RELIEVING WESTERN BEREAVEMENT THROUGH AFTER DEATH COMMUNICATION: AN INTERPRETIVE GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

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Abstract

After Death Communication can be a startling new phenomenon for people engaging with death through a Western socio-cultural worldview. It was a startling new phenomenon for me when I experienced a series of After Death Communications from the moment my 22 year old son was tragically killed in a car accident. This study uses my narrative to make sense of my research process after assumptions were made during the ethics review about my emotional safety being compromised as an outcome of engagement with the topic of After Death Communication. The study is positioned in relation to research from the fields of After Death Communication and Western bereavement theory. Narrative methods were used to synthesise my story into a structured account. Interpretive, inductive Grounded theory was used to explicate a substantive explanation from my narrative. A four step constant comparative method provided a systemic, iterative process of analysing the data. The data was broken down into significant concepts. Three categories emerged; significant events, significant thoughts and significant emotions. The core concept that emerged from identifying the relationships within the data was that grief experienced through a Western socio-cultural paradigm can be temporarily relieved by the experience of an After Death Communication. After Death Communication has not as yet been embraced, or directly named as such, in Western bereavement theory. It seems the connection is yet to be made between the two disciplines in peer-reviewed literature. After Death Communication with my son has enabled me to have temporary relief from my grief and has therefore enhanced my wellbeing which is contrary to the assumptions that were made during the ethics review. My research will ostensibly be relevant for people wanting to research in similar areas.

Introduction and Rationale

My passion is to understand the startling new phenomenon (for me) of experiencing After Death Communications (ADCs) from my 22 year old son, Robbie, after he tragically died in a car accident on 4 April, 2012. After Death Communication (ADC) occurs when a deceased person communicates directly with a living person (Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995). The moment Robbie died, I was overcome by an intense feeling of love, rising up from my heart into a burning lump in my throat that finally burst into loud uncontrollable sobs on the footpath of a busy city street. I had rushed out of my class and was phoning my partner because I did not understand what was happening to me. I was unaware of Robbie’s situation and was 1,600 kilometers away. One of the first questions I asked the police officer, who was waiting for me when I arrived home that night, was what time did Robbie die. It was then I realised both events happened simultaneously. Coincidence? I think not. This was the first of numerous ADCs I have experienced with Robbie since the moment of his death; most with witnesses.

My initial literature review identified a gap in the field of ADC research. I created my proposed Research Plan around this gap, which was to investigate if any of Robbie’s family and friends had experienced any ADCs from him and if so, compare them to my experiences. I was planning to conduct an Interpretive Grounded Theory study using online survey responses received from invited, voluntary, anonymous, geographically-dispersed participants.
An ethical review of my proposed Research Plan became mandatory because it involved human participants. I submitted my completed National Ethics Application Form (NEAF) to the University Peer Review Committee (PRC). The PRC rejected my application on the grounds that the scope of my project “deals with a topic that may cause distress to participants and poses a risk to the emotional safety of a student [me].” (A. Davis, personal communication, July 31, 2013). As a result of this email rejection, my research question has emerged to be: How can I now make sense of this process of research in which assumptions have been made about my emotional safety possibly being compromised as an outcome of engagement with this topic?

As a result of the PRC assumptions I started to question whether I am in fact coping with the grief from Robbie’s death. It has been about eighteen months since Robbie died. I am not really sure how I am meant to act or feel. Is there a right way?

It is outside the scope of this research to examine the individual and collective assumptions of the PRC members. However I am in a position to examine my own assumptions around ADCs in the theoretical context of bereavement grief. I do know that these ADCs have challenged my worldview. I will examine how my beliefs and perceptions of these ADCs have been conditioned by the Western bereavement grief culture I have lived in all my life.

Influencing this approach is my professional role as a facilitator to Master of Business Administration (MBA) students. In the unit ‘Leadership for Innovation and Sustainability’ I include a section on ‘Worldviews’. I focus on creating a safe space for students (senior business managers) to examine their unexamined beliefs including the assumptions that underpin these beliefs and to explore the many ways to perceive and know their reality. The outcome is that they experience a transformative paradigm shift (Mezirow, 2000) in how they perceive and connect with their world. It is now my turn to enter this safe space as a researcher-participant.

