funeral directors' everyday organizational life, the *discourse of mundanity* is proposed as the fusion of the discourse of commerce and the discourse of care, and that is "*a system of meaning in which the gravity of life and death is made to be experienced as ordinary and beautiful*." The aesthetic

moment reflects the fusion of control (i.e., the discourse of commerce) and resistance (i.e., the discourse of care), which is transformed over a routine social production of daily organizational life (e.g., a funeral director claims their self-rewarding in being a funeral professional and would like to stay in the industry even having a better payment opportunity).

As such, the dissertation provides empirical evidence for Mumby's theorizing on (1) the mutual constitutive of control and resistance by identifying the hybridization of the *discourse of commerce* and the *discourse of care* as the double nature (i.e., commerce and care) of funeral services and (2) the control-resistance dialectic transformation as a routine social production of daily organizational life by proposing the *discourse of mundanity*, which is "*a system of meaning in which the gravity of life and death is made to be experienced as ordinary and beautiful*."

The Commerce-Care dialectic perspective. The dissertation proposes a perspective of acknowledging human life, which is the complex interpenetration and constitutive process of the costed life and/or the sacred life, labeled as the *commerce-care dialectic perspective*, defined as:

> *Humans make meanings of unresolvable life events or struggles, which have two core attributes of money and humanity, and transform those struggles into mundane aesthetic moments by enacting behaviors and actions.*

The following paragraphs explain how the funeral industry and services reflect the commerce-care dialectic perspective and how this perspective can be transferred to other fields and life events.

The funeral industry and services reflect the commerce-care dialectic perspective, manifesting in the 20th-century history of American funeral homes and the meaning-making process of funeral planning. Throughout reviewing the 20th-century history of American funeral homes in Chapter Two, the author identifies three characteristics of the commerce-care dialectic

in funeral services. First, a funeral service is a business that provides profound care for clients, indicating money and humanity attributes. Second, the commerce-care dialectic is perennial and unresolvable in funeral services, indicating that humans struggle with coping with and adapting to their loved one's death. Third, although conceivably unresolvable, people need to face and manage the commerce-care dialectic in funeral services, indicating that people eventually enact funeral planning and appreciate memorial services, even though some meaning-makings of funeral services favor their identities, relationships, and acknowledgments, while others are not favorable in that regard.

Moreover, this dissertation explores the meaning-making of funeral planning, and the findings of the three research questions reveal the commerce-care dialectic perspective in funeral planning. First, the *discourse of commerce* and the *discourse of care* indicate attributes of money and humanity. Second, the discursive synchronic and diachronic interplays reflect that funeral directors and their clients struggle with coping with and adapting to (unresolvable) death during funeral planning. Third, the *discourse of mundanity* is proposed as the fusion of the discourse of commerce and the discourse of care, suggesting that people finally enact behaviors and actions on funeral planning.

The dissertation argues that the *commerce-care dialectic perspective* can be transferred to other industrial fields, such as education and healthcare, and life events, such as fundraising ideas and volunteering activities. These industrial fields and life events operate by the principles of capitalism and market forces, but people who engage in these fields and events unconsciously and consciously enact support from the profound care of humanity while doing their jobs or delivering services. Therefore, the *commerce-care dialectic perspective* can be applied to describe, acknowledge, understand, and interpret extensive industrial fields and life events.

Practical Implications

The dissertation offers practical implications for facilitating future funeral planning for funeral professionals, clients, and governmental agencies. Funeral professionals should engage in more caring behaviors than commercial behaviors in funeral planning. For doing that, a training session for funeral directors might include the importance of self-care and compassion; perhaps a communication simulation centering on the bereaved (i.e., bereaved-centered communication) could be helpful during funeral director education. Clients should be aware of the profitable nature of funeral services and allow funeral professionals to earn reasonable profits. In specific, clients should be more interested in doing funeral pre-planning, absorbing information about funeral services, and participating in community events related to funeral planning. Governmental agencies should provide support for funeral homes to promise the social welfare nature of funeral services and design limited regulations for funeral homes to encourage the commodity nature of funeral services. Specifically, governmental agencies should supervise and follow the market change in the funeral industry and adapt to the funeral industry's regulations to advanced technology.

Limitations

This dissertation has at least three limitations. First, funeral planning is an interactive process between funeral professionals and clients, and interviews hardly document the full picture of conversations. Observations will help capture the conversation of funeral planning. Second, the dissertation discusses the commerce-care dialectic, but literature reviews regarding commodification, decommodification, the constitutive approach, and critical organization studies are short and thin. In the future, the author ought to dive into these thick and sophisticated literature groups. Third, the dissertation proposes the *commerce-care dialectic perspective*,

which seems like a heuristic concept. However, the *commerce-care dialectic perspective* requires further validation across other occupational interaction types to understand the concept's degree of transferability. The author may need to take decades to make it a valid concept.

Conclusion

This dissertation, grounded in relational dialectics theory 2.0, aims to illustrate what meanings emerge from the commerce-care dialectic when engaging in funeral planning. This dissertation contributes to RDT by aligning the discursive synchronic markers, including negating, countering, ambiguating (a new marker proposed), and entertaining, with four features of utterance chains. The alignment contributes to providing an additional guideline to make researchers confident in identifying discursive synchronic interplay other than having the guideline of the three discursive markers. Additionally, the dissertation provides empirical evidence for Mumby's theorizing on (1) the mutual constitutive of control and resistance by identifying the hybridization of the *discourse of commerce* and the *discourse of care* as the double nature (i.e., commerce and care) of funeral services and (2) the control-resistance dialectic transformation as a routine social production of daily organizational life by proposing the *discourse of mundanity*, which is "*a system of meaning in which the gravity of life and death is made to be experienced as ordinary and beautiful*." Moreover, the dissertation proposes a perspective of acknowledging human life, which is the complex interpenetration and constitutive process of the costed life and/or the sacred life, labeled as the *commerce-care dialectic perspective*, defined as:

> *Humans make meanings of unresolvable life events or struggles, which have two core attributes of money and humanity, and transform those struggles into mundane aesthetic moments by enacting behaviors and actions.*

This commerce-care dialectic perspective requires further validation across other occupational interaction types to understand the concept's degree of transferability. Lastly, the dissertation offers practical implications for facilitating future funeral planning for funeral professionals, clients, and governmental agencies.

References

Adamczyk, A., & Liao, Y.-C. (2019). Examining public opinion about LGBTQ-related issues in the United States and across multiple nations. *Annual review of sociology, 45*(1), 401-423. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-073018-022332

Altheide, D. L. (2007). The mass media and terrorism. *Discourse & Communication, 1*(3), 287-308. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481307079207

Alvarez, C. F., Scharp, K. M., & Friz, A. M. (2023). "I am a binary trans man and I love being pregnant": Making meaning of pregnancy in seahorse dad narratives. *Journal of Social and Personal relationships, 40*(9), 3028-3050. https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075231165700

Amati, R., & Hannawa, A. F. (2014). Relational dialectics theory: disentangling physician-perceived tensions of end-of-life communication. *Health Communication, 29*(10), 962-973. https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2013.815533

Apker, J., Ptacek, J., Beach, C., & Wears, R. (2016). Exploring role dialectics in inter-service admission handoffs: a qualitative analysis of physician communication. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 44*(4), 399-414. https://doi.org/10.1080/00909882.2016.1225164

Aries, P. (1974). The reversal of death: changes in attitudes toward death in western societies. *American Quarterly, 26*(5), 536-560. https://doi.org/10.2307/2711889

Ariès, P. (1981). *The hour of our death* (H. Weaver, Trans.; First American edition ed.). Knopf : Distributed by Random House.

Armour, R. A., & Williams, J. C. (1981). Image making and advertising in the funeral industry. *Journal of popular culture*, *14*(4), 701-710. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1981.00701.x

Assmann, J. (1989). Death and initiation in the funerary religion of ancient Egypt. In W. K. Simpson (Ed.), *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt (Yale Egyptological Studies)* (pp. 135-159). Yale Egyptological Seminar.