My personal and practical justification for this research is to gain insight into how I think and feel about this research experience, rather than simply conclude with a myopic judgement about whether my unexamined thoughts and feelings are valid (Cole, 2006, p. 26).

I will use an Interpretive Grounded Theory study of my own narrative, positioned by Western bereavement theory. My research will ostensibly be relevant for people wanting to research in similar areas or who have had similar experiences with a University Ethics Review process.

**Literature Review**

I have positioned my inquiry in relation to other research from the fields of After Death Communications (ADCs) and Western bereavement theory.

**After Death Communications**

It was a tentative start to my literature review about these profound communications from Robbie. I was unaware if this phenomena would be acknowledged as a laudable field of academic research. I had no idea what to call these experiences. My initial search was based around the broad topic of “communicating with the dead”. I discovered a multifarious history, dating back to prehistoric times, of the different methods people have used to communicate with the dead. Methods can be categorised under four main types: induced, mediums, devices and direct. The focus of this research project is on the direct methods. Figure 1 provides a visual summary of my findings of these four types and various methods. The red ticks in Figure 1 represent the direct methods that I have experienced in my communications from Robbie.
Figure 1. Mind map of the various methods of communicating with the dead compared with my experience.


Online software: (Text 2 Mind Map, 2013)

My literature review revealed that these direct methods of communicating with the dead are called After Death Communications (ADCs). This term was originated by Bill and Judy Guggenheim (1996) in their very popular book, Hello From Heaven. This book was published seventeen years ago which demonstrates that ADCs are a relatively new field of research. The Guggenheim’s extensive research commenced in 1988 where they interviewed over 2,000 Americans and collected 3,000 accounts of ADC events. This research has developed into the benchmark ADC definition and typology now used by proceeding researchers in this rapidly emerging field.

This literature review found that ADCs are referred to by various other names and terms based on other people's experience, both before and after the Guggenheim benchmark definition (1995). Figure 2 is a visual word-representation (Feinberg, 2013) I created from all the names and terms I found during the review. The larger the font, the higher the frequency of use of that word in the various terms. Therefore a definition of an ADC from the literature starts to emerge from the larger font words as: A communication experience - a visitation from and an anomalous encounter with a nonlocal, post-mortem ghost. This corroborates the Guggenheim benchmark definition (1995): "An After-Death Communication, or ADC, is a spiritual experience that occurs when someone is contacted directly and spontaneously by a family member or friend who has died". 
The Guggenheims (1995) conservatively estimate from their research that 20%-40% of American people have experienced an ADC. A series of USA Gallop polls surveyed a national sample of people to find out if they believed that spirits of people who have died could communicate with the living. There has been a steady 59% increase over 33 years, bringing the number of American people in 2011 who believe in being able to communicate with the spirits of people who have died, up to a remarkable 70% (Kwilecki, 2009).

Table 1. Guggenheim (1995) ADC Typology - 12 categories of ADC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>ADC Category</th>
<th>Mode of sensual experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sensing a presence</td>
<td>Sentient ADCs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Hearing a voice</td>
<td>Auditory ADCs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Feeling a touch</td>
<td>Tactile ADCs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Smelling a fragrance</td>
<td>Olfactory ADCs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Full and partial appearances</td>
<td>Visual ADCs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>A glimpse of beyond</td>
<td>ADC visions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Encounters at Alpha</td>
<td>Twilight ADCs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>More than a dream</td>
<td>Sleep-state ADCs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Homeward bound</td>
<td>Out-of-body ADCs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The findings from this literature review conclude that ADCs:

- are a direct and spontaneous communication from a dead family member or friend;
- are a common, normal, natural experience;
- have been researched by experienced, respected and acclaimed people with medical training/PhDs e.g. Devers, Botkin, Mood, LaGrand (Kwilecki, 2009); who each use ADC as therapy in their respective grief counselling practices;
- are not accepted as real by the scientific community, especially in medicine, because they cannot be empirically, objectively verified or re-produced;
- are not commonly spoken about by percipients for fear of being ridiculed or misunderstood;
- provide instant relief from grief so are considered a healing and positive experience;
- provide an irreversible, transformative learning experience for the percipient which results in an expanded worldview that includes an unequivocal belief in consciousness continuing after physical death;
- need to be phenomenologically experienced in order to know they are real.

ADC research has to-date focussed on the American experiences of one percipient (such as myself) and their experience of communicating with a single deceased being (such as Robbie). It appears that no Australian research has been done with multiple percipients who knew the deceased person (such as Robbie’s friends and family). Does a deceased being communicate with more than one person and if so, do they communicate using the same type and methods of direct communication (refer Figure 1)? This was the gap I identified in the literature review and became the focus of my initial Research Plan which was rejected by the Peer Review Committee.

Western Bereavement Theory

Experiencing grief when a loved one dies is a human reaction to loss. Humans register the grief experience on many levels of existence including the physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, sexual and spiritual (Dent, 2005; Hall, 2011). The way each of us conceives, perceives and responds to loss depends on the respective ontological and epistemological positions of our respective culture and personal experience. I have lived my life in Australia under a predominant Western cultural influence. Therefore this literature review has focussed on Western bereavement grief theory to provide the relevant framework in which to position my research.

For nearly the entire 20th century, Western bereavement theory was conceptualised through a positivist, medical-interventionist lens. There were only two kinds of grief; ‘normal’ and pathological. Table 2 summarises the five most widely used and acclaimed theories; commencing with Freud's pioneering Grief Work Hypothesis. The linear process common in all the theories up to the late 1970s was that each stage was required to be actively completed as “work” before the next stage was commenced. The underlying assumption was that everyone experienced ‘normal’ grief with the same orderly, predictable response. The common outcome was for the bereaved person to sever all emotional bonds with the deceased and move from distress to recovery as quickly as possible. The intensity of distress was influenced by the type of relationship with the deceased and the cause of death. Recovery was measured as a return to pre-loss autonomous functioning. The singular focus was...
on the emotional consequences of grief for the individual. If emotional bonds remained, the bereaved person was considered to still be in distress and in the pathological state of unresolved grief known as melancholia. (Dent, 2005; Hall, 2011; Klass, 2000; Mallon, 2011, Rothaupt & Becker, 2007, Walter, 1996; Wright & Hogan, 2008).

Table 2. 20th century positivist Western bereavement theories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Model/Theory</th>
<th>Originator</th>
<th>Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Grief Work Hypothesis</td>
<td>Freud</td>
<td>1. Free bereaved from bondage to deceased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Readjust to new life circumstances without deceased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Build new relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>Grief Work Hypothesis</td>
<td>Lindeman</td>
<td>1. Confront reality of loss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Sever emotional bonds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Build new relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>Stages of Grief</td>
<td>Kübler-Ross</td>
<td>1. Denial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Bargaining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Despair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Grief Process</td>
<td>Bowlby &amp; Parkes</td>
<td>1. Numbness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Searching and yearning for deceased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Reorganisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Task Model</td>
<td>Worden</td>
<td>Completed in any given order and revisited over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Accept reality of loss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Work through pain of grief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Adjust to environment where deceased missing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Emotionally relocate deceased and move on</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In the late 1980s a paradigm shift emerged in how people understood and experienced loss. This ontological and epistemological shift transformed the foundational concepts of Western bereavement grief theory. Research by Hogan & DeSantis (1992) with bereaved adolescents found that these participants resolved their grief, not by severing emotional bonds as previously thought, but by maintaining the emotional and social bonds with their deceased sibling. The existence of these bonds was evident from the 157 responses to the question: “If you could ask or tell your dead sibling something, what would it be?” The dominant response was “I miss you and I love you.” Of note,
responses were in the present tense, indicating the ongoing presence of the deceased sibling. A poignant finding was “the timelessness of adolescent bereavement and the infiniteness of the sibling bond”. These research findings challenged the existing 20th century paradigm that emotional bonds with the deceased need to be severed within a short timeframe in order to recover from grief.

New post-positivist, social constructionist theories emerged from this paradigmatic shift which are summarised in Table 3. These approaches individualise each loss and acknowledge that people grieve in different and diverse ways. The common outcomes are to:

- experience grief and adapt to the loss (rather than recover);
- maintain continuing social and emotional bonds with the deceased (if desired);
- re-adjust/re-construct reality to incorporate the deceased’s absence and presence;
- make meaning: make sense and identify benefits.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Model/Theory</th>
<th>Originator</th>
<th>Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1996 | Continuing Bonds | Klass, Silverman & Nickman | “Death ends a life, not necessarily a relationship”  
- Bond development: conscious and dynamic  
- Bond expression: numerous imaginative, creative ways alone or co-created e.g.  
  - talking to deceased  
  - relocating deceased  
  - deceased as role-model/mentor  
  - experience deceased in dreams, feel their presence, rituals, linking objects  
  - Adaptive response to grief: Internalised, symbolically based expressions of bond.  
  - Maladaptive response to grief: expressions of bond imply disbelief the deceased is physically dead. (Hall, 2011) |
| 1996 | Grief Narratives as process | Walter, Neimeyer | Life story, characters, plot all changes after a loss; especially an unexpected sudden death  
- Make meaning by telling and re-telling the story – past, present and future  
- Tell it to people who knew the deceased to create a shared identity for memory |
ADCs in bereavement theories

The distinct research fields of ADCs and post positivist bereavement grief theory emerged in peer-reviewed literature at about the same time; in the late 1980s; but there has been no significant crossover or integration between the two disciplines at this time. The only mention I found in the literature of a researcher directly naming and linking ADCs with bereavement grief theories was in Devers’ 1994 Grounded Theory study on ADCs (as cited in Devers & Robinson, 2002, p. 244). Devers reviewed the bereavement grief literature because she was studying ADCs within the context of grief. Her study was done just before the post-positivist Continuing Bonds theory (Table 3) emerged so her review only included the positivist theories (Table 2). Devers concluded that ADCs were being experienced by the bereaved but the researchers referred to the phenomenon in various indirect, nugatory ways such as:

- Lindemann: The bereaved sometimes thought they visualised the deceased.
- Bowlby: The bereaved searched for the deceased.
- Parkes: The deceased appeared to the bereaved in hallucinations.

This indirect way of referring to ADCs has continued into the post positivist Continuing Bonds Theory. There is a strong similarity with the Guggenheim (1995) ADC typology (Table 1) and how Continuing Bonds grief experiences are reported (Table 3). These similarities are compared in Table 4. It appears that the phenomenon called After Death Communication has not as yet been embraced or directly named as such in Western bereavement grief theory; only unrelated examples of the experiences are being mentioned. It seems the connection is yet to be made between the two disciplines in peer-reviewed literature.
Table 3: Experience the deceased via (Hall, 2011):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Guggenheim (1995) Typology:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dreams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel their presence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rituals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linking objects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The difference between the positivist and post-positivist bereavement grief theories is movingly captured in a newsletter quote from a bereaved father:

“If grief is resolved, why do we still feel a sense of loss on anniversaries and holidays and even when we least expect it? Why do we feel a lump in the throat even six years after the loss? It is because healing does not mean forgetting and because moving on with life does not mean that we don't take a part of our lost love with us.” (Klass, 2000, p. 4).

Methodology and methods

Imagine watching a one minute time-lapse photography of a small seed blossoming into an awe-inspiring, majestic Moreton Bay Fig tree. As this ten month research study progressed my narrative of the process, including my ADC experiences positioned in the context of Western bereavement theory, rapidly flourished in my imagination. It grew from this small, manageable seed into a buttressed, labyrinthine tree. My Fig Tree is still maturing as I write this report. The question then became: which leaves, limbs and lumber do I include in my narrative for this research?

To answer this question, I used narrative methods to synthesise and contextualise my multi-layered and complex story into a structured account that is relevant and manageable for this study. I then used interpretive, inductive Grounded Theory to explicate a substantive explanation from my narrative to critically respond to my research question: How can I now make sense of this process of research in which assumptions have been made about my emotional safety possibly being compromised as an outcome of engagement with this topic?

Narrative methods are affiliated with Narrative Inquiry. This research is not a Narrative Inquiry although it would have also been an appropriate methodology. Narrative methods were used to provide structure to the story of my research process which was then analysed using Grounded Theory. I specifically avoided using mixed methodologies.

Data: my narrative

In employing the narrative methods of Clandinin (2006), I established a relational, 3-dimensional space in which to unfold my account within the nominated boundaries of:

1. Continuity: Temporal (time - past, present & future)
2. Interaction: Personal and Social (characters)
3. Situation: Place (location)
My narrative account is represented by various forms of collected and created data as follows:

- My journal 4/4/12 – 11/8/12 documenting my experience of each ADC;
- Selected emails between my Facilitator and myself;
- Audio file 13/07/13 and transcript of interview between my Facilitator and myself regarding the PRC decision at that time;
- Audio file 21/09/13 and transcript of mid-semester group discussion about our respective experiences of the ethics review process; only using the discussion from myself and my Facilitator;
- Literature review of ADCs;
- Literature review of Western bereavement grief theory.