Bailey, T. (2010). When commerce meets care: Emotion management in UK funeral directing. *Mortality*, *15*(3), 205-222. https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2010.496613

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981a). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays* (C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.). University of Texas Press.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981b). Discourse in the novel. In J. Rivkin, & Ryan, M. (Ed.), *Literary theory: An anthology* (pp. 674-685). Wiley-Blackwell.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1984). *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (C. Emerson, Ed. & Trans.). University of Minnesota Press.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays* (V. W. McGee, Trans.). University of Texas Press.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1990). *Art and answerability: Early philosophical essays* (V. Liapunov, Trans.). University of Texas Press.

Banas, J. A., Dunbar, N., Rodriguez, D., & Liu, S.-J. (2011). A Review of Humor in Educational Settings: Four Decades of Research. *Communication Education*, *60*(1), 115-144. https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2010.496867

Barker, J. R., & Cheney, G. (1994). The concept and the practices of discipline in contemporary organizational life. *Communication Monographs, 61*(1), 19-43. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637759409376321

Barley, S. R. (1983). The codes of the dead - the semiotics of funeral work. *Urban Life, 12*(1), 3-31. https://doi.org/10.1177/009830983012001001

Baxster, J. (2011). Survival or success? A critical exploration of the use of 'double-voiced discourse' by women business leaders in the UK. *Discourse & Communication, 5*(3), 231-245. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481311405590

Baxter, L. A. (1990). Dialectical contradictions in relationship development. *Journal of Social and Personal relationships, 7*(1), 69-88. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407590071004

Baxter, L. A. (2011). *Voicing relationships: a dialogic perspective*. SAGE Publications, Inc.

Baxter, L. A., & Braithwaite, D. O. (2002). Performing marriage: Marriage renewal rituals as cultural performance. *Southern Communication Journal, 67*(2), 94-109. https://doi.org/10.1080/10417940209373223

Baxter, L. A., & Braithwaite, D. O. (2006). Family Rituals. In L. H. Turner, & West, R. (Ed.), *The family communication sourcebook.* (pp. 259-280). Sage Publications, Inc.

Baxter, L. A., & Braithwaite, D. O. (2010). Relational dialectics theory, applied. In S. W. Smith & S. R. Wilson (Eds.), *New directions in interpersonal communication research*. SAGE Publications, Inc.

Baxter, L. A., Braithwaite, D. O., Golish, T. D., & Olson, L. N. (2002). Contradictions of interaction for wives of elderly husbands with adult dementia. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 30*(1), 1-26. https://doi.org/10.1080/00909880216576

Baxter, L. A., & Bullis, C. (1986). Turning points in developing romantic relationships. *Human Communication Research, 12*(4), 469-493. https://doi.org/j.1468-2958.1986.tb00088.x

Baxter, L. A., & Erbert, L. A. (1999). Perceptions of dialectical contradictions in turning points of development in heterosexual romantic relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal relationships, 16*(5), 547-569. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407599165001

Baxter, L. A., Henauw, C., Huisman, D., Livesay, C. B., Norwood, K., Su, H., Wolf, B., & Young, B. (2009). Lay conceptions of "family": A replication and extension. *Journal of Family Communication, 9*(3), 170-189. https://doi.org/10.1080/15267430902963342

Baxter, L. A., Mazanec, M., Nicholson, J., Pittman, G., Smith, K., & West, L. (1997). Everyday loyalties and betrayals in personal relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal relationships, 14*(5), 655-678. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407597145005

Baxter, L. A., & Montgomery, B. M. (1996). *Relating: Dialogues and dialectics*. Guilford Press.

Baxter, L. A., Scharp, K. M., & Thomas, L. J. (2021). Relational dialectics theory. *Journal of Family Theory & Review, 13*(1), 7-20. https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12405

Beard, V. R., & Burger, W. C. (2017). Change and innovation in the funeral industry: A typology of motivations. *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying, 75*(1), 47-68. https://doi.org/10.1177/0030222815612605

Beard, V. R., & Burger, W. C. (2020). Selling in a dying business: An analysis of trends during a period of major market transition in the funeral industry. *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying, 80*(4), 544-567. https://doi.org/10.1177/0030222817745430

Beaunoyer, E., Guitton, A., & Guitton, M. J. (2022). Online presence of the funeral Industry: The example of the Quebec federation of funeral cooperatives. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying, 0*(0). https://doi.org/10.1177/00302228221111936

Beaunoyer, E., & Guitton, M. J. (2021). Cyberthanathology: Death and beyond in the digital age. *Computers in Human Behavior, 122*, 106849. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2021.106849

Beck-Sagué, C. M., Jarvis, W. R., Fruehling, J. A., Ott, C. E., Higgins, M. T., & Bates, F. L. (1991). Universal precautions and mortuary practitioners: Influence on practices and risk of occupationally acquired infection. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 33*(8), 874-878. https://doi.org/10.1097/00043764-199108000-00012

Becker, E. (1973). *The denial of death*. Free Press.

Bellah, R. N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W. M., Swidler, A., & Tipton, S. M. (1985). *Habits of the heart, with a new preface: individualism and commitment in American life*. Univ of California Press.

Berger, C. R., & Calabrese, R. J. (1975). Some explorations in initial interaction and beyond: Toward a developmental theory of interpersonal communication. *Human Communication Research, 1*(2), 99-112. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.1975.tb00258.x

Bi, D., & Hammonds, K. A. (2021). Listening to funeral directors in rural Oklahoma funeral homes: Social construction of roles, goals, and strategies. *Southern Communication Journal, 86*(4), 375-386. https://doi.org/10.1080/1041794X.2021.1941222

Bi, D., & Ploeger-Lyons, N. A. (2022). (Un)wanted and (Un)sought services: Exploring the funeral industry positivity and rural funeral directors' destigmatization. *Communication Studies, 73*(5-6), 511-526. https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2022.2149583

Blackwood, A. W. (1942). *The funeral, a source book for ministers*. Westminster Press.

Blake, R. R., & Mouton, J. S. (1981). Management by Grid® Principles or Situationalism: Which? *Group & Organization Studies, 6*(4), 439-455. https://doi.org/10.1177/105960118100600404

Blauner, R. (1966). Death and Social Structure†. *Psychiatry, 29*(4), 378-394. https://doi.org/10.1080/00332747.1966.11023480

Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Univ of California Press.

Boateng, A., & Anngela-Cole, L. (2016). Funeral practices in Ghana and the United States: A cultural comparison. *International Journal of Social Science Studies, 4*(1), 36-48. https://doi.org/10.11114/ijsss.v4i1.1221

Bonanno, G. A., Papa, A., & O'Neill, K. (2001). Loss and human resilience. *Applied and Preventive Psychology, 10*(3), 193-206. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0962-1849(01)80014-7

Bonanno, G. A., Wortman, C. B., Lehman, D. R., Tweed, R. G., Haring, M., Sonnega, J., Carr, D., & Nesse, R. M. (2002). Resilience to loss and chronic grief: A prospective study from preloss to 18-months postloss. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 83*(5), 1150-1164. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.83.5.1150

Bonanno, G. A., Wortman, C. B., & Nesse, R. M. (2004). Prospective patterns of resilience and maladjustment during widowhood. *Psychology and aging, 19*(2), 260-271. https://doi.org/10.1037/0882-7974.19.2.260

Booth-Butterfield, M., Booth-Butterfield, S., & Wanzer, M. (2007). Funny students cope better: Patterns of humor enactment and coping effectiveness. *Communication Quarterly, 55*(3), 299-315. https://doi.org/10.1080/01463370701490232

Boss, P. (1999). *Ambiguous Loss: Learning to live with unresolved grief*. Harvard University Press.

Boss, P. (2010). The trauma and complicated grief of ambiguous loss. *Pastoral Psychology, 59*(2), 137-145. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-009-0264-0

Bowman, L. (1975). *American funeral: A study in guilt, extravagance, and sublimity*. Greenwood Westport, Conn.

Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Sage Publications, Inc.

Braithwaite, D. O., & Baxter, L. A. (1995). `I do' Again: The relational dialectics of renewing marriage vows. *Journal of Social and Personal relationships, 12*(2), 177-198. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407595122002

Braithwaite, D. O., Baxter, L. A., & Harper, A. M. (1998). The role of rituals in the management of the dialectical tension of "old" and "new" in blended families. *Communication Studies, 49*(2), 101-120. https://doi.org/10.1080/10510979809368523

Brashers, D. E. (2001). Communication and uncertainty management. *Journal of communication, 51*(3), 477-497. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2001.tb02892.x

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology, 3*(2), 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Bregman, L. (2017). The Death Awareness Movement. In C. Moreman (Ed.), *The Routledge companion to death and dying*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315723747.ch38

Brookmeyer, R. (1991). Reconstruction and future trends of the AIDS epidemic in the United States. *Science, 253*(5015), 37-42. https://doi.org/doi:10.1126/science.2063206

Bruess, C. J. S., & Pearson, J. C. (1997). Interpersonal rituals in marriage and adult friendship. *Communication Monographs, 64*(1), 25-46. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637759709376403

Bruess, C. J. S., & Pearson, J. C. (2002). The function of mundane ritualizing in adult friendship and marriage. *Communication Research Reports, 19*(4), 314-326. https://doi.org/10.1080/08824090209384860

Burkhalter, S., Gastil, J., & Kelshaw, T. (2002). A conceptual definition and theoretical model of public deliberation in small face—to—face groups. *Communication Theory, 12*(4), 398-422. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2002.tb00276.x

Burrell, G. (1988). Modernism, post modernism and organizational analysis 2: The contribution of Michel Foucault. *Organization Studies, 9*(2), 221-235. https://doi.org/10.1177/017084068800900205

Cahill, S. E. (1999a). The boundaries of professionalization: The case of North American funeral direction. *Symbolic interaction, 22*(2), 105-119. https://doi.org/10.1525/si.1999.22.2.105

Cahill, S. E. (1999b). Emotional capital and professional socialization: The case of mortuary science students (and me). *Social psychology quarterly*, 101-116. https://doi.org/10.2307/2695852

Campbell, C. G. (2021). *Funeral planning communication: A new conceptual framework in communication studies* (Publication Number 28714603) [M.A., University of Colorado at Boulder]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. Ann Arbor.

Canine, J. D. (1996). *The psychological aspects of death and death*. Appleton & Lange.

Carbaugh, D. (2007). Cultural discourse analysis: Communication practices and intercultural encounters. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research, 36*(3), 167-182. https://doi.org/10.1080/17475750701737090

Carpentier, N., & Van Brussel, L. (2012). On the contingency of death: a discourse-theoretical perspective on the construction of death. *Critical Discourse Studies, 9*(2), 99-115. https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2012.656372

Carr, K., & Wang, T. R. (2012). “Forgiveness isn't a simple process: It's a vast undertaking”: Negotiating and communicating forgiveness in nonvoluntary family relationships. *Journal of Family Communication, 12*(1), 40-56. https://doi.org/10.1080/15267431.2011.629970

Clark, C. D. (2005). Tricks of festival: Children, enculturation, and American Halloween. *Ethos, 33*(2), 180-205. https://doi.org/10.1525/eth.2005.33.2.180

Coetzee, C., Van Heerden, C., & Maree, T. (2014). The marketing of an unsought service through an unobtrusive medium: A content analysis of the websites of members of the National Funeral Directors Association of South Africa. *Communicare: Journal for Communication Sciences in Southern Africa, 33*(1), 35-56. https://doi.org/10.10520/EJC156801

Conrad, J. B., & Coohey, C. (2023). The constructed meaning of suicide: A relational dialectics theory analysis of online suicide chats. *Journal of Communication Inquiry, 47*(2), 168-186. https://doi.org/10.1177/01968599221128533

Corr, C. A., & Doka, K. J. (2001). Master concepts in the field of death, dying, and bereavement: Coping versus adaptive strategies. *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying, 43*(3), 183-199. https://doi.org/10.2190/2T3W-MEL5-L4WL-VGG

Coweii, D. D. (1986). Funerals, family, and forefathers: A view of Italian-American funeral practices. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying, 16*(1), 69-85. https://doi.org/10.2190/ryld-33xc-t9gp-9ju7

Cremation Association of North America. (n.d.). *History of Cremation*. https://www.cremationassociation.org/page/HistoryOfCremation

Cremation.com. (n.d.). *Glossary of Funeral Terms*. Cremation.com. https://www.cremation.com/consumer-resources/glossary-of-funeral-terms

Creswell, J. W. (2007). Five qualitative approaches to inquiry. In J. W. Creswell, & Poth, C. N. (Ed.), *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches, 2nd ed.* (pp. 53-80). Sage Publications, Inc.

Currier, J. M., Neimeyer, R. A., & Berman, J. S. (2008). The effectiveness of psychotherapeutic interventions for bereaved persons: A comprehensive quantitative review. *Psychological bulletin, 134*(5), 648-661. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.134.5.648

Dahmen, N. S. (2018). Visually reporting mass shootings: U.S. newspaper photographic coverage of three mass school shootings. *American Behavioral Scientist, 62*(2), 163-180. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764218756921

Dainton, M., & Aylor, B. (2002). Patterns of communication channel use in the maintenance of long-distance relationships. *Communication Research Reports, 19*(2), 118-129. https://doi.org/10.1080/08824090209384839

Day, A. M. (2013). Balancing the business of family: Family business daughters' tensions between motherhood and work. *Atlantic Journal of Communication, 21*(3), 125-148. https://doi.org/10.1080/15456870.2013.773483

Deetz, S. (1992). *Democracy in an age of corporate colonization: Developments in communication and the politics of everyday life*. SUNY press.

Deetz, S. (2001). Conceptual foundations. In F. M. Jablin & L. L. Putnam (Eds.), *The new handbook of organizational communication: Advances in theory, research and methods*. Sage.

Deetz, S., & Mumby, D. K. (1990). Power, discourse, and the workplace: Reclaiming the critical tradition. *Annals of the International Communication Association, 13*(1), 18-47. https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.1990.11678743

Dickinson, G. E. (2012). Diversity in death: Body disposition and memorialization. *Illness, Crisis & Loss, 20*(2), 141-158. https://doi.org/10.2190/IL.20.2.d

Dindia, K., & Canary, D. J. (1993). Definitions and theoretical perspectives on maintaining relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal relationships, 10*(2), 163-173. https://doi.org/10.1177/026540759301000201

Dowd, Q. L. (1921). *Funeral management and costs: a world-survey of burial and cremation*. University of Chicago Press.

Dumlao, R. J., & Janke, E. M. (2012). Using relational dialectics to address differences in community-campus partnerships. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement, 16*(2), 151-175.

Dutta, D. (2017). Cultural barriers and familial resources for negotiation of engineering careers among young women: Relational dialectics theory in an Asian perspective. *Journal of Family Communication, 17*(4), 338-355. https://doi.org/10.1080/15267431.2017.1363045

Easterlin, R. A. (1995). Industrial revolution and mortality revolution: Two of a kind? *Journal of Evolutionary Economics, 5*(4), 393-408. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01194368

Eisenberg, E. M. (1984). Ambiguity as strategy in organizational communication. *Communication Monographs, 51*(3), 227-242. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637758409390197

Eisenbruch, M. (1984). Cross-cultural aspects of bereavement. II: Ethnic and cultural variations in the development of bereavement practices. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry, 8*(4), 315-347. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00114661

Ellis, D. G., Hamilton, M., & Aho, L. (1983). Some issues in conversation coherence. *Human Communication Research, 9*(3), 267-282. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.1983.tb00699.x

Emerson, C. (2000). *The first hundred years of Mikhail Bakhtin*. Princeton University Press.

Esping-Andersen, G. (1990). *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*. Princeton University Press.

Fahlander, F., & Oestigaard, T. (2008). The materiality of death: Bodies, burials, beliefs. In F. Fahlander & T. Oestigaard (Eds.), *The Materiality of Death: Bodies, Burials, Beliefs* (pp. 1-16). Archeaopress.

Fairhurst, G. T., & Putnam, L. (2004). Organizations as discursive constructions. *Communication Theory, 14*(1), 5-26. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2004.tb00301.x

Farrell, L. C., DiTunnariello, N., & Pearson, J. C. (2014). Exploring relational cultures: Rituals, privacy disclosure, and relational satisfaction. *Communication Studies, 65*(3), 314-329. https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2013.778892

Federal Trade Commission. (1975). *Funeral industry practices: proposed trade regulation rule and staff memorandum*. District of Columbia: Division of Special Projects, Bureau of Consumer Protection.

Federal Trade Commission. (1978). *Funeral Industry Practices: Final Staff Report to the Federal Trade Commission and Proposed Trade Regulation Rule (16 CFR Part 453)*. District of Columbia: Bureau of Consumer Protection.