Ethical considerations

My experience with the ethics review process has provided me with a clear understanding of the protracted, impersonal, inflexible, hierarchical, systemic complexity involved in applying for and receiving approval for any research that involves human beings. My naïve, inexperienced engagement with this process resulted in the focus of my research changing in order for me to complete my project within the allocated timeframe. The data subsequently used in this process did not require ethics approval because the data is either publically available or has been generated by myself. I confirm that no humans were harmed in the making of this research project, except possibly myself; which is the very focus of my revised question.

Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory is an interpretive methodology that discovers a subjective explanation of phenomena through a systemic, iterative process of analysing the data (Devers & Robinson, 2002). To analyse my narrative, I used the 4-step Glaser and Strauss’s inductive constant comparative method (Pace, 2012, p. 7):

1. Open coding: break the data down into significant concepts;
2. Theoretical coding: reassemble the significant concepts with propositions about their relationships to each other;
3. Selective coding: delimiting the analysis to only those concepts and relationships that are related to the core explanatory concept; and
4. Sorting: Sort the theoretical memos into an outline and write up the theory.

Findings and Discussion

Analysis

I applied the 4-step Glaser and Strauss’s inductive constant comparative method (Pace, 2012, p. 7) to my data; my narrative. My analysis unfolded as follows:
All data representations (Figure 3) were laid out on my desk in a printed format. For the first time I could see the ‘big picture’ of what my research process had generated in a tangible form. I felt overwhelmed by how much data my narrative included. The first question that came to me was: What does all this seemingly disparate data have in common? The answer emerged:

- It is now all in same format for easy comparison i.e. printed; and
- Each one tells a story that relates to Robbie’s death in some way. It is only because of Robbie’s death that each piece in front of me has been created.

Feeling the weight and intensity of the pain of Robbie’s physical loss overwhelm me from the sidelines again, I started to cry. I realised this whole research process has been about finding a way to live in this world without Robbie in it. Busy … just keep busy … don’t stop.

**Step 1: Open coding: break the data down into significant concepts**

I found the open coding a fluid and fast process. I circled and highlighted text that connected with me and made notes and codes in the margins. I had a flurry of thoughts coming and going in my mind so I wrote as many of these down as possible in a separate note pad. At the start of the process I had the thought of how could this process possibly find any common concepts between these seemingly disparate bits of data that make up my narrative. The interesting outcome was that an image/mind-map started to develop in my imagination as I progressed, which I drew in my notepad. It seemed to bring together the concepts I was identifying (refer Figure 4).
Step 2: Theoretical coding: reassemble the significant concepts with propositions about their relationships to each other.

I clustered the significant concepts identified in Step 1 into three categories: significant events, significant thoughts and significant emotions. Table 5 below summarises this process and provides an abstract overview of my narrative.

Table 5. Step 2 - Abstract overview of my narrative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significant events</th>
<th>Significant themes</th>
<th>Significant emotions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan 2013: Decision to focus my research on my ADCs with Robbie</td>
<td>BUSINESS BUSYNESI</td>
<td>GRIEF is the emotion for the feeling of separation after physical loss of Robbie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2013: Decision to interview others close to Robbie about their ADCs experiences (if any). Not supported by Facilitator</td>
<td>ROBBIE’S OMNIPRESENT PRESENCE</td>
<td>EMPOWERMENT and RELIEF to learn during literature review that others have experienced same as me re: ADCs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2013 – Facilitator agrees to support my changed</td>
<td>FRAMEWORKS seem to be important in my narrative: Research framework, ADC framework, Ethics Process framework, Grief frameworks, Cultural framework</td>
<td>FRUSTRATION and ANGER at PRC rejecting my proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CREDIBILITY – gained from my ADC experiences and</td>
<td>JOY, WONDER, INSTANT RELIEF FROM GRIEF and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Through a process of constant comparison I then looked for connections and relationships to emerge between these categories and concepts to provide core variables known as Basic Social Processes (BSPs) (Devers & Robinson, 2002).

- Using theoretical frameworks to intellectually understand and reconcile the incongruences that now exist between my personal, social and cultural realities about death and grief as a result of these ADCs with Robbie
- Using storytelling to creatively understand and reconcile (and interpret for others) the incongruences that now exist between my (and our collective) personal, social and cultural realities about death and grief as a result of the existence of ADCs
- Recognising that my professional work (Business) has become frenetic busyness, providing periods of time-out from my intense emotions of grief, frustration, fear and anger e.g. my intense focus on Biophilic Leadership that emerged during the research process
- Realising that I and others continue to refer to Robbie in the present tense
- Experiencing joy, wonder, empowerment, relief and gratitude for these ADCs with Robbie which reconnect both of us in timeless infinite love.

**Step 3: Selective coding: delimiting the analysis to only those concepts and relationships that are related to the core explanatory concept**

The core concept or BSP that captures the essence of my narrative, as delimited by my research question, emerged after many iterations as: Relieving Western bereavement grief through After Death Communication. This final BSP appeared in my mind in an “ah-ha” moment while driving to a meeting during a period where I was not consciously thinking about my research.

**Step 4: Sorting: Sort the theoretical memos into an outline and write up the theory.**

The final core concept (BSP) of my inductive Grounded Theory emerged to be: Relieving Western bereavement through After Death Communication

This final step explains the conceptual thinking behind my inductive Grounded Theory and responds to my research question: How can I now make sense of this process of research in which assumptions have been made about my emotional safety possibly being compromised as an outcome of engagement with this topic?

The word ‘relieving’ was selected because it indicates that only a temporary reprieve from grief is experienced during an ADC. When I experience an ADC I feel no grief. Grief is a human response to loss; to separation from someone or something we love. An ADC is about re-connection; the total opposite of separation. Therefore, from my experience, grief (a sense of separation) cannot be
experienced during an ADC (a sense of re-connection). They are mutually exclusive experiences. This makes experiencing an ADC a healing, therapeutic phenomenon; a bit like taking pain medication when you have a headache.

The adjective ‘Western’ elucidates and acknowledges that my experience of grief has been notably influenced by both my cultural and subjective, personal engagement with death. Further research opportunities exist in understanding ADCs positioned by grief experiences which have been influenced by other cultures.

Assessing the possible compromisation of my ‘emotional safety’ from engagement with the topic of ADC, is an element of my research question that needs to be addressed. To do this, I mindfully related my bereavement rather than my joy to ADC in my theory i.e. relieving bereavement through ADCs rather than experiencing joy through ADCs. The reason for this, is that my cultural and social life-time influences around death have conditioned me to expect only overwhelming grief, which, if experienced unrelentingly over a prolonged period could significantly impact my “emotional safety”. Therefore my theory makes the point that in my experience this has not been the case. My ‘emotional safety’ has in fact been enhanced by experiencing and engaging with ADCs as my research topic because they have provided relief from grief.

It was important to have the collective phenomenological name, After Death Communications, directly related to the theoretical term, bereavement, to encourage researchers in both fields of research to start linking these two areas together. The bereavement researchers can now start giving the collective phenomenological name of After death Communications to the range of experiences they have respectively been observing since the pioneering positivist years of Freud’s Grief Work Hypothesis right through to the current post-positivist theories. (Dent, 2005; Hall, 2011; Klass, 2000; Mallon, 2011, Rothaupt & Becker, 2007, Walter, 1996; Wright & Hogan, 2008).

**Conclusion**

As I sit here in my vantage point of the present moment and take a temporal perspective, I appreciate how my research process is an inter-related part of an infinite, timeless, multi-dimensional continuum; positioned in the context of this linear, past-present-future, material dimension. This research process has enabled me to reflect on how my cross-dimensional After Death Communications (ADCs) from Robbie have been my synchronistic, serendipitous pain medication for my soul. These joyous, wondrous ADCs provide periodic, temporary relief from my culturally-influenced, overwhelming experience of grief, as I frenetically work to create a new congruent reality in which Robbie no longer physically exists. My very survival depends on my ability to achieve this outcome.

The knowledge emerging in the literature about the human experience of After Death Communication has created an incongruence between my (and our collective) personal, social and cultural realities about death. I am planning to focus on using both multi-modal storytelling and Narrative Inquiry to creatively and intellectually continue my quest to make sense of (and interpret for others) these incongruences.

**References**