Federal Trade Commission. (1982). *Final Report: Baseline and Follow-up Studies for Evaluating the Effect of Federal Trade Commission's Funeral Home Industry Trade Regulation Rule*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Consumer Protection.

Federal Trade Commission. (2013). *FTC Puts Conditions on Service Corporation International's Proposed $1.4 Billion Acquisition of Rival Funeral and Cemetery Services Provider*. Federal Trade Commission. https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/news/press-releases/2013/12/ftc-puts-conditions-service-corporation-internationals-proposed-14-billion-acquisition-rival-funeral

Federal Trade Commission. (2023). *Complying with the Funeral Rule*. Retrieved Sep. 16 from https://www.ftc.gov/business-guidance/resources/complying-funeral-rule

Federal Trade Commission. (n.d.). *Our History*. Retrieved Sep. 16 from https://www.ftc.gov/about-ftc/history

Feeney, J. A., & Fitzgerald, J. (2022). Autonomy–connection tensions, stress, and attachment: The case of COVID-19. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *43*, 18-23. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2021.05.004

Feifel, H. (1959). *The meaning of death*. Blakiston Division, McGraw-Hill.

Feifel, H. (1974). Psychology and the death-awareness movement. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology, 3*(2), 6-7. https://doi.org/10.1080/15374417409532560

Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human relations*, *7*(2), 117-140. https://doi.org/10.1177/001872675400700202

Floersch, J., & Longhofer, J. (1997). The imagined death: Looking to the past for relief from the present. *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying, 35*(3), 243-260. https://doi.org/10.2190/5HDB-9MWY-WKDJ-L9PX

Fonseca, L. M., & Testoni, I. (2012). The emergence of thanatology and current practice in death education. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying, 64*(2), 157-169. https://doi.org/10.2190/OM.64.2.d

Foreman, J. (1973). Theory and the ideal type of the professional: The case of the funeral director. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying, 4*(3), 221-228. https://doi.org/10.2190/7n5f-x6qr-y8xq-pyda

Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language* (A. M. Sheridan, Trans.). Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline & Punish: The birth of the prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). Vintage Books.

Foucault, M. (1980). *The History of Sexuality* (R. Hurley, Trans.). Pantheon Books.

Fulton, R. (1965). The sacred and the secular: Attitudes of the American public toward death, funerals, and funeral directors. In R. Fulton (Ed.), *Death and identity* (pp. 89-105). Wiley.

Fulton, R., & Owen, G. (1988). Death and society in twentieth century America. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying, 18*(4), 379-395. https://doi.org/10.2190/6kym-f9eb-vy1j-fqwe

Gaddie, R. K. (n.d.,). *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*. Oklahoma Historical Society.

https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry?entry=RE030#:~:text=Since%20the%201960s%20the%20GOP,compared%20to%20the%20state%20Democrats.

Gal, S. (2005). Language ideologies compared. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology, 15*(1), 23-37. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1525/jlin.2005.15.1.23

Galinsky, A. D., Gruenfeld, D. H., & Magee, J. C. (2003). From power to action. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 85*(3), 453-466. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.85.3.453

Gastil, J. (2008). *Political communication and deliberation*. Sage.

Gebhart, J. C. (1928). *Funeral Costs: What They Average. Are They Too High? Can They be Reduced?* GP Putnam's sons.

General Accounting Office. (1991). *Occupational Safety and Health, OSHA Action Needed to Improve Compliance with Hazard Communication Standard*. US General Accounting Office.

Gerth, H., & Mills, C. W. (1958). *From Max Weber : essays in sociology*. Oxford University Press.

Gervais, M., & Wilson, D. S. (2005). The evolution and functions of laughter and humor: A synthetic approach. *The Quarterly Review of Biology, 80*(4), 395-430. https://doi.org/10.1086/498281

Giddens, A. (1972). *Emile Durkheim: selected writings*. Cambridge University Press.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1965). *Awareness of dying*. Aldine.

Glass, A. P., Chen, L.-K., Hwang, E., Ono, Y., & Nahapetyan, L. (2010). A cross-cultural comparison of hospice development in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology, 25*(1), 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10823-009-9108-8

Golden, J. L., Berquist, G. F., Coleman, W. E., & Sproule, M. J. (2003). *The rhetoric of western thought: from the Mediteranean world to the global setting* (2nd ed.). Kendall Hunt.

Goldsmith, D. (1990). A dialectic perspective on the expression of autonomy and connection in romantic relationships. *Western Journal of Speech Communication, 54*(4), 537-556. https://doi.org/10.1080/10570319009374359

Goren, A. A. (1994). Sacred and secular: The place of public funerals in the immigrant life of American Jews. *Hîstôry¯a yêhûdît = Jewish history, 8*(1), 269-305. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01915918

Gudykunst, W. B., & Kim, Y. Y. (2003). *Communicating with strangers: an approach to intercultural communication* (4th ed.). McGraw-Hill.

Günthner, S., & Knoblauch, H. (1995). Culturally patterned speaking practices-the analysis of communicative genres. *Pragmatics, 5*(1), 1-32. https://doi.org/10.1075/prag.5.1.03gun

Habenstein, R. (1963). Conflicting organizational patterns in funeral directing. *Human Organization, 22*(2), 126-132. https://doi.org/10.17730/humo.22.2.t602u17535701hh3

Habenstein, R., & Lamers, W. (1955). *The history of American funeral directing* (1st ed.). Bulfin Printers.

Habenstein, R. W., & Lamers, W. M. (2021). *The history of American funeral directing* (10th ed.). NFDA Publishing Company.

Hample, D., & Allen, S. (2012). Serial arguments in organizations. *Journal of Argumentation in Context, 1*(3), 312-330. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1075/jaic.1.3.03ham

Han, G.-S. (2016). Funeral capitalism: Commodification and digital marketing of funeral services in contemporary Korea. *Korean Studies, 40*(0), 58-77. https://doi.org/10.1353/ks.2016.0002

Hanusch, F. (2010). *Representing death in the news: Journalism, media and mortality*. Springer.

Harrigan, M. M., Benz, I., Hauck, C., LaRocca, E., Renders, R., & Roney, S. (2021). The dialectical experience of the fear of missing out for U.S. American iGen emerging adult college students. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 49*(4), 424-440. https://doi.org/10.1080/00909882.2021.1898656

Hauser, G. A. (1998). Vernacular dialogue and the rhetoricality of public opinion. *Communication Monographs, 65*(2), 83-107. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637759809376439

Heffernan, K. (2002). Inner-City Exhibition and the Genre Film: Distributing "Night of the Living Dead" (1968). *Cinema Journal, 41*(3), 59-77. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1225699

Hertz, R. (1960). A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death (R. Needham & C. Needham, Trans.). In R. Needham & C. Needham (Eds.), *Death and the Right Hand* (pp. 27-86). Aberdeen: Cohen & West.

Hewes, D., & Planalp, S. (1987). The individual's place in communication science. In C. R. Berger, & Chaffee, S. H. (Ed.), *Handbook of communication science* (pp. 146-183). Sage.

Hintz, E. A., & Brown, C. L. (2020). Childfree and “bingoed”: A relational dialectics theory analysis of meaning creation in online narratives about voluntary childlessness. *Communication Monographs, 87*(2), 244-266. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637751.2019.1697891

Hintz, E. A., & Scharp, K. M. (2023). “I hate all the children, especially mine”: Applying relational dialectics theory to examine the experiences of formerly childfree regretful parents. *Journal of Social and Personal relationships, 40*(11), 3781-3799. https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075231194363

Hoey, L. M., Ieropoli, S. C., White, V. M., & Jefford, M. (2008, 2008/03/01/). Systematic review of peer-support programs for people with cancer. *Patient education and counseling, 70*(3), 315-337. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pec.2007.11.016

Holquist, M. (2003). *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his world*. Routledge.

Hoppe-Nagao, A., & Ting-Toomey, S. (2002). Relational dialectics and management strategies in marital couples. *Southern Communication Journal, 67*(2), 142-159. https://doi.org/10.1080/10417940209373226

Howarth, G. (1996). *Last rites : the work of the modern funeral director*. Baywood Pub. Co.

Høybye, M. T., Johansen, C., & Tjørnhøj-Thomsen, T. (2005). Online interaction. Effects of storytelling in an internet breast cancer support group. *Psycho-Oncology, 14*(3), 211-220. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/pon.837

Hutchby, I. (2019). Conversation Analysis. In S. D. P. Atkinson, A. Cernat, J.W. Sakshaug, & R.A. Williams (Ed.), *SAGE Research Methods Foundations* (pp. 1-21). SAGE Publications Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526421036789623

Hutchby, I., & Wooffitt, R. (2008). *Conversation analysis*. Polity.

Hyland, L., & Morse, J. M. (1995). Orchestrating Comfort - the Role of funeral directors. *Death Studies, 19*(5), 453-474. https://doi.org/10.1080/07481189508253393

Iqbal, Z. (2011). McDonaldization, Islamic teachings, and funerary practices in Kuwait. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying, 63*(1), 95-112. https://doi.org/10.2190/OM.63.1.e

Irion, P. E. (1954). *The funeral and the mourners; pastoral care of the bereaved*. Abingdon Press Nashville.

Jackson, E. N. (1957). *Understanding grief : its roots, dynamics, and treatment*. Abingdon Press New York.

Jackson, P. E. (1950). *The law of cadavers and of burial and burial places*. Prentice-Hall.

Jacobs, T. A., & Wilkes, M. S. (1988). Cremation patterns for patients dying of AIDS in New York City. *New York State Journal of Medicine, 88*(12), 628-632.

James, J. (2004). What is a funeral for? *Rural Theology, 2*(1), 15-27. https://doi.org/10.1179/rut.2.1.16mwl6nj0up5kp36

James, K., Hawley, B., McCoy, C. R., & Lindley, L. C. (2022). Challenges and opportunities of providing pediatric funeral services: A national survey of funeral professionals. *American Journal of Hospice and Palliative Medicine®, 39*(3), 289-294. https://doi.org/10.1177/10499091211019298

Jung, C. G. (1959). The soul and death. In H. Feifel (Ed.), *The meaning of death* (pp. 3-15). New York, McGraw-Hill.

Kastenbaum, R. (1993). Reconstructing death in postmodern society. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying, 27*(1), 75-89. https://doi.org/10.2190/p4xj-egne-e157-g3qn

Kauffman, J. (2001). Denial. In G. Howarth & O. Leaman (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of death and dying / edited by Glennys Howarth and Oliver Leaman*. London ; New York : Routledge.

Keely, C. B. (1971). Effects of the immigration act of 1965 on selected population characteristics of immigrants to the United States. *Demography, 8*(2), 157-169. https://doi.org/10.2307/2060606

Kehl, K. A. (2006). Moving toward peace: an analysis of the concept of a good death. *American Journal of Hospice and Palliative Medicine®, 23*(4), 277-286. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049909106290380

Kemp, E., & Kopp, S. W. (2010). Have you made plans for that big day? Predicting intentions to engage in funeral planning. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice, 18*(1), 81-90. https://doi.org/10.2753/MTP1069-6679180106

Kemp, E., & Kopp, S. W. (2011). Resistance and risk: Examining the effects of message cues in encouraging end-of-life planning. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing, 30*(1), 100-109. https://doi.org/10.1509/jppm.30.1.100

Klicker, R. L. (2009). *Funeral directing and funeral service management*. Thanos Institute.

Kline, S. L., Stafford, L., & Miklosovic, J. C. (1996). Women's surnames: Decisions, interpretations and associations with relational qualities. *Journal of Social and Personal relationships, 13*(4), 593-617. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407596134007

Knee, C. R. (1998). Implicit theories of relationships: Assessment and prediction of romantic relationship initiation, coping, and longevity. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 74*(2), 360-370. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.74.2.360

Koczanowicz, L. (2000). Freedom and communication: The concept of human self in Mead and Bakhtin. *Dialogism: An International Journal of Bakhtin Studies, 4*, 54-66.

Kopp, S. W., & Kemp, E. (2007a). Consumer awareness of the legal obligations of funeral providers. *Journal of Consumer Affairs, 41*(2), 326-340. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6606.2007.00083.x

Kopp, S. W., & Kemp, E. (2007b). The death care industry: A review of regulatory and consumer issues. *Journal of Consumer Affairs, 41*(1), 150-173. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6606.2006.00072.x

Korai, B., Ouellet, C., & Cloutier, J. (2022). What are these strange things called emotions? An analysis of service interactions in the funeral industry: Issues, implications, and future

research directions. *Services Marketing Quarterly, 43*(2), 1-23. https://doi.org/10.1080/15332969.2021.1987611

Korai, B., & Souiden, N. (2017). Rethinking functionality and emotions in the service consumption process: the case of funeral services. *Journal of Services Marketing, 31*(3). https://doi.org/10.1108/JSM-03-2015-0132

Krebs, E., & Schoenbauer, K. V. (2020). Hysterics and Heresy: Using dialogism to explore the problematics of endometriosis diagnosis. *Health Communication, 35*(8), 1013-1022. https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2019.1606136

Krieger, W. M. (1951). *Successful Funeral Service Management*. Prentice-Hall.

Kubasak, M. W. (1990). *Cremation and the funeral director: Successfully meeting the challenge*. Avalon Press.

Kübler-Ross, E. (1969). *On death and dying*. New York Macmillan.

Laderman, G. (2000). The Disney Way of Death. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion, 68*(1), 27-46. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1465709

Laderman, G. (2003). *Rest in peace: A cultural history of death and the funeral home in twentieth-century America*. Oxford University Press.

Lang, A. (2020). The good death and the institutionalisation of dying: An interpretive analysis of the Austrian discourse. *Social Science & Medicine, 245*, 112671. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2019.112671

Lensing, V. (2001). Grief support: The role of fuenral service [Article]. *Journal of Loss & Trauma, 6*(1), 45-63. https://doi.org/10.1080/108114401753197468

Lev, P. (2000). *American films of the 70s: conflicting visions*. University of Texas Press.

Levinson, R., & Link, W. (1963, Oct. 31). The Exploiters [TV series] Episode S3.E6). In L. J. Horn, *Dr. Kildare*. National Broadcasting Company (NBC); Arena Productions; MGM Television.

Lindemann, E. (1944). Symptomatology and management of acute grief *American Journal of Psychiatry, 101*(2), 141-148. https://doi.org/10.1176/ajp.101.2.141

Littlejohn, S. W., Foss, K. A., & Oetzel, J. G. (2021). *Theories of human communication*. Waveland press.

Lofland, L. H. (2019). *The craft of dying: The modern face of death*. Sage Publications.

Lynch, T. (2004). Funerals-R-Us: From Funeral Home to Mega-Industry. *Generations: Journal of the American Society on Aging, 28*(2), 11-14.

Lynch, T., & Taylor, K. (2002). Interview With Thomas Lynch. *Fourth Genre: Explorations in Nonfiction, 4*(1), 236-256. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23594584

Macpherson, C. B. (1962). *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*. Oup Canada.

Malhotra, P., Scharp, K., & Thomas, L. (2022). The meaning of misinformation and those who correct it: An extension of relational dialectics theory. *Journal of Social and Personal relationships, 39*(5), 1256-1276. https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075211050429

Maphela, B. (2021). The role of local economic development and environmental health in the emerging funeral home sector in Mpumalanga, South Africa. *African Journal of Development Studies, 11*(4), 117. https://doi.org/10.31920/2634-3649/2021/v11n4a6

Marrall, R. (2006). Urbanism and North American funerary practices. *PSU McNair Scholars Online Journal, 2*(1), 26. https://doi.org/10.15760/mcnair.2006.186

Marsden-Ille, S. (2023). *What is the 2023 Cremation Rate in the US? How is this affecting prices?* US Funerals Online. Retrieved Sep. 22 from https://www.us-funerals.com/2023-us-cremation-rate/

Marsh, T. D. (2018). Regulated to death: Occupational licensing and the demise of the US funeral services industry. *Wake Forest JL & Pol'y, 8*, 5.

Martin, E. A. (1970). *Psychology of funeral service* (5th ed.). Sentinel Print. Co.

Martin, J. R., & White, P. R. (2005). *The language of evaluation: Appraisal in English*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Marx, K. (1867a). The fetishism of commodities and the secret thereof (M. Samuel, & E. Aveling, Trans.). In *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (Vol. 1, pp. 46-59). Progress Publishers.

Marx, K. (1867b). Two Factors of a Commodity (M. Samuel, & E. Aveling, Trans.). In *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (Vol. 1, pp. 26-29). Progress Publishers.

Marx, K. (2016). Economic and philosophic manuscripts of 1844. In L. Wesley, & D. Winchester (Ed.), *Social Theory Re-Wired: New Connections to Classical and Contemporary Perspectives* (pp. 152-158). Routledge.

Marx, K., & Engels, F. (2002). *The Communist Manifesto*. Penguin.

McCarthy, J. (2016). Closing the casket: professionalism and care amongst funeral directors in the Republic of Ireland. *Mortality, 21*(4), 305-321. https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2015.1100160

Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self and society*. University of Chicago Press.

Mellor, P. A. (1992). Death in high modernity: the contemporary presence and absence of death. *The Sociological Review, 40*(1_suppl), 11-30. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1992.tb03384

Mellor, P. A., & Shilling, C. (1993). Modernity, self-identity and the sequestration of death *Sociology, 27*(3), 411-431. http://www.jstor.org/stable/42855231

Mendelsohn, S. (1940). *Embalming fluids; Their historical development and formulation: From the standpoint of the chemical aspects of the scientific art of preserving human remains*. Chemical Publishing Company.

Metcalf, P., & Huntington, R. (1991). *Celebrations of death: The anthropology of mortuary ritual*. Cambridge University Press.

Milam, J. M., & Heath, R. G. (2014). Participative democracy and voice: Rethinking community collaboration beyond neutral structures. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 42*(4), 366-386. https://doi.org/10.1080/00909882.2014.911944

Miller-Day, M. A. (2004). *Communication among grandmothers, mothers, and adult daughters: A qualitative study of maternal relationships*. Routledge.

Mitford, J. (1963). *The American way of death* (Vol. 735). Simon and Schuster New York.

Mitford, J. (2000). *The American way of death revisited*. Vintage.

Montgomery, B. M. (1993). Relationship maintenance versus relationship change: A dialectical dilemma. *Journal of Social and Personal relationships, 10*(2), 205-223. https://doi.org/10.1177/026540759301000203

Mulkay, M. J. (1988). *On humour : its nature and its place in modern society*. Polity Press.

Mumby, D. K. (2005). Theorizing resistance in organization studies:A dialectical approach. *Management Communication Quarterly, 19*(1), 19-44. https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318905276558

Murphy, R. F. (1971). *The dialectics of social life: Alarms and excursions in anthropological theory*. Basic Books.

Murray, J. L. (2017). Mass media reporting and enabling of mass shootings. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies, 17*(2), 114-124. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708616679144

NASDAQ. (n.d.). *SCI Advanced Charting*. https://www.nasdaq.com/market-activity/stocks/sci/advanced-charting

National Funeral Directors Association. (2023). *Statistics*. National Funeral Directors Association. Retrieved Aug. 3 from https://nfda.org/news/statistics

National Funeral Directors Association. (n.d.). *Funeral Service 101*. National Funeral Directors Association. Retrieved Feb. 13 from https://nfda.org/news/funeral-service-101

Neimeyer, R. A., & Currier, J. M. (2009). Grief therapy: Evidence of efficacy and emerging directions. *Current directions in psychological science, 18*(6), 352-356. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2009.01666.x

Ngcongo, M. (2016). Mobile communication privacy management in romantic relationships: a dialectical approach. *Communicatio, 42*(1), 56-74. https://doi.org/10.1080/02500167.2016.1140666

O'Connor, M.-F. (2003). Making meaning of life events: Theory, evidence, and research directions for an alternative model. *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying, 46*(1), 51-75. https://doi.org/10.2190/0CKD-PVQ0-T260-NTXU

Oglensky, B. D. (2008). The ambivalent dynamics of loyalty in mentorship. *Human relations, 61*(3), 419-448. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726708089000

Ogolsky, B. G., Monk, J. K., Rice, T. M., Theisen, J. C., & Maniotes, C. R. (2017). Relationship maintenance: A review of research on romantic relationships. *Journal of Family Theory & Review, 9*(3), 275-306. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12205

Oklahoma Commerce. (2023). *Oklahoma's Fortune 500 Report*. https://www.okcommerce.gov/doing-business/data-reports/reports/oklahomas-fortune-500-report/

Oliver, C. (1990). Determinants of interorganizational relationships: Integration and future directions. *Academy of management review, 15*(2), 241-265. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1990.4308156

Palgi, P., & Abramovitch, H. (1984). Death: A cross-cultural perspective. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 13*(1), 385-417. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.13.100184.002125

Parkes, C. M., & Weiss, R. S. (1983). *Recovery from bereavement*. Basic Books

Parsons, B. (2003). Conflict in the context of care: an examination of role conflict between the bereaved and the funeral director in the UK. *Mortality, 8*(1), 67-87. https://doi.org/10.1080/1357627021000063133

Parsons, B. (2012). Identifying key changes: The progress of cremation and its influence on music at funerals in England, 1874–2010. *Mortality, 17*(2), 130-144. https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2012.675228

Pearce, W. B., & Littlejohn, S. W. (1997). *Moral conflict: When social worlds collide*. Sage.

Pearson, J. C., Child, J. T., & Carmon, A. F. (2011). Rituals in dating relationships: The development and validation of a measure. *Communication Quarterly, 59*(3), 359-379. https://doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2011.583502

Peplau, L. A. (1982). Research on homosexual couples. *Journal of Homosexuality, 8*(2), 3-8. https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v08n02_02

Petronio, S. (2010). Communication privacy management theory: What do we know about family privacy regulation? *Journal of Family Theory & Review, 2*(3), 175-196. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1756-2589.2010.00052.x

Piehler, G. K. (1994). The war dead and the gold star: American commemoration of the first World War. In J. R. Gillis (Ed.), *Commemorations* (pp. 168-185). Princeton University Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv39x64g.14

Pine, V. R. (1969). Comparative funeral practices. *Practical Anthropology*(2), 49-62. https://doi.org/10.1177/009182966901600201

Pine, V. R. (1975). *Caretaker of the dead: The American funeral director*. Halsted Press.

Pine, V. R., & Phillips, D. L. (1970). The cost of dying: A sociological analysis of funeral expenditures. *Social Problems, 17*(3), 405-417. https://doi.org/10.2307/799558

Pitts, M. J., Fowler, C., Kaplan, M. S., Nussbaum, J., & Becker, J. C. (2009). Dialectical tensions underpinning family farm succession planning. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 37*(1), 59-79. https://doi.org/10.1080/00909880802592631

Prentice, C. (2009). Relational dialectics among in-laws. *Journal of Family Communication, 9*(2), 67-89. https://doi.org/10.1080/15267430802561667

Prothero, S. (2001). *Purified by fire: A history of cremation in America*. Univ of California Press.

Putnam, L. L., Fairhurst, G. T., & Banghart, S. (2016). Contradictions, dialectics, and paradoxes in organizations: A constitutive approach. *Academy of Management Annals, 10*(1), 65-171. https://doi.org/10.1080/19416520.2016.1162421

Quigley, C. (2005). *The corpse: A history*. McFarland.

Raff, S. J. (1976). The Life of Riley. *American Speech, 51*(1/2), 94-101. https://doi.org/10.2307/455359

Rahim, M. A. (2023). *Managing conflict in organizations*. Routledge.

Rando, T. A. (1984). *Grief, dying, and death : clinical interventions for caregivers*. Research Press Co.

Raudasoja, M., Sorkkila, M., Laitila, A., & Aunola, K. (2022). "I feel many contradictory emotions": Finnish mothers' discursive struggles with motherhood. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 84*(3), 752-772. https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12828

Reher, D. S. (2011). Economic and social implications of the demographic transition. *Population and development review, 37*, 11-33. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41762397

Reimers, D. M. (1983). An unintended reform: The 1965 Immigration Act and Third World Immigration to the United States. *Journal of American Ethnic History, 3*(1), 9-28. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27500293

Reimers, E. (1999). Death and identity: Graves and funerals as cultural communication. *Mortality, 4*(2), 147-166. https://doi.org/10.1080/713685976

Reynolds, D. K., & Kalish, R. A. (1974). Work roles in death-releated occupations. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 4*(2), 223-235. https://doi.org/10.1016/0001-8791(74)90106-7

Riley, J., Entwistle, V., Arnason, A., Locock, L., Maccagno, P., Pattenden, A., & Crozier, R. (2023). Hybrid funerals: how online attendance facilitates and impedes participation. *Mortality*, 1-19. https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2023.2201421

Riley Jr., J. W. (1983). Dying and the meanings of death: Sociological inquiries. *Annual review of sociology*, *9*(1), 191-216. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.09.080183.001203

Ritzer, G. (1983). The "McDonaldization" of Society. *Journal of American Culture, 6*(1), 100-107. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1542-734X.1983.0601_100.x

Ritzer, G. (2013). *The McDonaldization of society* (20th anniversary, 7th ed.). Sage.

Roark, M. O. (1979). *Oklahoma Territory: Frontier Development, Migration, and Culture Areas* (Publication Number 7925652) [Ph.D., Syracuse University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. United States -- New York.

Roberts, P. (2004). The living and the dead: Community in the virtual cemetery. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying, 49*(1), 57-76. https://doi.org/10.2190/d41t-yfnn-109k-wr4c

Robinson, C., & Pond, D. R. (2019). Do online support groups for grief benefit the bereaved? Systematic review of the quantitative and qualitative literature. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *100*, 48-59. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2019.06.011

Robison, L., Oliver, J., & Frank, K. (2015). *Commodity and Relational Good Exchanges: Commodification and Decommodification* 2015 Allied Social Sciences Association (ASSA) Annual Meeting, Boston, Massachusetts. http://purl.umn.edu/189690

Roisman, G. I., Clausell, E., Holland, A., Fortuna, K., & Elieff, C. (2008). Adult romantic relationships as contexts of human development: A multimethod comparison of same-sex couples with opposite-sex dating, engaged, and married dyads. *Developmental Psychology*, *44*(1), 91-101. https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.44.1.91

Room, G. (2000). Commodification and decommodification: a developmental critique. *Policy & Politics, 28*(3), 331-351. https://doi.org/10.1332/0305573002501009

Runstrom, M. R. (2015). *Death in life: approaches to the contemporary denial of death in theoretical & experimental psychology and continental philosophy* [dissertation, DePaul University.].

Sahlstein, E., Maguire, K. C., & Timmerman, L. (2009). Contradictions and praxis contextualized by wartime deployment: Wives' perspectives revealed through relational dialectics. *Communication Monographs, 76*(4), 421-442. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637750903300239

Sanders, G. (2009). “Late” Capital: Amusement and Contradiction in the Contemporary Funeral Industry. *Critical Sociology, 35*(4), 447-470. https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920509103978

Sanders, G. (2012). Branding in the American funeral industry. *Journal of Consumer Culture, 12*(3), 263-282. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540512456924

Saunders, C. (2000). The evolution of palliative care. *Patient education and counseling, 41*(1), 7-13. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0738-3991(00)00110-5

Saussure, F. d. (1959). *Course in general linguistics* (W. Baskin, Trans.). McGraw-Hill.

Schafer, C. (2007). Post-mortem personalization: pastoral power and the New Zealand funeral director. *Mortality, 12*(1), 4-21. https://doi.org/10.1080/13576270601088319

Schafer, C. (2012). Corpses, conflict and insignificance? A critical analysis of post-mortem practices. *Mortality, 17*(4), 305-321. https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2012.731724

Scharp, K. M., & Barker, B. A. (2021). “I have to social norm this”: Making meaning of hearing loss from the perspective of adults who use hearing aids. *Health Communication, 36*(6), 774-781. https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2020.1712523

Scharp, K. M., Hansen, R., Kubler, K. F., & Wang, T. R. (2021). Making meaning of parenting from the perspective of alienated parents. *Personal Relationships, 28*(1), 169-189. https://doi.org/10.1111/pere.12356

Scharp, K. M., & Thomas, L. J. (2016). Family "bonds": Making meaning of parent–child relationships in estrangement narratives. *Journal of Family Communication, 16*(1), 32-50. https://doi.org/10.1080/15267431.2015.1111215

Scharp, K. M., & Thomas, L. J. (2020). A child for every family? Characterizations of "adoptable" foster children in online permanency advocacy publications. *Journal of Social and Personal relationships, 37*(7), 2098-2117. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407520918668

Scharp, K. M., & Thomas, L. J. (2021). Relational dialectics theory: A dialogic theory of meaning-making. In D. O. Braithwaite & P. Schrodt (Eds.), *Engaging Theories in Interpersonal Communication* (pp. 194-205). Routledge.

Schinzel, C. (2006). Funeral Planning. In L. Pauley, A. Schroeder, C. Ehmke and C. Paseneaux (Ed.), *Passing it on : an estate planning resource guide for Wyoming's farmers and ranchers* (pp. 155-161). Wyoming Agriculture and Natural Resource Mediation Program.

Schlereth, T. J. (1992). *Victorian America : transformations in everyday life, 1876-1915*. HarperCollins Publishers.

Schrodt, P., Baxter, L. A., McBride, M. C., Braithwaite, D. O., & Fine, M. A. (2006). The divorce decree, communication, and the structuration of coparenting relationships in stepfamilies. *Journal of Social and Personal relationships, 23*(5), 741-759. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407506068261

Schwartz, M. L., Jolson, M. A., & Lee, R. H. (1986). The marketing of funeral services - Past, present, and future. *Business Horizons, 29*(2), 40-45. https://doi.org/10.1016/0007-6813(86)90068-6

Semino, E., Demjén, Z., & Koller, V. (2014). 'Good'and 'bad'deaths: Narratives and professional identities in interviews with hospice managers. *Discourse Studies, 16*(5), 667-685. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445614538566

Service Corporation International. (2023a). *Our Brands*. Service Corporation International. Retrieved Sep. 22 from https://www.sci-corp.com/about/our-brands

Service Corporation International. (2023b). *Our history*. Service Corporation International. Retrieved Sep. 22 from https://www.sci-corp.com/about/history

Shafir, E., & LeBoeuf, R. A. (2002). Rationality. *Annual review of psychology, 53*(1), 491-517. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.53.100901.135213

Simon, W., Haney, C. A., & Buenteo, R. (1993). The postmodernization of death and dying. *Symbolic interaction, 16*(4), 411-426. https://doi.org/10.1525/si.1993.16.4.411

Sommer, R., Hess, K., & Nelson, S. (1985). Funeral co-op members' characteristics and motives. *Sociological Perspectives, 28*(4), 487-500. https://doi.org/10.2307/1389230

Spanier, G. B. (1972). Romanticism and marital adjustment. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 34*(3), 481-487. https://doi.org/10.2307/350447

Spence, L. (2016). The Art of Goodbye: Planning Final Arrangements: FCS3335/FY1466, 7/2016. *EDIS, 2016*(6), 7-7. https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/FY1466

Staudt, C. (2009). From concealment to recognition: The discourse on death, dying and grief. In M. K. Bartalos & R. L. Belknap (Eds.), *Speaking of death. America's new sense of mortality* (pp. 3-41). Praeger.

Stearns, P. N. (1994). *American cool: Constructing a twentieth-century emotional style*. NYU Press.

Stroebe, M., & Schut, H. (2010). The dual process model of coping with bereavement: A decade on. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying, 61*(4), 273-289. https://doi.org/10.2190/OM.61.4.b

Strub, C. G., & Frederick, L. G. (1989). *The principles and practice of embalming* (5th ed.). Professional Training Schools : Robertine Frederick Dallas, Tex.

Suls, J., Martin, R., & Wheeler, L. (2002). Social comparison: Why, with whom, and with what effect? *Current directions in psychological science, 11*(5), 159-163. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8721.00191

Suter, E. A. (2018). The promise of contrapuntal and intersectional methods for advancing critical interpersonal and family communication research. *Communication Monographs, 85*(1), 123-139. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637751.2017.1375131

Suter, E. A., & Norwood, K. M. (2017). Critical theorizing in family communication studies:(Re) reading relational dialectics theory 2.0. *Communication Theory, 27*(3), 290-308. https://doi.org/10.1111/comt.12117

Sykes, K. (2007). Interrogating Individuals: The Theory of Possessive Individualism in the Western Pacific. *Anthropological Forum, 17*(3), 213-224. https://doi.org/10.1080/00664670701637669

Table, B., Tronstad, L. D., & Kearns, K. (2022). 'Anything is helpful': examining tensions and barriers towards a more LGBT-inclusive healthcare organization in the United States. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 50*(4), 382-401. https://doi.org/10.1080/00909882.2021.1991582

Tannen, D. (1987). Repetition in conversation: Toward a poetics of talk. *Language, 63*(3), 574-605. https://doi.org/10.2307/415006

Thomas, L. J. (2017). Contrapuntal Analysis. In *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods* (pp. 1-3). https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118901731.iecrm0269

Thomas, L. J., & Scharp, K. M. (2020). Voicing the system: How formerly fostered adults make meaning of the US foster care system. *Journal of Social and Personal relationships, 37*(6), 1806-1824. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407520911104

Thompson, B., Rudick, C. K., Kerssen-Griep, J., & Golsan, K. (2018). Navigating instructional dialectics: empirical exploration of paradox in teaching. *Communication Education, 67*(1), 7-30. https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2017.1388527

Torres, N. I., & Turner, J. (1989). Funeral Planning: FCS7050. *EDIS, 2007*. https://ufdcimages.uflib.ufl.edu/IR/00/00/25/54/00001/HE79700.pdf

Tradii, L., & Robert, M. (2019). Do we deny death? II. Critiques of the death-denial thesis. *Mortality, 24*(4), 377-388. https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2017.1415319

Trapp, R., & Hoff, N. (1985). A model of serial argument in interpersonal relationships. *The Journal of the American Forensic Association, 22*(1), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1080/00028533.1985.11951297

Trompette, P. (2007). Customer channeling arrangements in market organization: Competition dynamics in the funeral business in France. *Revue française de sociologie, 48*(5), 3-33. https://doi.org/10.3917/rfs.485.0003

Trost, J. (1990). Do we mean the same by the concept of family. *Communication Research, 17*(4), 431-443. https://doi.org/10.1177/009365090017004002

Turner, R. E., & Edgley, C. (1990). Death as theater: A dramaturgical analysis of the American funeral. In C. Edgley (Ed.), *Life as theater: A dramaturgical sourcebook* (pp. 285-298). Routledge.

Twain, M. (1985). *Life on the Mississippi*. Penguin.

U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2023). *Occupational outlook handbook*. https://www.bls.gov/ooh/personal-care-and-service/funeral-service-occupations.htm

Van Dijk, T. A. (1995). Discourse, power and access. In C. R. Caldas-Coulthard, & Coulthard, M. (Ed.), *Texts and Practices: Readings in Critical Discourse Analysis* (pp. 93-113). Routledge.

Van Ryn, L., Meese, J., Arnold, M., Nansen, B., Gibbs, M., & Kohn, T. (2019). Managing the consumption of death and digital media: The funeral director as market intermediary. *Death Studies, 43*(7), 446-455. https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2018.1522387

Vitellone, N. (2001). Watching AIDS, condoms and serial killers in the Australian 'Grim Reaper' TV campaign. *Continuum, 15*(1), 33-48. https://doi.org/10.1080/713657768

Voloshinov, V. N. (1987). *Freudianism: a critical sketch* (I. R. Titunik, Trans.). Indiana University Press.

Walter, T. (2002). *The revival of death*. Routledge.

Walter, T. (2005). Three ways to arrange a funeral: Mortuary variation in the modern West. *Mortality, 10*(3), 173-192. https://doi.org/10.1080/13576270500178369

Walter, T. (2015). Death and Dying, Sociology of. In J. D. Wright (Ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences (Second Edition)* (pp. 865-869). Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.32037-2

Walter, T. (2020). *Death in the modern world*. Sage.

Walter, T., Hourizi, R., Moncur, W., & Pitsillides, S. (2012). Does the Internet change how we die and mourn? Overview and analysis. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying, 64*(4), 275-302. https://doi.org/10.2190/OM.64.4.a

Wilson, A., & West, C. (1981). The marketing of unmentionables. *Harvard Business Review, 59*(1), 91-102.

Wojcik, M. E. (1993). AIDS and funeral homes: Common legal issues facing funeral directors. *J. Marshall L. Rev., 27*, 411.

Wolfe, B. H., & Scharp, K. M. (2023). A (In)curable disease? Making meaning of addiction from the perspective of people in recovery from opioid use disorder. *Health Communication, 38*(13), 2936-2944. https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2022.2128157

Wolfe, T. (1929). *Look homeward, angel a story of the buried life*. New York, The Modern Library.

Woodthorpe, K. (2017). Family and funerals: Taking a relational perspective. *Death Studies, 41*(9), 592-601. https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2017.1325419

Wozniak, A., Lollis, S., & Marshall, S. K. (2014). Competing discourses within parent–adolescent conversations. *Journal of Social and Personal relationships, 31*(6), 847-867. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407513508726

Zamfirache, I. (2021). Funerals as a social process: Rituals and symbols in rural and urban funerals. In I. R. Lamond & R. Dowson (Eds.), *Death and Events: International Perspectives on Events Marking the End of Life* (pp. 13-25). Routledge.

Zhang, J. (2001). *Falling seeds take root: Ritualizing Chinese American identity through funerals* (Publication Number 3015398) [Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. United States -- Pennsylvania.

Appendix

Interviewing Protocols: Appreciating Aesthetic Compromise

Starting points:

1. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study today. Before we begin audio recording, do you have any questions?
2. Are you a funeral home owner? Is this a family business or a franchise of a larger company?
3. How many years have you worked as a funeral director? How many workers and staff are employed by this funeral home?

Competing discourses and discourses interplay:

1. Funeral Pre-planning.

1) What makes people pre-planning funerals or have an interest in funeral pre-planning?
2) *In your experience, what are the challenges or difficulties of recommending pre-planning funerals to people?*
3) How do you make this funeral home known to people? Do you do any advertising about this funeral home?
4) Have you attempted to recommend funeral pre-plan to people? How do you do that, such as holding funeral-related events or speaker's talk in high school?
5) What are people's reactions and reflections after participating in those events? Do people show their interest in those events? Stories.

2. Funeral Planning.

6) How do you welcome first-time people visiting the funeral home? What is your story?
7) Do you have an experience where a client is not mentally prepared for doing funeral planning but walks into the funeral home? What abnormal questions or behaviors do they have? How do you face the scenario?
8) *How are you going to guide potential clients to acknowledge funeral planning? How do you explain the value and benefit of funeral services? How do you explain or clarify the legitimacy of pricing "Services of funeral director and staff?"*
9) Some people want an immediate cremation. Do you encourage clients to do a memorial, ritual, or viewing service? Stories.
10) How do you introduce the different types of caskets, urns, and options for funeral packages? Stories.
11) *Tell me about a time when it was challenging to discuss funeral planning with a client?*
12) Tell the story of a time when you know that a client is ready to talk about the money side of funeral planning?
13) How did you learn how to communicate with clients about money-related issues?
14) In your experience, how do you work with clients who want specific services or merchandise but cannot pay for it?
15) *How do you talk ot your client about money-issues, while being sensitive 1o their bereavement*?

16) What is your story of performing professionally and being compassionate to clients during funeral planning? How do you perform professionally and release your grief during funeral planning?
17) What is your experience regarding a client who does not trust you initially but appreciates your help and guidance for funeral planning when a client signs the contract?

3. Funeral Post-Planning *(memorial services)*

18) Except for standing near the casket, what do you do during the family's viewing? Families may cry in their viewing. How do you comfort the family? Stories.
19) For the last chance to view the dead, friends come first, and families are last. How do you confirm that families completed the final viewing and were ready to go to the cemetery? How do you help families for their last viewing?
20) What is your job responsibility at the graveside service? Do you have any special experience at the graveside service? How do you support families at the graveside?
21) Do some families have a reception service (food and drinks) for all funeral attendees after the whole funeral service? Do families come to you and appreciate your service? How do you support families at the reception?
22) Have families come to you days, weeks, or months after funeral services for appreciation or thank you? What do they do? How do you accept their appreciation?
23) What aftercare do you provide for funeral services? What are some free aftercare you provide? How do you charge funeral service aftercare?
24) In what situation would you suggest families do professional grief counseling? (grief counseling is about $100 per hour)

Conclusion:

1. What else do you want to share about funeral planning?
2. Do you have anything else to share about what funeral services should change to provide better services?
3. If I publish an article to the public, what do you want people to know the most about funeral services?